Exploring the Effectiveness and Accessibility of Diversion and Intervention Programs for Juvenile Offenders in the United States

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Introduction

The recidivism rate among juvenile offenders is a prevalent issue in the United States; a review of state studies showed an average of 55% of juveniles are rearrested within one year of their release and 24% are re-incarcerated. (OJJDP, 2020) Studies have shown that juvenile court exposure and processing lead to a higher likelihood of reoffending (Peticlerc et al., 2013). Further, there has been an overwhelming amount of studies suggesting that traditional criminal justice measures are ineffective in reducing recidivism (Peticlerc et al., 2013; Petrosino et al., 2010). Placing these juveniles into intervention or diversion programs, rather than simply incarcerating them, may be more effective in curbing criminal behavior and lowering recidivism rates. However, these programs may not be accessible or affordable. While some previous studies have examined the success of intervention and diversion programs versus incarceration, their research quality is low, thus not making their findings generalizable. Second, most studies do not examine barriers to enrollment in intervention and diversion programs, such as affordability to the participant. The proposed study will be utilizing two research questions: 1) Which aspects of intervention and diversion programs are most effective for various juvenile risk factors? 2) Are intervention and diversion programs affordable for participants?

Intervention and diversion programs are prevalent topics in the media. While some authors may intertwine definitions, for the purposes of this paper, the following definitions will be used: Intervention programs are more focused on rehabilitative aspects while diversion programs divert the youths from criminal justice processes and sometimes incorporate interventive aspects. For example, intervention programs may include training in anger management, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and after-school programs for at-risk juveniles.

Diversion programs typically include reducing the charges and receiving mandatory rehabilitative treatment. For instance, an individual may receive a Driving While Ability Impaired charge instead of a Driving Under the Influence charge and be required to attend a certain amount of documented Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

Many sources discuss the effectiveness of these programs. The article written by Seacrest (2024) highlights many studies suggesting the effectiveness of a variety of intervention programs. Many of these programs addressed things such as violence prevention, including Safe Streets, Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver (GRID), Stand up to Violence (SUV), StreetSafe Boston (SSB), and Ceasefire 365. They also utilized mentors, such as in the Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM) program. Further, health and employment initiatives were present in some of these programs, such as Create Real Economic Destiny (CRED). These programs showcase the positive impact of intervention programs. The effectiveness of diversion programs, such as restorative justice programs, has also been discussed in the media (Chapoco, 2024). The article written by Durbin (2024) highlights a study showing that diversion programs are highly effective, with only 7% of the participants being charged with new offenses within one year. The media also highlights the importance of intervention programs as juveniles who are formally processed are significantly more likely to re-offend. (Durbin, 2024)

The media has also discussed the cost-related issues with these programs. Many of these programs face issues with inconsistent and inadequate funding, affecting their ability to sustain these programs (Seacrest, 2024). These programs can also be extremely expensive to participate in, sometimes costing thousands of dollars (Chapoco, 2024). High costs can make these out of reach for participation by some of the most disadvantaged individuals—further worsening the cycle of criminal behavior. The out-of-reach costs of these programs also cause many individuals

to need to borrow money, take out payday or title loans, and even commit further crimes to pay the participation fees (Chapoco, 2024). The racial disparities in access to these programs is also a prevalent topic in the media. The article written by Hajela points out how Black juveniles receive five-14 times more and Latino youths receive 1.8 times as many court referrals than those who are white (Hajela, 2024), despite formal court processing being shown to have negative effects on recidivism (Peticlerc et al., 2013)

Previous studies focused on the effects of juvenile system processing, diversion, and intervention programs as they relate to recidivism. Though these programs have been studied to some degree, I found a few notable holes in the research. These include the exclusion of juveniles processed in the adult justice system, the use of mostly males, and a lack of consideration when it comes to the monetary costs of participation to the juveniles and their families. These are crucial aspects to consider since the effectiveness can drastically differ among females, those processed in the adult justice system, and those previously considered, but we have yet to effectively research the difference. The affordability of a program is also extremely important; we have to consider that socioeconomic status is a well-known correlate of criminal behavior. Diversion and intervention programs have monetary costs for individuals, sometimes costing well over $1,000 (Chapoco, 2024). If these programs are not affordable, they are not easily accessible and people who need them are unable to get the benefits, overall negatively impacting recidivism rates and society as a whole.

Factors Influencing Recidivism

Juvenile recidivism has been a pressing issue in criminal justice research, with numerous studies seeking to identify the risk factors that contribute to youth's likelihood of reoffending. Prior offense history, psychiatric conditions, gender, and other personal and familial

characteristics have been shown to play a significant role in predicting recidivism among juveniles (Petrosino et al., 2010; Dembo et al., 2001; McMackin et al., 2004; McReynolds et al., 2010). Research highlights that youths with a history of chronic offending are more likely to continue offending (McMackin et al., 2004), while those with psychiatric conditions, particularly externalizing disorders, face a heightened risk of reoffending (McReynolds et al., 2010). Intervention and diversion programs are designed to address these criminogenic needs, offering targeted support to rehabilitate at-risk juveniles and reduce reoffending rates.

Studies have investigated the factors that may contribute to juvenile recidivism, such as prior offending history, gender, and psychiatric conditions (Petrosino et al., 2010; Dembo et al., 2001; McMackin et al., 2004; McReynolds et al., 2010). The study performed by McMackin et al. (2004) found that juveniles with a chronic prior offense history were significantly more likely to re-offend than those who did not have this history. Moreover, previous research has shown that the presence of psychiatric conditions is a significant predictor of recidivism. The findings of the study performed by McReynolds et al. (2010) suggested that juveniles with psychiatric conditions are significantly more likely to re-offend. It was found that juveniles with externalizing psychiatric conditions, particularly disruptive behavior disorders, were at a significantly higher risk of re-offending. Those with substance abuse disorders were also found to be at a significantly higher risk. Moreover, although they did not find a correlation between internalizing disorders and recidivism, they did find that internalizing disorders had a complex impact when combined with externalizing disorders. Females with substance abuse disorders and affective disorders were almost four times as likely to re-offend than females without any disorders; however, males with comorbidity were less likely to re-offend. Further, the risk of reoffending was increased in participants who suffered from anxiety disorders and disruptive

behavior disorders; this likelihood was only slightly lower with the exclusion of anxiety disorders. The study performed by Schweitzer et al. (2017) found that age is also a significant correlate of recidivism; juveniles are at a 19% higher risk for every year older the juvenile is at the start of participation in a program. As acknowledged by Peticlerc et al. (2013), other personal risk factors, such as antisocial tendencies, conduct disorder, and aggressiveness, can contribute to juvenile recidivism. Familial risk factors, such as parental education, family socioeconomic status, parental marriage status, mother's age at the birth of her first child, and parental criminal history, are also significant contributors to juvenile recidivism. It has also been acknowledged that societal risk factors, such as the levels of aggression in those the juvenile is friends with, are also contributors to juvenile recidivism. (Petitclerc et al., 2013)

These risk factors turn into criminogenic needs, which intervention and diversion programs aim to address and rehabilitate. Understanding the multifaceted risk factors that contribute to juvenile recidivism is essential for developing effective intervention and diversion strategies. Prior offense history, psychiatric conditions, age, peer influence, and other personal and familial factors all play significant roles in shaping recidivism risk. By identifying these criminogenic needs, rehabilitative programs can target specific factors that drive reoffending, offering tailored programs to reduce these risk factors and reduce their likelihood of future criminal behavior. Moreover, evaluating how intervention and diversion programs reduce these criminogenic needs is important in evaluating the effectiveness of these programs. Such programs are crucial in breaking the cycle of recidivism, not only improving outcomes for individuals but also fostering a safer community.

Effectiveness and Affordability of Intervention and Diversion Programs

Many only consider recidivism rates in the traditional sense of reoffending when evaluating the effectiveness of intervention and diversion programs, not the variety of other factors contributing to or correlating with criminal behavior that these programs successfully reduce. By only focusing on recidivism rates in the traditional sense, we hinder our ability to effectively evaluate these programs. Examining factors contributing to social integration, such as employment skills, mental health wellness, and addiction counseling, provides a more holistic view of the effectiveness of these programs. (Cunneen & Luke, 2007) Previous studies have primarily focused on the effects of juvenile system processing and various programs as they relate to recidivism. Available studies have examined the effectiveness of pre-charge and post-charge programs (Wilson & Hoge, 2013), such as wraparound services (Carney & Buttell, 2003) and restorative justice interventions (Bouffard, 2017). However, none of these studies examine the affordability or accessibility of these programs; these factors need to be considered when evaluating their effectiveness. Further, due to the difference between intervention programs and diversion programs, one must examine the research and outcomes of each of these categories separately.

Intervention programs

Many forms of intervention programs have proven to be effective in various aspects. The study performed by Carney and Buttell (2003) found that wraparound services did not reduce recidivism in the traditional sense, it did reduce many risky and delinquent behaviors such as missing school, suspensions from school, being assaultive, running away from home, and being picked up by police. Reducing these behaviors is an effective outcome of this intervention program. Moreover, a previous study examining the impact of a Post Release Support Program (PRSP) found that although it also did not reduce juvenile recidivism in the traditional sense,

participants reported benefits such as improved access to income support, education, training, and employment services as well as enhanced self-esteem, reduced social isolation, increased stability and support in life, and support with family relationships (Cunneen & Luke, 2007). The Family Empowerment Intervention (FEI) was found to be highly effective in reducing juvenile recidivism. It was found that juveniles who participated in the FEI program had significantly fewer charges and almost significantly fewer arrests after 12 months when compared to juveniles who participated in the Extended Services Intervention or did not participate in either program. (Dembo et al., 2001)

Diversion Programs

Many forms of diversion programs have proven to be effective in various aspects. The review performed by Wilson et al. (2018) analyzed the effectiveness of police-led diversion programs and found that police-led diversion programs effectively reduced future delinquent behaviors in juveniles. These diversions included formal warnings from the police without further referrals, formal warnings from police with referrals to rehabilitative services, and police restorative cautioning. The rehabilitative services varied across studies, typically including case management, educational support, or family therapy. Further, the pilot study performed by Varghese and colleagues (2024) proved the effectiveness of a career mentoring program in reducing factors related to recidivism among non-violent juveniles. They found that juveniles who participated in the mentoring program had an increased interest in prosocial behaviors, such as helping others, whereas the control group showed a decrease in this area. Findings also suggest that juveniles who participated in the mentoring program experienced a shift in job preferences, showing an increase in preference for professional jobs and a decrease in preference for “attention and spotlight” jobs. When examining a residential diversion program, the Pilgrim

Center, McMackin and others (2004) found that both chronic and non-chronic offenders were significantly less likely to be reconvicted if they remained in the program for 11 months or longer; this association is stronger in chronic offenders.

Wilson and Hoge (2013) examined the effectiveness of diversion programs in lowering recidivism rates among juveniles as well as identified program characteristics that are most successful. The researchers found that both caution and intervention-based diversion programs were significantly more effective in reducing recidivism than traditional processing. The risk level of juveniles was important in the effectiveness of these programs; caution programs were more effective for low-risk individuals, while intervention programs were more effective for medium and high-risk offenders. They also found various program characteristics that moderated the effectiveness of diversion programs. For instance, programs that targeted youth prior to being charged, especially for low-risk offenders, were found to be more effective. Moreover, programs that were provided by the criminal justice system and provided tailored treatment for medium and high-risk offenders, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, were found to be effective characteristics.

Affordability and Accessibility

The media has frequently highlighted the cost-related issues within intervention and diversion programs. Many of these programs face issues with inconsistent and inadequate funding, limiting their ability to maintain the level of support and resources needed to effectively help participants (Seacrest, 2024). Additionally, the participation fees for these programs can be extremely high, sometimes costing thousands of dollars (Chapoco, 2024). For many disadvantaged families, these costs are simply unattainable, further reinforcing the cycle of poverty and criminal behavior. When juveniles and their families cannot afford the program fees,

they may be compelled to turn to payday or title loans or, in some cases, to engage in illegal activities to cover the costs (Chapoco, 2024).

Interestingly, while much research has focused on the cost-effectiveness of these programs for the government and taxpayers, no studies examine the monetary impact on individual participants and their families. This gap in the literature overlooks the significant financial strain that these programs can impose on low-income households, potentially undermining their accessibility (FFJC, 2024) and thereby influencing effectiveness. Low socioeconomic status is a well-documented risk factor for juvenile delinquency (Rekker et al., 2015); understanding the cost implications for participants is essential as it is an often overlooked but crucial aspect of program accessibility.

Past Research Study Quality

Research on the effectiveness of juvenile intervention and diversion programs has largely focused on quasi-experimental studies, with limited random assignment to treatment and control groups, impacting the internal validity of findings (Dembo et al., 2001; McMackin et al., 2004; Peticlerc et al., 2013; Varghese et al., 2024). These studies have predominantly relied on quantitative data, which does not fully capture the complexities of underlying juvenile criminal behavior and treatment outcomes (Carney & Buttell, 2003; Dembo et al., 2001; Wilson & Hoge, 2013). While many studies incorporated longitudinal designs, thereby strengthening their findings through extended tracking of the participants, notable gaps remain. Research has largely excluded certain groups of juveniles, leaving significant questions about the effectiveness of these programs for the overall population of young offenders. Additionally, research on the financial costs of these programs for individual participants and their families is lacking, with prior studies primarily examining cost-effectiveness from a governmental perspective. It is

crucial to investigate whether intervention and diversion programs are more effective than incarceration for juvenile offenders and whether these programs are financially accessible to participants.

The studies examined primarily utilized quasi-experimental designs where participants were not randomly assigned to treatment and control groups (Dembo et al., 2001; McMackin et al., 2004; Peticlerc et al., 2013; Varghese et al., 2024). The lack of random assignment to the treatments negatively affects the rigor of the studies by weakening internal validity. However, some studies utilized random assignment to the treatment and control groups which significantly strengthened their internal validity. (Dembo et al., 2001; Varghese et al., 2024) There was also an overwhelming reliance on quantitative data (Carney & Buttell, 2003; Dembo et al., 2001; McMackin et al., 2004; McReynolds et al., 2010; Peticlerc et al., 2013; Wilson & Hoge, 2013). The reliance on quantitative data in a majority of these studies may not fully capture the complex issues influencing criminal behavior, affecting the rigor of the studies. The addition of qualitative data to the studies may give further insights into the impacts of the treatments in reducing criminogenic needs, such as in the studies performed by Varghese et al. (2024) as well as Cunnen and Luke (2007). Many of the studies also used a longitudinal design. (Carney & Buttell, 2003; Dembo et al., 2001; McMackin et al., 2004; McReynolds et al., 2010; Peticlerc et al., 2013) The longitudinal design used in many of the studies enabled them to follow participants over extended periods of time, significantly strengthening the results and rigor of the studies.

Though the studies identified for this paper were rigorous overall, gaps in the body of research were identified. Past studies have not considered youths who were processed in the adult justice system rather than the juvenile justice system. This is important to consider as not all youths are processed within the juvenile system. They have also used a disproportionate

amount of males in past research, rarely including females at all. This leaves a hole in the research by not showing the effects of these programs on females. Further, no articles considering the monetary cost of these programs for the individual participants were identified; they only appeared to mention cost-effectiveness in relation to governments. This needs to be examined since many diversion and intervention programs cost money for juveniles to participate in. The proposed study will be utilizing two research questions: 1) Are intervention and diversion programs more effective for juvenile offenders than incarceration? 2) Are intervention and diversion programs affordable for participants?

Proposed Study

The study that I am proposing will address the research design issues mentioned in the past research study quality section. These can include the lack of randomization, addressing key differences between female juvenile offenders, those processed in the adult justice system, and other groups that have previously been considered, and the affordability and accessibility of these diversion and intervention programs. In this study, I will consider the monetary costs of participating in these programs for the juveniles and their families. The consideration of monetary costs for participants and their families is crucial when considering diversion and intervention programs. Low socio-economic status is a well-known correlate of juvenile delinquency (Rekker et al., 2015); by considering the monetary costs of participation, this study will shed light on a crucial but often overlooked factor in the accessibility of intervention and diversion programs. Moreover, youths charged in the adult justice system, as well as the juvenile justice system will be included. The additional inclusion of youths processed in the adult justice system will provide a more holistic view of the effects of intervention and diversion programs on juvenile offenders.

This study will also be a more inclusive sample by utilizing a proportionate amount of males and females. The inclusion of female participants is vital to examine the effectiveness of these programs across the sexes. I would also utilize random assignment to the treatment conditions in order to strengthen the internal validity and show a stronger correlation between the program and effective outcomes. To ensure the ethicality of this, all participants will be provided with whichever treatment is found most effective at the end of the study. I also plan to utilize qualitative data to give further insights into the impacts of these programs. By making these adaptations, I will be contributing to past research.

Methods

Participants

Juveniles who had at least one interaction with the criminal justice system in the United States will be the participants of this study. Six hundred juveniles will be recruited beginning on January 1, 2025 and asked to participate in a study titled "Exploring the Effectiveness and Accessibility of Diversion and Intervention Programs for Juvenile Offenders in the United States." A sample of this size will increase the external validity of the findings. For this study, juveniles are considered any person between the ages of 13-17 years old, whether they were treated as a juvenile or adult by the criminal justice system. Beginning January 2, 2025, participants will be recruited by teacher and local law enforcement recommendations, as well as court records. Since two alternatives to incarceration programs (intervention and diversion) will be used in this study, recruitment will continue until participants fill each study group as described below.

Intervention (I) Programs. Juveniles who have interacted with the criminal justice system, but have not been court-processed nor incarcerated (i.e. arrested by law enforcement officers but let

off with a warning). The two intervention programs that will be analyzed in the study are Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise (I-HWW) and Safe Streets (I-SS).

Diversion (D) Programs. Juveniles who have been court-processed, including those who have previously been incarcerated. The two diversion programs examined in the study are Wraparound Services (D-Wrap) and Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (D-AIM).

Once placed in either the intervention or diversion program, the participants will be randomly assigned to the subtype program. I will stratify while assigning the participants, such as in the study performed by Dembo et al. (2001), to ensure that there is an equal distribution of sex, socioeconomic status, race, age, type and frequency of offense (violent v. non-violent), geographic region, aggressiveness, negative peer association, antisocial tendencies, education level, and mental health status. I will also ensure an even distribution of familial factors, such as parental education and socioeconomic status. Moreover, an even distribution of juveniles who have been court-processed or previously court-processed and those who have not will be ensured in each sample.

Materials

Demographics

In order to gather relevant personal and family characteristics, an initial self-report survey will be provided to participants asking the following: 1) What is the sex you were assigned at birth? 2) What race do you identify as? 3) What is your age? 4) What is the highest level of education that you have obtained? 5) Do you have any known mental health conditions? 6) What state do you live in? 7) What prior criminal activity have you engaged in (violent v. non-violent)?

An initial self-report survey will also be provided to the guardian(s) of the participants asking the following: 1) What is the sex your participating child was assigned at birth? 2) What race does your participating child identify as? 3) What is your participating child's age? 4) What is the highest level of education that you have obtained? 5) What is the highest level of education that your participating child has obtained? 6) What state does your participating child live in? 7) What prior criminal activity, that you know of, has your participating child engaged in? 8) Does your participating child have any known mental health conditions? Psychiatric conditions will not be limited to specific diagnoses; reduction in symptoms related to any psychiatric condition will be considered effective.

Affordability

To analyze the affordability of these intervention and diversion programs, the participation costs for individuals will be calculated and the socioeconomic status of participants will be collected. Responses given by participants in a questionnaire utilizing open-ended questions to assess how affordable they believed the programs were will also be considered in this analysis. This questionnaire will ask participants the following: 1) How did you or your family obtain the money to cover your participation costs? 2) Did you believe that costs to participate were easily within your reach? Affordability often incorporates both a consideration of the family household SES, a perception of the benefit of the program, and the dollar cost (APA, 2024). The questionnaire will additionally ask the following: 1) What aspect or aspects of the program did you find most helpful? 2) Why did you find the aspect or aspects helpful?

Effectiveness

To analyze the effectiveness of the programs, the improvement of multiple factors that have previously been shown to contribute to criminal behavior will be considered (Petitclerc et

al., 2013). These factors comprise both personal and familial characteristics. These characteristics include psychiatric symptoms, antisocial tendencies, aggressiveness, offending, school performance, negative peer association, parental education, and socioeconomic status. Psychiatric conditions will not be limited to specific diagnoses; reduction in symptoms related to any psychiatric condition will be considered effective. The familial characteristics include parental education and family socioeconomic status.

To assess the baseline status and to assess the potential impact of the program, the participants and their guardian(s) will be provided with questionnaires to assess the effectiveness of their assigned program. Post-test assessments will occur at 1) The conclusion of the program; 2) 6 months after completion; and 3) 12 months after program completion. The following tools have been developed for use with children and will be utilized to assess the effectiveness of the programs.

The Brame Aggressiveness Questionnaire used by Peticlerc et al. (2013) will be utilized to measure aggression levels in participating juveniles. This tool was developed for children and has reliability ranging from Cronbach's alpha .78 to .87. This tool categorizes aggression into low, medium, and high trajectories.

The Antisocial Personality Questionnaire (APQ) will be used to measure antisocial tendencies. It is a 125-item inventory that measures traits such as self-control, self-esteem, resentment, aggression, and others. The APQ can differentiate between offenders and normals and between those with and without mental illness. Its scale reliabilities range from .77 to .87 (Blackburn & Fawcett, 1999).

Moreover, the Problem Behavior Frequency Scale (PBFS) will be used to measure negative peer association (Farrell et al., 2016). This self-report tool measures adolescents'

frequency of victimization, aggression, drug use, and other problem behaviors. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that it distinguished well between 7 key behaviors. It was standardized on an adolescent population of equal genders, but a much higher percentage of Black non-Hispanic than in the general population.

Socioeconomic Scale - Composite (SES-C) is a 10-item scale that encompasses multiple variables that contribute to a family's SES. In addition to the income, work status, and educational level of the head of household and the participant, it includes issues of debt, if there are others assisting with finances, and a crowding index (Sacre et al, 2023).

Records from local law enforcement will also be obtained to document if there has been any interaction with the criminal justice system since participation in the A2I program. Medical records related to the participants' mental health symptoms. School performance will be tracked via the number of unexcused absences and G.P.A.

Procedure

Study Design

This study will have two arms to examine the sub-programs within the two major types of alternatives to incarceration programs. A two-between-group pre-test/3 post-test design will be used to compare the effectiveness of each of the Intervention and Diversion programs. This type of design is utilized when a control group, such as not providing any remediation, is not ethically or legally realistic. It is considered an experimental approach, as control is provided via the randomized assignment to each of the subgroups allowing for generalizability to larger, similar populations (Portney & Watkins, 2015).

The independent variables in this study include the aspects of the program provided for each group of juveniles. The dependent variables include: 1) Psychiatric symptoms; 2) Substance

abuse; 3) School performance; 4) Aggression; 5) Negative peer influence; 6) Antisocial tendencies; 7) Criminal behavior; 8) Socioeconomic status.

Steps Taken

1. The surveys and demographic forms will be completed online by the participants and the guardian(s).
2. The participants and their guardian(s) will participate in an 18-month program at their local community center.
3. After participating in the assigned program, participants and their guardian(s) will be provided with the same questionnaire as the intervention groups to assess the effectiveness.
4. The affordability and effectiveness of different aspects of the programs in reducing factors leading to recidivism will be measured and research study results will be ascertained.
5. Providing participants, guardians, and the criminal justice system with results.
6. Offer the most effective program to participants of less effective groups.

Timeframe

Participants and their guardian(s) will be informed that participation in the study will require active participation in an alternative to incarceration program for a period of 18 months, similar to past studies. Further, they will be informed that participation in the study will extend for 12 months after completion of the program. Completion of the initial and follow-up questionnaires will require 1.5 hours.

Ethical Considerations

Written permission from both the juvenile and their guardian(s) will be required to participate. Permission will also be obtained from participants and their guardian(s) to access a list of mental health diagnoses from the participants' medical professionals, as well as prior interactions with the criminal justice system from law enforcement. Human Subjects Committee of Univ. of Oswego and approved by each participant's criminal justice system. Participants will be assured that all responses are anonymous. Moreover, participants will be provided with the contact information for the researchers, faculty advisor, and State University of New York at Oswego Human Subjects Committee Chair in case of any questions. After the study is completed, each participant will be debriefed and offered participation in the program that is most effective in reducing their individual risk factors, free of cost to them.

Program Overviews

The programs will be hosted by a trained facilitator and will be located at a local community center within 10 miles of the participants' residences. The following sections include the descriptions of the 4 programs used in this study.

Diversion Programs

D-AIM: Advocate, Intervene, Mentor

AIM is a successful diversion program that helps high-risk youth (Cramer, et al, 2018; NYC Department of Probation & NYC Center for Economic Opportunity; Seacrest, 2024). The program includes: 1) Developing individualized safety/crisis plans; 2) Community-based advocacy; 3) Family involvement; 4) Wraparound services; 5) Vocational assistance; 6) Meetings to discuss unmet needs; and 7) Mentors with which to attend meetings and activities (Seacrest, 2024). It also includes a wrap-around component.

D-WRAP: Wrap-around

Wrap-around is a team-based planning process to individualize and coordinate care for children at risk of institutional placement (Carney & Buttell, 2003). Wraparound services often include: 1) Family involvement; 2) Community involvement; 3) Implementing needed services that did not previously exist (i.e. home/living arrangements, family problems, education, vocational assistance, psychological treatment, legal assistance, medical assistance); 4) Developing individualized crisis plans; 5) Delivering direct services as needed; 6) Developing individualized transition plans; and 7) Training key individuals in the juveniles' lives.

Intervention Programs

I-SS: Safe Streets

Safe Streets is an evidence-based violence prevention and interruption program (City of Baltimore, Seacrest, 2024). It includes: 1) Workers who can relate to the juveniles (i.e. former gang members, those who have previously been incarcerated); 2) Working/meeting in untraditional settings (i.e. places in which young people like to hang out); 3) Job training; 4) Public education; and 5) Faith-based leader involvement (i.e priests, rabbis).

I-HWW: Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise

The HWW is a peer-led group cognitive behavioral program that enhances life coaching services that are offered to persons at high risk of engaging in gun violence (Gonzalez et al., 2020; Seacrest, 2024)). This program includes the following components: 1) Group cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT); 2) Decision-making skills; 3) Identity development; 4) Life skills; and 5) Financial literacy.

Data Analysis

Since there are both categorical and quantitative continuous variables for outcomes in this study, a combination of descriptive, non-parametric, and parametric statistics will be utilized.

Statistical procedures

Data will be inputted from the questionnaires into Microsoft Excel and will be reviewed for completeness. Any areas of retention losses (e.g. certain geographies, gender, etc) will be noted. Those who cease participation in the programs or do not complete any of the follow-up assessments will not be included in the final sample. Descriptive statistics for means and frequencies of the demographic characteristics, sample size and type, and the values from the various questionnaires will be compiled and illustrated using pie charts and graphs. These values will also be used for the test statistics. The affordability and potential effectiveness of the programs will then be examined to determine if a statistical difference is present.

If a program improves at the < .05 significance level for any of the DV factors that are associated with criminogenic needs, the program will be considered effective. A chi-square statistic will be utilized to compare nominal variables such as Yes and No, gender, and type of offense. To ascertain DV changes for the continuous variables, a multivariate statistic such as MANCOVA will be calculated using SPSS statistical software. The advantage of this statistic is that it is able to control for covariates such as gender, geography, SES, etc.

Affordability will be measured by descriptive statistics (frequencies of "No and Yes" on the affordability assessment and the helpfulness questions). These frequencies will then be utilized to calculate a chi-square statistic. Potential changes in SES-C scores will be calculated by a dependent t-test, as only the initial and final SES-C scores will be used.

Discussion

Past studies have established that intervention and diversion programs are more effective in curbing juvenile recidivism and overall criminal behavior when compared to traditional court processing (Cunnen & Luke, 2007; Dembo et al., 2001; Wilson et al., 2018; Varghese et al.,

2024). The proposed study aims to examine what aspects of intervention and diversion programs are most effective for various juvenile risk factors as well as the affordability of participation in these programs. The goal of this study is to expand on previous research examining the effectiveness of intervention and diversion programs in reducing juvenile recidivism and overall criminal behavior. The results of this study will assist in creating more practical and equitable approaches to juvenile justice.

Limitations

Although the proposed study will be greatly beneficial to research regarding juvenile intervention and diversion programs, there will be limitations, as there are with all research. One potential limitation of the proposed study is participant attrition. When working with juveniles in intervention programs, they may cease participation in the program. Further, after completion of both the intervention and diversion programs, participants may not complete follow-up assessments. Those who ceased participation in the intervention program or did not complete follow-up assessments would not be included in the final sample, decreasing the initial sample size. Moreover, participant attrition may disproportionately affect certain subgroups, such as those with lower socioeconomic status or unstable family environments. A potential bias can be introduced into the results if the participants who remain in the study significantly differ from those who drop out. This can skew the findings of the proposed study and limit the generalizability.

Another potential limitation of the study is the reliance on self-report data. Many biases are unconscious and can be present in self-report surveys, leading to inaccurate results. Juveniles may not be unbiased when reporting on themselves, and their families may not be unbiased when reporting on the juvenile. Juveniles may underreport deviant behaviors or overreport positive

qualities due to a social desirability bias, potentially distorting data. Similarly, families may present information in a way that reflects positively on the juvenile, whether consciously or unconsciously. These biases may reduce the accuracy of the findings and could obscure the effectiveness of the programs being studied.

Moreover, although 600 juveniles is a large sample size, there is not a significant number of participants in each state. Since the proposed study will use stratified random sampling and include juveniles from all 50 states in the United States of America, there will only be 12 participants from each state. Although a nationally representative sample is valuable when examining broader trends, having only 12 participants per state diminishes the study's ability to identify and analyze regional differences or state-specific factors influencing the effectiveness of intervention and diversion programs. This lack of representation makes it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about how these programs operate differently in different cultural contexts.

The proposed study also has a limited amount of intervention and diversion programs. This study will only consider two intervention programs and two diversion programs (Safe Streets, HWW, AIM, and Wrap-around services). Programs that will not be considered in this study may have different components that are effective; however, they will not be examined in this study. By focusing on only two intervention programs and two diversion programs, the study excludes a wide range of alternative approaches that may also have effective aspects. This limitation restricts the comprehensiveness of the study as it cannot capture the diversity of program methodologies, structures, and goals present in other intervention and diversion programs.

Further, a limited age range is included in the study. Juveniles younger than 13 years old may be in need of these programs, but they were not considered in this study. By excluding juveniles younger than 13 years old, the study does not account for how these programs may work for younger children. Juveniles younger than 13 years old may display delinquent behavior or engage in criminal activities, but they will not be considered in this study. This limitation may lead to an incomplete understanding of the broader applicability of the programs, especially since early adolescence is a critical development period for intervention.

A final limitation of the proposed study is the grouping of offenses into violent and non-violent. There may be crucial differences in specific types of offenses (i.e. assault, larceny, weapons, drug trafficking) that were not considered in the study. Grouping offenses into broad categories such as violent and non-violent risks oversimplifying the nuanced differences between types of offenses. For instance, drug trafficking and theft may fall into the same non-violent category despite involving distinct underlying factors and potential responses for intervention and diversion. This could lead to an incomplete or inaccurate interpretation of program effectiveness for specific offenses.

Implications

Despite the limitations, the proposed study will provide necessary insights into understudied topics relating to juvenile intervention and diversion programs. This study will fill a significant gap in scholarly knowledge about juvenile intervention and diversion programs. Targeted approaches to intervention and diversion are becoming common, such as the probation program used in New York State (probation officer, personal communication, October 8, 2024). However, there is no research that suggests specific program aspects help reduce specific criminogenic needs. This study will provide data indicating what programs are most effective in

reducing known criminogenic needs. Since this will be an experimental study that uses stratified randomized sampling of juveniles from many United States jurisdictions, the conclusions can be generalized to the larger juvenile offender population. The inclusion of juveniles processed in the adult justice system and a proportionate amount of females will also fill a significant gap in the current research which lacks these aspects. This knowledge can assist criminal justice practitioners in creating more effective interventions and diversions for a wider range of juveniles.

Making intervention and diversion programs more effective and affordable for juveniles is a critical step toward reducing future crime rates and overall costs associated with incarceration. These programs are evidence-based and often require a fraction of the resources needed to house and manage individuals in correctional facilities, making them a more cost-effective solution. By using these programs, juveniles who might otherwise fall into a cycle of criminal behavior can be redirected toward more constructive paths. This, in turn, can significantly lower stress on families, lower future incarceration rates, and alleviate the long-term financial burden on the justice system.

Examining the monetary costs of participation for juveniles and their families will address another significant gap in the current literature and has profound implications for program accessibility and success. Socioeconomic status is a well-known correlate of criminal behavior. If these programs are not affordable, they are not accessible; programs that are prohibitively expensive can exclude those who may benefit from them. Such barriers undermine the potential impact of these initiatives and perpetuate inequalities in the justice system. Understanding the affordability of intervention and diversion programs is not just a financial issue but also a matter of equity. Programs that are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic

status, can better serve the juvenile population and help reduce disparities in outcomes. By identifying the monetary costs for participants and their families, practitioners and policymakers can develop approaches that are more accessible and align with the broader goals of juvenile justice. Ensuring that all juveniles, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, have access to effective intervention and diversion programs is key to creating a more equitable system.

Future Directions

Future research may choose to explore a wider range of intervention and diversion programs, examining their unique approaches, structures, and outcomes. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different program aspects are effective for different individual needs. By analyzing a diverse array of programs, researchers can identify more components that are most effective in mitigating particular risk factors. This tailored understanding will allow for the development of more personalized and responsive intervention and diversion strategies that cater to the unique circumstances of each juvenile, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of these programs.

Future research may also choose to utilize a larger sample size. Utilizing a larger sample size will allow researchers to analyze the nuanced differences between states. A more extensive dataset can provide the statistical power needed to detect subtle variations in program outcomes that a smaller sample size may overlook. This is particularly important when considering the diverse legal and cultural landscapes, which can significantly influence the implementation and success of intervention and diversion programs. Further, a larger sample size enables researchers to analyze how state-specific policies, resource allocations, and community support systems impact juvenile justice outcomes. By understanding these regional differences, programs can be

better tailored to fit the unique needs and conditions of each state, leading to more effective and contextually appropriate solutions.

Moreover, using a wider age range of juveniles as participants may be considered in future studies. Including a broader age range can shed light on how intervention and diversion programs perform across different developmental stages. Younger juveniles may benefit more from preventive measures that focus on behavior modification and academic support, whereas older adolescents might require programs that address more complex issues such as substance abuse, gang involvement, or mental health challenges. By encompassing a wider age range, researchers can identify age-specific needs and outcomes, ensuring that programs are appropriately designed to support juveniles at various points in their development.

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