

Good juvenile crime prevention: gang reduction program a policy analysis essay ex...

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I. Introduction

There several reasons why one would want to prevent juveniles from being delinquents or from pursuing actions that would lead them to continue to delve into delinquent behavior. One of the most obtrusive reasons for doing such is that delinquency holds the youth at risk. These risks are for school drop outs, drug use and dependency, further injury, incarceration, adult criminality and early pregnancy (Greenwood, 186). Protecting the youth from such delinquent acts saves them from wasting their lives. Of course, many other reasons arise as well. As Greenwood (186), narrates, most of the adult criminals that people know of today have begun their criminal journeys as early as their juvenile stages. Preventing such delinquent acts will also prevent the onset of an adult criminal career. Such preventive action reduces the weight of having an opportunity to be criminals; thus lessening the victims in society. It is well noted that most adult offenders and delinquents cast heavy consequences upon victims both emotionally and financially and also among taxpayers who have to share the costs of rehabilitating the said criminals or delinquents. According to Greenwood (186), the costs of prosecuting, arresting and treating offenders are for the most part one of the growing aspects of the country's budget. This fast-growing allotment is putting a greater part of the burden on the taxpayers. Over the past decade, it has been listed that the costs of overcoming such overage in the budget because of the growing number of offenders have amounted to billions of dollars per year. However, according to the most recent analyzes, it was revealed that investments in the rightful delinquency

prevention programs may save taxpayers seven to ten dollars per year for every dollar that is invested in these programs. Mainly, programs that aim to remove these delinquents and criminals from prison have proven to be the most effective return on investment for these contributors.

According to Greenwood (186), such a prospect of reaping the return on investments by preventing delinquency is a novel concept heard by people. According to Loeber, Farrington, and Petechuck (1), the number of child delinquents between those with ages 7 and 12 has increased to 33 percent over the last decade. Such a development has become a reason to concern the government and society not only because the offensive acts have revealed to be more serious crimes among these juveniles but also for the very reason that these children are more likely to continue their delinquency in crime. As stated by Loeber, Farrington, and Petechuck (1), these child delinquents are more likely to become violent, serious and chronic with their acts as offenders. This seriousness is more opportune than adolescent whose delinquent acts begun during their teens. The recent high-profile media scoops of violence have shown children with ages 12 or younger have committed serious crimes of violence that have drawn the attention of potential child delinquents to model such behaviors. For this very reason, child delinquents have represented an important concern for both the juvenile justice system and the society. It is said that the arrest rate of child delinquents have gravely changed between 1988 and 1997. Arrests for violent crimes have increased by 45 percent and drug abuse offenses that have increased by 156 percent. On the other hand, arrests concerned with property crimes have decreased by 17 percent as related again by Loeber,

Farrington, and Petechuck (1). According to the Denver Youth Survey, about 10 percent of boys and girls with ages 11-12 were found to have had police contact because of delinquent acts. Moreover, the total degree of child delinquency cases that were handled in the juvenile courts have also been greater. According to the same researchers, the youth with ages 13 who were sent to court were found to most likely become chronic juvenile offenders than the youth who were sent to court with older ages (Loeber, Farrington, and Petechuck, 1). An important idea to note however, is that since 17 is generally the upper age limit of court jurisdiction over juveniles, those who have committed or are first-time delinquents during this age have fewer chances of developing as chronic juvenile offenders. From the study of the United States Department of Justice for juvenile delinquency, it was revealed that there is an overlap between the juvenile offenders and the chronic, serious and violent groups. It was held that a larger proportion of child delinquents become more serious, violent and chronic offenders as compared with those who had developed at a later stage in life. Also, a higher part of the violent child delinquents became more chronic offenders when looking at their counterparts who developed their status later in life. These children comprise of the one-third of all arrests determined for arson, one-fifth of juvenile arrests for the action of vandalisms and sex offenses. Also, they were identified as one-twelfth of juvenile arrests for violent crime and one-eighth of juvenile arrests for forced rape and burglary (Loeber, Farrington, and Petechuck, 2). Such an alarming number of a group of very young offenders has moved the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to study to determine how chronic offenders came to develop

later in life. Because of the many factors that affect social delinquency aspects being one, this paper will aim to discuss the policy brief of the Gang Reduction Program and discuss the evaluation held by the United States Department of Justice.

II. Factors affecting delinquency

As studied by Loeber, Farrington and Petechuck (3), the several generations of studies in criminology have shown that the best way to predict the future actions would be the past behavior. It was historically shown that the studies on delinquency have concentrated on the later part of adolescence or the time when the delinquent acts are at its peak. In the 1990s, there were some studies produced that have examined the already classified chronic juvenile offenders that were already known for an indeterminate ratio in crimes, most, especially in serious crimes. However, the United States Department of Justice has decided to shy away from the trend. This fact is so since it was revealed that those who were brought to court for delinquency before the age of 13 had more opportunities to become chronic violators of the law. This fact was established as compared with those who start later in life. Also, the same study has found that the root of the delinquency behaviors in boys starts on average that is much earlier than those of the average age of the first-time Court Crime Index Offenses. This revelation that the minor behavior problems of these children were already starting to have the potential to move to develop a new initiative in their lives, and that is becoming very serious young offenders. Also to these findings, it was also found that those children whose ages seven to twelve who have manifested anti-social behaviors were determinant too, in some cases, early

delinquency. It was also identified in this finding that there were some significant risk factors that, also affect the onset of early offenses when combined with the anti-social behaviors. Children who have showed persistent disruptive behaviors are more likely to have opportunities to become delinquents. As a result, these child delinquents are more likely to become chronic, violent and serious and their offenses. This conclusion was found on the basis that there is a significant relationship between those who have had an early experience of delinquency and later on coming to terms with crime and delinquency. Young delinquents, when compared to those who were juvenile, were at a greater risk of becoming serious offenders and had more exposure to delinquent acts. Of course, with great emphasis, the United States Department of Justice discusses that not all those children who have disruptive behaviors will become violent and serious. However, for the greater part of the violent, eventual and serious offenders, they were found to have longer histories of behavioral problems that date back to their childhood ages. According to studies, the antisocial behaviors of boys have started on an average of age 7. This age is earlier than the average age of first court contact as stated on the Crime Index offenses which is 14 and a half. However, although this is the case, it is not yet a foreseen factor that these children will progress to more serious problems. It is only advisable to handle the problem behaviors beforehand to lessen the chances of becoming more serious and inculcated (Loeber, Farrington, and Petechuck, 3).

The preschool period has become an important place for the foundation of preventing the development of delinquent acts. Loeber, Farrington and Petechuck (3) have revealed that there are four major reasons why this age

is being considered for having significant results in understanding and blocking very young offenses. First, the disruptive acts including those of manifestations of the chronic violation of rights and property and the serious aggressions is the most basic source of the referral for mental help services for these children who are still in the preschool age. Second, studies have also shown that there is a predictive correlation between the problem behaviors done during preschool and the later conduct disorder and delinquency of the child. Also, there are many significant developmental skills that begin during this period that difficulty in developing them weaken the very basis of learning and may add later to disruptive behaviors and delinquency. Lastly, it is understood that the early onset of these problem behaviors may help in creating the most effective and earlier programs that can prevent the development of child delinquency. It is a well-founded fact that behaviors that put a child at risk for an earlier life of delinquency can be present for as early as two years of age. Although majority of these delinquents have a history of disruptive behaviors such as inattentiveness, sensation-seeking and aggressive behaviors, the greater part of preschoolers who have behavior problems do not take it to mean that they will grow up to become young offenders. Factors such as the temperamental characteristics, the language, the low attachment to caregivers and the aggressive behaviors manifested by these young children are, for the most part, responsible for leading these children to delinquent behaviors.

III. Prevention

According to Thrasher (500), the problem is primarily one that is off dealing with social influences that affect the delinquents before committing

disruptive behaviors. It is said, that delinquency involves many reasons and many programs to prevent the said acts. However, the main problem is that one of synthesis of all methods that are known to be important so as to deal with reliably and in total with the complete situation in a given delinquency aspect. Such a strategy involves the unavoidable program of social planning that is clearly suggested by any study that is founded in sociology. As stated by Thrasher (501), this influence seems to be elusive to the professionals who deal with delinquents. It was said that the persons, who are well trained in dealing with such issues like the criminologists, educators and social workers have failed to get hold of the main and fundamental principle of preventing a crime that must be explored within the confines of the local community from which majority of the mentioned criminals and delinquents are produced. Apparently, these people have neither possessed the general knowledge, the technical know-how nor the interest to allow themselves to promote their focus of community responsibility in cooperation with local departments and the integration of local community services that are important to the development of the program. As Thrasher (503), relates for an example, the gang is most definitely a sign of a disorganized community. This gang, with the workings of social and personal factors in the crime production area, plays a vital role in demoralizing the youth and the facilitation of delinquent acts. However, although it is known that the gang influences mainly these delinquent acts, it is closely and almost impossible to prevent with the whole question of preventing crime when applied to the other contributing factors of delinquency, creates an impossible problem. The gang and other results of more recent studies have found that a crime

prevention program for a community has several elements. The general purpose of the program is to achieve a systematic, comprehensive and inclusive, social program for the inclusion of all children with delinquency especially those who are maladjusted and those who are currently identified as delinquents. According to Thrasher (502), to achieve such a purpose, the following are the means to obtain the desired goal.

1. Focusing the responsibility for crime prevention on the local delinquency community in observance
2. Research to obtain important facts that are updated and is relevant to developing an effective crime prevention program
3. The use of services and of cooperation among the other preventive agencies that are existing in a local community
4. The application of the preventive program to all children of the given community in question. And;
5. Creation of new departments or agencies, which are necessary to support social organizations in a point that needs utmost attention.

IV. Preventive program analysis

It is said that during the early 1990s, a time when the crime rates have soared to higher degrees, it was unclear on how to start preventing the growing number of delinquent acts in society. Among the most popular delinquency prevention programs during that time were the DARE, the Boot Camps, the Scared Straight or the method of transferring juveniles to the holding of adult courts to effectively address the situation at hand. According to Greenwood (186), it is only during the last fifteen years have researchers started to unambiguously identify the risk components that affect

delinquency and the programs for intervention that almost reliably lessen the chances that delinquency acts will happen. Some of the mentioned risk factors according to Greenwood (186) are the biological and genetic components that can no longer be altered, and the involvement of schools, parents, and peer associations that hinder the juvenile's developments. The ongoing studies that monitor the social development of the associates of these youth who are at risk for infancy and early childhood stages are the only means by which the continued risk factors are refined to how they progress and relate to each other over the course of time.

Because of the developing factors that continue to hinder a juvenile's development, the United States Department of Justice has studied and compared the methods that work and those that do not for these offenders. However, to arrive at the list of programs that do work, they have used a rigorous amount of strategy to determine what programs would best fit each and every stage of a person's development. The first step done was that they have identified and have studied the reports discussing the success of each program. The major factor used to select which among those programs work and do not work, the primary evidence used was the impact of the program. To further assess the study, they have developed the Maryland Scale to assess further the relevance of the studies found to each crime prevention program. Among those that were found to be promising and were in effect during the present time, is the Gang offender monitoring in communities (Sherman, et al., 9)

V. Policy Brief of the Gang Reduction Program by the DOJ

As it was discussed, one of the main factors affecting juvenile delinquents is

the influences that they are surrounded by every day. Among those are the gangs that continuously permeate their lives as young offenders. According to the United States Department of Justice, as part of their initiative, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is currently using a program that is known as the Gang Reduction Program. This program was created to lessen gang activities in certain neighborhoods by including a wider view of research-based programs in creating solutions to family, personal and community issues that add to gang activity and juvenile delinquency. This program aims to include the state, federal and local resources to integrate a state-of-the-art program for the suppression and intervention of the mentioned activities (DOJ, “Gang Reduction Program”). It was estimated five years after the selection of GRP sites and the start of the implementation of the Gang Reduction program, researchers of the project have found significant evidence that were associated with the changes in the degrees of crime and gang-related scenarios within the sites tested. However, the validity of these findings were varying. Some of the findings have contradicted the foreseen GRP crime results, but, in general, the positive evidence for the program outweighed the unpleasant outcomes of the study. According to the research, the GRP had the strongest positive effect on crime and gang measures on the Los Angeles and Richmond locations which were, among the four who executed the plan correctly and that they were founded on a strong local relationship across the various GRP channels. Also, it was found that each site experienced an important success at building relationships to address the local gang issues and raising the awareness of the community about these issues. The Los Angeles site,

fortunately, had an existing web of intervention, suppression and prevention providers who acknowledged the need to address the local gang issues in the community. Since the strategy was already established in the city of Los Angeles, the study focused more on providing help more than laying the foundations for gang-related concerns. On the other hand, the other sites such as North Miami Beach, Milwaukee, and Richmond were still needing of an orientation to lay the groundwork for the program. All these efforts were best done with the participation of local providers and through building rapport between organizations to include the neighborhood (Cahill, 14). Although it was a promising effort by the researchers, it was still found to have certain limitations that produced necessary implications. It was recommended for further studies that the model would be suit sites that are already established in their network of service providers. Those cities who already have relationships that are made by the politicians, city leaders, and other related parties. This process is the most taxing part that is required for the program. If these relationships were already established, the GRP would produce better results when implemented similarly in Los Angeles (Cahill, 15).

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