

Day fines

Adult Criminal Justice

Literature review updated February 2017.

As part of WSIPP’s research approach to identifying evidence-based programs and policies, WSIPP determines “what works” (and what does not work) to improve outcomes using an approach called meta-analysis. For detail on our methods, see our [Technical Documentation](#). At this time, WSIPP has not yet calculated benefits and costs for this topic.

Program Description: In the criminal justice system, fines can be used as a sanction when a person commits a crime. Typically the magnitude of these fines is determined based solely on the gravity of the offense, and not on the person’s ability to pay the fine through legitimate means. To achieve equitable punishment, day fines are a method of calibrating fines based on both the gravity of the offense as well as the individual’s ability to pay. When day fines are assessed, a judge first determines the scale of punishment that is appropriate for the offense by calculating “punishment units.” A punishment unit equals a day’s pay. Thus, if a person is sanctioned to three punishment units (3 days’ pay), the total amount paid by the individual depends on the person’s income. This type of sanction is typically used for municipal violations or non-violent felonies.

Meta-Analysis of Program Effects

Outcomes measured	No. of effect sizes	Treatment N	Adjusted effect size and standard error			Unadjusted effect size (random effects model)	
			ES	SE	Age	ES	p-value
Payments/fines/restitution	2	383	0.327	0.325	29	0.342	0.267
Crime	1	191	-0.163	0.172	31	-0.163	0.343
Technical violations	1	191	-0.556	0.182	31	-0.556	0.002

Meta-analysis is a statistical method to combine the results from separate studies on a program, policy, or topic in order to estimate its effect on an outcome. WSIPP systematically evaluates all credible evaluations we can locate on each topic. The outcomes measured are the types of program impacts that were measured in the research literature (for example, crime or educational attainment). Treatment N represents the total number of individuals or units in the treatment group across the included studies.

An effect size (ES) is a standard metric that summarizes the degree to which a program or policy affects a measured outcome. If the effect size is positive, the outcome increases. If the effect size is negative, the outcome decreases.

Adjusted effect sizes are used to calculate the benefits from our benefit cost model. WSIPP may adjust effect sizes based on methodological characteristics of the study. For example, we may adjust effect sizes when a study has a weak research design or when the program developer is involved in the research. The magnitude of these adjustments varies depending on the topic area.

WSIPP may also adjust the second ES measurement. Research shows the magnitude of some effect sizes decrease over time. For those effect sizes, we estimate outcome-based adjustments which we apply between the first time ES is estimated and the second time ES is estimated. We also report the unadjusted effect size to show the effect sizes before any adjustments have been made. More details about these adjustments can be found in our [Technical Documentation](#).

Citations Used in the Meta-Analysis

McDonald, D.C., Greene, J., Worzella, C., & Abt Associates Inc 55 Wheeler Street Cambridge MA 02138. (1992). *Day fines in American courts: The Staten Island and Milwaukee experiments*. United States.

Turner, S. & Greene, J. (1999). The FARE probation experiment: implementation and outcomes of day fines for felony offenders in Maricopa County. *The Justice System Journal*, 21(1), 1-21.

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Printed on 03-28-2024



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