**Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs**

Author: Phillip Kadaev from The Bronx High School of Science, NY

The United States’ juvenile justice systems have struggled in obtaining a coherent balance of both punishing juveniles for violations of the law and with establishing a constructive system that sets juveniles on the proper path in life. A continuous challenge for the juvenile justice system is to not only to protect the public from juvenile offenders, but it is also to help induce a self-sustaining behavior change that will endure throughout the juvenile’s life. The current system of juvenile justice has illustrated effectiveness to some extent, but studies have shown that approximately 57% of juvenile delinquents are arrested again by the age of 25.⁠1 This high rate of repeat offensives by juveniles after treatment illustrates the existence of flaws in the juvenile justice system, but several alternatives to traditional treatment do exist.

The current juvenile justice focuses on rectifying delinquency through community supervision and counseling, but a small percentage of juvenile delinquents bypass the juvenile system and are instead are charged as adults even if they are under the age of eighteen depending on the crime committed. Juveniles who are tried as adults are often exposed to vitriolic environments and are absorbed into a culture of crime within prisons and in turn continue to follow a pattern of crime into their adulthood. However, most juvenile delinquents are either sent to juvenile court for hearing or they are sent to diversion programs. In addition meta-analysis studies have illustrated that juveniles sent to court had a higher rate of being arrested later in life than those who bypassed court and were sent directly to community programs.⁠2 Therefore, instead of acting as a deterrent to crime the juvenile court system fosters criminal activity.

Another method for deterring crime that the juvenile justice system employs is shock incarceration, which sends juveniles to an adult prison for one night in attempt to scare and intimidate them so that they would never wish to commit a crime again.⁠3 Unfortunately this technique is largely ineffective and it also tends to increase criminal activity among the juveniles who are treated this way.⁠4 One of the most prevalent processes for treating juvenile delinquency is the employment of residential institutions such as boot camps, treatment facilities, and detention centers. The purpose of these residential facilities is to is to provide an opportunity for rehabilitation and to protect the community by removing troubled youth from their homes. However, these residential programs are largely ineffective and several studies have shown that mental health and educational services are not fully met in these facilities and thus they increase criminal activity.⁠5 The use of residential institutions for juvenile delinquents has caused controversy over whether the atmosphere of these facilities fosters crime instead of deterring it. However, since public safety is a primary goal of these programs it has been proposed that only serious juvenile offenders should be sent to these facilities, while smaller offenders are placed in community programs and services that do not provide such a vitriolic atmosphere. Although the current juvenile justice system employs an array of different policies and methods for reducing criminal activity among youth offenders, these methods have largely been ineffective. However, three methods that have been shown to effectively reduce the rate at which juvenile delinquents return to patterns of criminal activity in their future are functional family therapy, multisystemic therapy, and multidimensional treatment foster care.

Functional family therapy (FFT) is a family and community based treatment first developed in 1982 as a means to reduce antisocial behavior, which often fuels delinquency in repeat juvenile offenders.⁠6 Evaluations of functional family therapy have illustrated that this method decreased antisocial behavior in juvenile offenders and it has now become one of the most widely employed juvenile programs with 270 programs globally.Functional⁠7 Family programs currently treat nearly 17,500 youth and their families annually and it they aim to maintain new patterns of family behavior to replace dysfunctional ones that often fostered delinquency. Functional family therapy programs also integrate behavioral and cognitive interventions through the engagement of family members and extensive efforts to improve the behavior of the individual. The functional family therapy program is one of the most effective policies under the juvenile justice system and it has exhibited continual improvement in the reduction of antisocial behavior and it continues to serve as an effective means of deterring young offenders from lives of crime.

Another effective program under the juvenile justice system is Multisystemic therapy, which is a community and family based treatment for young offenders who have a past of substance abuse, emotional instability and violent crime that are often at risk of being placed into residential facilities. Multisystemic therapy is one of the most effective ways in dealing with violent offenders and it reduces crime rates among these offenders significantly in comparison to traditional relocation facilities.⁠8 Currently Multisystemic therapy is delivered to more than 17,000 young offenders and their families annually and it deals with the offenders’ different daily influences including neighbors and family. Multisystemic therapy has supported the roles of improved family functioning and decreased the offenders association with deviant peers who provide negative influences. Furthermore, Multisystemic therapy has been proven to prevent youth offenders from continuing to commit crimes and it has served as a sustainable form of treatment that sets young offenders on the proper path in life.⁠9

Multidimensional treatment foster care has also proven to be an effective way to treat young offenders through the use of community based foster care as an alternative to state detention. This program is mostly employed on offenders who have extreme antisocial behavior that cannot be left at home.⁠10 Multidimensional treatment foster care is employed in over 50 sites in the United States and it treats about 1,300 youth offenders. Multidimensional treatment foster care is based on principles of social learning and behavior therapy and it heavily emphasizes the role of parental supervision and monitoring in order to promote positive school performance and interaction with peers. The multidimensional treatment foster care program increased parental involvement, decreased association with negative influences, and even improved schoolwork for offenders.

The current juvenile justice system has several major flaws and instead of reducing the levels of crimes in young juveniles it instead proliferates them by placing juveniles in vitriolic environments. However, three alternative systems that have been shown to effectively reduce emotional problems and reduce criminal behavior within young delinquents are functional family therapy, multisystemic therapy, and multidimensional treatment foster care. These three methods have provided a viable and effective way to treat young delinquency without exacerbating criminal behavior as traditional methods such as the juvenile court system or relocation facilities do. Therefore functional family therapy, multisystemic therapy, and multidimensional treatment foster care should be employed more heavily to rectify the growing problems of the juvenile justice system and prevent young delinquents from becoming future criminals.

1 "From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending." National Institute of Justice. March 11, 2014.

2 Petrosino, A., Turpin-Petrosino, C., & Guckenburg, S. (2010). Formal system processing of juve- niles: Effects on delinquency. *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2010:1 doi:10.4073/csr.20101

3 Howell, J. C. (2003). *Preventing and reducing juvenile delinquency: A comprehensive frame- work*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

4 Greenwood, P. W. (2006). *Changing lives: Delinquency prevention as crime-control policy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

5 Sedlak, A. J., & McPherson, K. S. (2010). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: Conditions of confinement: Findings from the survey of youth in residential placement.* Washington, DC: U.S. Depart- ment of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

6 Alexander, J. F., & Parsons, B. V. (1982). *Functional family therapy: Principles and procedures.* Carmel, CA: Brooks/Cole.

7 Henggeler, S. W., & Sheidow, A. J. (in press). Empirically supported family-based treatments for conduct disorder and delinquency. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*.

8 Henggeler, S. W., Schoenwald, S. K., Borduin, C. M., Rowland, M. D., & Cunningham, P. B. (2009). *Multisytemic therapy for antisocial behavior in children and adolescents.* New York: Guilford Press.

9 Schoenwald, S. K. (2008). Toward evidence-based transport of evidence-based treatments: MST as an example. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse, 17,* 69-91.  
doi: 10.1080/15470650802071671

10 Chamberlain, P. (2003). *Treating chronic juvenile offenders: Advances made through the Oregon multidimensional treatment foster care model.* Washington, DC: American Psycho- logical Association.