Combating Florida's Rise in Teen Violent Crime

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Abstract

Lawmakers face extreme challenges when addressing the issue of violent crimes committed among young people. While most jurisdictions have seen a reduction in overall juvenile crime, the same cannot be said for violent crimes. Surveys were conducted by taking random samples of youth who were currently in juvenile detention facilities and juvenile residential facilities around Florida. Firsthand research is gathered and contrast identifying best practices. This report analyzes major causes and contributors to violent crime and provides the most effective and efficient program and measures to reduce violent juvenile crime.

Introduction

Florida is currently experiencing the lowest arrest rate amongst juveniles in 43 years. A report detailing arrest rates of Florida juvenile youth (18 years of age and younger) by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) revealed that felony arrests dropped 10% over the last fiscal year and overall juvenile arrests declined 8% in the same time frame. The Department attributes the decline in arrests to the collaborative efforts of its dedicated staff, law enforcement partners, and community stakeholders. By implementing comprehensive, data-driven reforms, DJJ has worked to transform the juvenile justice system in Florida. As a result, Florida has been recognized as a national leader in innovative, evidence-based approaches to juvenile justice and in providing services for young people and families. (2018-2019)

Though the DJJ has experienced a 24% decline in juvenile arrest over the past five-years, there is a growing trend violent crime committed by juveniles. Recognizing this challenge is the first step in exploring the states options to address the violent crime tendencies.   It is no surprise that curving these tendencies of crime is a daunting task. This report will examine what factors contribute to the rise of violent crimes committed by juveniles; Suggest what should be done to curve this trend of rising violent crimes amongst juveniles; and produce proposed legislative and/or policy recommendations that create prolonged and sustainable change.

Literature Review

Violent crime among juveniles has grown almost twice of that over adults in the last 20 years. Along with the rise in violent crimes is an alarming 79% rise in juvenile arrests. Juvenile murders also rose 177% between the years of 1986 and 1993. (Livett, 1997) With some youth labeled as "super predators," these statistics brought about almost a decade of being "tough on crime" that led to higher rates of youth housed in the

juvenile justice system. As researchers gathered data and reviewed statistics following that time, new ideologies and ways to address juvenile delinquency emerged. Research began to identify that youth could be best served in their communities along with the existence of close-nit support systems and positive reinforcement. Studies revealed that identifying risk factors of youth at younger ages and offering prevention-based services have a better return than lateral interventions. (Livett, 1997)

Violent Juvenile Crime plagues the fabric of our society. *Crime and Public Policy* examines the factors and causes for growing crime rates and prevailing trends of juvenile justice since the late 1960s. A multifaceted approach to addressing juvenile crime is provided resulting from a cross-national comparison of effective programs and policies. By poling information from the United Nations, Interpol, homicide victimization data from the World Health Organization, and the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS), the report defines key social determinants of juvenile crime. Lastly, the reader is provided with research useful to consider and use in the development of legislation and policy. (Wilson, 2011)

Debate and speculation on the causes of recent increases in homicide rates have been largely free of systemic evidence. This report examines 56 larger US cities and territories; it examined items from the expansion of urban drug markets and the heroin epidemic. The author calls one point of consideration the Ferguson effect. Resulting from the increase amount of deadly police encounters. This theory shares the belief that some crimes are overlooked until they become of a serious nature mainly by way of media and news outlets. The causality of this leads to an increase in the reporting of violent crime. Another factor to review is whether or not there is any correlation between the decline in incarceration rates and the higher rate of violent crime. Overall the author examines whether the recent increase in crime is attributed to the recent push for reduced prison sentences. To this end, he argues that we may be suffering from evidence of bad recidivism rates. This creates the thought that there are missed opportunities through correctional facilities that can help reduce a substantial number of violent crimes. (Rosenfield, 2016)

The author takes a systems-thinking approach to identify factors that can reduce violent crimes committed through acts of extremism. The report is an analysis of the rise of violent extremism, its roots, and causes. One suggested approach provides mechanisms to reducing violent acts through considering factors outside of the criminal justice system. The writer points out that the scope of addressing crime and delinquency can sometimes be drawn to small. To rectify this, one must create and research a plan that addresses a wide view of contributors leading to crime. Points are drawn connecting a case study on the effects of violent extremism on public health. Violent extremism has recently been on a rise through acts of mass shootings. (National Academies… 2017)

The observance of these acts has dramatically increased in public forums, public events, schools, and places of worship. Through a knowledge and skills base curriculum known as Countering Violent Extremism or CVE, the author seeks to identify community-based efforts in the form of public policy-based law enforcement engagement while engaging stakeholders in the fight to curve the stats of violent extremism. (Weine, et al, 2016)

The Florida State University School of Criminology published an article addressing the growing need to provide criminological research to public policy. Through 6 years of

research, substantial evidence links the rise of violent crime more to public policy rather than societal factors; such as unemployment and poverty to name a few. The research provides that policy can sometimes drive and influence other causalities aiding the increase of violent crime. To this point, it is argued that policy tends to drive the mindset that leads to public action rather than public action leading to policy development. (Blomberg, 2013)

There is a need to invest more into fields of research that point us to more direct causality of violent crime rather than working from the top to the bottom. Inclusive of examining what drives persons to enter the criminal justice system due to violent crimes, we must also look at the way the system releases or returns citizens to the community. This return is commonly known as reentry. Bloomberg suggests that much of crime can be traced to a lack of investment and quality reentry program. (Bloomberg, 2013)

Research conducted on policies that are effective in reducing adult and juvenile recidivism returned mixed results. While some findings produced significant outcomes, others in effect, made things worst. The data first return that there are many uncertainties that exist mainly due to the many factors that contribute to the issue of delinquency. There are no individual components that lead to delinquency, rather there is usually a myriad of factors that lead individuals to commit crime. Simply put there is not a one-size-fits-all approach that can be taken. It is therefore concluded that a system with multiple components should be implemented that will increase the level of success by addressing the needs of multiple individuals. (Howell, et al, 2012)

When considering policy that aid the fight to reduce violent crime, one main point is concluded from the research; arrests, convictions, and imprisonment do not curve or reduce recidivism rates. It is also noted that juvenile youth who are transferred to adult systems are more likely to reoffend. Another Finding concluded that following there release, juveniles who were transferred to the adult system committed crimes in more violent in fashion. It is recommended that legislators and policymakers focus on juvenile justice as opposed to investing more in adult corrections as recidivism rates tend to increase as an individual's age increases. (Howell, et al, 2012)

Drawing from the Serious Youth Violence Strategy, Colm Walsh addresses the issue of violent youth crime from a gender-specific consideration and approach. Walsh provides that violent crime amongst juveniles isn't just an issue, but it's a male issue. Drawing on substantial findings regarding disproportionate numbers of violent crimes committed by males, the case is made to develop interventions that are intensively geared at serving needs of young men, not just addressing criminogenic factors in general. Walsh offers the view that being a male is a risk factor to violent crime. This risk factor is most displayed through personalities and characteristics of hyper masculinity. The issue of violent juvenile crime is noted to be a worldwide problem. Walsh links the higher probability of males to commit violent crime to an over exposure of traumatic life events. (Walsh, 2018)

Determining youth crime to be a public health concern, a case study conducted by the University of North Carolina Wilmington captures essential programmatic efforts of a multisectoral community-based initiative to address youth violence in southeastern North Carolina. The study finds that an effective intervention program model must contain the following components: includes the education system, criminal justice system, local government, university, and service providers. The Center for Disease Control (CDC,

n.d.), stated that homicide is the second leading cause of death for young persons aged 15–24, meaning that on average, 13 youths are victims of homicide each day. Homicides alone result in an estimated 16 billion dollars in combined work and medical costs loss. (CDC, n.d.)

Highlighting the Harlem Children's Zone, a model was implemented in North Carolina including over 140 city blocks, 3 public schools, and a private charter school with the mission of "Building a community where youth are safe, healthy, educated, and successful." While the program proved to be effective, identifying specific areas of success and failure proved to be difficult because of the many different services and programs overlapping each other within the controlled setting. (Bolton, 2017)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is a term coined by physician-researchers Vincent Felitti and Robert Anda to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other traumatic childhood experiences. ACEs can be further defined as experiences that result in long-term exposure to severe chronic stress and the absence of a supportive adult. ACEs are experiences that profoundly effect a child's developing brain that can lead to negative adult behavioral and health outcomes (Sciaraffa, 2017). Individuals with an ACE score of 4 or higher were twice as likely to smoke, seven times as likely to be alcoholics, and six times as likely to have had sex before fifteen years of age. It was also found that men with an ACE score of 6 or higher were forty-six times as likely to have injected drugs than men who had no exposure to ACEs. (Sciaraffa, 2017)

There has been much study on the effects of ACEs, its prevalence for youth to commit violent crime, and long-term health complications in adults. Although many connections have been drawn relating ACEs to delinquency and other health related issues, there are still many conclusions that can be drawn. One complication that exists in the study of ACEs is the fact that persons are affected with so many prevailing factors. The Gathering of these factors can sometimes present unconcluded linkages and or cause foggy connections to exist. One concern is that longitudinal studies reveal that growing up in poverty increases the prevalence of crime and health issues. (Finkelhor, 2013)

When measured beside the ACEs study, it complicates whether or not persons suffer from high scores on the ACEs test or the prevalence of growing up in poverty. Recommendations are to create space within the ACEs testing that will allow variances based on other societal issues such as poverty and the effects of mass media. It is believed that the inclusion of such variables will create a more accurate testing variance. Yet and still, data gained from current ACEs testing reveals certifiable evidence for the need to treat and properly address trauma. (Finkelhor, et al, 2013)

Sharing the viewpoint of ACEs is a curriculum known as Trauma-Informed Care (TIC). Howard Bath acknowledges the importance of the effect of traumatic experiences on the lives of individuals. He proposes that service providers should simplify their approach to addressing this fragile and ever-expanding topic. In his journal, "The Three Pillars of Trauma-Informed Care,' he concludes that the complexity of addressing trauma can be categorized into three target areas; Safety, Connections, and Managing Emotions. Aligning the actions of multiple agencies and sources can become very convoluted and often unproductive. (Bath, et al, 2008)

Bath proposes a shift from agency-focus services to a person-centered focus. By using this approach, service providers target actual needs of clients as opposed to

providing across the board generic service. The client, in turn, receives the correct dosage and maximum amount of intervention specially equipped for them to be successful. First, one must identify the need of safety and security of basic needs in an individual's life. Secondly, connections must be drawn to develop a positive support system assuring continued success. Lastly, individuals must learn to deal with their personal emotions and promote their own self-sufficiency and survival. This aids in building the individuals resiliency. (Bath, et al, 2018)

Some programs are geared towards improving the lives of young persons and equipping them with necessary skills to decrease the likelihood of engaging in a life of crime. Christian Moore offers a non-traditional approach of corrections and or intervention programming. In his book, "The Resilience Breakthrough," he proposes that people are successful because of the way they learn to deal with life. In other words, successful people are resilient people. Programs that provide successful intervention targeted at reducing violent crimes should build character not curriculum. Moore's Resilience Training incorporates Core Principles, Rational Resilience, Street Resilience, and Resource Resilience. Moore provides a case study of different individuals, popular to today's society, while identifying tragedies and trauma they had to overcome to attain the level of success they have reached. (Moore, et al, 2014)

Moore concludes that intervention programs should not focus on providing resources to individuals and painting the picture of a perfect society, rather, he believes programs should equip individuals to deal with the heart aches and complexities of life. Individuals should find ways of coping and using resilience as a means addressing the downturns of life by using it for strength. As a point of comparison, Moore outlines the training offered by military branches. He compares the life of a soldier to the life of individual encountering personal battles. Just as soldiers are equipped to be resilient and taught how to use what they have to master their situation, Moore submits that the same skills are useful for one to execute in everyday life. (Moore, et al, 2014).

Street gangs represent a persistent threat to public safety. Conflicts between street gangs have long been noted to fuel much of the violence in US cities. City-level studies have found gang-related motives generate noteworthy shares of homicides in Chicago (Block & Block, 1993). In the book, "The Handbook of Gangs," reviews the current trends and knowledge on gangs. Comprised of an exhaustive team of experts on the behavior and evolution of gangs and gang activity, this resource provides a definitive research proposal that identifies the fundamentals and foundational makeup of street gangs and the violent they commit. (Curry, 2015)

Reviewing the theory and response for addressing gang activity, the book offers a resource for law enforcement officers and to equip personnel on how to understand the fundamentals of implementing useful tactics that combat gang violence. Highlighted is a curriculum known as the gang resistance Education and Training (GREAT) project. Providing a function work plan, readers are encouraged to avoid thinking about gangs in a traditional or preconceived manner and provided tools to take a more pragmatic approach to gang violence disbanding. To address violence by gangs one must understand the dealings and function of the gang in surveillance. The best methods identify the source and motivation of the gang while implementing a strategic yet simplified intervention. (Curry, 2015)

In the Office of Juvenile Justice delinquency and Prevention's (OJJDP) spring 2014 edition of the Journal of Juvenile Justice, a multi-jurisdictional study is published identifying criminogenic needs of in the juvenile justice system. Research was gathered in collaboration with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice outlining ACEs based curriculum used to address intervention programming geared at reducing juvenile crime. Using a Washington State originated assessment and screening tool, DJJ develop a Positive Achievement Change/Risk needs assessment. The Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) is a fourth-generation actuarial risk/needs assessment designed to assess a youth's overall risk to reoffend, as well as to rank-order criminogenic needs/dynamic risk factors. The assessment process is designed as a semi-structured interview and utilizes Motivational Interviewing techniques. (Baglivio, 2014)

ACEs not only increase the chances of involvement in the juvenile justice system but increase the risk of re-offense. Reports find that a focused effort on early identification of ACEs, providing interventions for ACEs with a goal of improving youth life circumstances, and preventing criminal behavior may reduce the likelihood of and costs related to juvenile criminal activities. (Baglivio, 2015)

The issue of recidivism remains a pivotal issue to address in the field of criminology. When we consider the plight of juveniles it is no less. Eve Mulder et.al. provide research aimed at finding risk factors that predict both overall recidivism and severity of recidivism in serious juvenile offenders. During this study, several risk factors for recidivism were examined including past criminal behavior, conduct disorder, family risk factors, involvement with criminal peers, and lack of treatment adherence, that were measured over a 2-year period involving over 700 youth. The report found fluctuations amongst recidivism rates although most of the youth had received treatment programs. The overall conclusion determined that classification and targeting treatment needs specific to juvenile offenders may lead to more targeted treatment specific to risk factors of the youth. The results also revealed that, for those who qualified, community-based programs returned more promising results. (Mulder, 2010)

A cross study of the co-occurrence of mental health and substance abuse disorders among incarcerated juveniles was held in Mississippi detention centers and training schools. A Sample of 482 juveniles in nine detention centers were consulted with two-thirds of the population comprised of African American males. Key findings:

- Between 66% to 85% of the juvenile offenders assessed met *DSM-IV* diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder.
- Multiple, co-occurring mental health and substance abuse diagnoses were evident. Half with two or more disorders have a Conduct Disorder and 38% have a cooccurring substance abuse disorder. (Robertson, 2004)

The report found that youth entering the juvenile detention system should have routine mental health screenings. Youth should also receive structured screenings and/or examinations that disclose past youth/family history. A collaborative network between community mental health centers and county courts in effort to increase treatment efforts is also recommended. (Robertson, 2004)

The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice conducted a five-year analysis capturing referrals of serious, violent, and chronic offenders. The projects focus analyzed

whether subsequent reoffending is predicted by similar risk and protective factors. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FDJJ) is one of the largest juvenile justice systems in the United States. Differing from other juvenile justice systems, FDJJ houses all points of the juvenile justice service continuum under one roof. While other states employ a bifurcated juvenile justice system, Florida capitalizes from immediate access to trends and data concerning its juvenile population. (Baglivio, 2015)

Over the years research has consistently supported a clear relationship between delinquency, violent crime, mental health, and substance abuse. Significate inferences were drawn between age and crime; withstanding even, more traditional factors such as race and gender. Simply put, the younger the age of the first offence, the greater the likelihood to commit more severe crimes. Findings determined that males were more than twice as likely to be serious, violent, and chronic offenders. Other findings concluded that serious, violent, and chronic offenders were almost three times more likely to have been first referred when 12 years old or younger. (Baglivio, 2015)

Methods

The purpose of this research was to identify any correlations between early traumatic childhood experiences and the prospect of engaging in acts of violent crime. Surveys were conducted by taking random samples of youth who were currently in juvenile detention facilities and juvenile residential facilities around Florida. Research was conducted to determine the most prevalent factors that lead to juvenile delinquency, while examining correlations brought on by other external factors surrounding the youth's development. Consideration was given to all youth participating in the surveys as to pose questions that were general in nature and did not require the youth to reveal any medical information, case history, and/or answer any uncomfortable questions. All surveys were anonymous to encourage natural responses in the answers provided.
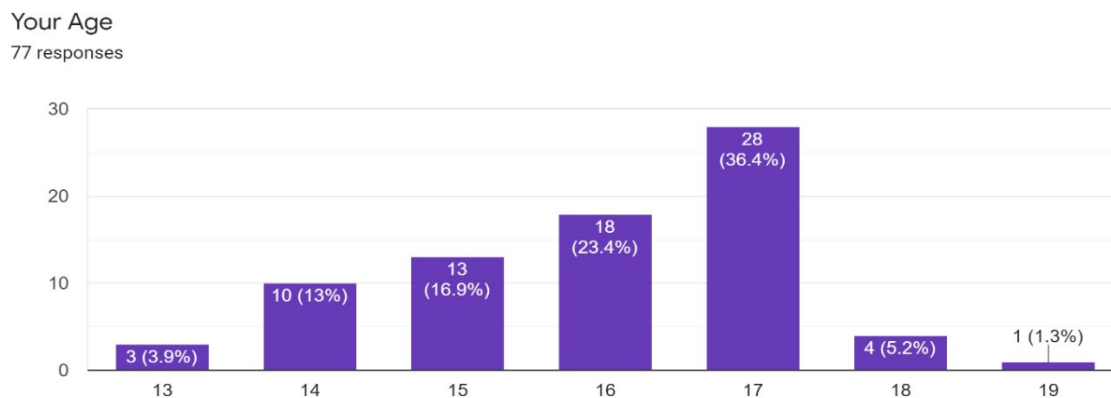
Data was also gathered from juvenile justice think tanks for the purpose of analyzing the existence of trends and causalities. Cross-program comparisons were drawn from prior research and program analysis that was used to identify best practices. Interviews were also conducted with practitioners in the juvenile justice field to gather observations and perspectives from hands-on knowledge and experience. Information gathered from this analysis will be presented to executive and legislative bodies in effort to develop policy and practices throughout the state in effort to further reduce the number of youths engaging in violent crime while advancing the mission of the Department.

Results

   Surveys were sent to 105 youth currently in juvenile detention centers throughout Florida. Seventy-seven of the 100 responses were received for a response rate of 73.33%. A total of three questions were skipped by respondents which were noted, and appropriate score assigned. The first three questions gaged the participants knowledge, awareness and feelings toward juvenile justice programming. Questions four through eight appealed to the participants relationships and personal experiences; while the remaining question sought to gain the participants input on the relevance of juvenile justice programs. Respondents were asked to provide their age and home county which allowed the reviewer to determine the balance and perspective in relation to the distribution methods of the survey.
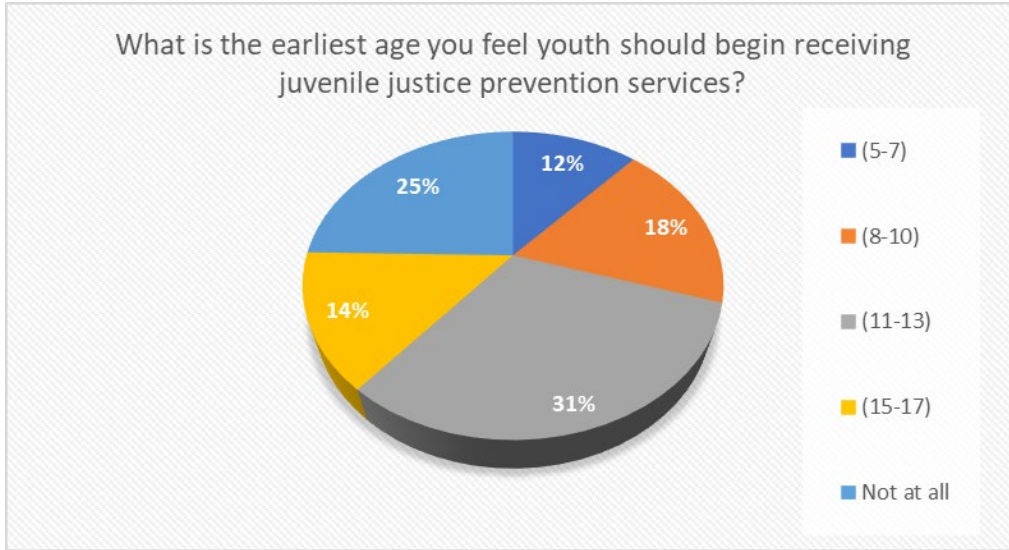
   Although respondents were randomly selected, age and geographical location of the respondents proved to be representative of the state. Representation was garnered from youth who resided in a myriad of counties throughout the north, south, east, and west quadrants of Florida. Respondents also represented multiple ages representative of youth committed to the Departments programming.
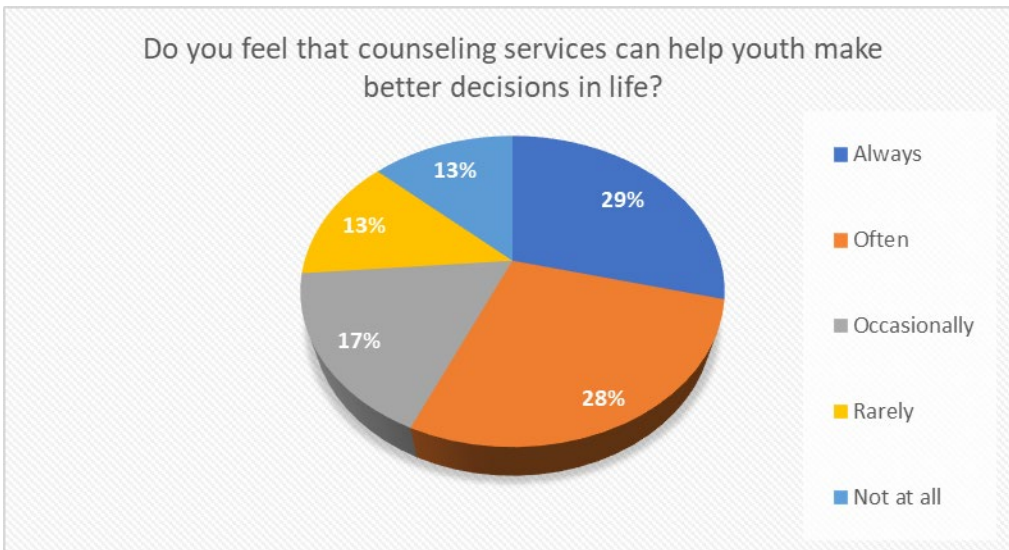
Table A:

Your Age
77 responses

   The first question focusses on what age participants believe juvenile justice prevention services should be made available for youth. Nine respondents or 12% felt that youth should begin receiving services at the earliest group provided on the survey of 5 to 7 years of age. Fourteen (18%) felt that Services should begin being provided to you between ages 8-10. Twenty-four or 31% of respondents believe youth should receive services between the ages of 11-13, while eleven (14%), believe youth should receive services beginning at ages 15-17. The remaining nineteen (25%) that responded believe youth should not receive services at all.

Table 1: 77 responses

What is the earliest age you feel youth should begin receiving juvenile justice prevention services?

- (5-7): 12%
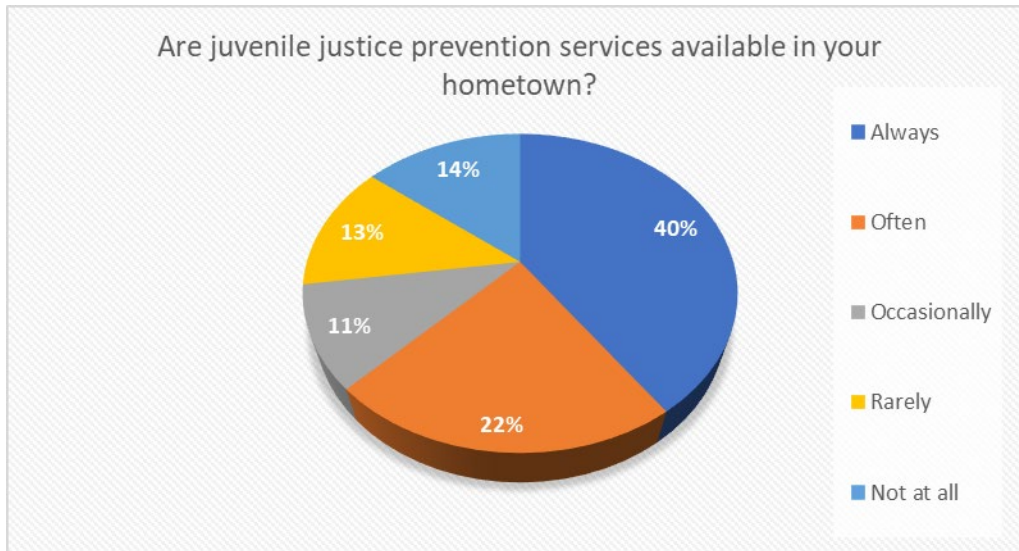- (8-10): 18%
- (11-13): 31%
- (15-17): 14%
- Not at all: 25%

The second question asked participants to gage their feelings on counseling services and its effect to help you make better decisions in life. Twenty-two (29%) respondents provided that counseling services always help you to make better decisions in life. Twenty-one (28%) respondents felt that counseling services often help you make better decisions, while 17% (13) felt that counseling services occasionally help youth make better decisions. Ten (13%) felt that counseling services rarely help you to make bad decisions while another 10 (13%) shared that counseling services provided no assistance and helping youth make better decisions in life. One participant chose not to answer this question.

Table 2: 76 responses

Do you feel that counseling services can help youth make better decisions in life?

- Always: 29%
- Often: 28%
- Occasionally: 17%
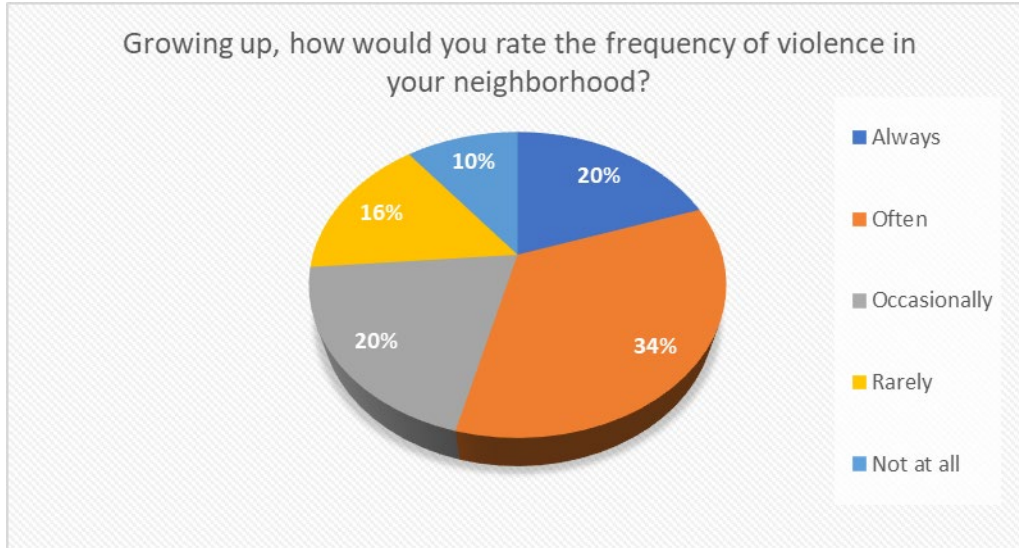- Rarely: 13%
- Not at all: 13%

The third question asked participants of their awareness of services around their local residence. When asked if juvenile justice prevention services were available in their hometown, 40% (31) said always. Seventeen (22%) provided they often are aware of prevention services in their hometown, while 8 (11%) occasionally heard about services in their hometown. Ten (13%) respondents were rarely aware of prevention services while the remaining 14% (11) were not aware of any prevention services in their hometown.
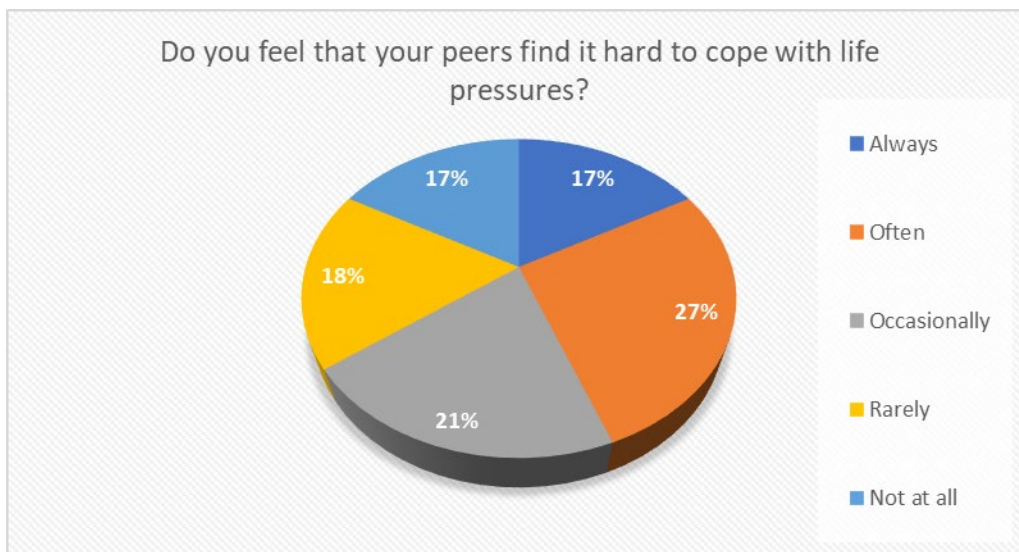
Table 3: 77 responses

The remaining questions provide a more in-depth focus on the participants life experiences. Question number four asked participants to rate the frequency of violence in their neighborhood. Fifteen (20%) provided that violence is always in their neighborhood. Twenty-six (34%) respondents provided that violence often occurs in their neighborhood. Another fifteen (20%) respondents provided that violence occasionally occurs in their neighborhood. Twelve (16%) stated that violence rarely occurs in their neighborhood with the remaining 10% (8) that stated no violence occurred in their neighborhood. One participant chose not to answer this question.

Table 4: 76 responses

Growing up, how would you rate the frequency of violence in your neighborhood?

- Always — 20%
- Often — 34%
- Occasionally — 20%
- Rarely — 16%
- Not at all — 10%

The fifth question asked participants whether they felt their peers find it hard to cope with the pressures of life. Thirteen (17%) respondents shared that their peers always have hard times coping with life pressures. Twenty-one (27%) respondents provided that their peers often find it hard. Another 21% (16) shared that their peers occasionally have hard time coping with the pressures of life; while Fourteen (18%) shared that their peers rarely have hard times coping with life's pressures. Lastly 17% (13) shared that none of their peers found it hard to cope with pressures in life.

Table 5: 76 responses

Do you feel that your peers find it hard to cope with life pressures?

- Always — 17%
- Often — 27%
- Occasionally — 21%
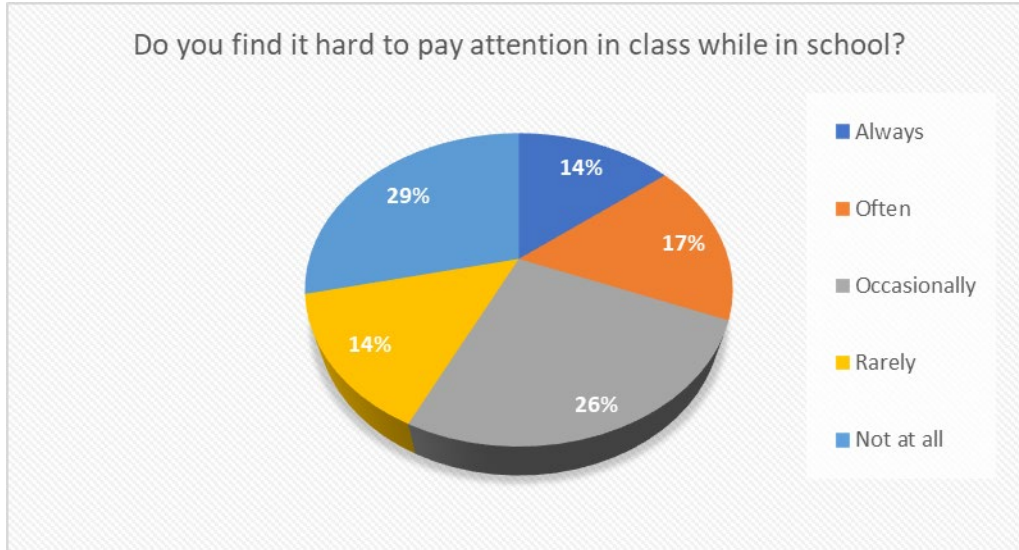- Rarely — 18%
- Not at all — 17%

Question number six asked participants to share if they believe that life experiences play a role in a person's ability to be successful. Twenty-eight or 37% of respondents share they believe that life experiences always play role that one's ability to be successful. Twenty-three (30%) felt that life experiences often play a role in one's ability to be successful. Twelve (16%) respondents share that experiences occasionally play a role in one's ability to be successful, while six persons (8%) felt that life experiences rarely play a role. The remaining 9% (7) felt that life experiences play no role in one's ability to be successful. One participant chose not to answer this question.
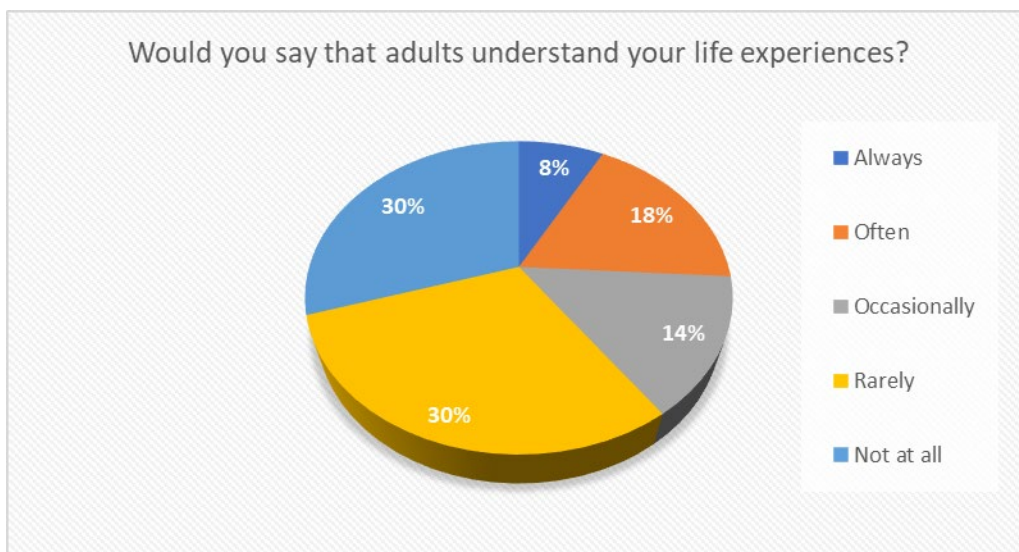
Table 6: 76 responses

Question number seven asked participants to share their personal experience on whether they found it hard to pay attention in class while in a school setting. Eleven (14%) respondents shared that they always have hard time paying attention in class while17% (13) shared that they often found it hard to pay attention in class. Twenty (26%) respondents share that they occasionally find it hard to pay attention in class. Another eleven (14%) shared that they rarely find it hard to pay attention in class. Lastly twenty-two (29%) respondents stated that they had no issues paying attention in class

Table 7: 77 responses

Do you find it hard to pay attention in class while in school?

- Always 14%
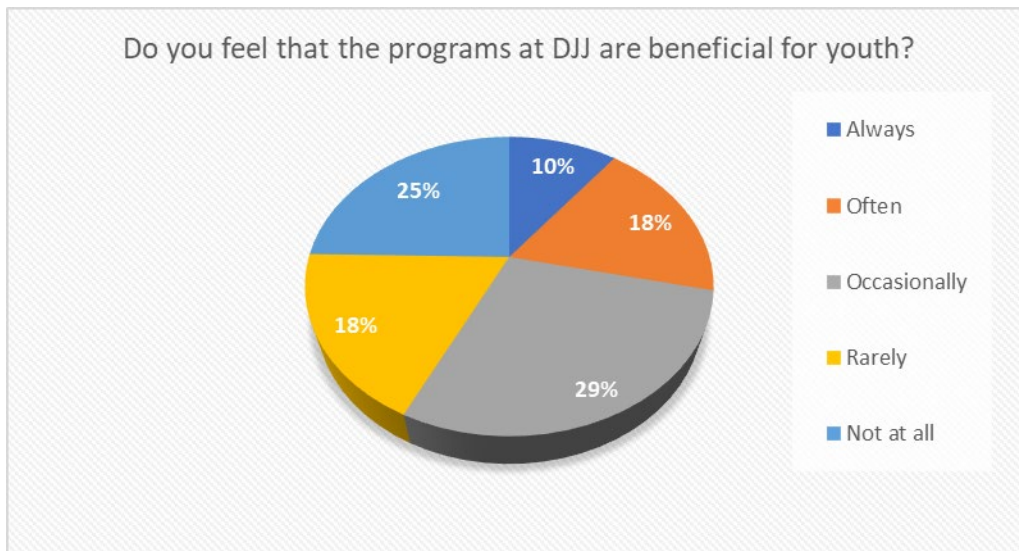- Often 17%
- Occasionally 26%
- Rarely 14%
- Not at all 29%

Question number eight ask participants to provide whether or not they felt adults understand their life experiences. Six (8%) respondents shared that they feel adults always understand the life experiences they go through. Fourteen (18%) shared that they feel adults often understand their experiences. Eleven (14%) shared that adults occasionally understand their life experiences. Twenty-three (30%) shared that adults rarely understand what they go through while another 30% (23) shared that adults do not understand their experiences at all.

Table 8: 77 responses

Would you say that adults understand your life experiences?

- Always 8%
- Often 18%
- Occasionally 14%
- Rarely 30%
- Not at all 30%

The ninth question asked participants to share if they feel juvenile justice programs are beneficial to youth. Eight (10%) felt that programs always benefit youth, while 14 (18%) said that programs are often beneficial to youth. Twenty-two (29%) respondents felt that programs are occasionally beneficial to youth; with another 18% (14) shared that programs are rarely beneficial to youth. The remaining 25% (19) felt that DJJ programs do not benefit youth.

Table 9: 77 responses

Do you feel that the programs at DJJ are beneficial for youth?

- Always 10%
- Often 18%
- Occasionally 29%
- Rarely 18%
- Not at all 25%

Discussion

The results gathered from the surveys revealed a myriad of connecting points to draw references in determining allocation and distribution of services to best meet the needs of those affected by the recommended policies. The age range of participants varied from ages 13 to 19 and covered a vast array of backgrounds. When asked how the respondents felt was most in need of juvenile justice prevention services the age group that was chosen aligned more with the general age of youth who enter the juvenile justice system. Survey results found that most youth recommended that services first be offered or geared towards persons in the age range of 13 to 15. An analysis conducted on persons entering the juvenile justice system found that 13 to 15 is also the age youth initially entered detention and residential programs.

The request for youth to see more services around this age appears to be a common theme. When examining studies and practices of the adult penal system we understand that data and statistics are gathered as early as the 3rd grade. Comparing the stats of the juvenile justice system to that of the adult penal system, it becomes apparent that for the best outcomes, juvenile justice services should be implemented during earlier stages of development prior to the age of eight.

It is interesting when analyzing the responses provided concerning relationship aspects between youth and adults. While 60% of respondents shared that adults rarely

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or never understand life experiences they encounter, about 59% felt that counseling helps youth to make better decisions in life. The conection is drawn that while there are generational gaps and differences between adults and youth on one hand, there is a need for a certain level of mentoring, guidance and leadership on the other. To aid youth in being successful and avoiding unnecessary pitfalls in development, recognition and attention to counseling services that create an atmosphere for youth to process their feelings and concerns.

At least 74% of respondents indicated that they reside in the community with a consistent level of crime. As we consider results from the ACE's study and data gathered by the Florida Department Juvenile Justice and other National think tanks, we understand that more trauma contributes to the increased likelihood to commit crime. Further noted in the surveys, 65% of respondents report they have witnessed at least an occasional breakdown of their peer's inability to cope well with pressures in life. This inability to cope with pressures in life displays a lack of one's ability to properly address trauma. There again, one of the greatest contributors and often untreated is the proper dealing and address of trauma. This becomes extremely important as 67% of respondents believe that life experiences often to always directly impact one's ability to become successful.

Recommendations

Development of Early Intervention Assessments

It is determined that the need for an early analysis to gain awareness and insight of the amount of trauma that a youth has encountered. The data gained from this analysis would be used to gage the amount of trauma incurred in the lives of young people and thus set to provide adequate training and counseling with that individual as they matriculate through life. The understanding is that extra amounts of trauma would make even the ordinary aspects of life difficult for one which necessitates the need for aid. This assessment would be voluntary; however as noted in the survey, a marketing mechanism is needed to promote awareness. Persons are more apt to participate and use services that have established reputations and familiarity. It is also recommended that this early intervention assessment be distributed to elementary schools particularly for youth entering the second and or third grades.

Early Intervention Programming

Following the detection of adverse experiences of trauma at an early age, programs should be implemented that seek to assist individuals in strengthening protective factors and coping with high levels of stress brought on by trauma. Said programs should be implemented statewide yet be led by local community partners who are more capable of delivering curriculum with a local community perspective. These programs should also serve to aid youth and families during the most venerable stages of youth development prior to third grade. In collaboration with local school districts, these programs should specifically address issues common to age groups between 5-7 and 13-

15. At best, the program should offer extended services of mentoring and counseling for cases deemed severe.

Adolescence Base Case Management and Counseling Services

As found in the survey, respondents provided that counseling services can be of great use to those entering the ages of adolescence. The current Graduated Sanctions curriculum used by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice establishes an encompassing system of rewards and accountability that aid to guide youth through stages of development. It is recommended that a collaborative effort be established with middle schools in particular to implement stronger levels of intervention through the use of case managers and in some instances, counselors. Middle schoolers represent one of the highest age groups That enter the juvenile justice system. It is therefore incumbent that we strengthen protective factors to serve this vulnerable population that provide added assistance in deterring a life of crime. The case managers should provide a set of eyes and ears aiding in the detection of youth who may be experiencing issues with coping with stressors in life and are not properly addressing trauma through adverse experiences. If it is determined that a more professional level of counseling is needed these case managers would be able to prefer the you to such.

Conclusion

While there are many factors that contribute to the success of youth, it is most import that a multi-faceted system of services be garnered for youth. The plight of each youth is different; and in most instances, difficult. Establishing a system able to meet youth where they are with the specific services they are in need of is imperative. Historical research has found it highly risky cations to avoid making rash and impulsive decisions but rather allow the data to guide the decision-making process. Legislators and policymakers should be provided data from current research and trend analysis which will prove useful creating policy in the most effective and efficient manner. Community based models as determined through the findings should be sought, however it is recommended that the State fund local entities to assure adequate oversight measures and give Floridians the "most bang for their buck."

Chief Marcus Smith has been in juvenile justice for over 20 years at the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). He initially began his career at DJJ as a college intern in 2001. Marcus went on to join the team following his internship as a Juvenile Detention Officer and soon progressed to become a Training Officer. Promoted through the ranks, he has served as Program Manager, Procurement Coordinator, Statewide Disproportionate Minority Contact Coordinator and Deputy Legislative Affairs Director. In 2015 Marcus was promoted to Programming and Policy Chief in the Office of Prevention. He currently serves in this capacity managing the Departments prevention reform efforts throughout the State. Marcus earned an A.A. degree in Public Administration from the Tallahassee Community College, B.S. degree in Public Management from the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, and recently became a Florida Certified Public Manager from the Florida State University.

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Appendix A

<u>Survey Questions</u>

<u>Introduction:</u>

You are being asked to participate in a voluntary survey as part of a research study. The purpose of the survey is to collect information used to identify needs and services for young people around the state of Florida. Your voluntary participation will involve the completion of a questionnaire (with no names or identification numbers) that will be confidently reviewed. The survey should take no longer then 3-5 minutes to complete. The risks related to participating in this survey are minimal and should you determine any question uncomfortable, you are not required to answer it. The benefits related to this research include improving your community's ability to develop programs and strategies to prevent youth from problem behaviors due to a lack of services or support.

You were randomly selected from a group of participants in juvenile detention centers throughout the state of Florida. Any answers you provide will be used only for the purpose of this study. You will not be penalized in any fashion if you should choose not to complete or take the survey. Your choice to participate or not participate will not affect your program time or program status. Thank you for your participation in this effort.

<u>Demographic Info:</u>

Your Age: _____   Home County: _____

What is the earliest age you feel youth should begin receiving juvenile justice prevention services?
☐ (5-7)   ☐ (8-10)   ☐ (11-13)   ☐ (15-17)   ☐ Not at all

Do you feel that counseling services can help youth make better decisions in life?
☐ Always   ☐ Often   ☐ Occasionally   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Not at all

Are juvenile justice prevention services available in your hometown?
☐ Always   ☐ Often   ☐ Occasionally   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Not at all

Growing up, how would you rate the frequency of violence in your neighborhood?
☐ Always   ☐ Often   ☐ Occasionally   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Not at all

Do you feel that your peers find it hard to cope with life pressures?
☐ Always   ☐ Often   ☐ Occasionally   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Not at all

Do you feel that life experiences play a role in a person's ability to be successful?
☐ Always   ☐ Often   ☐ Occasionally   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Not at all

Do you find it hard to pay attention in class while in school?
☐ Always   ☐ Often   ☐ Occasionally   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Not at all

Would you say that adults understand your life experiences?
☐ Always   ☐ Often   ☐ Occasionally   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Not at all

Do you feel that the programs at DJJ are beneficial for youth?
☐ Always   ☐ Often   ☐ Occasionally   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Not at all

Do have anything that you would like to add?