

The Importance of Using Restorative Justice to Reduce Recidivism Rates in the area of Juvenile Crime

Topic Overview:

Juvenile offenders are often considered to be among the most vulnerable members of society, and thus it follows that understanding their experience of the administration of justice, and the way this experience impacts the rest of their lives, is of the utmost importance to society as a whole. A youth's experience of justice is highly colored by the system through which their crime is processed, and whether this experience is constructive or destructive is the key to predicting recidivism rates. Recidivism, in terms of justice administration, refers to a relapse into undesirable or unlawful behavior by previous offenders, and recidivism rates can often be used as an indicator of the success of a particular justice program.

Both internal and external factors must be taken into account when considering the motivations behind a juvenile offender's actions and the type of justice that will best serve them and the community. Firstly, the now widely supported fact that juveniles' brains are less developed than those of adults must be taken into account when considering a youth's understanding of his or her actions (Restak, 2001). There are many external factors as well. Children of color, children living below the poverty level, and children who have a family history of disorderly conduct are much more likely to commit crimes (McCoy, et. al. 2012). Proponents for harsh juvenile punishments argue that this does not make their crimes more acceptable than those of children with more advantages. However, by removing them from society, whether permanently or otherwise, greatly decreases the chances that they will be able to successfully be rehabilitated back into their communities, and actually increases the chance that they will relapse.

Research Plan:

I will begin my research by examining the effects of the different justice systems on juvenile defendants, and then focus in specifically on the various types of restorative justice that exist in Arizona. I will begin by researching the history of juvenile justice in the US, based on the work of legal scholars Anthony Walsh and Craig Hemmens. I will then use studies such as those by Alex Piquero, Kathleen Bergseth, and Jeffrey Bouffard to examine the long-term impacts of the different forms of juvenile justice. I plan to interview the leaders of the various restorative justice programs in Arizona, such as the Flagstaff Teen Court Program and the Maricopa County Youth Court. I will then synthesize my findings into a comprehensive study of restorative juvenile justice and make recommendations specific to the AZ court system on practices they can implement or change to encourage a more effective form of justice for youth.

Meetings:

I will meet with my director every other week during her office hours to discuss progress on the project and to answer questions posed by either party. I will meet with my other committee members once a month to also discuss my progress and ask for their advice and expertise. Other meetings may be scheduled should new information or urgent questions arise.

Timeline:

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Task:</u>
Sept 9	Begin bi-weekly meetings with director, review schedule. Begin process for IRB approval.

Sept 23	Complete research on history of juvenile justice, present to director for review. Continue IRB approval process.
Oct 6	Complete research on long-term impact of justice administration, present for review. Get in contact with leaders of restorative justice programs in AZ.
Nov 17	Conduct interviews/research with AZ leaders.
Dec 1	Complete interviews with AZ leaders. Begin synthesizing material, discuss with director.
Jan 13	Begin to work on paper, continue research.
Jan 27	Continue research/work on paper.
Feb 10	Review rough draft of thesis paper with director.
Feb 24	Complete thesis paper, practice for defense.
March 10	Tentative Thesis Defense date; begin final revision of thesis.
April	Submit thesis