JUVENILE OFFENDERS: WHAT WORKS?

A Summary of Research Findings

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Introduction and Contents

This document can assist policymakers in understanding the major research findings in juvenile delinquency. It summarizes key findings and offers an overview. It is not an exhaustive review of the literature. Readers should consult the bibliography for publication citations.

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Risk Factors for Juvenile Delinquency

"Overall, research findings support the conclusion that no single cause accounts for all delinquency and no single pathway leads to a life of crime."

Huizinga, Loeber and Thornberry, 1994

A literature review found the following factors to be important *predictors* of delinquency:

1. ***Early conduct problems***—aggression, stealing, truancy, lying, drug use—are not only general predictors of delinquency many years later, but especially of serious delinquency, and in certain cases, of recidivism.

2. Children who have ***not outgrown their aggressiveness by early adolescence*** appear to be at high risk for delinquency.

3. Although juvenile arrest or conviction is a predictor of arrest or conviction in adulthood, the ***seriousness of the juvenile offense*** appears to be a better predictor of continued, serious delinquency in adulthood.

4. Individual ***family variables*** are moderately strong predictors of subsequent delinquency in offspring. Particularly strong predictors were ***poor supervision and the parents' rejection of the child,*** while other child-rearing variables such as lack of discipline and lack of involvement were slightly less powerful. In addition, parental criminality and aggressiveness, and marital discord were moderately strong predictors. Parent absence, parent health, and socioeconomic status were weaker predictors of later delinquency.

5. ***Poor educational performance*** predicted later delinquency to some extent, but available evidence suggests that accompanying conduct problems may be more critical.

6. A majority of eventual chronic offenders can be recognized in their ***elementary school years*** on the basis of their ***conduct problems and other handicaps***.

Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1987
Also see Farrington and Hawkins, 1991

Can Juvenile Offenders Be Rehabilitated?

The Progress of Research:

"With a few isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts reported so far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism."

Martinson, 1974

Rehabilitation was effective given certain treatments in certain settings with certain offenders.

Romig, 1978
Palmer, 1978
Ross and Gendreau, 1980

In reviewing the research, "it is clear that juvenile delinquency interventions have had much less impact than most interventions that attempt to help individuals with other problems."

Tremblay and Craig, 1994

What Doesn't Work:

The results of 170 control group studies with juvenile delinquents showed the following approaches did not work in reducing delinquent behavior:

- · Desk or office probation casework*
- · Diagnostic assessments and/or referral only
- · Behavior modification for complex behaviors
- · General discussion groups
- · School attendance alone
- · Occupational orientation
- · Field trips
- · Work programs
- · Insight-oriented counseling
- · Psychodynamic counseling
- · Therapeutic camping

Romig, 1982

** Defined as a once-a-month visit to a probation officer, usually lasting 5-20 minutes, to check whether youth is fulfilling court order and probation requirements.*

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Can Juvenile Offenders be Rehabilitated? *(Cont'd.)*

Using a technique called "meta-analysis," researchers can review a large number of program evaluations to determine whether rehabilitation programs are successful in changing behavior. Conclusions have varied; the major findings are summarized below.

- Garret's 1985 analysis reviewed 111 residential programs. ***Conclusion:*** Programs using behavior and life-skills approaches produced the largest positive results, averaging approximately 25 percent of the standard deviation of the recidivism rate for the control group.

- Davidson's 1984 analysis incorporated 90 community and residential programs for delinquents. ***Conclusion:*** Behavioral approaches had the most success in reducing recidivism although the effects were so small that "they could not reject the null hypothesis." Group therapy and transactional analysis programs were more likely to produce *negative* effects.

- Whitehead and Lab's 1989 analysis incorporated 50 juvenile programs. ***Conclusion:*** Results were "far from encouraging," and "correctional treatment has little effect on recidivism." Diversion of offenders from the juvenile justice system emerged as the most promising intervention. Treatment programs appeared to be *less effective* in recent years.

- Andrews and colleagues 1990 analysis incorporated Whitehead and Lab's studies with additional studies. ***Conclusion:*** "Appropriate" interventions reduced recidivism by more than 50 percent.

"What works...is the delivery of appropriate correctional service...reflecting three psychological principles: 1) delivery of service to higher-risk cases, 2) targeting of delinquency risk factors, and 3) use of styles and modes of treatment...matching with client need and learning styles.

Andrews, Unger and Hage, 1990

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Can Juvenile Offenders be Rehabilitated? *(Cont'd.)*

- Lipsey's 1992 analysis is the most comprehensive to date, encompassing 400 studies. ***Conclusion:*** Behavioral, skill-oriented programs and programs with multiple components produce the largest effects. Deterrent approaches (shock incarceration) were more likely to produce negative effects. Effective treatment approaches produce larger average treatment effects in a community as opposed to an institutional setting.

  The more effective approaches can reduce recidivism by 10 to 20 percent. The dosage (amount of treatment) was correlated with the intensity of result.

Are Diversion Programs Effective?*

Effectiveness:

An analysis of 103 studies did *not* provide "substantial evidence for the efficacy of diversion programs...Diversion interventions produce no strong positive or strong negative effects with youth diverted from the juvenile justice system."

Conclusions:

- The younger the diversion client, the more likely the intervention will have a positive effect.
- The greater the number of contact hours between the youth and the service worker, the greater the positive effect.

Gensheimer and Associates, 1986

Diversion programs operating as an extension of the *formal* justice system were found to be the most promising type of correctional intervention. Connecting diversion with the formal system may bring a deterrent value not associated with programs run outside the system.

Whitehead and Lab, 1989

Impact on the System:

Diversion has "widened the net" of the juvenile justice system, and increased the number of youth under juvenile court jurisdiction.

Saul and Davidson, 1983
Blomberg, 1983
Binder and Geis, 1984
Ezell, 1989, 1992

** Diversion represents an informal response by the juvenile justice system for first-time, minor offenders. The youth is required to "stay out of trouble," attend certain treatment programs and perform community service.*

What Works with Violent & Chronic Juvenile Offenders?

"High-rate offenders often exhibit a qualitatively different response to traditional treatment and are uniquely resistant to conventional intervention strategies."

Altschuler and Armstrong, 1991

In-Home Intensive Supervision: Detroit, Michigan

- Evaluation of three programs serving 500 juveniles as an alternative to state commitment.
- Most juveniles were black, with an average of 3.2 prior delinquency charges.
- Intensive supervision (6-10 youth per officer).
- Randomized experiment.

Conclusion: Two-year recidivism rates of supervised youth *did not differ* substantially from the rates of youths committed to the state. Institutional placements were approximately three times more expensive than community supervision; thus, the state *saved an estimated $9 million* in placement costs during the 4-year period.

Barton and Butts, 1990

Paint Creek Youth Center: Ohio

- This study compared whether youth assigned to a private experimental program with comprehensive and highly structured services performed better than youth assigned to a traditional training school.
- The costs for the experimental program were $29,700 per youth, and $26,100 for each control youth in a state facility.

Conclusion: *No significant differences* were found in arrests or self-reported delinquency after one year of follow-up.

Greenwood and Turner
Rand Corporation, 1993

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What Works with Violent & Chronic Juvenile Offenders? (Cont'd.)

Intensive Supervision of Violent Offenders Following Placement: Four Sites

- Four urban courts included in the study: Boston, Detroit, Memphis, and Newark.
- The most violent youth were targeted.
- Six-month placement in small, secure facilities, followed by reintegration into the community with transitional services.
- Intensive supervision (6-8 youth per officer).
- Control group members were institutionalized for 8 months, followed by 2 months of standard parole.

Conclusion: "Where the program design was well-implemented and its underlying theoretical principals were in strong evidence, *significantly lower recidivism rates* for violent, serious, and total crimes were observed...In Boston, where implementation of the experimental program was strongest, youths consistently had lower recidivism scores than controls. Most percentage differences exceeded 25 percent and several were over 100 percent lower.

Fagan, 1990

Intensive Supervision of Serious Offenders: Ohio

- Quasi-experimental design comparing recidivism rates of incarcerated youth in Ohio with those individually supervised.
- Youths were given extensive service referrals, in addition to 6 supervision contacts per month and 7 contacts per month with parents.

Conclusion: Recidivism outcomes at 18 months *were similar* for both groups.

"These results demonstrate that an intensive supervision program—if properly implemented—poses no greater risk to public safety than does a traditional incarceration/parole strategy."

Wiebush, 1993

Connection Between Juvenile and Adult Criminal Careers

"Most individuals who are arrested as juveniles (under age 18) will not be arrested as adults; and a large fraction of adults arrested may have never been arrested as juveniles. However, those individuals who are arrested as juveniles are *three to four times more likely to be arrested as adults* than those who are not arrested as juveniles. Juvenile record is predictive of adult crime, but, of course, having a juvenile record does not predestine one to commit crimes as an adult."

Greenwood, 1986

Several conclusions can be drawn regarding the patterns of delinquency and criminality across the life span:

1. Status and minor offenses **do not** necessarily lead to more serious crimes.

2. A **shift from property crimes** to personal crimes of violence may occur during adolescence.

3. **Age of onset** of criminal behavior is the single best predictor of continued delinquency and criminality.

4. **Chronic offenders** (those who persist in their criminal behavior) commit crimes with greater frequency, commit more serious crimes as children and young adolescents, and are more versatile in their offending than are occasional youthful offenders who stop their criminal behavior.

Wright and Wright, 1994

Results of Deinstitutionalization

Status Offenders

Following the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1979, most states removed status offenders from residential juvenile correctional facilities. Studies of the consequences have revealed the following:

- **In Washington**, approximately 50 percent of the state's offenders were relabeled as criminal offenders and referred to criminal court.

  Schneider, 1984

- Gains made in the removal of status offenders from the juvenile justice system in **Minnesota** have been offset by increased placement of youth in residential psychiatric and chemical dependency programs.

  Schwartz, Jackson-Beeck and Anderson, 1984

- In **Connecticu**t, the court substituted noninstitutional placements (e.g., foster homes) for institutional placement.

  Logan and Rausch, 1985

Training Schools

In the early 1970s **Massachusetts** closed its juvenile institutions and youth were returned to their community or moved to small, community-based residential facilities.

A Harvard Study in 1979 found that the average recidivism rate for youth sent to community-based programs was *higher* than youth who had lived in training schools (74 percent versus 66 percent). Some programs were able to demonstrate a reduction in recidivism rates.

Coates, Miller and Ohlin, 1978

Vermont, Utah, and Pennsylvania followed Massachusetts' path. In each of these states, **deinstitutionalization** did not increase the state's overall frequency or seriousness of juvenile crime.

Siegal and Senna, 1991

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Results of Deinstitutionalization (Cont'd.)

In 1988, **Maryland** closed one of its two training schools. Researchers studied the recidivism rates of juveniles who had been institutionalized (the institutionalized group) with those who would have gone to the training school, but because of its closure received community-based sanctions (the non-institutionalized group).

- The non-institutionalized group's *recidivism rate was considerably higher* than that of the institutionalized group's, both during and after the period of institutionalization.

- The results conform with previous reviews of treatment interventions which have suggested that "*neither institutional programs nor community-based programs are uniformly effective or ineffective*. The design of the intervention, rather than its location, appears important... Deinstitutionalization is not enough.
  A responsible policy must mesh community sanctions with treatments that empirical research suggests will be effective."

Gottfredson and Barton, 1993

Privately- and Publicly-Operated Facilities

A study compared two pairs of secure treatment programs for the most violent and troubled youth, each pair consisting of one privately-owned and one publicly-operated program. The *costs* were quite similar; within 1 percent of each other. The *service quality* and *effectiveness* of the privately-owned programs were higher.

The Urban Institute, 1989

Prevention of Delinquency

"A **healthy home environment** is the single most important factor in preventing delinquency." Parents must monitor their children's behavior, whereabouts, and friends, must reliably discipline their children for antisocial behavior, must provide love and support, must teach their children to feel empathy and compassion for others, and must avoid overly harsh authoritarian punishment.

Wright and Wright, 1994

Some evidence suggests that **primary prevention** conducted during preschool years may generate reductions which last into adolescence. Programs that have demonstrated such reductions include: the Seattle Social Development Program, the Perry Preschool Project, Syracuse University's Preschool Program, Yale Child Welfare Research Program, and the Houston Parent-Child Development Center.

Zigler, Tanssig and Black, 1992
O'Donnell, Hawkins, Catalano, et al., 1993

"The general orientation and short duration of most [prevention] programs suggests that they may have only limited impact on changing the behavior of more serious and chronically violent youth. Rather, **broad-based approaches** may be most useful in promoting non-violent norms, lessening the opportunity for and elicitations of violent acts, and in preventing the sporadic violence which emerges temporarily through adolescence."

Guerra, Tolan and Hammond, 1992

"Interventions that target **more than one risk factor, last for a relatively long period of time**, and are implemented early in life, have the best chance of preventing delinquency involvement."

Tremblay and Craig, 1994

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Prevention of Delinquency (cont'd.)

"In sum, the research results...suggest that efforts to **reduce delinquent behavior** should start early, be comprehensive and long-term, and attempt to interrupt developmental pathways before serious, chronic delinquency emerges. They also suggest that **intervention programs** should focus on family, school, peer, and neighborhood factors; and within these settings, focus on developing effective and caring monitoring and success opportunities that lead to attachment to prosocial groups and activities."

"Intervention programs should be designed for the **long-term, because risk factors usually have a long-term effect on juveniles' behavior**...Thus, intervention programs lasting 6 to 10 months with youth returning to the same high-risk environment from which they came are not likely to produce lasting results."

Huizinga, Loeber and Thornberry, 1994
Also see Mulvey, Arthur, and Reppucci, 1993

Influence of Single Parent Families

What is known about the influence of single parent families on delinquency?

- ***Economic conditions*** inherent among single parent households may place children at greater risk.
- ***Socialization*** of children residing in single parent homes may differ from those residing with two parents.
- ***"Bad" neighborhoods***, where single parents often reside, may contribute to delinquency.
- The **response of officials from formal institutions, police, and courts** to children from single parent homes may increase the likelihood that they are identified as delinquent.

What remains unknown or unclear?

- We lack a good understanding of parental practices and differences among the various types of households.
- We tend to see single parent families in a monolithic way, neglecting the variations that may produce successes as well as failures. Hartman (1990) indicated that at least **25 percent** of all families with children are **single parent households**. Most of these families **do not produce delinquent children.**
- Similarly, we lack knowledge about the variation among two parent families.

Wright and Wright, 1994

Influence on Case Processing:

Case processing decisions in New York State with automatic transfer priorities to adult court revealed that juvenile offenders from *single parent households* were *more likely* to face a grand jury indictment than those from two parent households.

Singer, 1993

A study of juvenile court dispositions in Buffalo, New York, concluded: "Children from *non-traditional families and children living apart from their parents* are *at risk* of out-of-home placement entirely *out of proportion* to the risk of recidivism they pose. There may be compelling organizational and institutional reasons for this sort of treatment, but they are not correctional in nature."

Jacobs, 1990

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