

**Outcome Evaluation of a Treatment Program for
First Time Adolescent Offenders**

by

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PREVIEW

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Abstract

Diversion programs reduce the number of juveniles exposed to the juvenile justice system by diverting offenders away from the juvenile court and into alternate types of treatment. Power of Choice is a diversion program for first time adolescent offenders. This research evaluated the effectiveness of the Power of Choice Program and examined the relationships between recidivism within one year and the participants' demographic characteristics, change in knowledge, attitudes, attendance, and level of participation. Data was collected on 105 participants who were referred by parents, local law enforcement, Municipal Court, or the Department of Social Service agency and completed the Power of Choice program. Findings demonstrated that participants improved their knowledge based on an outcome instrument. Of the 105 participants, 65.7% did not recidivate, 19.0% recidivated within the first 6 months, and 15.2% recidivated between 6 months and 12 months after the program completion. According to a regression analysis, of the predictor variables (age, grade, gender, ethnicity, family structure, perceived attitude, perceived participation, and attendance), only the perceived attitude rating predicted recidivism. The results are discussed in the context of intervention and risk-reduction.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The estimated number of juvenile arrests in the United States in 2003 was 2.2 million (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2005). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) categorize offenses in terms of degrees of violence and/or severity. Typically, classifications of offenses include crimes against people, property crimes, drug/alcohol-related crimes, and status offenses (Glaser, Calhoun, & Petrocelli, 2002). Status offenses, which are on the low end of the severity scale, are violations of laws and sanctions that apply only to juveniles and are not considered criminal when committed by an adult (Lundman, 2001). Status offenses include: adolescents who run away, smoke cigarettes and defy their parents, and curfew violations, and truancy. Status offenders are subject to arrest and juvenile court processing. Property crimes are more serious offenses and include burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Property crime represents a major portion of juvenile offenses accounting for approximately one third of all juvenile arrests (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Half of all juvenile property crime arrests are for shoplifting or minor thefts. Violent crimes are the most serious. They include acts involving rape and other sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assaults. Juveniles were involved in an average of one quarter of all serious violent victimizations annually over the last 25 years. Although only a portion of juvenile offenders commit the most serious and violent crimes, these youth tend to continue their antisocial behavior into adulthood (Moffit, 1993; Moffit & Caspi, 2001; Moffit, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002).

Detained juveniles are sent to either the juvenile court or into diversion programs. Law enforcement officials usually make this decision after talking to the victim, the

juvenile, and the parents. According to the 2006 National Report on Juvenile Offenders and Victims (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006), approximately 20% of all juveniles arrested in 2003 were handled within the police department and then released. The remaining 80% were referred to juvenile court. Law enforcement referred 84% of all delinquency cases sent to juvenile court (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). The remaining 16% were made by others such as parents, victims, schools and probation officers. About half of the cases referred to juvenile court intake are handled informally and then dismissed. In the remaining cases, the juvenile agrees to conditions for a specific time period. Conditions may include victim restitution, school attendance, counseling, curfew or a diversion program.

Several efforts have been made to develop diversion programs for juvenile offenders to prevent further incidents of crime. Some examples of treatment efforts are the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program, the Scared Straight program, and Boot Camp. DARE is a program where uniformed police officers teach young children about drugs and the problems caused by them. Three project DARE programs were evaluated by Lundman (2001): Project DARE Long Beach, Project DARE Charleston County and Project DARE Kokomo. Unfortunately, results indicated that as the children enter their teenage years, the lessons DARE officers teach do not measurably affect adolescent behavior. Scared Straight is a prison-based program where juveniles attend intensive confrontation sessions run by adult inmates serving long or life sentences. Research has shown that this program at best has no effect and at worst may influence children to become more rather than less delinquent (Finckenauer & Gavin, 1999; Lundman, 2001; Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino & Finckenauer, 2000). Boot camps

offer traditional educational and treatment services in a military-style environment where offenders spend part of each boot camp day marching, drilling, exercising, and working under the direction of drill instructors. Other parts of their day are spent in school and in treatment. Research has shown that juvenile boot camps are ineffective both in terms of costs and recidivism rates (Tyler, Darville & Stalnaker, 2001; Lundman, 2001; Stinchcomb & Terry, 2001; Tyler, 2001).

Another alternative program is the Power of Choice program. The Power of Choice program is a six-week psychoeducational treatment program designed specifically for first time adolescent offenders, aged 13 through 17. This program was expanded from The Power of Choice Program for Teens, a weekly video-based series (Pritchard, 1988). The goal of Power of Choice is to decrease or eliminate future re-offending behavior before a lifestyle of criminality is developed. The Power of Choice program provides youthful offenders with six relevant topics and uses activities such as games, role-plays, videos, and discussion to sustain the interest of the individuals. The topics covered include: individuality, stress, self-esteem, sex and relationships, communication, and peer pressure. To date, the effectiveness of this program has not been formally evaluated.

Statement of Problem

Juvenile crime is prevalent, can be serious, and may continue into adulthood (Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001; Lab & Whitehead, 1988; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006; Webber, 1997). Previous research has suggested that property offenders (one in three juvenile offenders), are more likely to repeat their offenses than those who offend against persons (Heilbrun, Brock, Waite, & Lanier, 2000). Juvenile offenders are at greater risk than adult offenders for re-offense over the course of a lifetime. Furthermore, younger

age at first offense is associated with higher risk of re-offense (Cottle, et al. 2001; Jones, Dodge, Foster, Nix, & Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2002; Landsheer & Hart, 1999; Moffit, 1993). Incarceration does not serve as an effective deterrent for juvenile offenders (Myner, Santman, Cappelletty, & Perlmutter, 1998). In fact, first incarceration appears to perpetuate future criminal behavior, especially for first-time property offenders. Overall, treatment programs for juvenile offenders have not proven to be effective. Effective treatment programs are needed to prevent first time juvenile offenders from continuing their criminal behavior.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the Power of Choice Program as measured by member attendance, change in knowledge from beginning of the program to completion of the program, member participation and member attitude. Additionally, this research studied the relationships between recidivism and demographics, change in knowledge, attitude, and participation. Participants in this study were first time adolescent offenders referred to the Power of Choice program by parents, local law enforcement, the Municipal Court or the Department of Social Service agency. This study will evaluate program outcome based on knowledge acquired by the adolescents, and identify factors that predict short term (6 months) and long term (12 months) outcome on recidivism rates.

Significance of the Study

The need for effective intervention programs to deter further delinquent behavior is apparent. The ramifications of continuing to provide ineffective or counter-effective programming weighs heavy on society's future in both monetary and human costs.

Measuring the effectiveness of intervention programs will allow the strongest intervention methods to emerge. Those empirically-validated methods can be framed as Best Practice and realistically employed by community-based services for first time adolescent offenders. The monetary cost of not preventing juvenile offense and re-offense is substantial, 1.7 to 2.3 million dollars per high risk youth (Cohen, 1998).

This investigative study of the Power of Choice Program will evaluate one intervention program. It also will help to identify factors that contribute to and/or predict re-offending among adolescent offenders. Determining factors that predict lower recidivism rates may provide insights into methods that contribute to treatment success, thereby guiding program adaptations to benefit more participants. Identification of these factors will suggest modifications to the Power of Choice program and/or what specific population it should be targeted for (e.g. adolescents, females, from intact families) or offenses. The existing Power of Choice program could be shown to be more effective for certain ages, genders, family structures, or offenses. Law enforcement and the juvenile justice system are looking for ways to deter and divert juveniles away from incarceration. Empirically supported intervention programs are needed.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What was the overall outcome of the Power of Choice Program as measured by a knowledge questionnaire, perceived participation of participant, perceived attitude of participant?
2. How many adolescents who participated in the Power of Choice Program recidivated within the first year after treatment?

3. What factors predicted recidivism among first time adolescent offenders that participated in the Power of Choice program?

PREVIEW

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a review of the literature on intervention programs for predominately first time adolescent offenders and their effectiveness in preventing further contact with law enforcement. The Power of Choice Program, as one of these interventions, will be described. This review will be followed by an examination of literature on theories of juvenile offense, factors that predict juvenile offending and recidivism for adolescent offenders.

Popular Intervention Programs

Juvenile crime has become a problem in the United States and millions of dollars are being spent each year on juvenile crime prevention programming (Cohen, 1998; Gavazzi, Wasserman, Partride, & Sheridan, 2000). One approach to dealing with juvenile delinquency is diversion. Diversion programs have been a routine part of the juvenile justice system since the 1960s and 1970s (Kammer & Minor, 1997). These programs reduce the number of juveniles exposed to the juvenile justice system by diverting offenders away from the juvenile court and into alternate types of treatment. Reducing exposure to the juvenile justice system lessens the effects of labeling, stigma, and delinquent associations thereby lessening further delinquent activity (Gavazzi et al. 2000).

The primary models for juvenile diversion programs are: the labeling approach, the deterrence approach, educational approach and the psychoeducational approach. A review on each approach follows.

Labeling Approach

Labeling theorists contend that labeling individuals will affect the subsequent attitudes, values, self-conceptions, and behavior of those who are singled out for special attention (Bernburg, Krohn, & Rivera, 2006; Chen, 2002; Farrington, 1977; Klein, 1986). A diversion program that employs the labeling approach and has become popular in diverting youngsters from formal system processes is teen court (Harrison, Maupin, & Mays, 2001; Minor, Wells, Soderstrom, Bingham, & Williamson, 1999; Zehner, 1997). Teen courts deal with a wide range of offenses, ages (usually from 10 to 14 years old) and school grades. The offenses accepted by teen courts are normally classified as misdemeanors such as shoplifting, possession of alcohol, fighting and vandalism. Most teen courts limit participation to first-time adolescent offenders. Teen court allows offenders to admit their delinquent act and present their case to a jury of their peers for sentencing. One of the commonly stated goals of teen court is to utilize peer pressure to correct negative behavior. The peer-devised sentencing offers the offending youth an opportunity to serve as teen court juror in future cases (Forgays & Milio, 2005). During their time on the jury, other jurors are unaware of previous crimes or accusations and work with the past offender on the common task of deliberation.

According to the National Youth Court Center (2007) as of October, 2006 there were 1,127 youth courts across the United States. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the Urban Institute conducted an Evaluation of Teen Courts Project (ECT). The ECT was reviewed by Butts, Buck, and Coggeshall (2002). This review studied teen courts in four states: Alaska, Arizona, Maryland, and

Missouri. The project compared recidivism outcomes at six months for teen court defendants with six month outcomes for youth managed by the regular juvenile justice system. Recidivism was measured as re-referral to law enforcement or juvenile justice system. The sample consisted of approximately 500 juveniles referred to teen court for nonviolent offenses, such as shoplifting and vandalism. The comparison group was first time adolescent offenders and had similar nonviolent offenses. During the study period in 2000 and 2001, more than 100 youth from each program consented to participate in the evaluation. The results of the ETC indicate that in Alaska and Missouri youth referred to teen court were significantly less likely to be re-referred to the juvenile justice system for new offenses whereas in Arizona and Maryland significant results were not found. The Maryland teen court results may be due to the comparison with a proactive, police diversion program that provides many of the same services and sanctions offered by teen courts. Teen courts in the other three states were compared with case outcomes for an average group of young, first-time offenders.

A study conducted by Harrison et al. (2001) examined the teen court of Dona Ana County, New Mexico. Four hundred seventy-eight participants were randomly selected from the Dona Ana County Teen Court (DACTC) program and traced through the local Juvenile Probation and Parole Office (JPPO) database. Comparisons were made between those who completed the program (n=350) and those who chose not to complete the program (n=126). Completion of the program meant that the individual had to go through the teen court process including fulfillment of their sentencing. A 22.6% recidivism rate for those who completed the program and 32.3 % recidivism rate for those who did not complete the program were found. JPPO officers reported that there

were virtually no consequences for those individuals who choose not to complete the program or fulfill sentencing (Harrison et al.). Moreover, if juveniles become aware of this lack of consequences, teen court participation may decline significantly within the county. Inconsistencies in referrals to the teen court may also have skewed results.

A positive aspect of teen court is that it decreases the juvenile court's workload, thereby decreasing crime rates, and reduces recidivism. Positive public opinions regarding teen courts are due to the emphases on offender accountability, the instillation of respect for the legal system, and reparative sentencing imposed by the teen court (Minor et al., 1999). Teen courts also have the added attractions of involving large numbers of peers in the legal process and promoting education about the process. Teen court has a shorter turn around time from referral to sentencing when compared to the lengthy process of traditional juvenile justice. Various police reports and teen court staff maintain that the risk of recidivism is lower for those who wait a shorter time between referral and teen court hearing (Rasmussen, 2004).

Teen court is less expensive than juvenile court, it provides needed community service hours for nonprofit organizations, and has been found to be more beneficial than doing nothing at all (Harrison et al., 2001). Traditionally, communities spend approximately \$3,000 to process a youth through the juvenile court system, from arrest to probation. It costs less than \$300 to process a child through teen court (Zehner, 1997). The average annual budget for a youth court program is approximately \$32,767 (National Youth Court Center, 2007). Teen courts are typically funded through multiple sources made up of both public and private sectors. Cost wise there is much variability from one teen court to another (Wisconsin Court System, 2007). Some teen courts require the

hiring of a coordinator to train and manage volunteers, assist with intake; and process cases.

In summary, teen court is the primary diversion program using the labeling approach. Teen court decreases the work load on the juvenile court system (Minor et al., 1999), utilizes peer pressure to correct negative behavior (Butts et al., 2002), educates the adolescent on the judicial process, is less expensive than juvenile justice court (Harrison et al., 2001; Zehner, 1997), and has demonstrated low recidivism rates for those that follow through with their involvement (Butts et al.; Harrison et al.; Minor et al.). Through direct participation, teen court addresses responsibility for the offender's behavior and accountability to his/her community and peers. It also enhances respect for the judicial process. Implementing a teen court can be difficult due to the importance of integrating community resources such as school, family and juvenile justice systems.

Deterrence Approach

Deterrence theorists assert that the threat or actual imposition of sanctions increases individuals' perceptions of the risk of non-normative behavior so much that they will choose to avoid or reduce the frequency of their participation in such conduct (Johnson, Simons, & Conger, 2004; Keane, Gillis, & Hagan, 1989; Thomas & Bishop, 1984). Two diversion programs that incorporate the deterrence approach and have generated tremendous public appeal are boot camps (Stinchcomb & Terry, 2001) and Scared Straight (Petrosino et al., 2000). In general, boot camps tend to focus on military drills and ceremonies, discipline, physical exercise and substance abuse programming, as well as varying degrees of education and vocational training (Stinchcomb & Terry, 2001; Tyler, Darville, & Stalnaker, 2001). Scared Straight is based on the deterrence approach

that troubled youth would refrain from lawbreaking because they would not want to follow the same path as the inmates and end up in prison (Petrosino et al.). Both boot camps (Lutze & Brody, 1999; Stinchcomb & Terry, 2001) and Scared Straight (Petrosino et al.) programs are widely accepted by the public even though research fails to demonstrate their effectiveness.

A study examined the results of a systematic review of randomized experimental trials of Scared Straight type programs comprising organized visits to prisons by juvenile delinquents or pre-delinquents (children in trouble but not officially adjudicated as delinquents) aimed at deterring them from criminal activity (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, & Buehler, 2003). This review demonstrated that these programs resulted in an increase in criminality. Further, a higher rate of recidivism was found for youth who participated in the treatment group as compared to a non-treatment control group. Scared Straight type programs increased the odds of offending approximately 1.7:1 (1.7 treatment adolescents offend for every control participant who offends). Doing nothing was shown to be more effective than exposing juveniles to the program (Farrington & Welsh, 2005; Petrosino, et al., 2003; Petrosino, Farrington, & Sherman, 2003).

Boot camp was examined in a study (Stinchcomb and Terry, 2001) at a 90-day residential program administered in an urban jail in Florida for groups of 24 to 25 youthful offenders. Youth were assigned to the program by county criminal court judges as an intermediate sentencing option for those who were too risky for probation but who did not warrant an institutional sentence. Comparisons of re-arrest on felony charges and time before next felony arrest were made between the treatment group $n = 191$ and the control group $n = 279$. The control group was matched to the treatment group in terms of

age, race, sex, and sentencing points as well as data collected from the jail's booking and release database which consisted of information about initial arrest charges, prior felonies, and subsequent felony arrests. Sentencing points are calculated following criminal convictions that take into account both the seriousness and frequency of the offender's criminal involvement to date. Results indicated that youth completing the boot camp program were re-arrested more frequently than others who received jail time, probation, or community control (81% versus 73%, respectively). It should be noted that the majority of the boot camp graduates were not first-time offenders and had on average committed more than two prior felonies.

Similar findings were found in a long-term follow up study (Bottcher & Ezell, 2005) examining data for a juvenile boot camp and intensive parole program in California. This program incorporated an incarceration period that averaged 4.6 months. The name of the juvenile boot camp LEAD represented expected participant outcomes- leadership, esteem, ability, and discipline. A total of 621 participants, 344 in the LEAD program and 277 in the control group comprised the study. Researchers measured average time between completion and re-offense. They found no significant differences between the boot camp group and the control group in average time to first arrest or in average overall arrest charges during the first year, during the first three years, and during all available years following release to parole.

Not only have boot camps been found to be ineffective for juvenile recidivism but they have other problems as well. Recently, the media has reported the camps as death camps rather than boot camps. On January 5, 2006 a 14 year old adolescent died due to suffocation at a Panama City boot camp in Florida (Times Staff Writer, 2006). Eight

people face charges of aggravated manslaughter of a person under 18 in the death including guards and a camp nurse. Countless number of children have been killed by suffocation (better known as accidental restraint-related death) in custodial settings (Riak, 2006).

A Specialized Treatment and Rehabilitation program (STAR) program has generated appeal with parents (Trulson, Triplett, & Snell, 2001). This program is an application of the boot camp concept within a school setting. STAR is unlike the structure of traditional correctional boot camps in that it involves school jurisdictions, correctional authorities, the juvenile court, law enforcement, and parents. The goal of the STAR program is to curb disruptive and delinquent behavior in the public school system while reducing student movement in and out of the schools due to discipline problems.

The participants of the STAR program were compared to participants of a non-school-based Intensive Supervision Probation (ISP) program. Youth in the ISP group were court mandated to the program for a period ranging from 12 weeks to 24 weeks with lengths that could be extended by probation staff. ISP youth attended school regularly, were required to perform community service and were supervised on a daily basis by field probation staff.

Comparisons on the two groups indicated that the STAR participants offended more often after completion of the boot camp program and were arrested for more serious offenses in the 6- and 12-month follow-up period than the ISP participants. Fifty-three percent of the STAR participants re-offended whereas 36% of the ISP participants re-offended. Evaluation of the STAR program also revealed that although the program had a relatively small impact on recidivism, perceptions from parents, teachers, and STAR

participants were favorable for the overall program. A survey indicated 86% of parents agreed that they wanted their children to be in the STAR program. However, only 35% agreed that because of the STAR program their child would not get into trouble again. It should be noted that of the 146 surveys mailed out to parents, only 41% were returned. It is plausible that parents that returned the surveys may have had a successful experience with STAR, and the parents with unfavorable perceptions about STAR did not return their survey.

To recap, deterrence programs such as scared straight and boot camp programs are popular with parents; however research fails to demonstrate their effectiveness (Bottcher & Ezell, 2005; Farrington & Welsh, 2005; Lutze & Brody, 1999; Petrosino et al., 2003; Petrosino, Farrington, & Sherman, 2003; Stinchcomb & Terry, 2001; Trulson et al., 2001). In fact, some research suggests that doing nothing would be better than exposing juveniles to these programs. The theory behind many boot camps is that if you verbally confront children and discipline them, they will change their angry, defiant, oppositional behaviors. However, the data suggests that it is more likely that this type of setting will create increased hostility and resentment toward authority figures.

Educational Approach

Research has revealed the central strategy used by teachers for preventing substance use among adolescents is the provision of facts about drugs, alcohol and violence (Burke, 2002). A program that incorporates drug and violence education is the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program (Birkeland, Murphy-Graham, & Weiss, 2005; Burke, 2002). DARE has rapidly made its way into elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the nation. DARE is the most widely used drug prevention

program in the United States (Birkeland et al., 2005). Originally, the program targeted fifth and sixth graders, but now many school districts are employing the DARE program at all grade levels. The goal of the DARE program is to aid students in recognizing and resisting pressures to experiment with substances and/or engage in violence (Burke, 2002). The program includes lessons on drug and law-related topics delivered by police officers to students in kindergarten through fourth grade; a 17-week core curriculum for fifth or sixth graders; and a 10-week junior high program on peer pressure, decision-making skills, anger management, and conflict resolution. Additionally, the DARE program has developed a 10-week senior high program (taught in collaboration with teachers) on decision making, anger management and programs for parents and special education populations. It should be noted that the core 17-lesson curriculum delivered to students in grade 5 and 6 has been the most frequently used form of the program (Ahmed, Ahmed, Bennett, & Hinds, 2002). The topics included in the 17-week curriculum are 1) practices of personal safety, 2) drug use and misuse, 3) consequences, 4) resisting pressures to use drugs, 5) resistance techniques—ways to say no, 6) building self-esteem, 7) assertiveness—a response style, 8) managing stress without taking drugs, 9) media influences on drug use, 10) decision making and risk taking, 11) alternatives to drug abuse, 12) other activities, 13) teaching police officer—planned lessons 14) role modeling, 15) project DARE summary, 16) taking a stand, and 17) assembly and graduation. A workbook is provided to each student in the beginning of the program. Police officers trained in the program use a wide range of teaching strategies such as lectures, question and answer, group discussions, role playing, audiovisual material and workbook exercises.

Although DARE has gained such popularity that it has been active in 75 percent of schools in the US, a review of research reveals that students who completed the DARE program used drugs at the same rate as those who had not taken the course (Ennet, Tobler, Ringwalt, & Flewelling, 1994; Lynam et al., 1999; Thombs, 2000; West & O'Neal, 2004). For example, Lynam et al. (1999) examined the efficacy of DARE ten years after administration. A total of over 1,000 participants, who in the 6th grade had either received DARE or a standard drug-education curriculum, were re-evaluated at age 20. Participants completed a questionnaire regarding their use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other illegal drugs as well as their expectancies about drug use. Participants also responded to nine questions regarding their ability to resist peer-pressure and the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Few differences were found between the two groups regarding actual drug use, drug attitudes, or self-esteem. These findings were consistent with an earlier study by Clayton, Cattarello and Johnstone, (1996) which examined over 2,000 participants in the DARE program. The students' attitude and use of drugs were assessed before and after the DARE program and then for the next 4 years or through 10th grade. The program produced initial improvements in students' attitudes toward drug use; however, the changes did not persist over time.

In response to this research on the poor outcomes of the DARE program (Clayton et al., 1996; Ennet et al., 1994; Lynam et al., 1999; Thombs, 2000), DARE is in the process of their 10th revision (DARE, 2006). The new program which is known as Take Charge of Your Life is underway in six cities: Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Newark, New Orleans, and St. Louis. A five-year research project conducted by the University of