

Recommendations for delinquent youth: public policy white paper



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Recommendations for Delinquent Youth: Public Policy White Paper

I have been asked to contribute to a “ public policy white paper” in order to advance a new approach to forensic psychology in this juvenile court for this county. In this matter I will be providing consultation to the court judge relating to community service services for delinquent youth. In my recommendations I will analyze the 9-guiding principles of Multisystemic Therapy (MST) that I will providing the court and include arguments against the use of residential facilities or group living programs.

For the purpose of clarity to the court I will begin my consultation to the court with what my research has revealed as the top educational predictors of juvenile crime from elementary to high school. I would ask the court to recognize that while the research on risk factors focuses mostly on serious violent offenses, all the risk factors can be considered relevant to all levels of delinquency. I would also ask the court to recognize that while looking for solutions to what is a complex problem, that it keeps in mind some important factors that may be helpful regarding the science of prevention (Coie et al., 1993):

- The ability to see how problem behavior and risk factors relate may come with some difficulty however, the court should recognize that it is rare that the behavior is due to only one risk factor.
- The stage of life or the developmental state of the delinquent can affect the impact of the relevant risk factors.

- It is important that court is aware that a delinquent who is being exposed to several risk factors more than likely, suffers from a cumulative negative effect.
- Some problem behaviors share fundamental risk factor. For example, the same risk factor often predicts different problem behaviors.

I would ask the court, that while looking at these risk factors to be aware that just because a juvenile may show signs of various risk factors, it is not be considered definite proof of delinquency. There are many instances where youth can exhibit risk factors in their behavior and never commit a delinquent act. While the risk factors may raise the probability delinquent behavior, it does not raise the certainty of delinquent behavior.

General Findings

The court should be aware that there is research (Otto & Borum, 2018), that highlights the fact that the history of juvenile courts has changed in part due to the formal and scientific recognition of the developmental stage of adolescents, which is an ongoing process. However, despite the greater cognitive abilities over their younger counterparts, they are considered not to possess the same capacities as adults. So, to examine the risk factors associated with delinquency a good approach would be to look at the causal link between education and juvenile delinquency. According to research (Chung, Taylor & Taggart, 2018), this link is said to be fundamentally complex. For example, early problems in the classroom like aggressive behavior may lead to a child receiving unfavorable evaluations from their peers and educators. These factors alone lead to delinquency, or just simply

the problem behavior that that the juvenile brings to the school in the first place. Despite the ongoing discussions into the origins of delinquency there is clear evidence(McCord et al., 2000), the certain factors connected to juvenile delinquency:

- Poor attendance (Truancy) – Not attending classes or participating in class activities puts the juvenile at increased risk for delinquent behavior which may include substance abuse.
- Teacher-student relationship. There is evidence that shows that when a student is labeled negatively by their teachers, they are more likely to disengage and become susceptible to crime
- School instability – research shows (Hawkins et al., 2000) that frequent changes in schools can lead to crime.
- Minorities disproportionately affected – according to research (McCord et al., 2000), school policies of retention, suspension, and expulsion affect minorities and can have negative consequences such as delinquent activity.
- Academic failure – poor grades particularly in Math & English are a result of a students struggle, hastens the likelihood of leaving school early and may be related to increased juvenile activity (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).
- Peer Association – If the student associates with delinquent peers they are more likely to commit juvenile crime and get arrested at an earlier age (Loeber et al., 2003).
- Bullying – the effect of bullying can be felt in three ways, physical, verbal and psychological. Whether bullying or be bullied, it can be

linked to future delinquent behavior, such as drug use, shoplifting, vandalism, dropping out/skipping school (Ericson, 2001). It can also be causal to continuing the behavior into adulthood. For example, workplace abuse, spousal abuse and verbal abuse (Seale, 2004).

Guiding Principles

My recommendation to this court is that they follow the 9 guiding principles of the Multisystemic Therapy (MST). My analyzation of this therapy leads me to believe that the principles outlined are consistent with empirical evidence and the social ecological theory that is necessary for the treatment of behavioral and emotional problems of the juveniles that will come before this court. The steps are designed to stimulate scientific thinking in all of the concerned parties and should help in designing a working theory about the causes and solutions for the juvenile in need of help instead of incarceration. Solutions that can be that can be continuously tested and upgraded while administered in an outpatient basis of treatment. According to research (Henggeler, Schoenwald, Rowland & Cunningham, 2002), the MST process will bring the scientific method of hypothesis testing to the differing circumstances of each referral. A simpler explanation for the court would be to explain that this method enables clinicians to form specific ideas concerning the combination of factors that sustain a problem behavior, with evidence that supports their hypothesis, test it with interventions, collect the data to assess the interventions impact, and to use the data to begin another assessment process. The 9-guiding principle are as follow:

1. Understanding the “ fit” – this is the primary purpose of the assessment, to understand how the identified problems relate and their broader systemic context.
2. All consultations with the juvenile will accent the positive, using systemic strengths to reinforce empowering change.
3. The designs for intervention should promote positive behavior and lead to decreasing irresponsible behavior among their family members.
4. Present-focused, action-oriented interventions that target well defined problems.
5. Interventions target sequences of behavior that can be identified in multiple systems currently used to maintain the identified problems.
6. Age appropriate interventions that fit the developmental needs of the youth.
7. The design of the interventions will require daily of weekly effort on the part of family members.
8. The efficacy of the interventions should be evaluated continuously from several perspective where the provider is held accountable for overcoming problems that may prevent successful outcomes.
9. Designs for interventions that promote treatment generalizations and long-term maintenance of therapeutic change. A change that comes about by creating opportunities for the caregiver to address the family’s needs across multiple system contexts (Henggeler, Schoenwald, Rowland & Cunningham, 2002).

For the courts indulgence these guidelines can be placed on both sides of a business card.

Successful Outcomes

For far too long when a court finds that a parent can no longer handle the delinquent behavior of their adolescent they are removed from the home. The MST process is geared to change this common occurrence and in fact the guidelines three and nine specifically addresses this concern. The guidelines are geared to address the needs of the family as a whole and to give them tools that can be sustained long after interventions. It is in the best interest of an adolescent child to help adjust their living at home when they have only committed non-violent offenses such as staying out late skipping school and the consumption of alcohol. The goal of MST is to improve the situation by improving the parent's skills and support needed to manage their adolescent's risky behavior in and out of the home. Research (Swenson, 2018), suggests that children who are taken from their homes are less likely to have a smooth transition back into their homes. What MST does is attempt to educate the parents and all other concerned parties that are already in the delinquent youth's environment. Further research (Williams, 2014) tells us that incarceration does not supply the court with an evidence-based practice. While jeopardizing their safety and well being that can happen in residential facilities and/or group living programs, there is an argument to be made that it increases the likelihood of juveniles committing unlawful acts. Especially in times where overcrowded facilities that are understaffed become environments that breed violence and exacerbate unmet needs. In my research (Williams, 2014), I have discovered that an organizations like the Coalition for juvenile justice has developed options like the Safety Opportunity & Success (SOS) Project that can provide the court

with guidelines for implementing policy and practices that divert juvenile delinquents away from courts and towards family and community-based systems of care that are more suited to their needs. Support that gets to the root of the juvenile's delinquency and helps the family-unit deal with their disfunction as a whole.

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