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Juvenile Justice

There are often cases where juveniles and children are charged as adults, this is due to the fact that they commit crimes at a high level of violence and severity. Factors considered when deciding the fate of a juvenile in court are the age of the offender (juvenile), their criminal history, environment, mental state, and most importantly, the level of the offense. Societal and legal involvement have a great impact on the act of trying juveniles in adult courts – where they are likely to be sent to adult prisons. It is clear there is a division between what people think is correct, while some people believe that if the crimes are severe, juveniles should be charged as adults and punished for their crimes, others believe adult prisons are no place for the young ones, regardless of what they've done. Maintaining a balance and considering everything as a whole is important, including the outcome. This is a controversial practice since it can either be seen as harsh, consequential, **unjust**, or fair and appropriate.

Juveniles should not be charged as adults or sent to adult prisons, it is unfair, harmful, and ineffective.

The developmental differences between adults and juveniles have a critical role in juvenile crime, differences in brain development and emotional maturity greatly affect decision-making and impulse control, therefore it is unfair to treat juveniles as adults in criminal situations.

“Compared with adults, teens tended to make less use of brain regions that monitor performance, spot errors, plan, and stay focused — areas the adults seem to bring online automatically.”

This statement from “Juvenile Justice Article Packet” contains the results from an experiment conducted on the brains of teens and adults. The scientific and physiological factors have a lot to do with the way teens act, the brains of children and young adults are significantly different from adult brains. Juveniles are much more susceptible to emotional responses and regulation, they are also more likely to react to negative emotions, such as pressure, anger, and fear, without clearly analyzing or thinking about their actions and choices. Scientific evidence also shows that teens have a higher desire for risk and have risky behaviors, this is due to the fact that their brain is still undergoing extensive “remodeling”, this process requires adapting and can take time, therefore adolescence is a peak time for risk and acting on impulse. BJ Casey, Christina L. Williams, Professor of Neuroscience at Barnard College, states, “Juveniles have a heightened sensitivity to emotional information related to rewards, threat, stress, and also social information like peer influences. And this is combined with this under-appreciation of risks and consequences.” Juveniles are also still developing a sense of morality, they may have a fine distinction between wrong and right, but they are less likely to comprehend the seriousness and understand the long-term consequences of their actions. On the other hand, most adults have a more mature cognitive processing and established moral structure to guide their behavior, they are more likely to weigh risks. The fact that adults have fully developed brains means they already have rooted behaviors and habits making it hard for rehabilitation, unlike juveniles that still have opportunities to grow and mature. There is evidence that most youth who commit crimes stop as they mature. Scientific developmental differences and evidence provided are not to excuse juveniles' crimes but to supply context as to why they make certain choices and

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actions, this must be taken into consideration because it is important to understand juveniles before determining the majority of their future.

By determining their future, I am referring to the negative impact of charging juveniles as adults. Charging juveniles as adults is harmful for their mental, physical, and emotional health, and leads to lifelong notoriety.

“When kids are transferred into the adult criminal justice system, opportunities for rehabilitation are significantly limited.” - Marsha Levick, Chief Legal Officer and Co-Founder of the Juvenile Law Center.

The text from the article “Youth Tried as Adults” from Juvenile Law Center explains that opportunities for juveniles to become better are shortened when they are sent to adult systems. If treating them as adults limits rehabilitation, how do we expect juvenile crime to stop being an issue? Not only does it limit support and help, but it puts them at a high risk of physical violence, sexual assault, bullying, and isolation, therefore leading to severe trauma, anxiety, and suicide. Juveniles are exposed to unnecessary risk and more negative influences, they may become more affiliated with criminal thinking and even re-offend in the future. Adult prisons may also lack educational programs which can make it challenging for juveniles to access education, jobs, and housing due to a criminal record. Lastly, being exposed to such negative experiences, especially at a young age, can cause complications in the process of growth and development, it can disrupt or prevent cognitive skills, and can overall worsen them instead of helping.

This leads to the ineffectiveness of harsh punishments for juveniles.

Sending juveniles to adult prisons does not reduce adolescent crime or

“Time has shown that harshly punishing youth by trying them in the adult system has failed as an effective deterrent. Several large-scale studies have found higher recidivism rates among juveniles tried and sentenced in adult court than among youth charged with similar offenses in juvenile court.”

This is quoted from the article packet, it shows that adult prisons and consequences have a greater negative effect on juveniles, but it is not effective. Young offenders are exposed to more violent environments and it is possible that instead of rehabilitating, they adapt. Adult prisons aren't appropriate environments for young people, they can reinforce criminal thinking into immature teens and do the opposite of helping. They may also lack helpful resources and counseling that provide juveniles with opportunities to rehabilitate and move on in life.

In conclusion, adults should be the only ones getting charged as adults because they have more years of a variety of experiences, they have had time to mature and advance, they have clear cognitive and emotional skills, and can comprehend and handle the consequences of their actions, unlike adolescents and younger ones. Charging the youth as adults has no good outcomes for anybody. It is unfair to do so due to the lack of maturity and a fully developed brain. Teens act more on emotions rather than logic, the way they make decisions is different from the way adults do. Treating them as adults becomes a harm to their emotional and mental health, it is something that can affect the way they live for the rest of their time. Finally, it is ineffective and harsh to punish them the same way adults are punished.