

Violent Juvenile Offenders Prevention Programs

Phillip Neely, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Criminal Justice

Saint Leo University

3555 Koger Blvd. Suite #105, Duluth, Georgia 30096

United States of America

Abstract

Juvenile offenders have flooded the juvenile facilities, and as a result juveniles are being housed in local county jails. One reason for the increase in the number of juvenile offenders is the failure of lawmakers in DeKalb County, Georgia, to find ways to mitigate the crimes these juveniles are committing. Juvenile crime stems from many factors, including lack of good parental guidance, truancy, and running away from home. Subsequently these teens become involved with the wrong individuals, potentially become dropouts, and are susceptible to becoming potential juvenile offenders. Many complex factors influence the problem of crimes committed by teens; however, there are viable and comprehensive solutions to the challenges. Because of the serious nature of juveniles crimes , lawmakers are seeking unprecedented ways to combat the increasing threat throughout the community.

Keywords: Violence, Juvenile Offenders, Delinquency, Social Trends

Introduction

Teenage delinquency has decline in the economy, which results in job loss. A possible correlation may exist between job loss and teenage delinquency because teens often look for illegal resources to help support their families and become easy targets for gang-initiated activity as a result of their vulnerable home environments. Influence from gang members encourages teens to show the gang members that they are loyal to the gang.

Weapons have also played a large part in the high crime rate among teens, largely because of individuals who place weapons in the hands of minors. "In 1972, researchers Marvin Wolfgang, Robert Figlio, and Thorston Selling published a landmark study, in a Birth Cohort. Typically they followed a delinquency pattern of cohort careers among boys that were born in Philadelphia from birth until their 18th birthday" (Siegal & Welsh, 2012, p. 63). According to Siegal and Welsh (2002), "The two researchers obtained the boys' data files from police and school records. They collectively gathered the social economic status based on the residence and family income, and at least 54% were repeat offenders" (p. 63). Welch also noted, "cognitive behavior therapy is a treatment that focuses solely on the patterns of how a person thinks and their beliefs, attitudes, and the way they value life" (p. 64). Flglio indicated, "Characteristics of distorted thinking may include the following: an egocentric view point, lack of trust in other people, and acting on impulse including a lack of self-control" (p. 64).

Most delinquency acts occur during the warm summer months. Teens have a greater opportunity during the summer to commit a crime and the warmer it gets the more out of control teens become (Siegal & Welsh, 2012). "The program trial bases were over 400 clinical trials involving a broad range of conditions and populations; the program has also been reliable and effective, with a wide variety of behavior problems including antisocial and aggressive behavior problems, all of which have been linked to delinquency among teens" (Siegal & Welsh, 2012, p. 65). The goal of the program is to restructure those teens who are facing challenges with behavior problems that will eventually lead them to commit crimes and become career criminals.

Discussion and Results

Juvenile crime is so severe in Georgia that some juveniles are housed at adult facilities. In the State of Georgia, juveniles who are 17 years old will go to jail and not to a juvenile facility. "In 1899, the first juvenile court was created in Chicago, Illinois, the court represented the dawn of a new era for the legal system, the concept of the juvenile court in Illinois, was for prevention and rehabilitation" [(Territo, Halsted, & Brombley, 2004, p. 547).

According to Territo et al. (2004), “Any youth who was in violation of the law were called juvenile delinquents not criminals, this applied to the teens who were wayward children that needed help from the court”(p. 547). “The juvenile court judges were to assume a parental role in an atmosphere that is less threatening than that of an adult atmosphere, criminal court reviews the behavior of teens, disciplining them when appropriate and devising a course of action to prevent future delinquent behavior”](Territo et al., 2004, p. 547). “In addition, the court hired Psychiatric and social workers to prepare comprehensive analyses on teens background (Territo et al., 2004, p. 547).

Territo et al. (2004) noted, “Prevention is any attempt to forestall anticipated delinquent behavior and diversion deals with delinquent behavior that has already occurred” (p. 548). A lot of diversion programs are held in the community [to help mitigate the delinquent problem Diversion programs

can provide a juvenile with assistance without the stigma of involvement in programs that are connected with official agencies of social control; these programs are sponsored by community organizations including: Department of Children Services, welfare department, mental health departments, non profit organizations, and religious organizations. (Territo et al., 2004, p. 550)

Currently there are no diversion programs in Dekalb County, even though there is an overwhelming need. The need for programs is so high due to the high level of teen involvement in criminal activities. When teens commit a crime, they are sent to juvenile detention, but if they are over the age of 17, they go to jail. When teens begin to act out in their homes, schools, and communities and they are not disciplined, they will likely become vulnerable society and engage in criminal activities.

According to Territo et al. (2004),

In 1974, a bill was passed by Congress known as the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) within the Department of Justice. This office administers grants to the states and territories to provide technical assistance in helping with the jurisdictions to be in compliance with the act’s provision (p. 555)

The dynamics of this act mandates that participating states remove status offenders such as runaways, truancy violators, and non-offenders that are neglected and abused teens from juvenile detentions and correctional facilities. However, in 1980, the act was amended to require that the state remove all juveniles from adult jails. (Territo et al., 2005, p. 555)

Communities and Crime Prevention

According to Sherman (1997), “Communities have been the central institution for crime prevention. They have also been the limelight on which all other institutions combined together with families, schools, retail shops, police and corrections must all confront the consequences of community life” (para. 1). Sherman noted, “Community prevention programs have empowered local community leaders to design and implement their own crime prevention strategies” (para. 3).

Researchers are adamant about prevention. Sherman (1997) reported,

In mobilizing all available agents or government crime prevention programs that merit the term more by agencies that participate as opposed to risk factors, because risk factors and agencies are good in a few cases, such as in having a nurse to visit single parent child raising homes. One significant framework for classifying community risk entities are as followed: distinguishing community composition, oppositional culture, social structure and social and physical disorder. Each of these entities could be the focus of comprehensive community crime prevention programs. (Sherman, 1997, para. 15)

Preventing Crimes and Violence: Criminal Justice Programs in Georgia

The State of Georgia “implemented prevention programs to help decrease or rehabilitate those individuals who have been victims of a crime. The programs were also to assist in resolving the issue of crime and violence within the state” (Brooks, 2013, para. 1).

Criminal Justice consists of a wide range of practices of government and institutions that coordinate and uphold the social conditions. This is done by deterring and alleviating the occurrences of criminal activities. However, the ideal role of a criminal justice system is to enforce legal matters which includes: inflicting probationary measures to offenders, sentencing of offenders, defense and prosecution incarceration, and supervising those who have committed a crime and or have violated state laws or statutes. (Brooks, 2013, para. 1)

The Georgia Crime Prevention Association is a not-for-profit organization that is comprised of law enforcement officers both public and private crime prevention practitioners who are designed to work together to incorporate and develop programs that are used to deter criminal activities. (Brooks, 2013, para. 4)

Personnel in these agencies share vital information with one another while applying their good leadership skills. It is imperative that the agencies share and communicate their information with each other. If a wanted fugitive travels to another jurisdiction, and with shared knowledge or linked systems, they can help capture the suspect and have that individual expedited back to the original county in which the crime was committed.

According to Brook (2013),

Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) is held in the county of Dougherty. The program is taught to middle age teens that live in the county as part of the Dougherty school system. The main goal of GREAT is to get teens to become aware of the consequences of becoming a street gang member. (para. 5)

Brook (2013) noted, "Youth Development Campuses (YDC) was created to facilitate and accommodate youths that live in the State of Georgia, in which they provide the youths with secure care and proper supervision" (para. 8). The "Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC) was formulated to house youths on a temporary basis while these juvenile delinquents await their disposition from their previous arrest" (Brook, 2013, para. 8).

The Student Transition and Recovery Program (STAR) has been very effective in mitigating criminal offenders that have been imposed on innocent victims Brook (2013) noted, "It has also been very effective in an economical environment as an alternative to incarceration, suspension or expulsion from school" (para. 9).

According to Walls (2014),

In 1994, state legislators toughened juvenile justice laws by stiffening sentences of most violent crimes and they started by sending teens to adult prisons. However, lawmakers have also given courts the discretion to keep some of the serious crimes that are committed by juvenile offenders in the state's juvenile facilities. (para. 1)

Attorney and state representative Mary Oliver stated, "Department of Juvenile Justice recidivism rates are deplorable and clearly lawmakers are both wasting taxpayers' money and helping neither the young offenders nor protecting the community" (Walls, 2014, para. 11).

Recidivism is defined as those offenders who after three years of being released from being incarcerated committed another felony, to which they were subsequently convicted. Records state that 625 youths who served time between 1994 and 2008 were for armed robbery and aggravated sex crimes. (Walls, 2014, para. 12)

When youths commit these serious crimes, they cannot be placed in the juvenile system. These teens have no fear of anyone, including the law, and often take advantage of their weaker peers who may appear to be vulnerable. When cases like this occur, they are sent to an adult facility, which can result in a tremendous amount of physical harm toward them from more violent offenders such as adult sex offenders. Corrections officers must closely supervise the youth. Youths are at a disadvantage, whether they are housed in youth or adult facilities [

Individuals who make sound decisions for youths, such as lawmakers, the justice system, and juvenile court officials, should stiffen the penalties for juveniles who commit violent crimes. The Internet and social media have made it easier for teens to be accessible in committing particular crimes. The current trend is to post fake advertisements for high-dollar items, including vehicles, iPads, and cell phones. They lure buyers, or potential victims, to an area where they are ambushed. This type of crime can be committed by an adult or a teen. Two similar incidents happened to people who responded to fake advertisements on Craigslist. When an elderly couple arrived see a classic Mustang for sale, they were robbed and shot execution style by an adult male. Secondly, a college student who was an honor student in his junior year at a prestigious school in Atlanta responded to a fake advertisement on Craigslist for an iPhone 6. When the young man arrived, he was also robbed and shot to death by two or three teenagers. When teenagers are introduced to drugs and street gangs, they learn to have neither fear nor remorse for humankind. They do anything to get what they want, even if it involves harming or killing another person. (Morgan, 2015)

According to Morgan (2015), “In 2013, two teens at the time, were behind a mastermind of a bogus scheme involving two iPhones that were advertised on Craigslist. The victim was visiting his family for the birth of his new grand baby.”

The two teens lured the victim and a relative who accompanied him so that he was not alone, to an abandoned house. When both the victim and his relative arrived the victim was shot multiple times and later died at a nearby hospital. (Morgan, 2015, para. 4)

On February 18, 2015, Judge Cynthia Becker sentenced both men to life with no parole for the shooting death of a retired railroad worker. However, the prosecutor wanted the judge to have mercy because of their ages and due to the fact they did not have any previous felonies, but the judge refused to do so because the men showed no remorse during the trial. (Morgan, 2015, para. 1)

The juvenile justice system and other lead stakeholders may be trying to consolidate their resources to reduce the crimes that teens are committing. “Prevention programs can impact the public because they stop the crime from happening. The aspect of a successful program is their comprehensive nature, and if the program is holistic, it focuses on the various aspects of a teen’s life” (Saminsky, 2010, para. 3). “There are two programs that have shown tremendous results: early interventions with comprehensive at home visitation programs and Head Start” (Saminsky, 2010, para. 4).

The more logical approach for the justice system to be labeled as using too much excessive force in a prison is known to be part of the Eighth –Amendment Bill of rights, cruel and unusual punishment . The Eighth Amendment “is designed to prevent the use of torture and excessive physical punishment on Prisoners. In addition, it was designated to overturn the legal aspects of the death penalty, but to return later] (Territo et al., 2004, p. 134).

Justices Bar Mandatory Life Terms for Juveniles

According to Liptak and Bronner (2012),

Those juveniles who were serving life without parole were feeling hopeful that the Supreme Court ruled with laws requiring those teens that are charged with murder, to be sentenced to die by lethal injection violated their “Eighth Amendment Rights” on cruel and unusual punishment. (para. 1)

There were two entities in which harsh penalties were imposed on juvenile offenders including Roper v. Simmons 2005 and Graham v. Florida 2010. The court ruled that sentencing them without parole was unconstitutional, but only if the crime did not involve murder. (Liptak & Bronner, 2012, para. 5)

“Over 100 prisoners were affected by the decision if their crime was committed before they turned 18, crimes such-as armed robbery, kidnapping and rape” (para. 5).

The City of Atlanta Department of Corrections created a junior corrections officers program. The program will enable students to adapt to the Criminal Justice System by exploring the three branches of public safety including Police, Corrections, and Court. Additionally, the students will learn leadership, service, social responsibilities and a multitude of life experiences. (City of Atlanta Department of Corrections, 2014, para. 1)

The program may also give teens a sense of hope and inspire them to become someone who works in the criminal justice field, as opposed to being on the wrong side of the law. Mental health issues have been associated with deviant behavior. People who suffer from physical abuse, self-neglect, and low self-esteem may also experience some mental problems. Scott and Gordon (2010) noted,

The correlation of mental health and crime are social constraints. Mental health issues are also linked with homelessness, poverty, and unemployment. The law may have been broken to support of their basic necessities including: food, shelter and a place to stay warm. **[Please check quote against original] (Please provide page or paragraph no.)**

Specialty court was implemented for people who are suffering from substance abuse and mental illness. The logic of it was to move away from the offense-based sanctions and move toward a system that considers the developmental stages of the offender. (DeList & Conis, 2012, p. 338)

According to DeList and Conis (2012), “Specialized courts include drug courts and mental health courts that help offenders with problem solving and treatment focused on helping offenders with those specific issues” (p. 338). These courts in Georgia have been both effective and ineffective. Offenders can receive all the help that the law can provide but will have to want the help and show significant changes by being a consistent participant. The administrators of the program will have to follow up to make certain that the offender is continually making progress. These programs can also help mitigate and reduce violent crimes, as well as nonviolent crimes committed by juveniles. Trial basics **[Is this clear?]** are always good to determine if the programs are efficient. DeList and Conis noted,

In 2003, state legislation created Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative Programs to serve violent offenders reentering into the community. The program recognizes that serious and violent offenders were at high risk for recidivism once they are released back into the community. (DeList & Conis, 2012, p. 437)

Pollock (2012) stated,

There are three entities for negative behavior prevention, including: deterrence, incapacitation, and treatment. Deterrence and the first deterrence – what is done - to the offenders to prevent them from committing a crime and the second deterrence is to prevent other offenders from engaging in the same behavior. [(p. 320)

Secondly, incapacitation is another entity for prevention; it is designed not to inflict pain but to hold an offender until there are no signs of at-risk behavior for any crimes. Lastly, treatment is also a way of preventing crime. Anything that has been experienced after sentencing is considered to be associated with treatment, such as prison discipline, religious services, and education (Pollock, 2012, p. 321).

Several states have implemented and funded pilot prevention programs for troubled youth. The goal of these programs is to help reduce both crime and the recidivism rate. Some individuals may not feel that the programs will work as effectively as lawmakers would like for them to work.

In 1996, the California legislature sought to reduce juvenile crime by creating a grant prevention program. The Juvenile Crime Enforcement and Accountability Challenge Grant Program allows counties in the State of California to delegate different strategies in response to the issues of juvenile delinquency. (Worrall, 2004, para. 1)

There is a strong possibility that the programs will eventually work, but there should be a certain amount of consistency from legislatures pushing counties into being accurate and loyal to the programs to make a difference in the high-incarceration rate. Some people have forgotten about the reality of where negative behavior starts. Parents like to insinuate that their child should be disciplined at school. Teachers and parents need to communicate effectively and collectively discuss a child’s problems to help mitigate issues before they get out of control.

In most states, schools have experienced tragic gun violence from either a former student or isolated situations where gunmen enter schools and fatally wound innocent children and educators. Parents who detect a child’s abnormal behavior early can seek counseling or other forms of help. One of the first tragedies occurred

on April 20, 1999, [at] Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where 15 teachers and students were killed by two students dressed in black trench coats and another 25 people who were wounded. The gunmen used homemade bombs and semi-automatic weapons to do the killing before turning the guns on themselves. (Swanson, Territo, & Taylor, 2008, p. 148)

After the tragedy at Columbine and similar incidents, a demand for permanently assigned school resource officers was put into place. “The primary purpose is to help with the safety and well being of the students” (Swanson et al., 2008, pp. 148-149).

According to Welsh et al. (2008), “Prevention and intervention programs focus mainly on mitigating criminal behavior, whereas the longitudinal studies identify the factors that protect criminal behavior” (para. 1). Welsh et al. noted, “Many of these programs have been conducted on trial basis but other rigorous studies prove that these programs have positive effects on offenders” (para. 1).

Conclusion

New strategies for mitigating crime committed by teenagers have been implemented by stakeholders who show a great interest in the quality of life for teenagers, including those in correctional and juvenile facilities, private groups, and church groups. For these suggested applications to work effectively, policies and procedures made by lawmakers and their official stakeholders will need to be revised to make certain that teens attendance in youth prevention programs is documented. When those teens violate the policy and the ruling of the law and the recidivism rate increases, the penalty should also increase. If no strict accountability is enforced for those teens when they commit a crime, then the programs are defeating the purpose of minimizing the reentry rate into the system.

Action Recommendation

It is imperative that the juvenile justice system employs enough juvenile probation officers to aid in the supervision of teens previously released from the juvenile facility and currently on probation. Supervision includes visiting the schools and the residents, as well as being visible in the community and receiving positive feedback on teens' performance. In addition, the juvenile justice system will need to make it mandatory that the teens, either alone or with a parent or legal guardian, report to their probation officer on a weekly basis for an in-house assessment that includes an oral drug test and to discuss any major concerns that the teens feel compelled to discuss.

Police departments should consider hiring more school resource officers in middle and high school where gangs are prevalent. These provisions will need to be addressed in the upcoming fiscal year for each county. The proposed budget for an annual salary for the officers would be based on officers' education and work history and would range between \$45,000 and \$55,000 annually. School resource officers will receive classroom training, firearm training, and physical training every 90 days to comply with state law.

To deter gang members or gunmen from entering schools, each middle and high school should have a metal detector installed at the entrance of the school to detect any unusual objects that can seriously wound innocent people and prevent them from entering the school. Metal detector equipment will be added into the upcoming fiscal year budget for each county.

Youth prevention programs are an essential tool and are used as a proactive approach as opposed to a reactive approach. Providing a proactive approach allows individuals who are conducting the programs to aid in deterring youths from entering the juvenile justice system through counseling, education awareness, and developmental skills. These initiatives will enable youth to learn how to adapt with life skills so they can have the proper resources to become productive citizens by staying focused and doing the right thing. To determine if a program has been effective in a child's life, counselors as well as probation officers should create a test trial on a group of teens upon their completion of the program to see if any negative results need to be addressed. In this way, the next group of teens will not have to experience the same issues. The primary goal of the program is to see positive results for the teens. The program will run once a week for 7 to 10 consecutive weeks and preferably on weekends. There will be a minimum of 20 youth per coach to get the full effect. Individuals associated with the program will register with their local county government and should be eligible to receive government grant funding with proper documentation.

If the application of any of these recommendations produces a profound impact by making a difference, not only in teens but also in communities, schools, homes, and violent crime rates, then there is a possibility that the recidivism rate will also decline.

References

- Brooks, J. (2013). Preventing crime and violence criminal justice programs in Georgia. Pacific Grove, CA: Journal of Contemporary *Criminal Justice* , 26, 167–185.
- City of Atlanta Department of Corrections. (2014). *Junior corrections* [Brochure]. Atlanta, GA: Author.
- DeList, M., & Conis, J. P., (2012). *Violent offenders: Theory, research, policy, and practices* (2nd ed.). : Jones and Barlett Learning.
- Gottesman, D., & Schwarz, W. S. (2011). *Juvenile justice in the United States: Facts for policymakers*.
- Liptak, A., & Bronner, E. (2012). *Justices bar mandatory life terms for*
- Martinek, L. (2014). *Juvenile justice GPS charts National Change in Policy, Practice Statistics*.
- Morgan, V. (2015). Craigslist killers get life with no parole. *On Common Ground News*, 20, 26.
- Pollock, M. J. (2012). *Ethical dilemmas and decisions in criminal justice* (7th ed.). Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Russell, T., Woods, S., & Domeier, S. (1998). *Establishing juvenile diversion in your community*. Lincoln, NE: West Publishing Company.
- Saminsky, A. (2010). *Preventing juvenile delinquency early intervention and comprehensive as critical factors*. New York, NY, Academic Search Premier. EBSCO.
- Scott, D., & Gordon, C. H. (2010). *Controversial issues in prisons*. Lancashire, UK. Open University Press; 1 edition
- Sherman, W. L. (1993). *Communities and crime prevention*. Chicago, IL. University of Chicago Press
- Sickmund, M., & Puzzanchera, C. (2014). Juvenile offenders and victims: 2014 national report.
- Siegel, J. L., & Welsh, C. B. (2012). *Juvenile delinquency theory: Practice and law*. Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Swanson, R. C., Territo, L., & Taylor, W. T. (2008). *Police administration structures processes and behavior* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Territo, L., Halsted, B. J., & Brombley, L. M. (2004). *Crime and justice in America: A human perspective* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Walls, J. (2004). Georgia's troubled effort to reduce juvenile crime. *Legislatures* Changes to laws in 1994 have not reduced recidivism.
- Welsh, C. B. (2014). *Changing lives: Prevention and intervention to reduce serious offending*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Worrall, L. J. (2004). *Funding collaborative juvenile crime prevention programs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.