

Assess the benefits and pitfalls of measures designed to divert youth from crime ...

[Business](#), [Strategy](#)



Introduction

The number of youths engaging in criminal activities in United Kingdom and across the world is alarming. For long, such youths were sentenced in juvenile courts and subsequently detained in respective juvenile prisons. However, as time passed, the government was concerned that detaining and sentencing the youths through the courts was an ineffective method of guiding the youth to acceptable behavior. Many programs, designed to guide the youth to up to standard behavior were introduced. Most of these methods do not use the courts; instead, they use community programs, strict parenting, warnings, surveillance, and punishment. According to Muncie and Goldson (2005), the aim of these strategies is to ensure diversion from crime, prosecution, and custody among the youth. These strategies have worked well as parents have reported positive behavior change in their children. The number of youth offending has also reduced significantly. However, some youths continue to engage in criminal activities even with the application of these strategies. Such youths receive warnings from the relevant authorities. Continued offending makes the authorities to charge the offending youths in the juvenile court systems. This paper will discuss the benefits of the youth diversion strategies and the pitfalls they face.

Advantages

Reduced crime rates

Youth diversion has played an important role in reducing youth crime. The United Kingdom, through the Ministry of Justice indicates that the number of youth arrests and out of court disposal decreased from 86, 469 in 2002/2003

year to 41, 343 in 2011/2012, and subsequently to 30, 778 in the year 2012/2013, signifying a 64% and 26% decrease respectively (Ministry of Justice, 2014). From 2002/2003 to 2012/13, the number of proven criminal activities by the youth decreased by 68% (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

Additionally, the number of youths committing a criminal activity for the first time in 2012/2013 was 27, 854, which was a 67% and 25 % decrease from the 2002/2003 and 2011/2012 statistics respectively. The ministry of Justice (2014) asserts that the diversion program has played an important role in reducing these criminal activities.

According to Tiley (2013), diversion is probably the best strategy of preventing and addressing crime among the youths. Youth diversion programs do not only reduce criminal activities, but they also prevent crime by ensuring that youths who have not committed any criminal activities do not engage on the same (Tiley, 2013). According to Taylor, Earle, and Hester (2014), the best strategy for preventing youth crime is removing youths from the justice system entirely. The three claim that putting the youths in the justice system does more harm than good. Stephens (2014) supports these assertions by stating that some of the youth offenders have some anti-social disorders, which cannot be solved by arresting and prosecuting the youths in the juvenile justice system. According to Wilson and Hoge (2013), the best strategy to prevent youths from re-offending is taking caution and introducing intervention strategies as early as possible.

Reduced costs

Youth diversion saves the taxpayers a lot of money. In the normal prosecution process in the juvenile courts, there are many charges and a lot of time wastage, which makes the process more expensive. On the other hand, youth diversion is less expensive and convenient because there are fewer processes involved. According to Burke (2013), in 1991, keeping an offender (youth or adult) in custody for three weeks would sustain the offender in a community program for more than twelve months. It is, therefore, beyond imagination how costly it would be if all the youth offenders were detained whenever they committed criminal activities. Burke (2013) asserts that keeping the youths in custody became more expensive because 83% of the youths detained re-offended within two years after release. Burke (2013) is of the opinion that youth diversion does not only save costs, but also prevents criminal activities by the youths in the future. It is evident that continued youth diversion will play a role in reducing the costs of the juvenile justice system and crime rates in the United Kingdom and all over the globe. The current reduction, which is consistent with low costs in the justice system are because of the progresses attained by the youth diversion programs across the United Kingdom and other developed nations. Further reductions are expected with continued youth diversion strategies and programs (Tiley, 2013). Countries and states that are prosecuting the youths for criminal activities should reconsider the approach and introduce youth diversion measures, which will definitely have an impact in reducing costs associated with youth crime in addition to reducing criminal activities in this age group.

Safe Community

Youth diversion has become an important factor in ensuring community safety. The youths are capable of criminal activities that make the society unsafe. In fact, youths have committed rape and sexual assault, murder, burglary, robbery with violence, in addition to other criminal activities. These activities pose a direct threat to the community because they can affect anyone. The youth diversion strategies came in handy as they played a role in reducing these dangerous activities (Tiley, 2013; Stephens, 2014).

Communities that were once unsafe have become safe for every person to do what they please at any time of the day or night. Continued efforts in youth diversion will ensure that the little criminal activities by some youths are eradicated completely for a comprehensive community safety. McCarthy (2014) asserts that the soft policing among youths, through youth diversion programs, can guarantee a safe community. According to Helms (2012), the introduction of safe community policies, which include diversion projects for the offending youths play an important role in ensuring community safety.

Youths living positively

Education

Youth diversion programs have played an important role in encouraging the youths to pay more attention to education. Most of the youths (10-17 years old) are mostly in the mainstream education system. Engaging in criminal activities derails them from learning properly, leading to poor education performance. According to Shoenfelt and Huddleston (2006), youths improved their school attendance and education performance during the

Truancy Court Diversion Program (TCDP) and thereafter. This is a clear indication that continued youth diversion helps the youths to focus on their education. Youths undergoing these programs pass their final examinations in elementary and high school levels, which increase their chances of joining good colleges and universities. This will allow them to access good employment opportunities, which will help them lead a better life. Additionally, they also become the societal role models for the younger ones, which also play a role in reducing crime.

Pitfalls

Youth re-offending

Youth re-offending is probably the greatest pitfall in the United Kingdom and across the world. According to Burke (2013), approximately 83% of youth offenders engage in the same practice after release, especially in the old justice system where they were prosecuted by the courts. Although youth diversion reduces the chances of youths re-offending, there is that small percentage that continues to engage in criminal activities (Junger-Tas and Decker, 2010). The small percentage may hinder the success of these strategies and programs. In most cases, the youths are un-collaborative, which makes it a challenge for the supervisors to work with them. The supervisors may warn the re-offenders severally until they are left with no other alternative, but to have them charged in a juvenile court of law. Additionally, some criminal activities are a challenge to engage the youths in youth diversion. Murder and manslaughter cases pose a great challenge to

youth diversion. In fact, the high-risk criminal activities are not encouraged in these programs.

Improper parenting

Parent's busy schedule

According to Wilson and Petersilia (2011), parenting plays an important role in preventing youth crime. Unavailability of the parents, parental stress, and discord are some of the leading causes of youth delinquency. Parents are the closest to children and guiding them from an early age would help in preventing criminal activities among them. However, in the current times, parents (men and women) are busy with their careers, which make it a challenge for them to have enough time to be with their children. This unavailability has contributed greatly to the involvement of youth in criminal activities (Wilson and Petersilia, 2011). In fact, studies show that youths whose parents are readily available do not commit criminal activities. This revelation led to the introduction and implementation of the parenting Order under the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 (Evans, 2012). This Parental Order required parents to create time for their children, to guide them accordingly. The objective of the Order was to reduce the increasing criminal activities among children and youths. Despite its implementation, Evans (2012) claims that some children and youths continue engaging in criminal activities.

Parental family history

According to Lizotte, Philips, Krohn, Thornberry, Bushway, and Schmidt (2013) and Murray, Loeber, and Pardini (2012), criminality tends to run in families. In this case, if parents are involved in any criminal activities, there

is a high chance that their children will engage in the same behavior in the future. Murray, Loeber, and Pardini (2012) did a research study on parental history in criminality and youth offending in Pittsburg city. These authors found out that there was a strong relation between parental incarceration and theft in whites compared to blacks. Children and youths learn from their parents and some of these behaviors maybe because the children were copying the parents. Additionally, parents involved in criminal activities would be unavailable to guide their children accordingly, leading to their engagement in criminal activities (Wilson and Petersilia, 2011). In addition, poverty also plays an important role in the engagement of youth in crime such as substance abuse, homicide, and robbery with violence (McDonald and Marsh, 2002). These factors pose a major challenge to the strategists and supervisors of the youth diversion programs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, youth diversion, which is using extrajudicial methods to guide youths, has been significant in preventing criminal activities among the youths. This strategy has reduced the number of youth offending and re-offending, thereby making societies safe. However, the strategy faces many challenges, for example, parental unavailability, parental history in crimes, and poverty, which hamper the effectiveness of the strategy. The government and other stakeholders should devise policies that support youth diversion, as they will not only reduce criminal activities among this age group, but also costs, which threaten the sustainability of the judicial system in combating youth crime.

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