Article 5

Outreach Intervention Reduces Recidivism in Juvenile Delinquents

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Crime is considered one of the most devastating things this country and other countries face everyday. It doesn't discriminate against any age, race or socioeconomic status and can infiltrate any lifestyle. In a world where public concern is great, crime is fueled by social and economic problems. Indeed, in recent years, national opinion polls have found that violent crime is frequently considered the single "most important problem facing this country today," ahead of the economy, unemployment, poverty, healthcare and other problems that are regularly on the minds of American adults (Rosenbaum, Lurigio, & Davis, 1998, p. 3).

Antisocial behavior often leads to criminal acts. People with antisocial characteristics are people who are selfish, irresponsible, lack guilt, and frequently violate rules of society (Sue, Sue, & Sue, 2000, p. 230). These common behaviors describe many of our increasing numbers of youth offenders who are incarcerated in youth facilities and boot camps across the country. Research suggests that antisocial behavior has a link to genetics. In a study conducted with individuals who were diagnosed with antisocial behavior personality disorder, males were five times more likely to inherit the disorder among first-degree biological relatives, and females were ten times more likely to inherit the disorder among first-degree biological

relatives, than the general population. These findings can be used to support either an environmental or a genetic hypothesis (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Research suggests that antisocial behavior is manifested by low self-esteem, poor peer and adult relationships, and instability in the home life (Wright, Caspi, Moffitt, & Silva, 1999). According to research, association with delinquent peers is due to low social control, poor self-concept, and interpersonal inadequacy (Brook, Whiteman, Balka, & Cohen, 1997). Poor or ineffective parenting will produce children who lack self control (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Associating with antisocial peers occurs through modeling of antisocial behavior and attitudes. Youth who see antisocial behaviors are more likely to act on them than peers who just talk about it (Mills, Kroner, Mongrain, & Sylvain 2005, p. 47). Youth who engage in risky behaviors are also at risk for delinquency (Blaske, Borduin, Henggeler, & Mann, 1989); another factor that leads youth to delinquency is living in poverty (Lerner & Galambos). Social learning of antisocial behavior can be used to explain an increase of antisocial behavior during the adolescent years (Corbett & Petersilia, 1994). Exposure to delinquent peers can increase rapidly from the preteen years through adolescence and into the late teenage years. It should also be noted that antisocial behavior can be changed by exposure to positive influences.

To understand juvenile delinquency, a look at Agnew, Brezina, Wright, and Cullen's general strain theory (2002) needs to be discussed. General strain theory suggests that negative relationships with others are one of the causes of delinquency (Agnew et al., p. 44). There are three major strains relative to this theory: a) others may prevent individuals from achieving success, b) the removal of positive stimuli, and c) the presentation of negative stimulus. These strains are likely to increase the negative emotions felt by an individual that can lead to delinquency. More importantly, personality traits are also a contributing factor of negative responses. Persons who have constraint issues are more likely to act on their impulses, including impulses of a delinquent nature (Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995). These individuals are risk takers and also sensation seekers; these persons reject social norms

placed on them by society and don't care about others' feelings or their rights. Individuals that are high in negative emotionality are much more likely than others to experience events that are aversive, to attribute these events to the malicious behavior of others, to experience intense emotional reactions to these events-particularly the key emotion of anger-and to be disposed to respond to such events in an aggressive or antisocial behavior (Agnew et al., p. 45).

Community and family based programs play an important part in reducing crime. These programs focus on youth and their families to improve their lives. Starting with early intervention is the key. Offering support to youth and their families who are at risk is paramount. Participating in a program that has long-term goals for youth and their families provides the best outcome, although being involved in this type of program does not exclude a problem free childhood or adolescence (Rosenbaum et al., 1998). Although research suggests that community based programs are good, they are also the least effective in providing treatment because they demand that the family structure and lifestyle cater to the life of the juvenile to treat delinquent behavior (Northey, Primer, & Christensen, 1997). Research by Greene (1993) and Garbarino, Kostelny, and Dubrow (1991) insist that any program that will positively impact a youth will foster coping skills, self-efficacy and relationship with family and other adults.

Community and family based programs offer a wide range of activities to youth and their families to deter crime and provide positive channels in the communities in which at risk youth live. Examples of activities that at risk youth participate in are sports that serve to encourage a positive outlet for aggression, summer camps to promote socialization, and after school programs (Ludman, 1993).

Outreach to youth offenders is very important. If programs are available to them it reduces their chances to recidivate. Programs that provide at least the minimum of help are very useful. Many youth upon their release from facilities have no jobs, no skills and have not finished high school. This puts them at high risk of recidivism as soon as they walk out the door. One program that helps juvenile delinquents make the transition out of youth facilities is Safer Foundation. This program is nestled in downtown Chicago and

helps ex-offenders, adult and juvenile, get on the right track. Safer Foundation has an array of programs geared to ex-offenders to help them make the successful transition back into society to become productive citizens. They have programs that reach out to those still incarcerated, such as corresponding with inmates before they get released from prison. By reaching out to individuals before their release, case managers are getting them prepared for life outside of prison. Case managers are a vital part of the program's outreach (Cowen & Work, 1998). Case managers assist individuals by providing referrals to different agencies or other entities that may assist the youth as well as the adult offender. They also have partnerships with many area high schools and alternative schools where juvenile offenders can get an education. Without these important programs many adult and youth offenders wouldn't have the start, support or means to get on the right track.

A program used by the state of Colorado uses intensive education programming geared toward reducing the recidivism rate in its state. The program has slashed recidivism by about 50% since its implementation. About 10% of juveniles who entered the program earned a GED or high school diploma, while 59% entered it while involved in the program. The program lasts about two to seven years. The state division of Criminal Justice states that after five years of completing the program, about half of them avoided any further contact with law enforcement or the court system. The program is only for the most violent offenders and it includes boot camp, counseling, education courses, and training in life skills ("Colo. Cuts Recidivism with Youth Education," 2005).

A study conducted by Nugent and Paddock (1996) looked at the effects of mediation as it related to the recidivism rate of juvenile offenders vs. juvenile offenders who went through the traditional court systems. It found that out of a sample of 100 juveniles the use of mediation provided a positive benefit as it related to recidivism. The results of the study yielded the following: participants who went through the traditional court system reoffended at the rate of 35% while participants who went through mediation reoffended at a rate of 20% within the first year. This study noted that some of the reasons

for the recidivism rates were possibly related to family structure. In another study conducted by Umbriet (1994), two groups of juvenile offenders were compared to see if their recidivism rates were the same; this study looked at 903 cases of offenders who either went through mediation or did not. His research was conducted with 85% male and 15% female juvenile offenders and their victims. He concluded that juveniles who participated in the mediation committed fewer crimes post-mediation than those who did not participate in the mediation.

Future Implications for Counseling Research

Further research should be conducted in order to gather information that examines whether there is a correlation between intervention programs and reduced juvenile recidivism. I hypothesize that such a study would show that there *is* a direct correlation between these two variables. Moreover such a study could provide insight as to why delinquents believe as they do and what type of situations they feel are acceptable for punishment, i.e., what crimes are permissible. As suggested by Agnew et al.'s general strain theory (2002), preventing individuals from achieving success will cause delinquency. The removal of positive variables will cause an individual to engage in acts that lead to delinquency and crime. I anticipate that results would suggest that the use of intervention programs, either while an individual is in custody or out of a facility, would decrease recidivism rates.

Providing our youth with many outlets that are positive in nature fosters their self-esteem as well as their self worth. Positive outlets provide youth a means of addressing their needs as well as their wants. Research needs to allow youth to communicate attitudes and beliefs, thus underlying problems that keep youth involved in a life of crime can be examined; protective factors that keep youth free from crime will also be revealed. Providing an open forum where youth can discuss their struggles and victories gives the youth power. This power will not only build their self-esteem but will allow youth to make some decisions about what is right and what is wrong in their lives and work to alleviate the issues they face.

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