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Willingness Of Persons To Pay For And Volunteer In Delinquency Prevention Programs

Robert Schaefer
Carroll College, Helena, MT

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WILLINGNESS OF PERSONS TO PAY FOR AND VOLUNTEER IN DELINQUENCY PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Honors Thesis

By

Robert A. Schaefer

Sociology Department
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This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of Sociology.

Father Jeremiah Lowney, Director
Libby Chute, Reader
Laurie Fahlberg, Reader

4/05/02
Date
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WILLINGNESS OF PERSONS TO PAY FOR AND VOLUNTEER IN DELINQUENCY PREVENTION PROGRAMS

The problem of juvenile delinquency in today’s society raises many questions. One of these questions is, “What is the best way to treat, prevent, and deter delinquent youth?” Various authors have developed three basic proposals to answer this question: 1) incarceration, 2) treatment programs, and 3) community-based programs. In order to take strides toward effectively treating the youth of America, it is necessary for people to be aware of the juvenile delinquency problem, and understand that stronger efforts must be made to find more ways to treat the problem. One of those ways is to develop programs of prevention. It is logical that one way to develop more treatment and prevention programs is through taxes and to volunteer in those programs. This research is based on a survey that was conducted in Helena, Montana. The results indicate variances among those who support increased taxes for prevention and treatment programs and those who are willing to volunteer in a community-based program.

Introduction

Although overall crime and juvenile violent crime has been decreasing, juvenile delinquency is still perceived as a problem. The causes and vehicles of preventing and treating this societal problem have occupied the minds of many authorities and sociologists alike. Focusing on the treatment and prevention of future delinquency is the issue this paper will address.

There are three fundamental proposals in treating juvenile delinquents: 1) incarceration, 2) treatment programs, and 3) community-based intervention. Each will be discussed in the following pages.

Literature Review

Incarceration

Barry Krisberg, author of Reinventing Juvenile Justice, argues that juvenile delinquents are incarcerated for three primary reasons. The first reason is a fear, on the
part of the judge, that if the youth is not incarcerated, he or she will propose a definite threat to the safety of the community. The second reason youths are incarcerated is due to no fault of their own. In fact, it is because the judge deems that his or her home environment is insufficient and he or she must be detained until a more permanent home is found. The final reason a youth may be detained is to make sure the offender will appear at the required court dates (1993:74).

From a study performed in the United States, Krisberg further notes that in 1989 there were 2,245 status offenders that had been sent to public facilities. On the other hand, there were 6,863 that were placed in facilities that were privately operated, which is a total of 9,098. Krisberg goes on to explain that approximately 416,000 youth were sentenced to detention centers and the cost for this certain system has grown to $240 million (1993:74). This study shows how much money taxpayers are paying for the incarceration of juveniles and the unbalanced proportion between juveniles that are sent to public and private facilities compared to those that are sent to the costly detention centers.

Krisberg (1993) provides a very important perspective on the incarceration of juvenile delinquents. Although he is not boldly promoting the incarceration of our youth, he is also not speaking out against it. Krisberg discusses two more important points about this prevention technique by stating that there are few states that have laws that provide for a maximum length of time a juvenile may stay in detention. He also notes that juveniles are not always specifically placed in juvenile institutions and may be detained in an adult county jail. In fact, a juvenile being placed in an adult facility is not
an uncommon occurrence. Approximately 60,000 juveniles were placed into adult jails in 1990 (1993:76).

In *Dealing with Delinquency*, Jay Albanese, focuses more directly upon the incarceration of juvenile delinquents. Albanese discusses a factual approach to this topic and the type of offenders that are sent to these rehabilitative programs. He states that most incarcerated juvenile offenders come from single-parent households, have an average of an eighth grade education, are about fifteen-and-one-half years old, and have spent 8-10% of their young lives in juvenile detention facilities (1993:186).

The solution that Albanese, among others, is promoting is the prevention of delinquent behavior before the juvenile becomes another statistic in the incarceration system. Albanese proclaims that in order to prevent juvenile delinquency, treatment must start within the family (1993:186).

David Popenoe, author of *Life Without Father*, also believes that delinquency begins in the home and within the relationship between a son and a father. Popenoe notes:

Children who grow up with only one of their biological parents (nearly always their mother) are disadvantaged across a broad array of outcomes...they are twice as likely to drop out of high school, 2.5 times as likely to become teen mothers, and 1.4 times as likely to be idle—out of school and out of work—as children who grow up with both parents. (1996:9)

Edwin Schur, in his book, *Radical Nonintervention: Rethinking the Delinquency Problem*, boldly discusses his opinion on the incarceration of juveniles. Schur notes that although juvenile institutions were developed to create safe, protective environments for children, away from their troubled home life and from adult offenders, there are many problems within the juvenile institutions that hinder their very purpose (1973:64).
Schur proceeds by noting three severe problems that juvenile facilities often encompass: failing to be properly supported; having an uneven distribution of juveniles; and simply that many facilities are inadequate (1973:64).

Kenneth Wooden, author of *Weeping in the Playtime of Others*, discusses the harm of institutionalization through the example of the notorious Charles Manson. Having summarized and reviewing all of Manson’s prison records, Wooden notes that Manson spent seventeen of his twenty-two years in prison for crimes that would only account for less than five years in a federal facility. Manson’s failed recovery, which could partially be the fault of the institutions he received treatment in, included never once having a serious treatment program and being allowed to drop out of the institution’s elementary school after one day (1976:56).

Manson’s situation is a perfect example of an institution not providing the proper means to help a patient at an early age and simply continuing this improper and unsuccessful treatment until the patient is completely institutionalized and has no hope of being returned into society. Institutionalization is believed by some, such as Krisberg (1993), to help deter juveniles from committing crimes, however, if a delinquent does commit a crime—locking them up may not be the best answer. Wooden (1976), among other sociologists and researchers, believes that treatment programs may be more effective for juveniles.

*Treatment Programs*

There are many programs today that are considered an effective alternative to institutionalization. These treatment programs are appointed by a judge and include organizations such as wilderness programs and group homes.
Kenneth Wooden discusses many successful programs that have helped treat society’s delinquent youth. One of these homes is called the Harris Home for Children. It started with an elderly woman who saw the youth of her neighborhood in great distress and began to take unwanted children into her home and provide them with a family atmosphere. The Harris Home for Children compiles all profits and invests in apartments and small group homes. Another important aspect of the Harris Home is the fact that they do not alienate the biological parents of the children they house, and actually strive to involve the parents whenever possible (1976:217).

Wooden proceeds by describing the accolades that this small home has received. He notes that the Harris Home is very low-key and does not have “fancy brochures, rhetoric or public relations, boasts no showpiece structures, [and is] just a solid record of saving young human beings from the vacuum of not being wanted” (1976:218).

Wooden continues by stating that 90 percent of all children that have been taken in to the Harris Home, have broken stereotypes and returned to the community where they once lived and are now productive and fully capable citizens (1976:218).

Wooden describes many treatment programs that have been abundantly successful. He further states that successful programs all share the same basic characteristics. These programs are small and personal and have very small budgets. The successful programs also have recidivism rates that are 100 to 500 percent better than more expensive institutions (1976:219). Wooden also notes, “all [successful programs] save more children for fewer tax dollars (by and large, they require one third the annual financial subsidy of state training schools, and even less when compared with the fly-by-
night private institutions that have sprung up upon newly available federal and state monies” (1976:219).

According to Wooden, these programs are not only more effective than institutions, but are also save more of the taxpayer’s money (1976:219).

Treatment programs provide an appealing alternative to institutionalization, but community-based programs may even serve society’s delinquent youth with a better opportunity to treat themselves and be reintroduced to society. Celeste Fremon (1995), Richard Lerner (1995), Jeremiah Lowney (2001), and Edwin Schur (1973) are a few researchers that believe community-based programs may be the most effective answer to juvenile delinquency.

**Community-Based Intervention**

There are two different types of community-based intervention: formal and informal. Informal community intervention can be as seemingly insignificant as watching over a neighborhood adolescent who does not receive a very comforting family life. Informal intervention is exemplified in the book Father Greg & the Homeboys, by Celeste Fremon (1995), which explains the incredible journey one man made into the lives of juveniles who were headed down the wrong path. Father Boyle was simply present in the lives of many juveniles in the Latino gangs of East Los Angeles, California. He provided the troubled youth with a father figure, a role model, and someone who did not judge them.

Father Boyle was simply present to them. This directly relates to what is noted by Jeremiah Lowney (2001) in his book, What Were Your Parents Doing Back Then? In doing his research in an objective and non-moralizing manner, Lowney found that non-
intervention and simply “being present” to juveniles in need was very effective. The following quote, taken from Carl, who was one of his subjects, provides evidence for the effective impact that Lowney’s objective, nonjudgmental presence had on Carl’s life.

First, you [Lowney] were always present to us. You were always there. Wherever we were, you were there. Second, you were not judgmental. You never moralized or advised us what to do. You accepted us as we were. Third, it was your presence… Fourth, you had values and cared, but you did not moralize or make us feel like we were being analyzed. (2001:381)

Lowney also believes in formal community intervention. He felt that programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, the YMCA and YWCA, church groups, Pop Warner football, and other similar volunteer organizations definitely benefit juveniles (2001: 420).

Edwin Schur also feels that formal community intervention, specifically the community treatment program at Pinehills, in Provo, Utah, is very effective in helping troubled youth. This program is different from others because the juveniles who are in this program spend only some of the day in the actual program center and the rest of their time is spent within the community. The boys are employed by the city and occupy a number of jobs in recreation areas, streets, and parks (1973:59). In Pinehills, only twenty juveniles take part in the program at one time. This type of system allows for the juveniles to fully experience one-on-one treatment and allows for the city to be able to produce jobs for the boys. Schur notes that 84 percent of the juveniles that finish the program have not been rearrested during the next six months (1973:60).

Richard Lerner (1995), author of America’s Youth in Crisis: Challenges and Options for Programs and Policies, discusses four points that must be addressed when developing community intervention programs for juvenile delinquents. The first is that
society needs to focus more on “developing a comprehensive and integrative youth development policy” (1995: xiv) than deterrence.

Lerner’s second point states that proper resources must be available in order for community-based programs to succeed. As he contends, “these resources must be used to increase the capacity of community members themselves to sustain these programs and to create community-wide, comprehensive, and integrative services that enhance the life chances of their children, adolescents, and families” (1995: xiv).

The third point that Lerner notes must be present in order to develop successful community intervention programs is that communities must learn from one another. They have to see what works and what does not and properly conduct their programs in the footsteps of other prosperous programs (1995: xv).

Lerner’s final point suggests that communities must involve faculty and university personnel in their program building process. These educational minds have the knowledge about the best programs and how the results of the most successful programs can be duplicated (1995: xv).

Lerner furthered his explanation of community-based intervention programs and, gathered from his findings, listed the positive effects that these programs have on juveniles. One of the effects Lerner notes is “providing opportunities for youth to engage in positive and social relationships with peers and adults” (1995:63).

Other effects include making sure that juveniles learn the appropriate life skills to function successfully in society and to offer the youth an opportunity to give back to their community. Two final effects Lerner leaves us with are allowing the youth to feel like
they are an important part of a positive group experience and to also allow them to feel
confident in every endeavor in which they choose to take part in (1995:63-64).

It is possible that community-based intervention may be the answer to the
problem of juvenile delinquency, but the overlooked key is the average citizen who might
or might not volunteer the time, the life, and the money to prevention and treatment
programs. People such as the Harris’, the founders of Pinehills, Jeremiah Lowney, and
Father Greg Boyle all encompass the characteristics that Lerner (1995) believes create a
positive and successful community-based program. In order for people to understand the
delinquency problem and how they can play a part in treating this problem, they must be
aware that juvenile delinquency is definitely a thorn in the side of our society. They must
also recognize that more programs need to be implemented and in order to do this
taxpayers must not only be willing to spend their money, but also to volunteer their time.

**Methodology**

I analyzed data collected from a non-random sample of one hundred Helena
community members. Because this was not a random sample, one cannot generalize
beyond the sample administered. A survey (see Appendix) was given to volunteers at
four Helena locations: Bon Marche, the Walking Mall, Capital Hill Mall, and Walmart. I
surprisingly had little problem gathering the data, and the sites of the surveys turned out
to work very well.

The volunteers were given a survey that covered the major areas of juvenile
delinquency and inquired about the awareness of juvenile delinquency as a problem in
today’s society, the belief that more effort should be placed on finding ways to treat this
problem, and that one of these ways is to develop more prevention programs. The survey
contained items as to whether or not respondents agreed with more tax money being spent on treatment programs for juveniles and if the respondents were willing to volunteer in community-based programs. The survey contained three controls, which were age, gender, and whether or not the respondent had children.

**Results**

**TABLE 1**

AGREEMENT TO SURVEY ISSUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N=100</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile delinquency is a problem</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More effort is needed to treat this problem</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize that more prevention programs are needed</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More tax money should be spent on treatment programs</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to volunteer in community-based programs</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the one hundred replies, 90 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that juvenile delinquency is a problem in today’s society. Eighty-seven percent agreed that more effort should be placed on finding ways to treat this problem. When analyzing the respondents that agreed with the statement that juvenile delinquency is a problem, 97 percent of those respondents also agreed that more effort should be placed on finding ways to treat this problem. When asked if the respondents agreed that one of the ways to help treat the juvenile delinquency problem is by developing more treatment programs, 77 percent of them agreed.
When the respondents were asked whether or not they supported more tax money being spent on treatment programs for juveniles only, 62 percent agreed. Out of the 90 percent who agreed with juvenile delinquency being a problem in today’s society and that more efforts need to be focused on finding more ways to treat this problem, only two-thirds agreed that more tax money should be spent on treatment programs. However, out of the 77 percent that believed one of the ways to treat the juvenile delinquency problem was by developing more prevention programs, 80 percent of those respondents also agreed with more tax money being spent for these programs.

When the respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement that they were willing to volunteer in community-based programs, 70 percent of the respondents agreed. Out of the 88 percent that felt juvenile delinquency is a problem in today’s society and that more effort should be placed on finding ways to treat this problem, 79 percent of those respondents are willing to do something about it and volunteer.

**TABLE 2**

**RESPONDENTS’ AGREEMENT BY PARENTHOOD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WITH CHILDREN (N=70)</th>
<th>WITHOUT CHILDREN (N=30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile delinquency is a problem</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More effort is needed to treat this problem</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize that more prevention programs are needed</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More tax money should be spent on treatment programs</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to volunteer in community-based programs</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first control that was used is whether or not the respondent has children. Out of the one hundred respondents, 70 percent have children. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents who have children agreed that juvenile delinquency is a problem and more effort should be placed on finding ways to treat the problem. Ninety-four percent of those respondents agreed with the statement that more prevention programs are needed. Eighty-three percent of the respondents are also willing to volunteer and a remarkable 91 percent agree with the statement that more tax money should be spent on treating the juvenile delinquency problem.

Out of the 30 percent of the respondents that do not have children, 70 percent agreed that juvenile delinquency is a problem and 60 percent agreed that more effort should be placed on treating this problem. Fifty-five percent also agreed that more prevention programs are needed. Out of the respondents who do not have children, only 33 percent of them are willing to volunteer in community-based programs and only 10 percent agreed with the statement that more tax money should be spent on treatment programs for juveniles.

**TABLE 3**

**RESPONDENTS’ AGREEMENT BY SEX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FEMALE (N=60)</th>
<th>MALE (N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile delinquency is a problem</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More effort is needed to treat this problem</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize that more prevention programs are needed</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More tax money should be spent on treatment programs</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to volunteer in community-based programs</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second control used was sex. According to the results from the survey, 60 percent of the respondents were female. Ninety-seven percent of the female respondents agreed with the statement that juvenile delinquency is a problem in today’s society, and 97 percent also agreed that more effort is needed to treat this problem. Eighty-three percent of the female respondents agree that prevention programs are needed to treat this problem, 82 percent believe more money should be spent on treatment programs for juveniles and 78 percent are willing to volunteer in community-based programs.

Forty percent of the respondents were male. Seventy-eight percent of the male respondents agreed that juvenile delinquency is a problem in today’s society, 70 percent believe more effort should be placed on finding ways to treat this problem, and 68 percent agree with developing more prevention programs. However, only 53 percent of the male respondents believe more tax money should be spent on treatment programs and only 55 percent are willing to volunteer in community-based programs.

**TABLE 4**

**RESPONDENTS’ AGREEMENT BY SEX AND PARENTHOOD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FEMALE WITH CHILDREN (N=49)</th>
<th>MALE WITH CHILDREN (N=22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile delinquency is a problem</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More effort is needed to treat this</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize that more prevention</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programs are needed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More tax money should be spent on</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>treatment programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to volunteer in community-</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When the controls of sex and parenthood were analyzed together, the results were very informative. According to the results of the survey, 49 percent of the respondents were females who were also parents. Out of these respondents, 100 percent agreed that juvenile delinquency is a problem and that more effort is needed to treat this problem. Ninety-six percent agreed that more prevention programs are needed and 82 percent felt more tax money should be spent on treatment programs. Eighty-four percent of the females with children also agreed with the statement that they were willing to volunteer in community-based programs.

Twenty-two percent of the respondents were males who also had children. Ninety-one percent of those respondents agreed that juvenile delinquency is a problem, more effort is needed to treat this problem, and one way to treat this problem is by developing more prevention programs. Thus, based on these findings, the significant variable was not gender but parenthood.

The third and final control used was the age if the respondent. In analyzing the different ages of the respondents, 19 percent were 20-29 years old, 26 percent were 30-39 years old, 19 percent were 40-49 years old, 18 percent were 50-59 years old, 16 percent were 60-69 years old and 2 percent were over 70 years old. There was not any significance in the difference between the ages of the respondents and the way they answered the survey.

Discussion

The results of the survey provide a snapshot into how a community looks at juvenile delinquency and how people may form biases toward certain issues. Almost all of the respondents agreed with the fact that juvenile delinquency is a problem in today’s
society, more effort should be placed on finding ways to treat the problem, and that more prevention programs are needed. However, the responses to the questions regarding more tax money being spent on treatment programs and willingness to volunteer in community-based programs produced the most variance and significant findings in the survey. Although the age control did not produce any significant results, when the gender control was implemented and analyzed, a few points became clear. As can be seen, females were much more likely to agree with every question than the males, especially when considering volunteering and tax money being spent. For example, there was almost a 30 percent difference between the male and the female respondents when asked the question if they agreed with the statement that more tax money needs to be spent.

The third control implemented whether or not the respondents had children or not, and this control produced remarkable results. The questions of delinquency being a problem in today’s society, more effort is needed to treat this problem, and the need for more prevention programs displayed a difference of 25 percent between those who have children and those who do not. However, the results that were the most alarming was the fact that there was a 50 percent discrepancy between the two groups in terms of agreeing to volunteer, and only 10 percent of the respondents without children agreed that more tax money should be spent on treatment programs.

As can be seen, when the controls of sex and parenthood were compiled, the statistics were striking. Based on these findings, it seems that parenthood produced the most significant differences as to whether people supported more tax money being spent or if they were willing to volunteer their time. If the respondents answered that they did
have children, both the men and women were much more likely to be aware of juvenile delinquency as a problem, recognize that more effort needs to be placed on treating this issue, and feel that more programs need to be developed. The control of sex did not seem to matter; it simply came down to if the respondents had children.

Although the results of the survey are preliminary research, they did however, reveal how some community members view juvenile delinquency and how they feel it can be helped. Incarceration was not included within the survey; however, it still should be recognized when considering the need for early intervention in delinquent youth. The responses also revealed that most participants agree with the programs that Wooden (1976), Lowney (2001), and Lerner (1995) mention and characterize, such as successful programs including the Harris Home, and community-based programs such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, the YMCA and YWCA, and community church groups.

Juvenile delinquents are more than just troubled youth. They have the potential, just like everyone else, to become competent beneficial members of their community. However, they will not become attributes in society unless one of the three treatment proposals mentioned earlier is implemented. If there is not early intervention into the lives of troubled youth, then the problem of juvenile delinquency will continue to grow and the future potential of today’s generation will be lost.
Appendix

Please CIRCLE the appropriate answer.

SA- strongly agree, A- agree, I- indifferent, D- disagree, SD- disagree

1) Juvenile delinquency is a problem in today’s society. SA A I D SD

2) More effort should be placed on finding ways to treat this problem. SA A I D SD

3) One of these ways is to develop more prevention programs. SA A I D SD

4) I support more tax money being spent on treatment programs for juveniles. SA A I D SD

5) I am willing to volunteer in community-based programs. SA A I D SD

   (i.e. Big Brothers Big Sisters, YMCA, church groups, athletic programs)

6) Do you have any children? Yes No

7) Age: 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70+

8) Sex: Male Female
Bibliography


