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Title of Presentation: “When Justice Feels Good but Looks Flimsy”: An Analysis of the Rhetoric Surrounding Problem-Solving Courts on News and Twitter

Abstract

Since their implementation, problem-solving courts have been the subject of extensive debate between government policymakers and the public. These courts provide an alternate means of justice and divert offenders with unique needs, (e.g., homelessness, mental health issues), from a cycle of crime. Most of the public learns about the criminal justice system through the media. Given media potential to inform public opinion, analyzing messages and representations of problem-solving courts in news and social media is useful. This research explores the rhetoric surrounding media representations of problem-solving courts. An inductive qualitative content analysis of 90 news articles and 50 tweets between 2008 and 2020 identified four overarching themes: “Waste of taxpayer dollars,” “Addiction is a choice,” “When justice feels good but looks flimsy,” and “There’s nothing more coercive than drug courts.” Results suggest media representations of problem-solving courts are misleading regarding their function, those involved in the process, and measuring their effectiveness.