We investigated four main questions:

1. **How do judges view trauma-informed care?**

We surveyed 91 district court judges to better understand their experiences and attitudes related to TIC. We found:

- Juvenile justice (JJ) judges held more favorable attitudes towards TIC compared to non-JJ judges.
- Judges self-reported higher levels of engagement with TIPs related to communication and less engagement with practices related to policies/procedures and decision-making.

2. **How do judges respond to trauma education?**

We surveyed 50 new judges before and after a trauma education program. Judges rated all sessions “very” or “extremely” effective on a 5-point Likert scale. We also assessed judge agreement before and after the session on common barriers to TIC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Judge Agreement With Common Barriers to TIC Pre- and Post-Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trauma is an excuse for poor behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing TIPs diminishes my ability to hold people accountable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing TIPs to assist defendants is at odds with practices to assist victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing TIPs is too time-consuming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing TIPs is too resource heavy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to be more trauma-informed, but I don't know how to do that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to be more trauma-informed, but I'm concerned I'll do it wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel empowered to make changes that align with TIC.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **How do judges act in juvenile court?**

We observed 201 juvenile delinquency court hearings across 16 judges in seven counties. We scored judges’ engagement with 30 TIPs across six categories:

- Judges’ Mean Scores For TIP Categories:
  - Communication
  - Understanding/Transparency
  - Juvenile Interaction
  - Decision-Making
  - Family Interaction
  - Bigger Picture

4. **How do youth experience court?**

We surveyed 17 youth, 25 juvenile defenders, and 29 juvenile court counselors in North Carolina about youths’ court experience.

- Youth reported more than moderate distress during their court experience ($M = 5.80$).
- This was more distress than defenders ($M = 4.78$) and court counselors ($M = 4.93$) perceived the youth to have.

**Average TIP Scores**

**Positive Impact**
- Show respect
- Practice active listening
- Acknowledge progress
- Encourage accountability
- Seek to understand

**Negative Impact**
- Exhibit malicious behavior
- Be overly punitive
- Lack of empathy/understanding
- Be too soft

This research is part of a collaboration and ongoing partnership between Duke Law’s Bolch Judicial Institute and the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts.

**OUR STUDY**

Trauma is the lasting emotional response that can result from a distressing event.\(^1\)

Up to 90% of court-involved youth, and 75% of court-involved adults have experienced trauma.\(^2\)

Trauma-informed (TIC) in the court context recognizes this reality and elevates safety and comfort through environment, policy, and behavior modifications, called trauma-informed practices (TIPs).\(^3\)

This project is the first empirical assessment of trauma-informed care in the North Carolina court system.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

- Judicial education programs can begin to shift attitudes, showing promise for future trauma education efforts.
- Judges self-report and demonstrate highest engagement with TIPs related to communication, but less with practices that require broader collaboration and planning.
- Judges underutilize TIPs related to decision-making, interactions with youth and families, and understanding systemic causes of court-involvement.
- Future research and education could explore why these gaps exist and how to encourage judges to make far reaching TIC-aligned changes.
- More research is also needed to understand the impact of trauma-informed practices on court-involved youth and their families.

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