Juvenile Justice Research: Implications for Intervention and Policy

Edward P. Mulvey, Ph.D., Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

Mark W. Lipsey, Ph.D., Peabody Research Institute, Vanderbilt University

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Reforming Juvenile Justice:
A Developmental Approach

Committee Charge: To assess the implications of advances in behavioral and neuroscience research for the field of juvenile justice and the implications of such knowledge for juvenile justice reform.
The Science

• Adolescence is a key period of development between childhood and adulthood characterized by:
  
  • Lack of mature capacity for self-regulation in emotionally charged contexts
  
  • A heightened sensitivity to proximal external influences such as peer pressure and immediate incentives
  
  • Less ability to make judgments and decisions that require future orientation
Major Conclusions

• Being held accountable for wrongdoing and accepting responsibility in a fair process (perceived and real) promotes healthy moral development and legal socialization.

• Being held accountable and punished in an unfair process (perceived or real) reinforces social disaffection and antisocial behavior.

• Predominantly punitive policies and programs do not foster prosocial development or reduce recidivism.

• No convincing evidence that confinement of juvenile offenders beyond a minimum amount required to provide intense services reduces likelihood of subsequent offending.

• Pattern of racial disparities impede efforts to provide equitable services and contribute to perceptions of unfairness.
Proposed Goals of the System

- Promoting Accountability
- Ensuring Fairness
- Preventing Re-offending
Other Key Research

*Pathways to Desistance*

About the study: Multi-site study that follows 1,354 serious adolescent offenders as they make the transition from adolescence into early adulthood through regular interviews over a seven year period.
Patterns of Offending

- **Finding**: Adolescents who have committed serious offenses are not necessarily on track for adult criminal careers.
  - Even among serious adolescent offenders,
    - there is considerable variability
    - the pattern is reduced offending

- **Implications**: To increase the impact of investments in justice interventions, it is important to promote decision frameworks or statutes that:
  - consider cumulative risk and addressable needs, and
  - target services to the highest risk offenders
Self-reported offending

7 year follow-up period – only males – controlling for time on street

- High stable 10%
- Drop-off 21%
- Lowest 26%
- Low stable 31%
- Low rising 12%
Mean rate of re-arrests in each wave

Number of arrests per days in the community. Ex: 1 arrest in 121 days in community = .008, 1 arrest in 65 days in the community = .015, 3 arrests in 183 days in community = .016
Median severity ranking for arrests across time (within month)

1 = status offense, 2 = misdemeanor, 3 = possession of narcotics (excluding glue and marijuana), 4 = felony, not part 1, 5 = major property felonies, 6 = burglary, 7 = drug felony, 2nd degree sex offense, 8 = felonious assault, felony w/ weapon, 9 = murder, rape, arson
Institutional Placements/Experiences

- **Finding(s):** Institutional placements and longer stays do not necessarily reduce juvenile reoffending and may increase recidivism for certain youth.

- **Context:**
  - There are about 40% – 50% fewer adolescents in institutional care than there were about seven years ago
  - The system will still rely on institutional care
  - Keeping adolescents longer may not increase success
  - The quality of these environments relates to later community adjustment
  - Re-entry is a key challenge

- **Implications:** It is possible to reduce the rate and duration of institutional placements for certain offenders and increase the level of community-based services while protecting public safety.
Effect of placement on re-arrest

Comparing placement and probation without controls

Treatment effect of placement after propensity score matching on 66 baseline variables

Finding: Overall, no effect of placement on rate of re-arrest (if anything, it may increase re-arrest).
Effect of length of stay on re-arrest
3 month intervals as doses

Finding: For intermediate lengths of stay (i.e., 3-13 months), there appears to be no marginal benefit in terms of re-arrest for longer lengths of stay.
Is a generally more positive institutional experience related to better outcomes?

Finding: Even after controlling for background characteristics, there is a 35%-49% reduction in the probability of system involvement in the next year.
Institutional placements over 84 months

Subject 691

Age 15
Access to Appropriate Services

- **Finding(s):** Community-based services can reduce reoffending and improve other outcomes, but...  
  - many with identifiable problems (e.g., substance abuse problems) linked to their offending do not receive services

- **Implications:** Increase the provision of services (mental health, substance abuse, etc.) to adolescent offenders in both institutions and in the community, ensuring that the services are of adequate intensity and that they involve family members.
Are these adolescents getting substance use services?

Looking at those adolescents with a diagnosed substance use problem*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adult Setting</th>
<th>Juvenile Setting</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% with service</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average intensity of sessions</td>
<td>1 every 13 days</td>
<td>1 every 3 days</td>
<td>1 every 47 days</td>
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* Diagnosed at baseline as present in the past year