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Delinquent Behavior and Recidivism Among Juveniles in the Southeastern United States

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Anthony B. Essix Jr.

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Delinquent Behavior and Recidivism Among Juveniles in the Southeastern United States

by

Anthony B. Essix Jr.

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

In the United States, juvenile delinquent behavior has continued to rise despite attempts by the legal system and policymakers. Much of the research contributing to the understanding juvenile delinquency and recidivism has been focused on risk factors believed to push an individual to show signs of delinquency. Limited research has been conducted to explain how policies affect juvenile behaviors. The current study examined risk factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency to determine if a factor may have been overlooked in prior juvenile studies. Based in anomie and strain theory, a qualitative method of general inquiry was used to gain a better understanding of the contributing factors to juvenile delinquency. Participants were fifteen individuals between the ages of 21 and 25 years of age who had committed delinquent acts as a juvenile while living in the southeastern region of Florida. Data were collected via face-to-face interviews obtained through participant referrals. Participant responses were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Through manual coding emerging themes were identified based on participants' views on issues that affected their decision-making process that led to the committing acts of delinquency. Findings indicate that policies put in place to combat delinquent behavior caused individuals to be combative and repeat delinquent acts the policies were meant to deter. This research can help with the policy implementation process and address how policies affect juvenile individuals. The results of this study can contribute to positive social change by bringing about more research in this field, and informing policy makers, community leaders, and the people being affected by implemented policies to address delinquent behavior.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to the memory of my grandmother Elizabeth, who instilled hard work and perseverance in me at an early age and made me believe that I could do anything I set my mind to. Also, to my two younger brothers, Alan-Michael and Antonio Essix, who continuously sent me words of encouragement, love, and support. I would also like to dedicate this study to my parents, Marinda and Anthony Essix, whose prayers, kind words, and moral support kept me focused, motivated, and mentally strong throughout this process. These wonderful individuals have continuously stood behind me and supported me in all my endeavors.

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I would like to thank God for giving me the mental fortitude, strength, and determination to take on this task. Special thanks to my parents, Marinda and Anthony Essix, for giving me the encouragement to pursue my goals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency and an increase in recidivism continue to be problems despite federal legislation implementing a multitude of structured acts, bills, and policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), mandatory minimum sentencing, and the war on drugs, which were believed to be a step in the right direction to address juvenile crime (Rekker et al., 2015). Juvenile delinquency involves illegal behavior by a person who, in most jurisdictions, is under the age of 18 and who is adjudicated as delinquent in a juvenile court (Rekker et al., 2015). In 2010 the National Report Series indicated that approximately 1.4 million U.S. cases had been held within the Juvenile court system (Warren, 2015). The number of juvenile court cases in the United States has continued a similar trend and over the number of years have increased at an alarming rate (Warren, 2015).

Data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report showed that nearly 1,123,992 arrests of juveniles occurred in the United States in 2011 (Hill-Clark, 2014). Though many juvenile crimes are not serious offenses, the number of crimes committed by juveniles is alarming (Hill-Clark, 2014). Property crimes by juveniles resulted in 258,211 arrests; 23% of these crimes included nonviolent arson, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and larceny-theft (Hill-Clark, 2014). Ten percent of juvenile arrests, totaling approximately 112,427, were related to drug abuse, and 62% were minor crimes classified as status offenses (Hill-Clark, 2014).

In the United States, juvenile offenders are treated differently than adult criminals are. Research conducted by Rekker et al (2015) suggested that juveniles are not responsible for their actions and that their behavior can be altered over time. The adolescent population has been identified as an immature group when it comes to the behavior they display (Cordero, 2015). In the United States, juveniles are not held fully accountable for their actions; the belief that they should not be punished in the same manner as adults brought about a separate court system for juveniles in 1889 (Cordero, 2015). According to Cordero (2015), the separate court system was implemented based on two assumptions. One assumption was that individuals under the age of 18 were not fully capable of making mature decisions, and the second assumption was that juveniles are more likely to experience successful rehabilitation than adults are (Cordero, 2015). In the United States, juveniles are not punished to the same degree as adults; it is believed there are ways to promote positive behavioral change before juveniles become involved in committing adult criminal offenses (Rekker et al., 2015). Juveniles act and think impulsively and, in many cases, engage in risk-taking behaviors, whereas adults typically have the capacity to think before acting (Cordero, 2015). This argument pushed policymakers to create the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and Control Act of 1968.

The Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and Control Act of 1968 was implemented to add incentives for states to develop programs that would help discourage juvenile delinquency at a community level (Rush, 2003). Once states developed the required programs and obtained approval, they were eligible to receive government funding (Rush, 2003). Although states were able to create programs and obtain funding, states in

the southeast region of the United States experienced a steady increase in delinquent teenagers (The Children's Campaign, n.d.). Florida fails to consistently make positive change when attempting to combat juvenile delinquency in the state (The Children's Campaign, n.d.). Many of these problems result from inadequate funding for the juvenile justice system in the Southeast region of the United States (The Children's Campaign, n.d.). In 2009, the beginning of budget and program cuts occurred in schools and the juvenile justice system; Legislators in the Southeast region removed hundreds of millions of dollars, which limited alternatives to addressing juvenile delinquency (The Children's Campaign, n.d.). With the need to correct budget issues and funding of programs to combat juvenile delinquency problems in the region, a new budget was developed. Florida, in particular, made significant strides to bring about change.

In 2016–2017, the state of Florida budgeted billions of dollars for its growing population, increasing spending by approximately \$3.8 billion, bringing the annual total to \$82.2 billion to make improvements in the community, school system, and criminal justice system to combat the increase of criminal activity (Florida Policy Institution, 2015). The state of Florida allocated \$2 billion into their criminal justice system, of which \$541 million was allocated to reduce juvenile delinquency through intervention, prevention, and treatment programs and services (Florida Policy Institution, 2015). These programs and services were implemented to improve the family structure and assist with the mental and physical health of youth throughout Florida. According to the Florida Policy Institution (2015), the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) was authorized to spend the funds in the following manner: \$94 million to implement and improve

community supervision services, which was an increase from previous years by nearly \$2 million; \$44 million for services such as community intervention; and \$76 million for delinquency diversion services and prevention programs, which has received the majority of the state's budget cuts over the years. This amount is \$5 million from the 2015–2016 budget, and much of the funding dispersed to the state was part of policy requirements and was only received if certain guidelines were met, such as standards found in the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and Control Act (Florida Policy Institution, 2015).

The Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and Control Act was the foundation of the extensive Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act that replaced it in 1974 (Rush, 2003). According to Inciardi (2007), the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 was a move by the federal government to withdraw funds from state programs that did not reform their status offender management process. This meant that states were required to deinstitutionalize youths who had been in the criminal justice and prison system and implement a way to separate juvenile offenders from adult offenders. Since the implementation of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, states such as Pennsylvania and Washington have added federally mandated programs.

Pennsylvania reviewed the Communities That Care (CTC) model, which set forth a standard to identify the needs of juveniles obtained through a school-based survey to determine the key factors and risk youth ages 6 to 12 face in order to isolate the problem in a particular area (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2016). In 1990, Pennsylvania adopted the CTC model, which allowed the state to create over 100 prevention programs that

pinpointed the community needs and put forth greater effort to combat juvenile delinquency throughout the communities with the greatest need (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2016). Currently, the state of Pennsylvania has implemented over 300 evidence-based programs to address issues surrounding juvenile delinquency (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2016).

In the state of Washington, leaders put forth standards to develop evidence-based juvenile justice programs after evaluating locations that lacked these resources. The goal was to address the rise in delinquency in locations throughout the state. Those areas that did not have programs in place forced policymakers to bring about change so that the state did not lose funding. According to the Pew Charitable Trusts (2016), with the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, Washington adopted four key elements of the quality assurance: (a) program oversight, (b) corrective actions, (c) provider evaluation, and (d) development. After the state began implementing these elements, juvenile delinquency in the state reduced, the number of juveniles arrested in the state was lowered, and the number of juveniles imprisoned was reduced by approximately 50% (Pew Charitable Trusts 2016). With the implementation of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 came about the following entities throughout the United States: (a) the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), (b) the Runaway Youth Program, and (c) the National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Although the implementation of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 brought about change, policymakers pushed to do more when it came to

criminal and delinquent acts. With an increase in violence committed by juveniles, there was an increase in fear among the public, which increased pressure on policymakers to enforce ramifications on juveniles tougher than in previous years (Davis, 2002). There was a subsequent increase in treating juveniles like adults who have committed similar criminal acts (Davis, 2002). Juveniles began receiving longer sentencing periods with diminished chances of being rehabilitated (Davis, 2002). In the 1990s, “Get Tough on Crime” legislation took a more punitive approach toward juvenile offenders (Meng et al., 2013). During the 1990s, numerous alarming trends that surfaced in studies of delinquent behaviors among juveniles in the United States.

In 1997, the FBI reported 2.8 million juvenile arrests, 19% of all arrests in the United States (Yablonsky, 2000). Of those juvenile arrests in 1997, 17% involved some aspect of violence (Yablonsky, 2000). The rise in juvenile crimes of violence began near the end of the 1980s and reached a peak in 1994 (Meng et al., 2013). According to Yablonsky (2000), even though juvenile violent crimes, such as murder, rape, aggravated assault, and robbery, decreased 1995–1997, the number of juvenile crimes of violence that occurred was still 49% higher than in 1988.

Additionally, Yablonsky (2000) documented that in the 1990s the FBI also reported a number of other alarming statistics involving juveniles. In 1997, it was documented that 2,100 juveniles were murdered; 56% were killed by an individual with some type of firearm. In 1997, juveniles were responsible for nearly 14% of aggravated assault and murder arrests. Law enforcement documented that juveniles made up 37% of burglary arrests, 30% of robbery arrests, and 24% of arrest for weapons in 1997. Between

1993 and 1997 juvenile drug use increased and drug use violence increased by approximately 82%. Juvenile arrests for loitering and violating curfew and other offenses increased 87%. Some of the rise in criminal activity among juveniles could be attributed to juveniles being used by adult criminals to commit criminal acts. Adults would do this because juveniles were not sentenced as harshly as adults in the court system (Yablonsky, 2000). The rise in criminal activity has also been attributed to more citizens reporting acts of crime to authorities (Yablonsky, 2000)

Understanding juvenile behavior is a broad field of study that includes historical aspects of juvenile delinquency and prior attempts—both successful and not—to attempt to address the issue. Within the field of criminology, philosophers have presented various theories for individuals displaying certain behaviors. In the 18th century, Cesare Beccaria (1735–1795) and Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) developed classical theories that individuals choose to commit certain crimes based on whether the end result will be a feeling of pleasure and less likely pain driven (Lanier et al., 2015). Classical theorists believe that individuals weigh their options and the outcomes of their behavior prior to taking action (Lanier et al., 2015). Many subsequent rational choice theories of crime were established based on classical theory.

Theorists and researchers, such as Gary Becker (1968), have presented bodies of work suggesting that individuals act rationally, taking actions to meet a particular goal (Steele, 2015). Other researchers, such as Robert Merton, have presented bodies of work in the study of criminal behavior, and theories have progressed from the belief that criminal behavior is a choice to criminal behavior being an option to resolve a situation

(Steele, 2015). Other philosophers have presented theories that criminal behavior is learned. The upward trend of juvenile delinquency has led to numerous temporary solutions, which are discussed in much of the existing research studies. New approaches are needed to positively affect juveniles with risk factors for adopting criminal behaviors.

Problem Statement

There is a problem in the southeast region of Florida when it comes to the steady increase of juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Specifically, the problem is that policies such as NCLB, zero tolerance, and other crime bills are affecting environmental factors such as family, peers, schools, communities, and how individuals view themselves in the region, which may be a cause of the increase in juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Currently, there is little to no research on how policies contribute to environmental factors that may lead to delinquent behavior. However, numerous researchers have sought to gain an understanding as to how risk factors contribute to juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Studies have been conducted on how to prevent delinquency, but policies have not been reviewed to determine if they are causing a change in why juveniles show signs of delinquency at an alarming rate in the Southeast Florida region. Many possible factors contribute to this problem: budget cuts, systemic flaws within the juvenile justice system, and other risk factors found in the region. This study may contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by looking at how policies affect environmental factors that may lead to juvenile delinquency and recidivism in Southeast Florida.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore how policies may affect risk factors that are contributing to juvenile delinquency and recidivism in Southeast Florida. By using qualitative methods, this study provides insights into understanding the causes of juvenile delinquent behavior and recidivism and actions that can be taken to lower the rate of recidivism among juveniles in this region. In Southeast Florida, there has been a steady increase in juvenile delinquency (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice n.d.). Juveniles make up approximately 42% of the recidivism rate in the area, and the goal of this research was to attempt to identify how policies affect risk factors such as a juvenile's family status, environment, and schooling. As such, I sought to explain some of the causes of juvenile delinquency occurrences; such an explanation could assist in the development of programs or intervention strategies to lower the rate of juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study through established qualitative means consistent with generalization, documentation, and interviews (Creswell, 2013):

RQ1: What social and environmental risk factors contribute to juvenile delinquency?

RQ2: How has NCLB's narrowing of classroom curriculum affected juveniles' ability to learn?

RQ3: How did the zero tolerance policies of the 1990s affect students' educational opportunities in Southeast Florida?

Theoretical Framework

Several theories have been presented to address issues around criminal and delinquent behavior. The anomie and general strain theories were used in this study as a foundation for the discussion of juvenile delinquency and the cause of criminal behavior among juveniles in Southeast Florida.

Anomie Theory

The primary theoretical framework selected for this study was anomie theory. David Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, developed the anomie theory in 1893. As he saw the way individuals interacted with each other, Durkheim viewed anomie as a state of social breakdown. Durkheim's (1893) theory of anomie showed that in an environment where a breakdown existed, the expectation of how individuals should behave was unclear. Durkheim also believed that an ongoing breakdown in what individuals believed to be normal caused deviant behavior. Durkheim identified a shift in social change and social differentiations that changed the structure of rules and principles established at the time. Anomie theory showed that criminality within any society is caused by the division of labor and affirms collective consciousness. According to Durkheim (1893), the presence of crime reflects an environment in which an individual consciously disobeys social rules. Durkheim found that the goal of policymakers should be to set forth guidelines to prevent a state of anomie in society.

Years later, in 1938, Robert King Merton revised Durkheim's anomie theory. Merton pointed out that additional social rules that lead to a state of anomie could be linked to value-medium discrepancies. Merton explained that crime came about due to

divergence among objectives presented in a society that were seen as legitimate and limits set forth that did not equally allow all to ascertain the objectives. Merton believed that the ability to obtain legitimate objectives was different when looking at the class of an individual in society and caused disorientation among individuals and encouraged psychological stress and social conflicts. This led to other theories, such as Merton's strain theory.

Strain Theory

The secondary theoretical framework selected for this study was general strain theory. In the 1940s, Merton presented what is now considered one of the most popular contemporary theories among sociologists: strain theory (Slepicka, 2018). Merton's strain theory was presented to explain the increase in criminal behavior in the United States (Slepicka, 2018). Merton's theory came about due to the structure of the United States and the belief that everyone could live the *American Dream*, which suggested that all individuals had equal opportunities no matter their educational background, work experience, class, gender, or ethnicity (Slepicka, 2018). Initially, people were supposed to be reaching their goals by using what they have learned over time and working hard to obtain wealth and financial happiness (Slepicka, 2018). Merton argued that meeting the goal of living the American Dream was not easily obtained by all; in many cases, the United States was structured to prevent some individuals from achieving success (Lanier et al., 2015).

With this Merton identified a concept of anomie that pointed out the unequal playing field as it pertained to cultural goals and institutionalized means (Lanier et al.,

2015). Imbalances in the structure produced tensions and strains between the goal that individuals wanted to accomplish and the means by which individuals could try to obtain those goals, often involving finances (Slepicka, 2018). According to Slepicka (2018), Merton's strain theory argued that when individuals are faced with issues when trying to complete a goal, strain occurs, and individuals have to adapt. Such adaptation occurs in the five following ways: (a) conformity, taking action to obtain a goal using means that are socially accepted; (b) innovation, using actions that are not socially accepted and are not conventional to society to obtain culturally approved goals; (c) ritualism, taking part in using socially accepted means to achieve a modest and humbling goal; (d) retreatism, the process of rejecting cultural goals and the means of obtaining them to escape the process at hand; and (e) rebellion, the process of rejecting cultural goals and the means of obtaining them in order to replace them (Slepicka, 2018).

With strain theory, Merton made a sound argument that the United States frequently displayed inequality as it pertains to certain groups meeting the goals portrayed as the American Dream (Slepicka, 2018). In many instances, U.S. society divides individuals into groups and only allows certain members of a population to achieve this overall goal; when individuals are not afforded the opportunity to meet their goals, many turn to criminal acts to do so (Slepicka, 2018). For example, a young person who has a job but does not make enough money because of the type of job or lack of education may begin to sell drugs to make the necessary money to pay bills and survive in society.

Nature of the Study

After comparing qualitative design approaches (phenomenology, narrative, grounded theory, and case studies), I identified that contributing factors to the research questions derived from a grounded theory approach in which change can be brought about based on a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study (Creswell, 2014). Using a qualitative method allows for observations of juveniles to occur to gain an understanding of why juveniles act a certain way. Qualitative research methods also allowed me to explore reasons juveniles repeat actions even after receiving punishment for those actions in the past.

Using a qualitative research method, a researcher can collect data by asking questions, analyzing previous work conducted on the study, and make interpretations as to what the collected data mean (Creswell, 2014). To strengthen this qualitative study, I used a general inductive approach to answer the research questions. This research is important to the field of public policy and administration because while juvenile delinquency has decreased, there are still a significant number of juveniles housed in correctional institutions (Creswell, 2014).

A general inductive approach was used to explore why juveniles commit acts of crime and the environmental impact of juvenile delinquency and recidivism. A general inductive approach involves a detailed review of raw data to find concepts, themes, or a model to clearly explain the data collected (Thomas, 2006). I selected a general inductive approach to compress a large amount of information collected from previous researchers and interviews conducted for this study. With a general inductive approach, I was able to

summarize the raw data and pinpoint a link between the research questions and themes found throughout the study (Thomas, 2006).

Definitions

For this research study, the following terms require additional clarity.

5th Amendment: A constitutional amendment providing each individual citizen the right to a trial by jury; the citizen has the right to not incriminate oneself through statements to the courts (Impact Law, n.d.)

14th Amendment: A constitutional amendment giving individuals the right to be treated equally in the court of law through due process (Impact Law, n.d.).

Adjudicate of delinquency: When a judge in juvenile court decides to remove a case from the judicial decision in which no jury is involved in making the decision of a juvenile's guilt or innocence (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, n.d.). In this case, the judge issues a decision on the best way to handle the offender, therefore removing the case from the courts (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, n.d.).

Adolescence: The period of biological, cognitive, and psychosocial transition from childhood to adulthood that usually lasts a decade or so (Berger, 2000). For the purpose of this study, *adolescents* refer to individuals ages 12 to 18.

Age of Criminal Responsibility: A set age range in which an offender will have their case heard in an adult criminal court instead of a juvenile court; in most jurisdictions, the age of criminal responsibility is 17 or 18 outside requirements that may transfer juveniles into adult court system (Juvenile Law Center, n.d.).

Amenable to Treatment: The courts legally assess youth offenders to determine the likelihood of rehabilitation based on an offender's level of maturity, past delinquency, and results of previous attempts to rehabilitate (Juvenile Law Center, n.d.). This occurs in juvenile court due to its belief in rehabilitating juveniles instead of using methods of punishment (Juvenile Law Center, n.d.). The court uses this method to determine whether a youth offender will be seen in juvenile court or transferred to an adult criminal court (Juvenile Law Center, n.d.).

Competency: Whether a youth can understand the process of the juvenile court to stand trial and have the mental capacity to understand what is happening (Juvenile Law Center, n.d.). A youth offender must have the ability to consult with a legal team that will assist in their defense (Juvenile Law Center, n.d.).

Delinquency: A juvenile's action or conduct that would be a violation of criminal law if the offender were an adult (Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, n.d.)

Delinquency Prevention: A term used to explain a number of programs implemented to deter and prevent juveniles from becoming delinquents (Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, n.d.)

Discrimination: Bias or prejudice treatment toward a category of individuals based on race, sex, or age unjust (Rush, 2003).

Diversion: A system mostly composed of local community properties, services, and programs to divert youth away from the criminal justice court process (Juvenile Law Center, n.d.).

Driving while Black or Brown (DWBB): An unlawful criminalization of Black or Brown drivers, in which police officers use traffic offenses as a means to stop an individual to question and search the individual's vehicle (UsLegal, n.d.)

Institutional Racism: Negative treatment displayed toward a group of people based on race in social institutions, such as the government, courts of law, schools, and financial institutions (Chegg, n.d.).

Judicial Waiver: A process in which a juvenile court judge waives their authority over a case, sending the case to be heard in an adult criminal court (Davis, 2002).

Justifiable Inequality: A defense for the unfair treatment of a particular group for the betterment of society as a whole (Souryal, 2015).

Juvenile: One who is under the age of consent, most often 18 years of age (Davis, 2002).

Juvenile offender: A person under 16, 18, or in some states, 20 years of age, who has been found guilty of committing offenses against the law (Rush, 2003).

Prejudice: A predetermined view that is not based on previous experience or behavior (Souryal, 2015)

Recidivism: Engaging in unlawful behavior by those who previously were sentenced, treated, and released (Davis, 2002).

Assumptions

The major assumption of this study was that juvenile participants would provide the best insight into why juvenile delinquency occurs. If juveniles are given the chance to express themselves, it is possible the resulting information can be used to bring about

change. I have worked as an after-school care provider and with juveniles in sporting events and other educational programs. I believe that building rapport will help obtain more information on the repeated occurrences of juvenile delinquency.

The second assumption in this study was that juveniles would not fully understand questions presented, and by questioning juveniles, I may not receive truthful answers. I presented questions in simple terms so that juveniles could understand the questions, and these questions were asked in a setting where the participants would feel safe and free from danger or punishment for their answers.

During the study to avoid selecting venerable participants I was very selective of who I would use. I evaluated answers obtained from 10 individuals who had previously displayed delinquent behavior as a juvenile from different areas of Southeast Florida. Other groups of individuals include parents and individuals who recently reached an age at which they would no longer be classified as juveniles. In the past, many researchers have studied the cause of juvenile delinquency and focused on environmental factors, such as education, family history, and placement in an adult correctional setting, and whether they increase the likelihood that juveniles will reoffend once released. With this study, I explored how policies affect risk factors that may lead to juveniles committing delinquent acts.

Scope and Delimitations

In Southeast Florida, an increase of juvenile delinquency continues to occur and to, in many cases, involve violence. In this study, I sought to explore the contributing factors to juvenile delinquency and recidivism in Southeast Florida. I looked at how

policies have contributed to the increase in juvenile delinquency in the area and attempted to gain an understanding of why juveniles commit acts of delinquent behavior. The implementation of some policies may have increased challenges experienced by teachers, schools, family members, and community leaders regarding youth in Southeast Florida.

The results of this study may provide new insights into ways to address juvenile delinquency and shine a light on policies that need to be altered to lower the risk of a juvenile being involved in delinquency. By addressing these issues there may be a way to address the violence in the area. According to Worzel (2008), certain policies are making it difficult for teachers to educate youth on what is right from wrong without receiving pushback from parents and administration, and Worzel suggests that parents cannot punish their children due to fears of being charged with criminal or negligent behavior. Through the data collected in this study, I will attempt to gain an understanding as to whether policies are the driving factor of how youth learn and display delinquency.

For this study, I did not look at populations outside Southeast Florida. Southeast Florida was the area under focus in the study; this area has some of the largest school districts and has a large recurrence of juvenile delinquency and recidivism (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The southeast region of Florida makes up over 9.4% of U.S. public school enrollment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The population in the studied area was believed to be sufficient to obtain common themes that can be translated through the state of Florida and additional research could be used to identify themes throughout the United States.

Limitations

The scope of this study was to determine how policies present issues that lead to environmental factors affecting the likelihood of juveniles showing signs of delinquency and signs of violence in Southeast Florida. There were limitations that could have affected the current study. First, I recognized that the presence of an adult figure during interviews may have affected the responses of juveniles being questioned. Second, not building a rapport prior to asking questions may have hindered truthful answers from participants. The study was also limited due to racial issues and previous statistics showing that certain groups, such as African Americans and people of African descent, are overrepresented in some studies involving juvenile arrests. Not having the ability to conduct an observational experiment on juveniles to show why juveniles commit certain acts or what factors contribute to the change in behavior also limited the study. Additionally, juveniles are a vulnerable population and may be at risk when being studied; therefore, obtaining consent can be difficult. To reduce the effects of these limitations, I invited participants who were just outside the classification of *juvenile*; participants were between ages 21 and 25. Further, participants names will not appear within the study to ensure confidentiality.

Significance of the Study

With this study, I sought to fill the knowledge gap pertaining to contributing factors to juvenile delinquency and recidivism among youth in Southeast Florida. According to the Florida Legislature Office of Economic and County (2016), Southeast Florida makes up approximately 13.4% of the state of Florida's population. In fiscal year

2014–15, juvenile delinquency complaints filed in Southeast Florida made up approximately 4,521 out of 62,517 complaints in the state. Per 100,000 juveniles ages 10–17, the southeast region of Florida made up 1,819.6 out of 3,408.4. Juveniles direct filed to adult courts in the southeast region of Florida made up 157 out of 1,446 Florida juveniles.

Results from this study may assist the criminal justice system, juvenile justice system, and policy makers with a better understanding of how policies can bring about change in the way individuals, groups, families, school systems, and communities are affected by policies. The results may help identify a link between juvenile delinquency and recidivism in Southeast Florida. In this study, I sought to gather data by observing individuals classified as repeat offenders housed in residential programs to gain an understanding of what the programs offer based on state policies to determine the programs' effectiveness in preventing individuals from reoffending; I was not able to do so because this group is a protected population and such data collection would have prolonged the research study.

According to Creswell (2009), the research process involves emerging questions and procedures, data collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building to general themes, and a flexible structure. Using a qualitative method allowed me to use open-ended questions to gain an understanding as regarding juveniles' traits of delinquency. Qualitative studies support a method of research conducted in a manner that honors an inductive style, which focuses on the individual meaning of a particular issue at hand as well as the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2009). The results of this study

may provide a better understanding of how juveniles engage with each other and make sense of how their actions based on historical and social viewpoints.

The qualitative research method was selected because this method is a form of investigation used to analyze findings through language and behavior in a subject's natural environment. This method allowed me to capture critical information that may not have been fully expressed in quantitative data regarding participants' feelings, behavior, beliefs, values, and motivations (Berkwits & Inui, 1998). By using a qualitative method, I was able to find the significance of information received from individuals who have been affected by a certain issue and obtain participants' views of potential resolutions (Berkwits & Inui, 1998). Nonetheless, data collected through a qualitative research method can be seen as subjective, and the data collection process can be time consuming and may lack clear statistical representation.

This study was unique because I sought to address how implemented policies may contribute to an increase in juvenile delinquency and recidivism. The results of this study have the potential to bring about positive social change in the Southeast region of Florida by bringing awareness to the study of juveniles and obtaining feedback from juveniles regarding the cause of delinquency, how policies effect the likelihood of recidivism, and what can be done to deter delinquent behavior. This study also could bring about social change by exploring current policies and potential improvements to those policies to lower the likelihood that a juvenile will take part in delinquent behaviors.

Summary

Juvenile delinquency and recidivism continue to be a problem despite federal legislation implemented through a multitude of structured acts, bills, and policies intended to address the juvenile crime problem. The research problem I examined in this study was juvenile delinquency and recidivism rates occurring in Southeast Florida. Through this study, I sought to explain how policies contribute to delinquency occurrence and to assist in developing programs or intervention strategies seeking to lower the rate of juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Though studies have been conducted as to how environmental factors contribute to juvenile delinquency, in this research, I looked at policies that change how environmental factors contribute to the way juveniles learn delinquent behavior and how delinquency is handled.

In Southeast Florida over the last 3 years, fatal shootings have occurred killing 88 individuals under the age of 18; many of these killings were at the hands of individuals classified as juveniles (Torres, 2017). Despite extensive literature examining juvenile offenders, there continues to be a gap examining when and how delinquent behavior is learned and the possible causes of juvenile recidivism in Southeast Florida. Chapter 2 will include an extensive analysis of the problem in this study and evaluate previous research to fill the gaps in literature regarding juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In 2014, law enforcement agencies in the United States made approximately one million arrests of persons under age 18; 50% less than the number of juvenile arrests in 2005 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). However, according to the director of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies, Daniel Losen, this number is questionable because the number of juvenile arrests has been poorly documented. In 2012, in the United States, approximately 80,000 youth were serving time in a correctional setting due to delinquent behavior (Ameen & Lee, 2012). Researchers estimate 50% to 80% of these youths will return to those correctional settings after being released (Ameen & Lee, 2012).

During the 2014–15 fiscal year, Southeast Florida accounted for approximately 2,799 juvenile delinquency cases in the state of Florida. The rest of the state of Florida accounted for 35,468 juvenile delinquency cases. In Southeast Florida, in the first 11 months of 2015, approximately 60 juveniles were shot and killed (Rabin & Veiga, 2015). In 2016, Southeast Florida's youth arrests fell to 2,453 (DJJ, 2017). Although there was a decrease in juvenile arrests in the fiscal year 2016, the types of crimes did not change. According to the *Miami Herald*, in Southeast Florida in the last 10 years, 316 juveniles have been killed by gun violence. More than 30 juveniles are killed each year; many of these killings are perpetrated by other juveniles (Rabin, 2016).

The research problem examined in this study was juvenile delinquency and recidivism rates occurring in Southeast Florida. Despite extensive literature examining juvenile offenders, there continues to be a gap in the literature examining when and how

delinquent behavior is learned and the possible causes of juvenile recidivism in Southeast Florida.

Literature Search Strategy

The intent of this literature review is to conduct a qualitative examination of the factors contributing to delinquent behavior and recidivism among juveniles. The research terms for the literature search included crime theories, rational choice theory, social disorganization theory, social control theory, juvenile delinquency, recidivism, zero tolerance, School to Prison Pipeline, NCLB act, mandatory minimum sentencing, risk factor and more. The literature review used in this study focused on articles related to the listed search terms alone with criminal justice programs, policies and justice reform. I conducted Google scholar searches, Sage Journals, Proquest peer reviews, EBSCOhost Online Research Databases and Walden library journal articles. During the literature review process, I combined terms, used various dates and time frames in order to conduct exhaustive review of the literature.

Theoretical Foundation

Crime Theories

For years, research theorists and other scholars have focused their time and efforts on gaining an understanding of why individuals commit crimes. Theories have been developed to identify factors that contribute to the explanation of criminal behavior. In juvenile delinquency research, some of the most common theories involve a combination of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and biological theories: rational choice, social disorganization, strain theory, social control, and mental illness theories.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory is used to explain a common process that occurs prior to an individual making the choice to commit a particular act (Foy, et al, 2018). The theory presented late in the 18th century through the work of Cesare Beccaria and set the foundation pertaining to criminal behavior and the thought process of the offender (Steele, 2015). For years, researchers have added different perspectives to the theory, such as ways of deterring criminal behavior, coming up with solutions to prevent criminal acts that have been committed by juveniles repeatedly (Steele, 2015). This theory has been applied to crimes consisting of robbery, drug use, white-collar crimes, vandalism, and juvenile delinquency (Foy, et al, 2018). The rational choice theory is that view that a person behaves because they believe performing their preferred activity is more beneficial than the possible outcome. Many scholars use rational choice theory to understand how and why social change occurs. This classical theory subsequently established much of rational choice theories of crime.

Gary Becker (1968) presented a body of work in “Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach,” wherein actors act rationally to get the most out of their actions to meet a particular goal (Steele, 2015). While many other theorists have presented bodies of work in the study of criminal behavior, theories have progressed over the years from the belief that criminal behavior is a choice to, in many cases, criminal behavior being an option to obtain the best outcome for a situation (Steele, 2015).

Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory has been used to explain how an individual's living, physical, or social environments are the main causation when determining how a person chooses to behave (Simms, 2016). For example, a neighborhood that has fraying social structures is more likely to also have high crime rates. Social disorganization has become a staple theory in identifying ecological differences as they pertain to the levels of crimes committed on the bases of structural and cultural factors that transform the norms of social order in a community (Daoud, et al, 2017). The theory was derived from research conducted by Clifford Shaw and Henry D. McKay from the Chicago School of Criminology in 1942 (Simms, 2016). In their research, an examination of juveniles in the Chicago court system demonstrated uneven representation of areas around Chicago as it pertains to who was committing crime during a particular time or space (Simms, 2016). Criminal activity seemed to only be occurring in certain areas—no matter the population or which racial or ethnic group lived in that reviewed area (Simms, 2016).

Social disorganization theory has been defined based on an individual's social and physical environment, showing that these environments are the root cause of a person's choice to behave a certain way (Daoud, et al, 2017). Many researchers have found that in a community that is deteriorating, the crime rate would be higher than a community that is being well maintained or newly rebuilt (Simms, 2016). Many of those deteriorating communities have schools that are not fit to be a conducive learning environment, a number of run-down or abandoned buildings, and a high unemployment rate (Simms, 2016). With much of Shaw and McKay's research, it is believed that criminal behavior is

a result of areas of structured dynamics. Much of their evaluations came from low socioeconomic neighborhoods classified as a social disorganized atmosphere that could be adopted by generations to follow (Simms, 2016).

Others looking into social disorganization have found there may be a relationship when it comes to youth violence, including an effect on family structure and stability. Sampson (1986) suggested that social disorganization has been found to influence the crime rate in an area (Simms, 2016). This occurs when there is nothing in place to control how youth behave, i.e., a lack of guardianship. Under social disorganization theory, it has been found that the predetermined factor of youth committing violent acts and committing crimes stems from the environment an individual is accustomed to. Much of the research behind this theory can be seen in areas throughout Southeast Florida (MiamiDade.gov 2018). In these same housing projects in Southeast Florida, over the last 3 years, fatal shootings have occurred killing 88 individuals under the age of 18, many of these killings were at the hands of individuals classified as juveniles (Torres, 2017).

Social Control Theory

This theory explains the reasons as to why people obey or disobey rules. It focusses on explaining how behavior conforms to the general expectation of society. Social control theory advocates that offenders can choose right from wrong, which legally makes the individual accountable for their behavior (Siegal & Welsh 2017). Social Control Theory is therefore aligned with the positivist perspectives of classical criminology school. It advocates that values and beliefs are shared in social settings. The law-breakers and offenders understand clearly that the social norms and rules should be

adhered to. This theory considers deviance and crime as unsocial behavior not approved by society. Social control theory explains how freedom from social constraints drives individuals into committing delinquency (Siegal & Welsh, 2017).

The work of the enlightenment thinkers, as well as the classical criminology school, gives the social control theory its important notions. An English philosophical author, Thomas Hobbes, describes how inherent tendency, self-indulgence, and evil are restrained externally by the government in its corresponding role (Siegal & Welsh, 2017). However, Emile Durkheim, a prolific French writer who founded socialism and functionalism gives this theory most of its origin (Siegal & Welsh, 2017). He described an anomie condition often resulting from the breaking down of social values and norms. He also depicts deviance and law-breaking as social facts, which occur in every society.

The fact that we are social beings gives us the capacity to be moral beings. Crime identifies behavioral boundaries which the community recognizes and reinforces negatively by its reactions (Siegal & Welsh, 2017). Therefore, the order in the society is maintained through socialization which helps individuals avoid association with offensive acts. This process also enables alterations to boundaries, hence promoting social change. Weakened groups enable an individual to depend solely upon himself, and to recognize rules founded within himself based on personal interests.

Literature Review

History of the Juvenile Justice System

In the 19th century, many factors contributed to the establishment of a separate justice system for individuals classified as juveniles, such as the rebuilding of government infrastructure and a transformation of the industrial age of the workforce (Meng, et al., 2013). Prior to this period, juveniles were punished in the same manner as adults within the criminal justice system. The individual at the age of 14 or older faced a judge and was sentenced to be housed with adult criminals and received many of the same punishments (Meng et al., 2013). The argument was raised that juveniles should be separated from the corruption of those experienced adult criminals. Though children at the age of 14 could be seen as individuals who may be capable of knowing right from wrong a defense was brought forth explaining that those children may not be mature enough to always do what is classified as the right thing or always making the right choices in life.

The reasoning behind the separation of juvenile and adult offenders was evidence that delinquent youth learned criminal behavior from older inmates (Inciardi, 2007). According to Swift, (1911) such logic was voiced in the Progressive Era with the belief that the practice of jailing young offenders with adults, young and impressionable offenders were being carried off to Rutland with more hardened men, there to receive an education in lawlessness from their experienced associates. An example would be the case with Lionel Tate. Tate was convicted at the age of 14 of first-degree murder for beating a 6-year-old to death using wrestling moves that he had seen on television

(Inciardi, 2007). He was the youngest juvenile sentenced to life without parole but later was released after a court overturned the sentence after an appeal. He was released after serving years in an institution with individuals much older than him. Shortly after his release, he was arrested again for armed burglary with battery, armed robbery, and probation violation just a few miles outside of Southeast Florida (Inciardi, 2007).

With the idea of a separate court system for juveniles, in 1899 Jane Addams founded the first juvenile court system in Chicago, Illinois (Brooks & Roush D 2014). This court system spread throughout the nation and established an exceptional system that was different from that of the adult criminal court system. The juvenile court system had an objective to go away from the methods of punishing juveniles and leaned towards doing what was in the best interest of the children placed in the system (Brooks & Roush 2014). The juvenile court system functioned under public policies that gave the state the ability to do what was needed to protect juveniles, the policy gave the courts the power to be in control of juvenile matters, this policy is known as *parens patriate*. The court system took on the role of the parent, placing juveniles in training and industrial schools and/or institutions (Meng et al. 2013). The juvenile courts had the power to oversee both juvenile delinquency and status offenses.

Within the juvenile court proceeding, the judge did not look for an admission of guilt or the proving of a person's innocents as seen in the adult courts (Meng, et al. 2013). The juvenile justice court system took on an approach that looked to assist in rehabilitating youth instead of punishing them for the offenses that had been committed. The juvenile court system placed much of its efforts on treatment over placing juveniles

on probation or getting social workers involved. The juvenile justice system utilized mental health professionals to communicate with the juveniles and ask questions to gain an understanding of why the acts were committed (Meng, et al. 2013). With the separation of court systems, in many cases, juveniles could be adjudicated for behaviors that would be classified as criminal if committed by an individual under the age of 18, but legal for adults known as “status offenses” (Meng, et al., 2013). Status offenses consist of acts that include sexual acts, running away, and smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, or committing acts of truancy (Meng, et al., 2013).

Florida Department of Juvenile Justice

Prior to the 2000s, the State of Florida focused on a rehabilitating form of justice when dealing with juveniles. During Florida’s rehabilitative period juvenile proceedings were matters addressed by the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice 2014). This agency provided social services to families and juveniles under Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes. These statutes gave HRS the ability to manage events involving children such as child abuse and delinquency processing of juvenile charges with criminal actions (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice 2014). With a steady increase in juvenile delinquency, the State of Florida took steps to shift away from a social services form of managing juveniles.

The shift in 1994 established the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). The new agency obtained power, funds, and personnel from HRS. DJJ was now given the task and responsibility to address juvenile delinquency issues and cases involving children and families in need. This was done with no changes in the statutes of Chapter

39. With few changes, the DJJ continued to look at juveniles as children in need of social services instead of criminals in need of some form of punishment. In a move to change how juveniles were handled, the DJJ pushed to address juveniles with criminal behavior with new statutes. In 1997, two Florida Statutes were established to transfer juvenile justice issues and separate them from social services systems that used to assist children and families included under Chapters 984 and 985 (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice 2014).

With a complete transformation of Florida legislation and the continual increase of juvenile delinquency a new Tough Love direction was taken. The legislation reform moved towards punitive criminal justice approaches yet separate from the adult criminal justice system. With the implementation of new policies, the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice was pushed to develop and run programs and services to prevent juvenile delinquency by using early intervention, control and rehabilitative treatment of juveniles that show signs of criminal behavior (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice 2014). The reformed Florida DJJ was organized among five programs: Administrative Services, Prevention, and Victim Services, Detention Services, Probation and Community Intervention, and Residential Services.

The established DJJ system looks to continue to increase public safety in the State of Florida by putting efforts into reducing the amount of juvenile delinquency by using effective prevention, intervention and treatment services that improve family structure and make a positive change in the lives of those classified as juveniles (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice 2014). With these actions being taken one would question

if these same changes and policies are causing more issues in Southeast Florida. The new direction affects the way juveniles are introduced to the criminal justice system (Monterastelli, 2017).

With an increase of juvenile delinquency and adult crime rising over time, the U.S. Government began to take a get tough on crime approach. This movement put forth policies that focused on punishment being the primary goal to address criminal behavior. These policies implemented mandatory minimums sentencing, zero-tolerance policies to penalize individuals for their actions. The implementation of these policies has created a greater problem, affecting juveniles, the schooling and prison population and issues on how policing in certain communities occurs. With “get tough on crime” policies there has been an increase in arrest when it comes to drug offenses, a departure from juvenile justice programs and more. With the questions presented in this study as to whether policies effect environmental factors which cause individuals to behave a certain way, a review of a number of policies may assist in bringing about change in Southeast Florida in order to limit the amount of juvenile delinquency in this area.

Florida’s Southeast Region Juvenile Justice System

In Southeast Florida around the mid-1990s, juveniles were not a focus for the criminal justice system until it was realized that organized crime groups were using juveniles to do their dirty work. Southeast Florida’s juvenile process was weak and very lenient, which those same crime groups knew and taught juveniles how to beat the system (MiamiDade.gov, 2018). Juveniles in the county were known to be the labor force for drug dealers, gangs, pimps, and other criminal organized crime groups. In the mid 90’s

Southeast, Florida's urban areas consisted of approximately 2 million juveniles (Blichik, 2017). In 1995, it was documented that nearly 20,000 arrests of juveniles occurred in Southeast Florida (MiamiDade.gov, 2018). With an increase in violence by juveniles in the area that made the news and major media headlines, it was believed that this deterred individuals from around the world to travel to Southeast Florida to visit which affected the tourist industry in this particular region of Florida (MiamiDade.gov, 2018).

In the '90s, the State of Florida had over thirty law enforcement agencies that made arrests of juveniles with little to no way of documenting those juveniles that were arrested (MiamiDade.gov 2018). In Southeast Florida, the only documentation obtained was the number of arrests that occurred involving those classified as juveniles. With the growing number of juvenile arrests in the Southeast region, the State of Florida was forced to create a framework to address the issue at hand as it pertains to documenting juveniles that have been arrested and their offenses (Blichik, 2017). Statutes were put in place by Florida Legislation which established the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC). The JACs facilities became the juvenile arrest processing center for Southeast Florida and throughout the State of Florida. JAC worked with different agencies to coordinate together during incidences in which juveniles were arrested. In the State of Florida, 18 facilities were established and Southeast Florida had the largest facility to address 20,000 plus juvenile arrest and initiate the movement to juvenile justice reform in Southeast Florida (MiamiDade.gov, 2018).

In 1997, one particular police department took on the leadership role over the Juvenile Assessment Centers in Southeast Florida. The Metro area police department

served in the capacity of the sheriff department but had no elected or appointed sheriff (MiamiDade.gov, 2018). In the joint efforts, local police department and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice worked to provide resources to document and process juveniles in an effective manner to stakeholders through the State of Florida and those invited to be a part of JAC partnership programs. Many stakeholders and partnering agencies consisted of the following: Florida DOJ, Florida Department of Children and Family, State Attorney's office, Department of Correction, Department of Human Services Administrative Office of the Court, Administrative Juvenile Judges and the office of the Court (MiamiDade.gov, 2018). The overall goal of JAC was to do more than document juvenile arrest but to be more efficient in how offenders were processed. Over time, JAC made significant progress in processing juveniles faster.

Prior to JAC, it took approximately 6 weeks to process juveniles through the juvenile justice system, but with JAC the process can be completed within two hours for those juveniles that could not be detained (MiamiDade.gov, 2018). With JAC the process when detaining a juvenile takes about 15 minutes, prior to JAC it took approximately 6 hours (MiamiDade.gov, 2018). Improvements came about due to advance technology that JAC implemented, using live scan fingerprinting and a number of identification methods which determine if the juvenile was arrested prior to or not (MiamiDade.gov, 2018). The use of JAC, The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice was able to provide assistance to 100% of juveniles processed through the juvenile justice system (MiamiDade.gov, 2018). With the Juvenile Assessment Center in Southeast Florida was able to obtain the necessary amount of information regarding juveniles' arrest and the juvenile population

processed through the juvenile justice system, which in turn allowed the courts to sentence and treat repeat offenders properly (MiamiDade.gov, 2018).

United States Juvenile Crime Rates

The United States had a population of approximately 70 million people, 1 in every 4 Americans are under the age of 18, which are classified as juveniles (OJJDP 2015). The number of juveniles continues to grow and it is believed that the juvenile population will grow by 2% by 2025 and another 4% by 2030 (OJJDP 2015). These increases demonstrate a change in the number of delinquent behaviors shown among juveniles. In 2015, 921,600 juveniles were arrested, of those juveniles arrested 29% were female participants and 71% were male participants, which was a change when compared to 2008 (OJJDP 2015). In 2008, 80% of all juvenile arrests were committed by male participants (Ameen & Lee, 2012).

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2015) Caucasian juveniles made up of 63% of juvenile arrests in 2015 and African Americans made up 34% of the arrest. Delinquent offenses outweigh many of the arrests that occurred over the years. Data shows that per every 1000 juveniles arrested 30% of those arrests were for offenses classified as delinquent behavior, 8% were crimes against persons, 10.6% were crimes against property and 4.1% were for public order offenses (OJJDP 2015). Between 1985 and 2014 the number of juveniles placed in detention has risen by nearly 64% (OJJDP 2015). According to OJJDP (2015), an increase in drug use by juveniles increased along with the number of public order offenses by 22%. Due to the increase of juvenile involvement with law enforcement and the juvenile court system it

continues to be a belief that juveniles are not fully aware of their actions (Youth.Gov 2017).

Juvenile Crime in Southeast Florida

Crimes committed by youth in Southeast Florida have continued to make alarming and horrific headlines throughout the years. Juveniles have been accused of criminal acts of all levels from misdemeanors to murders. According to the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (2018) the top ten common crimes committed in 2017 by juveniles in Southeast Florida are as follows:

1. Burglary - 671

- When a person enters or remains in an establishment with the mission to commit mischief (FindLaw 2018).

2. Aggravated Assault/Battery - 313

- When a deadly weapon is used during an assault, but without the intent to kill (Stevenson, M.T. & Mayson, S.G., 2018). Aggravated Battery the deadly weapon is used and creates bodily harm, permanent disability/disfigurement, or the victim is pregnant when it occurred with knowledge by the offender of pregnancy (Stevenson, M.T. & Mayson, S.G., 2018).

3. Assault and Battery – 277

- Consist of two separate charges that are commonly combined (FindLaw 2018). Florida Statute 784.011 assault is an intentional act of violence or threat, which is established fear in the person being harmed and having contact does not need to happen for an individual to be charged (FindLaw 2018). Battery contact must be made according

to Florida Statute 784.03. This charge causes bodily harm to another person intentionally by touching or striking a person against their will (FindLaw 2018).

4. Grand Larceny (excluding auto theft) - 258

- The juvenile was charged of this crime if the property is valued over \$300 (FindLaw 2018).

5. Auto Theft - 231

6. Misdemeanor Violations of Drug Laws – 172

- Illegal drugs or substances in their possession (Stevenson, M.T. & Mayson, S.G., 2018).

7. Weapon/Firearm - 152

- Possession of a prohibited weapon by a minor.

8. Petit Larceny – 144

- In the state of Florida Petit Larceny is a charge that's placed on a juvenile if the property taken is valued \$100 to \$300 (FindLaw 2018).

9. Disorderly Conduct - 36

- Florida Statute 877.03 juvenile conduct corrupt decency or affect the peace/quiet of the community (Adderley, L. 2018). Engaging in fighting and brawls in public.

10. Misdemeanor Obstruct of Justice – 77

- Lying or deceiving authority (Adderley, L. 2018).

Implemented Policies

The War on Drugs/Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 (SRA)

The War on Drugs government-led operative started in the 1970s to stop the unlawful utilization of drugs and distribution by imposing severe penalties for offenders. The SRA of 1984 is only part of the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 (US Sentencing Commission 2017). According to the United States Sentencing Commission (2017), the enabling statute spells out three overall policy goals that the Commission's sentencing policies and practices are designed to achieve: (a) fulfilling the purposes of sentencing listed in the statute; i.e., just punishment, deterrence, incapacitation, and rehabilitation; (b) providing certainty and fairness by avoiding unwarranted sentencing the disparity among similar cases while ensuring individualized consideration of unique aggravating or mitigating factors, and (c) reflecting, insofar as practicable, "advancement in knowledge of human behavior as it relates to the criminal justice process." (28 U.S.C. 991(b) (1) (A)-(C)). As drugs plagued the communities which were primarily minority residents, the war on drugs became a war on the minority (US Sentencing Commission 2017). As citizens were taken into custody with a specific amount of a particular illegal substance carried minimum sentences, incarcerating a vast majority of young minority individuals the numbers in the prison surged.

Mandatory Minimum Sentencing

Mandatory minimum sentencing laws require obligatory prison sentences of a precise length for people convicted of certain federal and state crimes. Often times uncompromising, commonly known as one-size-fits-all sentencing laws. Mandatory

minimum sentencing dates back to the 18th century. In the late 1700, federal offenses were nonexistent until the creation of the 1790 Crimes Act. The 1790 Crimes Act established 23 federal felony sentences which carried mandated minimum sentence. seven of the 23 crimes in the 1790 Crimes Act carried a mandatory death penalty. Mandatory minimum sentencing laws undermine justices by preventing judges from fitting the punishment to the individual and the circumstances of their offenses. Mandatory minimum sentencing laws over time have caused federal and state prison populations to increase which can lead to overcrowding, excessive costs to taxpayers and the digression of appropriate funding for law enforcement agencies (US Sentencing Commission 2017).

Not all but most mandatory minimum sentences apply to drug offenses, though Congress has enacted mandatory sentencing for other crimes including but not limited to certain gun offenses, pornography, and white-collar crimes. Many of the individuals affected by mandatory minimum sentencing are young men belonging to different minority groups; who are being sentenced egregious mandated minimums of 5 – 10 years for non-violent crimes. These young men are being sentenced as though they have committed violent crimes. It proves to be challenging to return these young men back into society as upstanding citizens because they have now been criminalized (US Sentencing Commission 2017).

Education Reform

The No Child Left Behind, (NCLB) Act was enacted by lawmakers to reform education because of the nationwide state of education in our country (US. Dept. of

Education n.d.). The purpose was to make schools accountable through standards and standardized testing (US. Dept. of Education n.d.). The implementation of standardized testing was to help close achievement gaps, get support for students early on, and allow students more time in the classrooms (US. Dept. of Education n.d.). There are many pros and cons to the act since its inception in 2002.

More so, the primary positives of the act are parent involvement. Parents are aware of the results of standards that are set for educational growth. Each school is ranked on an evaluation called the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), which is also a public record (US. Dept. of Education 2004). Parents have a choice to transfer their children from schools that do not meet the standards according to the AYP (US. Dept. of Education 2004). Another positive is the sustainability of highly qualified teachers (US. Dept. of Education 2004). States must hire teachers that have gone through teacher preparatory programs and passed teacher certification exams.

Teachers also undergo professional development and are evaluated on a yearly basis (US. Dept. of Education 2004). Reading, math, and writing are emphasized in the NCLB act to ensure students are meeting standards by the third, fifth, and eighth grades (US. Dept. of Education n.d.). NCLB also requires that schools provide quality education to students in rural and urban areas with diverse demographics (US. Dept. of Education n.d.). These schools are considered to be Title I schools as are funded more money and resources based on the percentage of students who are qualified for free and reduced lunch prices (US. Dept. of Education 2004).

On the contrary, there are many opponents of the NCLB act based on the results it has provided since 2002. Subject content areas such as science, social studies, and art programs, that are non-standardized tested, are receiving budget cuts (Goertz, 2005). Resources for rich educational experiences like books, supplies, and field trips are also getting cuts (Goertz, 2005). Along with the pressure for students to pass a standardized test, teachers are pushed to teach to the test and not teach students conceptual understanding. This ultimately causes a bigger gap in achievement. Students fall further behind because they are not getting the foundational skills thus making them not able to pass tests (Goertz, 2005).

There are many up and downsides to the NCLB act since it was introduced in 2002. Through two presidential leadership, there have been changes and other programs implemented since then. The act is still in effect today and more students have been falling behind based on a number of negative aspects such as the following:

1. Narrowing classroom curriculum
2. High-Stakes Testing as a Measure of Accountability
3. Schools in Low-Socioeconomic areas were not afforded the same progressive education environments.
4. Standards were not clear and schools that thought they were meeting standards at times found that they were failing.
5. More sanctions were placed on schools and teachers when students were not meeting the test standards (US. Dept. of Education 2004).

Narrowing of Classroom Curriculum. With the implementation of the NCLB act, an increase in standards and target test score came about which overwhelmed the education system. Schools and teachers believed that with these increased standards, there was not sufficient time to teach what would be on mandatory test and the usual curriculum. The rising challenges that the education system has been faced with which is a phenomenon now recognized as curriculum narrowing. According to King, K.V. & Zucker, S. (2005) looking at the phenomenon at hand, core academic subjects such as science, reading and mathematics were given priority over subjects to include social studies, foreign language, physical education, history and arts. The education system believed that narrowing the curriculum would maximize the time to teach students what was needed in order to obtain the highest possible score on standardized test (King, K.V. & Zucker, S. 2005). According to the National Council of Teachers of English (2014) standardized tests are administered, scored, and interpreted in a consistent way, so that the performances of large groups of students can be compared.

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) conducted an examination of the impact of NCLB curriculum and found clear evidence of narrowing to the tested subjects of English and math (Fair Test Examiner 2007). Since the implementation of the NCLB act took effect in 2002, 62% of school districts in a national study reported they increased time for reading and math in elementary school (Fair Test Examiner 2007). In middle school, more than 20% increased time in these subjects (Fair Test Examiner 2007). The increase was large with 46% in reading and 37% in math; 42% in the two subjects combined (Fair Test Examiner 2007). With standardized testing being the cause of a narrowed

curriculum, teachers began to see that students' writing skills were limited. As testing became more important, teachers began to see that narrowed curriculum caused students to read a narrow range of texts and have limited opportunity to learn strategies for and the value of revising, rather than just proofreading, their writing (National Council of Teachers of English 2014).

With an increase in standardized testing forcing the education system to narrow the curriculum, there has been an increase in student limitations. Standardized tests have been said to have limited students learning because they focus only on cognitive dimensions, ignoring many other qualities that are essential to student success (NCTE 2014). Student learning could lead in positive directions is diminished when tests prevent teachers from helping students develop the noncognitive abilities that support better life outcomes (NCTE 2014). According to studies conducted by the NCTE (2014) it has been found that standardized testing also limits student's confidence, this is said to be causing student to feel negatively about their capabilities to learn, perform equal or as well as other student and the ability to obtain passing scores to graduate.

Over time it has been seen that standardized testing and curriculum narrowing has had different effects on various groups of students. In recent years, curriculum narrowing has had a greater effect on students of low-income areas. Funding for schools in low-income areas was reduced often. Teachers who want to help students in these low-income areas seem to be punished and forced to teach a curriculum that they know would not help their student become productive citizens (Woods, A. 2015). In many respects, teachers in poor communities in which minorities live believe that narrowing curriculum

pushes students to cheat to pass or even dropout because they fail to meet standards. The NCLB act and curriculum narrowing was created by lawmakers to help change the overall education system in the United States. It is believed that the get tough on crime mentality and policies that focus on our youth is the cause of issues such as the School to Prison Pipeline and a large influx of juveniles being transferred into adult correctional settings (Monterastelli, 2017).

School-to-Prison Pipeline

With the implementation of zero-tolerance policies brought about a term that is believed to be a process that criminalized school setting over the years known as the School to Prison Pipeline (American Civil Liberties Union 2018). The School to Prison Pipeline has been defined as a collection of punitive laws, policies, and practices that push young students out of schools, which in many cases pushed youth into the juvenile or criminal justice system (Monterastelli, 2017). This process leads to schools implementing punitive approaches to discipline students due to politicians and the media expressing that juveniles are dangerous and are the cause of hardships and fear in communities (Monterastelli, 2017). Policies that were adopted into schools included the War on Drugs mandatory minimum sentencing policies, three-strike laws, and federal governments' gun-free school act of 1994 (Monterastelli, 2017). Schools would use these policies to deter juveniles from bringing fear into schools and keep the school community safe.

The implementation of zero-tolerance policies has increased the rate in which juveniles are being suspended and/or expelled from school and schools did not get safer

(Elias, 2013). Though these policies were established for some of the most harmful criminal acts and behaviors in society, schools and other education facilities used these policies for minor misconduct that include students being late or not coming to class, not paying attention in class, being disrespectful to educators and not abiding by class rules (American Civil Liberties Union 2018). It was believed that by using these policies it would give the students that want to learn the opportunity, but mainly so that school districts can pass the standardized test. The results of the policy implementation of students as early as those in elementary school were placed in juvenile detention (Monterastelli, 2017).

With the review of policies, it has been seen that the School to Prison Pipeline impacted two groups of students, racial minorities, and children with disabilities. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, an example of this targeting consisted of African American students being suspended or expelled approximately 3.5 times more when compared to white Americans classmates (Elias, Marilyn 2013). The numbers documented are alarming, in the school system African American students' make up about 18 % of the school's population but are said to face punitive actions 46 % on more than one occasion (Elias, 2013). In schools throughout the United States, students with a known disability that affects their ability to learn makes up only approximately 8.6 % but these same students make up for nearly 32 % of juveniles placed in some type of detention center for juveniles. When looking at these same numbers and comparing them racially about 1 in 4 African American students with

disabilities would be suspended from school versus white Americans students are being suspended at a rate of 1 in 11 (Elias, 2013).

With policies being enforced and students being punished for behaviors they may not even know is wrong or harmful, school teachers, administrators, and policymakers are fighting the fight against delinquency in schools, but the efforts seem to be more harmful as time passes. School administration wants students to learn but should that mean students that can be classified as troubled juveniles be made offenders and be incarcerated due to what appears to be unfair practices that policies have made in environments such as schools?

Mental Health

With respect to mental illness and the criminal justice system, the critically increased incidence of mentally sick in the criminal justice system has become a global problem (Barrett & Katsiyannis, 2017). It has come to the attention of the government, doctors for mental health, representatives, officials, and politicians, about the increasing numbers of people with a mental disorder ending up in prison. Law enforcement is frequently the first responders to persons in disaster hence they are required to make quick and serious decisions on the kind of assistance that needs to be provided.

According to Jagers, et.al. (2018) a growing number of individuals suffering from severe, chronic and incapacitating mental illnesses are taken to public psychiatric healthcare institutions for inpatient treatment each year. However, an increase in the number of people living with mental disorders in society, does not serve to adequately explain their disproportionate over-representation in the criminal justice system (Jagers

et al., 2018). Thus, it is necessary to plainly understand the sophisticated influences surrounding such law enforcement encounters involving people experiencing a mental health crisis. Understanding the connections between untimely diagnosis and/or inadequate management of mental disorders, homelessness and violent crimes starting in adolescence; is an important factor in beginning to address juvenile delinquency, and repeat juvenile offenses in the criminal justice system.

According to Jagers et al., 2018 in determining how to best manage the increased population of mentally ill persons at all stages of the criminal integrity system, less operative treatment approaches include purely non-directive plus psychodynamic treatments, a strategy intended to better the understanding of the offenders. Finding from the article concludes that a quite significant figure of jail and prison population have some sort of mental illness persons. The use of psychotropic drugs has been a way of treating ill people in treatment centers (Jagers et al., 2018). Also, inmates who are mentally sick can refuse to take their medication while in prison leading to complete damage to the brain system, which can cause damage and even cause individuals to commit suicide. This may be a side effect of the environment in which they are put.

Racial and Gender Differences

Throughout the studies of juvenile delinquency, it has been found that race has played a major part when determining who is being arrested and for what reasons. Research has also shown that police officers make decisions on arrest based on race and gender (Blasdell, 2015). In the United States, individuals are separated into groups based on the color of their skin, which are classified as race groups (Lauritsen, 2005). Though

the biological race cannot be simply defined based on a single trait to separate one person from another (Lauritsen, 2005). When looking at the amount of arrest, African American youth makeup nearly 16 % of the juvenile population ranging from age 10 to 17 but account for 41% of all arrests (Del Carmen et al., 2006). When compared to whites and blacks Americans are overrepresented in arrest statistics making up 58 % of robberies and 48 % of crimes involving violence to include murder (Del Carmen et al., 2006).

Though there have not been significant and proven studies as to whether race is a true cause of this phenomenon. With race many believe that white Americans have more options than African American to accomplish a particular goal (Lauritsen, 2005). For example, in recent years when it comes to the education system, ethnic and racial segregation has occurred due to white American parents being able to choose what school their children attend, choosing a school with fewer minorities (Lauritsen, 2005). With these racial disparities' minorities are not afforded the same education options or environments to succeed (Lauritsen, 2005). Little to no funding is given to schools populated by minorities, which leave African American youth behind the learning curve in most aspects of life (Lauritsen, 2005).

In many cases, minorities have fewer living options when compared to their white Americans counterparts. In a study conducted in 1996 by Sampson and Laub, it was found that the likelihood that African American men would be placed out of home custody is higher and more likely to happen at an early age (Blasdell, 2015). Furthermore, studies by Leiber and Fox in 2005 showed that African American were more likely to receive harsher penalties than white Americans and placed in a more

punishable state of a living arrangement such as adult correctional institutions or juvenile facilities that are not conducive to rehabilitating an individual (Blasdell 2015). Black youth over the years have been faced with harsher sentencing, longer wait time to see a judge and placement in positive programs (Blasdell 2015).

In the criminal justice system, gender has played a significant part when it comes to juvenile arrest. Often, male suspects are arrested for most serious criminal acts when compared to female suspects. According to Del Carmen et al (2006) female juveniles accounted for approximately 28 % of all juveniles arrested, but juvenile women only make up 50 % of the juvenile population when looking at female 10 to 17 years of age. All in all, men have been found to be the gender group who are arrested in most acts of delinquency or criminal event. In studies over time, female juveniles appear to be held to a higher standard and their behaviors are judged a little stricter than their male counterparts (Del Carmen et al., 2006).

In many cases, women are arrested for acts that appear sexual in nature or do not meet the standard moral value of society (Blasdell, 2015). Many arrest databases show that female juveniles are arrested for running away from home and prostitution (Del Carmen et al., 2006). In respects to the beliefs of moral, it seems that female juveniles are arrested at a disproportionate rate due to officers wanting to protect them from behaviors that will lead to these young women from pregnancy, becoming victims, using drugs and prostitution (Del Carmen et al., 2006). Though woman may receive probation more than men, on many occasions' woman, are arrested often for probation violation (Del Carmen et al., 2006). When looking at race and gender, throughout the justice system it can be

seen that men are arrested more than their female counterpart and African American are arrested more than white Americans (Blasdell 2015). Looking at a number of theories to determine why individuals turn to criminal behavior, it is clear that no one theory clearly defines the cause of all criminal behavior. Some theorists believe that the environment is good or bad causes individuals to act in a certain manner. Other theorists believe that criminal behavior is learned based on what individuals observe. Last but not least, some theorists will say that because a goal is to try to be accomplished people will do whatever they can to complete a task to reach their goal. Furthermore, racial and gender differences have been seen to also be a contributing factor to the increase of certain groups being classified as criminals and or delinquents.

Female Juveniles

Over the past decade, female arrest has increased at an alarming rate, even though the show of delinquency between men and woman ratios is approximately 4 to 1 (Yablonsky, 2000). In 2007, female juveniles made up approximately 29% of the 1.2 million arrests among juveniles in the United States (NCCD Global 2009). The arrest of female delinquents increases from 1998 in which female juveniles made up approximately 27% of the 1.2 million arrest that occurred of those under the age of 18 (FBI 2008). Nationwide female juveniles make up approximately 15% of the juvenile population that is housed in some type of detention or residential program and in some locations within the United States makeup as much as 34% of incarceration among juveniles (NCCD Global 2009). In many cases, it appears that the difference between male and the female arrest may be caused by environmental factors such as women

having to be more of a breadwinner since the change in gender roles that occurred in the 20th century (Yablonsky, 2000).

Risk Factors

Over the years, researchers within the field of criminology have placed emphasis on obtaining a clear understanding as to why juvenile delinquency occurs. Studies have continuously tried to understand correlations between acts and behaviors juveniles display and the leading cause. With juvenile delinquent studies, there has not been one deciding factor as to what causes juvenile delinquency, but it has been found that when a juvenile is faced with more than one risk factor the juvenile is more likely to become an offender (NSW Government Communities & Justice 2014). The idea of evaluating risk factors has been adopted in the healthcare field in order to obtain information to assist in pinpointing the problem and present methods to prevent or deter delinquency (Shader n.d). In the healthcare field doctors frequently look at what type of medical issues run in an individual's family and gives the patient information as to prevent a particular health issue, either by preventative treatments or simply suggesting a change in diet or physical activity (Shader, n.d).

With the studying of risk factors, much of the studies focus on the likelihood that a juvenile will become violent or to what extent of delinquency a juvenile will display. According to Shader (n.d) risk factors have been defined as events, characteristics, variables, and hazards that if placed upon an individual can possibly cause a person to be harmed and in turn display delinquent and/or violent behavior. In order to get an understanding of how risk factors can affect the likelihood of violence and delinquency

within youth an evaluation of factors can be undertaken to explain how the individual, their family, peers, and community will be affected by the observed factor in a particular environment, which may show that delinquency can be prevented if the risk is minimized or removed over time.

Individual

The first risk factors that have been identified over the years consist of individual youth showing signs of antisocial behavior as early as the adolescent stage of life (NSW Government Communities & Justice 2014). It has been found that a number of youths, it is seen that they display other risk factors such as a show of cognitive development which is lower than the average and when it comes to behavior the individual is hyperactive (NSW Government Communities & Justice 2014). In many studies, it has been found that youth that do not commit or put forth effort in school and do not aspire to do better at an elementary or middle school level will be a higher risk of delinquency when compared to other youth (OJJDP 2015). Many of the individual risks revolve around psychological, mental and behavioral characteristics, but a number of studies explain that the individual maybe predisposed due to prenatal and perinatal factors (Shader, n.d). According to Shader (n.d) research shows that health problems can influence a youth's development in a negative manner which can lead to criminal behavior and delinquency over time.

Family

When evaluating risk factors when it concerns a youth's family, researchers have found that family structure that displays factors such as abuse, disorder in the home, lack of positive parental involvement, teenage parenthood, family violence, a large family in

which a youth may be ignored and poverty to name a few (Youth.gov n.d). Youth are more likely to find security in areas that may get them in trouble or around the wrong group of individuals leading to encounters with the law when they do not have a family to turn to (Youth.gov n.d). Over the course of studying risk factors in the individual's family, it has been said that when families have four or more children in the household the likelihood of delinquency occurring is extremely high (Shader, n.d). Studies conducted in recent years have found that single-parent homes tend to produce youth that is delinquent based on the living conditions and the lack of resources (Shader, n.d).

Peers

Socially, factors that may lead youth to show signs of delinquency may be due to peer influence in which social learning theory may come into play (NSW Government Communities & Justice 2014). Involvement with gangs may lead to change in behavior, spending time with peer groups in which delinquent acts and risky behavior occurs may increase the likelihood of delinquency along with bullying and rejection (OJJDP 2015). Often youth get involved or encounter these factors due to the lack of positive social influences and low amounts of positive social opportunities.

Community and School

Community and school factors can change the behavior of youth and lead them to a life of delinquency (Youth.gov n.d). Many of the risk factors consist of poor performance in an education setting, living in high crime communities and those neighborhoods that lack social organizations to keep the youth away from criminal offenders (Youth.gov n.d). Some other factors revolving around schools and communities

that deal with safety issues that are not being addressed. When looking at the number of risk factors it is hard to say if one factor pushes youth to act out in a manner that could lead them to a life of crime, but it is possible that with the combination of multiple factors the likelihood is greater than not.

Protective Factors

Risk factors have been shown to contribute to the likelihood that an individual with becoming delinquent when there is a combined factor that comes from family, peer and person issues. Protective factors have been found to be efforts or events that lower the chance of juveniles turning to a life of crime or showing increasing signs of delinquency (SAMHSA 2015). Examples of protective factors consist of community service programs, parent participation in daily activities, sporting events and church programs to list a few.

Individual

When looking at the effects of protective factors research has identified that in the individual with high IQ, this individual has a mind that promotes resiliency and focuses on doing the best they can (OJJDP 2015). Those individuals that display social skills that are positive, feel good about pleasing adults and those that are caretakers, those with close relationships with clubs and religious organizations tend to be less likely to show signs of delinquency (Youth.gov n.d). When individuals have good morals and a positive frame of thought on many occasions the individual thinks before they act and pick the best course of action to satisfy others in society and stay out of trouble (OJJDP 2015).

Family

When families possess protective factors such as allowing youth to speak openly about problems that are happening whether it is in the home or in the day-to-day activities it is believed that delinquency can be pinpointed and addressed before youth encounter police or be placed in some type of detention facility (Youth.gov n.d).

According to OJJDP (2015), a youth's family that contains a positive adult is a factor said to be a factor that lowers the likelihood of a child becoming or showing delinquent behavior towards adults. Having a positive family atmosphere is said to be the leading factor in minimizing delinquency. Over time many have suggested that it takes a village to raise a child (OJJDP 2015).

Peers

Protective factors as it relates to an individual's peers has shown that those individuals that have good relationships with others that believe in team building, supporting one another and keeping each other from taking part in delinquent behaviors is a major factor to prevent criminal behavior (OJJDP 2015). When an individual takes part in positive peer groups and becomes active, it lowers the likelihood of taking part in delinquent behavior due to their time spent with friends and being productive in a positive group setting (OJJDP 2015).

Previous research on the study of juvenile delinquency reviewed the likelihood of how and when juveniles begin to show signs of delinquent behavior or commit acts of delinquency starts and ends with risk and protective factors (OJJDP 2015). Many of the researchers that study delinquency feels that there is a need to consider risk and

protective factors that can potentially trigger something in juveniles to act in a manner that if they were of legal adult age the act would be considered criminal (OJJDP 2015). According to The National Institute of Justice (2018), Risk and Protective Factors can be classified as pre-existing personal characteristics and even environmental conditions that can affect the chances of delinquent behavior and other unfavorable acts committed by juveniles. When evaluating the two factors, risk factors are things that will potentially increase the chances that a person will suffer harm and protective factors are those things that will decrease the effects of a particular risk factor (Youth.Gov n.d). Over the years, research on risk factors has presented a large body of work that identifies when a youth has the potential to become involved in criminal activity.

As we have seen over time, risk factors seem to promote delinquency whether it involves the child, family, peers, schools or the community. Risk factors must be addressed with protective factors to lower the rate at which delinquency occurs when it comes to juveniles. With the list of contributing factors addressed in research, a look at policies will be conducted and interviews of individuals from Southeast Florida will be obtained to see if policies are affecting environmental factors which prevent juveniles from getting the assistance, they need to prevent them from being re-offenders or adult criminals over time.

Recidivism

Within the United States criminal and juvenile justice system, recidivism has been one of the most evaluated topics over the years (National Institute of Justice 2014). Recidivism is a concept that refers to an individual committing an act that he or she has

previously been arrested and punished for then repeated the same or similar act after going through some form of rehabilitation (Thomas 2014). According to the National Institute of Justice (2014), recidivism can also consist of a person being re-arrested, reconvicted and/or reincarcerated. In studies conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, it has been found that the rate of recidivism is alarmingly high, 77% of offenders have been rearrested within three to 5 years after being released from prison (Keller 2016). According to Keller (2016) individuals that have been arrested and released from prison by the age of 21 had an arrest rate of approximately 68 % and those individuals released from prison after the age of 60 made up only 16 %.

For decades criminologists have studied the concept of recidivism and determined that this topic brings about a significant problem within the criminal justice system, because of the process of punishing some individuals for criminal behavior serves a great deal of significance in the attempt to reduce the possibility that the offender will repeat the same or similar criminal behavior (Good Therapy 2018). Defining and understanding the cause of recidivism has been complicated for researchers due to a number of factors, such as economics, lifestyle, sociological and individual person (Good Therapy 2018). According to Good Therapy (2018), the most relevant causes of recidivism have been documented as follows:

- Factors surrounding an individual within the criminal justice system can contribute to an individual being likelier to engage in criminal behavior.

Examples of this would be an individual who is known to sell drugs will be able

to network with other drug dealers or due to violence in the prison system an individual may show greater signs of aggression in order to protect themselves.

- Incarceration can prevent offenders from obtaining suitable jobs due to their criminal records.
- When incarcerated treatment is not relatively available and individuals with mental health issues may not receive the recommended treatment.

Policies and Regulations

The circumstances surrounding policymaking are constantly evolving. Policy and regulations have always been a point of interest in the United States. As a culture, we have learned to balance our lives based on policies that are put in place known as laws to govern all constituents. By definition, the word policy is a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, or individual (Bylund 2017). Currently, policymakers have run into a legality crisis throughout the country and cannot routinely count on existing standards as a condition for policymaking (Bylund 2017).

At this point the Policies implemented seems to only benefit the political institutions. According to De Jonge et al., (2018), when one attempts to influence people's behavior, one should take into account that the people one is targeting have an opinion about this. In the fields of social psychology and marketing, theories have been developed to understand the reactions of people that are subjected to such influence attempts. To understand the decision-making process in the political system the topic has to be significant. No new ideas have just been invented to make any of the policies easier. So many times, the decisions have been overlooked on behalf of the media and decision-

makers (Bylund, 2017). In some cases, it seems that political decision-makers do not like to be disturbed by confusion and negative circumstances. They would rather get a vote from the participants that ensure the feedback is similar to their decision-making process. Policymakers are not fair with the approach to equality and getting results.

Summary

In summary, this chapter includes an examination of juvenile delinquency, the history of the juvenile justice system as well as the juvenile justice system within the state of Florida, theoretical models that was used to gain an understanding of why juveniles commit certain acts, along with contributing risk and protective factors that can aid in understanding how certain acts can be triggered. The literature review provides details of previous research and provides ideas as to how to address the problem at hand, which may promote more research on the study in the area of Southeast Florida and throughout the United State and other countries around the world. The following chapter will identify the methodology in which the researcher will use in this study of why juveniles commit delinquent acts and whether policies contribute to delinquency.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the contributing factors to juvenile delinquency and recidivism in Southeast Florida. Using qualitative methods, I conducted the study to provide insights into understanding the causes of juvenile delinquent behavior and recidivism and to identify potential actions that might lower the rate of recidivism among juveniles in the region. In Southeast Florida, there is a recidivism rate among juvenile offenders of approximately 42%. This study was conducted to help explain the causation of juvenile delinquency and to assist in developing programs or intervention strategies to lower the rate of juvenile delinquency and recidivism. In this chapter, the following areas will be the focal points of the field research conducted: the research design, sample, role of the researcher, descriptions, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

For this study, I selected a qualitative approach to gain a clearer understanding of how policies contribute to increased juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Previous research that used a quantitative approach to gain an understanding of this phenomenon brought back numerical findings that did not clearly explain the driving force for delinquent behavior among juveniles. A general inductive approach was used to explore why juveniles conduct delinquent acts and the environmental impact of juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

The general inductive approach involves a detailed review of collected raw data to find concepts, themes, or a model to clearly explain the data (Thomas, 2006). The general inductive approach allows a researcher to compress a large amount of information collected from previous researchers and interviews conducted for a study, known as raw data. With a general inductive approach, a researcher summarizes the raw data and pinpoints a link between the research questions and themes found throughout the study (Thomas, 2006).

The research questions in this study were composed to gain an understanding of previous research on juvenile delinquency as it pertains to how environmental factors contribute to juvenile delinquency and whether government policies are affecting the environmental factors and causing an increase in juvenile delinquency and recidivism. Though many studies show that combined environment factors contribute to delinquency, there is a gap in the literature regarding identifying how certain implemented policies affect environmental factors. With this research, I sought to obtain information from a referred group of participants ages 21 to 25 who were just outside the classification *juvenile*. Participants gave insight as to what they see occurring with juveniles due to policies in place, such as NCLB and zero-tolerance.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher as it pertains to qualitative studies is to act as an instrument of data collection (Simon, 2011). The data are collected by the human instrument instead of being collected by inventories, handouts, questionnaires, machines, or other technological entities. In this study, I played a major part in the data collection

process. As the researcher, I collected data by asking participants questions, documenting their answers, and interpreting the information collected from the participants. While collecting data, I observed participants while being interviewed, including expressions, reactions, eye contact, body language, and visible comfort levels.

Methodology

Participants

In this study, I collected data from a sample of 15 individuals who reside in Southeast Florida and have had some type of interactions with law enforcement or showed signs of delinquent behavior as a juvenile. Selected participants were between ages 21 and 25. Participants were selected for this study using a purposeful sampling method known as *snowball sampling*. When using the snowball sampling method, a researcher uses participants to recruit other participants for the study. The purpose of this sample method is to reach a population that, in many cases, can be hard to reach without going through a government entity, dealing with minors, or using previous information about the participants (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, n.d.). Snowball sampling was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to tap into a population that may not have been otherwise available. Snowball sampling assisted me in finding characteristics about a body of individuals who I may not have been aware of. Using this method assisted me because I had a limited budget and time constraints, and the study was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

In theory, the snowballing method allows a researcher to select one or two individuals randomly to take part in a study, and those selected participants recruit other

participants to grow the participant population (Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching, n.d.). In this study, I asked individuals in the surrounding area of Southeast Florida to take part in the research study. Individuals currently under the age of 21 were excluded. No individuals who were currently under any government supervision, such as probation or parole, were included in this study. Due to the nature of the study and the focus target area of Southeast Florida, if an individual did not grow up or live in the area as a juvenile, they were not asked to participate. For this study, I sought participants who could give an account as to what it was like growing up in the specific region under study.

Prior to conducting interviews, I provided a consent form to the participants. The consent form advised that the information obtained would only be used for research purposes. I also read to the participants a brief statement as to why the study was being conducted and what the goal of the research study was. There were no monetary incentives for the participants, and the participants could withdraw from the study at any point. Each participant was given a participant number so their identity was concealed, freeing them to openly give answers that are honest and true. Participants were not precluded based on gender; M for male and F for female was included with their number identifier.

Vulnerable Population

When researchers conduct studies on a particular group of individuals, they must be aware of the possibility of selecting an individual who may be classified as part of vulnerable populations. According to Statistics Solutions (2018), a vulnerable population

consists of a group of people who need to be protected from any risk that may arise if they participate in a study. When using individuals who are classified as vulnerable populations, a researcher may run into individuals who may have a low capacity of understanding of what is being asked of them and may not be able to give consent (Statistics Solutions, 2018). According to Shivayogi (2013), the vulnerable population includes children, minors, pregnant women and their fetus, those housed in prisons or correctional institutions, individuals who are terminally ill, elderly individuals, mentally ill individuals, and people who are visually and/or hearing impaired.

In this body of work, I sought to gain an understanding of why juveniles commit delinquent acts and repeat the same offenses. Juveniles are people under age 16, 18, or in some states, 20 years of age, who have been found guilty of committing offenses against the law (Rush, 2003). The study looked to obtain the views of individuals as to the cause of their past activities and why they commit the same acts repeatedly. Because juveniles fall under the vulnerable population category and cannot give consent to be a participant in a study, I looked to protect this group by using individuals who were just outside the juvenile classification and could legally consent (individuals ages 21 to 25). Each participant was asked to complete a form stating that they were participating in the interview process under their own free will and that they understood they could stop the interview processes at any time. Also, the participants were assured that the information provided would only be used for the purpose of gaining insight as to why they believe delinquent behavior occurs so that the researcher could come up with themes and possible ways to prevent other juveniles from committing some of the same acts.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered through established qualitative means consistent with generalization, documentation and interview (Creswell, 2013):

1. RQ1: What are the social and environmental risk factors that may contribute to juvenile delinquency?
2. RQ2: How has the NCLB act narrowing of the classroom curriculum affected juvenile's ability to learn?
3. RQ3: How did the Zero Tolerance policies of 1990s affect student's educational opportunities in the Southeast region?

Setting

This study was conducted in Southeast Florida. All interviews were conducted in a reserved study area at the local library. This reserved study area was only assessable to those holding the key to the room, the researcher who reserved the room for the sole purpose of conducting the one on one in person interviews. On Saturday and Sunday during the hours of 10 A.M- 6 P.M, each participant was able to meet with the researcher. The participants were able to select a time slot appropriate for them on the days provided. Each individual interview lasted approximately 45 to an hour. The room in which the interviews took place was equipped with a table and comfortable chairs. The room provided at the local library was private and only the researcher and one participant were in the room at a time.

Data Collection

For this research study data were collected from one primary source. Interviews of individuals obtained from participants' referrals were the key sources of data collection. In this study the research used face to face interview, which is one of the most commonly used methods in qualitative research. The researcher took a personal approach to obtain as much information to exhaust all information needed to find common themes and determine the effects of risk factors and how policies effect the likelihood of a juvenile showing signs of delinquency or having interactions with law enforcement. The target population for this research study was individuals' 21 to 25 years of age, which are not a vulnerable population.

A structured interview was conducted by the researcher. The participants were asked to answer questions revolving around the state of juvenile delinquency and recidivism in Southeast Florida. The research asked questions that were structured and the same questions were used in each interview. Face to face structured interviews allowed the researcher to accurately screen those participants taking part in the study. The researcher was able to identify individuals better than if the researcher were using online surveys to collect data. Online surveys can allow inaccuracies because participants may try to omit certain information when not in the presence of the researcher (DeFranzo, 2014).

With face to face interview the researcher was able to capture a number of cues from the participant whether it was verbal or non-verbal, the researcher also was able to identify emotions and behaviors not able to be identified through online surveys

(DeFranzo, 2014). With this particular data collection method, the researcher was able to maintain control of the interview. The research kept the participant focus and on track until the interview had been completed.

The interviews were conducted in an enclosed area located inside local library. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Each participant was identified by a number paired with a letter identifying whether the participant is (M) male or (F) female. Upon completion of all interviews, the recordings were played back at a speed that allowed the researcher to document all that was said during the interview. Each interview was reread while listening to the recording to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

In this study, participant interviews were conducted to collect the necessary data. The researcher used coding as a qualitative data analysis method. According to Morse & Williams (2019) coding is a key data organizing strategy that assists researchers in processing data that has been collected. Coding allows the data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted so that the researcher can have a platform to organize and construct a clear meaning as to what has been found within the raw data (Morse & Williams 2019). The researcher used the data collected along with the use of coding to identify emerging themes. The following steps were used during the research study to analyze the collected data:

1. After the researcher completed all interviews, the researcher reviewed the recordings of each interview multiple times in order to accurately transcribe each of the

fifteen-participant interviews. The researcher reviewed all the data twice prior to composing a list of categories, themes or patterns. Upon finding themes the researcher then gave those themes an initial code.

2. The researcher then took on the task of sorting out and grouping data by the research questions after reading through all of the responses to the interview questions. The researcher then took on highlighting information that stood out and that was useful in the study, which allowed the researcher to compose a master coding list that consists of response categories based on the questions answered by each participant. The researcher used the “5W-1H” method (who, what, where, when, why and how). This set the foundation to systematically explore and examine data. The researcher broke down the data by labeling information by categories and comparing the relationships found in the data based on similarities and differences in answers given to interview questions by participants. The researcher used manual-open coding and evaluated and categorized data, terms, and information by using highlighters and post-it notes in order to analyze the data systematically (Morse and Williams, 2019).

3. Once the master coding list was completed the researcher reviewed the list and determined if there were common themes within the raw data. According to Vaismoradi, and Snelgrove, (2019) themes are patterns in data that capture significant or pertinent information about the research question and the data.

4. Once the researcher had identified common themes and patterns in the data and had composed a Master coding list, the researcher then reviewed the established themes to ensure that they make sense, does the data support the themes that has been

composed, does themes overlap and whether the researcher has tried to fit too much information into one theme. The researcher also must look at the information to determine if there are subthemes or are there more themes that can be found in the collected data.

5. The researcher identified the themes that have been found in the study and define what each particular theme means and how they may relate to one another.

6. An analysis was written up based off on the researcher's finding and presented in chapter IV a detailed account of how participants responded to each question within the study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Prior to beginning any interviews, the researcher advised the interviewee of any risk that they could possibly incur during the study. This study involved little to no risk and did not pose any harm to participants. Participants were advised that no payment of any kind would be offered or paid out for their participation in the study. All documents and correspondents collected for this study will remain with the researcher in a secure space under lock and key. This includes all data collected and analyzed while conducting this study. The documents and data collected will remain on recording device and stored in a safe. Data will be kept by the researcher for a period of approximately 5 years. All participants were advised that being a part of this study is voluntary and they do not have to participate. Also, the researcher advised all participants that they could stop the interview process at any time.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented information to include the research design, the purpose of the study, the research question, setting, participants, data collection methods, as well as the data analysis process. Results from the qualitative data analysis will be reported in Chapter IV, followed by implications and conclusions that will be presented in chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore how policies may affect risk factors contributing to juvenile delinquency and recidivism in Southeast Florida. Using qualitative methods to conduct the research, I hoped to provide insights into the causes of juvenile delinquent behavior and recidivism and identify actions that could lower recidivism rates among juveniles in Southeast Florida. In Southeast Florida, there has been a steady increase in juvenile delinquency, and juvenile offenders constitute approximately 42% of the area's recidivism rate. I attempted to identify how policies affect risk factors such as a juvenile's family status, environment, schooling, and more. I hoped to explain the cause of juvenile delinquency occurrences and assist in developing programs or intervention strategies to lower juvenile delinquency and recidivism rates. This chapter includes the research questions that guided the study. I also describe the environmental risk factors that may contribute to juvenile delinquency, identify how NCLB affected juveniles' ability to learn, and explain how the zero-tolerance policies of the 1990s affected students' educational opportunities in Southeast Florida. The research findings consist of an analysis of the structured interview questions.

Setting

The data collection process for this study occurred in Southeast Florida. All interviews took place in an enclosed reserved study area at a local public library. The reserved study area was assessable only to me because I reserved the room for the sole purpose of conducting the one-on-one in-person interviews. I met with the participants on

Saturday and Sunday during daytime hours. Each participant selected a time appropriate for them on the days provided. The room at the library was private, and only I and one participant were in the room at a time. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I sanitized the room before and after each interview. Each participant and I sat 6 feet away from each other. The room in which the interviews took place was equipped with a table and comfortable chairs. Participants were required to wear a cloth mask over their nose and mouth due to CDC guidelines for all public locations.

Demographics

The participants in the study consisted of six African American women, four African American men, three Hispanic women, and two Caucasian men. All participants were between 21 and 25 years of age and were from the Southeast region of Florida. The participants contributed a substantial amount of data that allowed me to identify themes to answer the research questions. Each participant contributed their voice and view to the study.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through face-to-face structured interviews. Through solicitation in Southeast Florida, I recruited two participants. Each participant was then asked to refer other individuals who may be able to assist with this study. Snowball sampling is a participant recruiting technique that allows a researcher to identify potential subjects for a study (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, each participant had the option to take part in the interview virtually via Skype, Zoom, or FaceTime, but all 15 participants opted for the in-person interview.

According to McLeod (2014), structured interviews involve a set of prepared questions that a researcher asks each participant word for word in the same order. The interviewer does not deviate from the interview questions (McLeod, 2014). Structured interviews do not allow the researcher room to probe the participant. The researcher gives the participant the option to address any question they want once the initial interview is complete (McLeod, 2014). In the current study, each interview took between 45 and 60 minutes.

During the interview, I documented the participants' responses via audio recording. I used a printed copy of the research questions as a guide while conducting the interview. After each interview, I played back the audio recording multiple times and transcribed the recording word for word. I reread the transcript while listening to the audio recording to ensure that the transcripts were accurate. Initially, I planned to evaluate the participants' facial expressions and body language to see how the participant reacted to each question, but due to CDC guidelines, each participant was required to wear a mask that covered a good amount of their face. Though I was unable to document participants' facial expressions, their answers to the interview questions provided sufficient data.

Data Analysis

Transcript data collected from the 15 audio-recorded interviews were hand coded to identify common themes and categories. Upon finding themes, I gave those themes an initial code. I then sorted out and grouped data by the research questions after reading through all responses to the interview questions. Highlighting information that stood out

and was useful in the study allowed me to compose a master coding list that consisted of response categories based on the questions answered by each participant. I used the 5W–1H method (who, what, where, when, why, and how). This established the foundation to systematically explore and examine raw data. I broke down the data by labeling information by categories and comparing data relationships based on similarities and differences in answers given to interview questions.

Next, I used manual open coding to evaluate and categorize data, terms, and information using highlighters and post-it notes (see Morse & Williams, 2019). I composed a master coding list and reviewed the list to determine whether there were common themes within the raw data. According to Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019), themes are patterns in data that capture significant or pertinent information about the research question. I pinpointed five themes during the hand-coding process: (a) social and environmental risk factors (i.e., family structure, peer influence, education, and community); (b) influences; (c) narrowing of curriculum; (d) feelings; and (e) zero tolerance policies. The themes were used to answer research questions. Table 1 displays each research question, the interview questions the data were collected from, and the themes that address the research questions.

Table 1*Research Question, Interview Questions, and Themes*

Research question	Interview questions	Themes
RQ1: What are the social and environmental risk factors that may contribute to juvenile delinquency?	1, 2, 3, 4	Theme 1: Social and environmental risk factors Theme 2: Influences Theme 4: Feeling
RQ2: How has the NCLB act narrowing of the classroom curriculum affected juveniles' ability to learn?	5, 6, 7	Theme 3: Narrowing of curriculum Theme 4: Feeling
RQ3: How did the zero tolerance policies of the 1990s affect student's educational opportunities in your community?	8, 9, 10, 11	Theme 5: Zero Tolerance Policies Theme 4: Feeling

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in the qualitative research process can be defined by four characteristics: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility is similar to internal validity in which the researcher inquires about and provides justification for participants' views on events that have occurred in their lives, and the researcher's description of those events is presented in a manner the participants approve of (Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability is similar to external validity and refers to the issue of generalization in terms of case-to-case transfer (Patton, 2015). The researcher's responsibility is to provide as much information on the subject for readers to have a working knowledge of the study so they can apply that knowledge to similar circumstances (Patton, 2015).

Dependability is similar to reliability and focuses on the researcher establishing that the study's findings are consistent and repeatable (Statistics Solutions, 2018). The researcher has the responsibility to show that the study was conducted in a logical, traceable, and documented manner (Patton, 2015). In qualitative research, confirmability can be compared to objectivity. According to Nowell et al. (2017), confirmability indicates that the researcher's explanations and conclusions are clearly derived from the data collected. Confirmability also requires the researcher to give explanations of how the conclusions were drawn. I collected data from participants selected through solicitation, in addition to the use of snowball sampling. With documentation of structured interviews, the necessary steps were taken to establish trustworthiness.

Credibility

The research study was conducted according to Walden University's IRB ethical standards. The researcher used snowball sampling to identify research participants. According to Patton, M.Q. (2015), snowball sampling is an approach in which a researcher can obtain quality amounts of information from crucial informants. Structured interviews were administered to participants between the ages of 21-25 who have shown signs of delinquent behavior. Purposeful sampling was used for interview recruitment. According to Patton, M.Q. (2015), purposeful sampling is the strategic selection of information-rich cases that illuminate the inquiry questions being investigated by nature. The researcher used a variety of sources to ensure reliability. The researcher used the methods mentioned above to establish trustworthiness and ensure credibility.

Transferability

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to explore how policies may affect risk factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency and recidivism in Southeast Florida. Research efforts focused on individuals raised or who lived in the Southeast region of Florida and are between the ages 21-25. This research study can be repeated in different regions throughout the world. In the United States, an increase in juvenile delinquency fluctuates and, at some points, are alarmingly high. This research can be replicated, and a quantitative method could be used to collect data and gain an understanding of how policies may influence rates of juvenile delinquency and recidivism. This study can provide insight into what policy characteristics negatively impact the likelihood of juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

Dependability

Dependability favors reliability, focusing on whether the research study's findings are consistent and repeatable (Statistics Solutions n.d.). To ensure repeatability, the researcher provided clear details on the process of recruiting participants, data collection, and the data analysis process. The researcher created a journal to document the research process and indicated progression as the research process advanced. The research focused on a meaningful issue that has been identified historically, but no resolution has been found. This qualitative inquiry was necessary because gaining more insight may lead to a revision in policies, more community awareness, and addressing an ongoing problem. In this study, all participants were treated equally and ethically at all times. Each participant was given the option to participate via video chat due to Covid-19. They were allowed to

stop participating in the study and were given an opportunity to ensure the validity of the interview details collected. The research took the necessary steps to ensure that each participant's identity was protected and that the information provided would only be used for study purposes.

Confirmability

The researcher reviewed and compared the findings obtained from the data sources. This process is known as triangulation, a step taken on behalf of the investigator in an effort to minimize bias. The researcher also allowed the participants to review transcripts and data results to ensure the interpretation is accurate. The researcher was objective due to the method in which participants were recruited. The researcher used the snowball method, which limited the researcher's knowledge of the participants' race or gender until the day of the interview. The researcher reviewed data presented in preceding peer-reviewed articles that focused on policies, juvenile delinquency, and recidivism; to ensure the integrity of the study.

Results

The three primary research questions: What are the social and environmental risk factors that may contribute to juvenile delinquency? How has the NCLB act narrowing of the classroom curriculum affected juvenile's ability to learn? How did the Zero Tolerance policies of the 1990s affect student's educational opportunities In Miami Dade County? These research questions were answered by using multiple sources such as face to face interviews, video and telephone interviews. The themes associated with research question 1 are Theme 1: (Social and environmental risk factors), Theme 2: (Influences), and

Theme 4: (Feeling). Themes associated with research question 2 are Theme 3: (Narrowing of the curriculum) and Theme 4: (Feeling). The themes associated with research question 3 are Theme 5: (Zero Tolerance Policies) and Theme 4: (Feeling).

Interview questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 support research question 1: What are the social and environmental risk factors that may contribute to juvenile delinquency? With juvenile delinquent studies, there has not been one deciding factor as to what causes juvenile delinquency. Still, it has been found that when a juvenile is faced with more than one risk factor, the juvenile is more likely to become an offender (NSW Government Communities & Justice 2014). With the studying of risk factors, much of the studies focus on the likelihood that a juvenile will become violent or evaluate to what extent of delinquency a juvenile will display. According to Shader, M. (n.d), risk factors have been defined as events, characteristics, variables, and hazards that, if placed upon an individual that can possibly cause a person to be harmed and in turn, display delinquent and/or violent behavior.

Interview Question 1: Please explain how your immediate family was structured as a juvenile and how was it growing up in that family atmosphere?

Participant 1 said,

“I was raised by a single mother who worked multiple jobs. She did the best that she could to make sure my siblings and I had not only what we wanted but what we needed. She made every day great, and she was stern about us getting a good education and making something of ourselves.”

Participant 2: My Mother died when I was a little boy. So, I was then raised by my Grandparents, and shortly after, they too passed away. My Aunt raised me. She did what she could. She had no biological kids of her own, just me. I can tell that parenting was not her thing, but she loved and supported me all the same. I am forever grateful for her doing so. It was rough growing up in the neighborhood that I did, seeing things I really should not have seen. My Aunt made sure I stayed busy, so I had no reason to linger outside as much.

Participant 3: I could say I practically raised myself far from the feminine aspects my dad tried. My father raised me. I have the slightest clue who my mother is. My father was and still is great. He was even the Co Cheerleading Coach for my optimist team two years in a row and did not care what no one thought I was his baby. He had a good team to back him far as friends who helped along the way, but they were also men. I have no complaints. He did the best he could, and I turned out great.

Participant 4: I lived in a house with a whole lot of people. My parents, big Brother, myself, aunt, uncle, three children/ my cousins, and our grandparents/their parents. It could be great at times, and it can be bad at times. The memories will last a lifetime for sure. Sometimes you get lost in the mix. When you need the attention for personal growth, it's not there because no one is available. They are working.

Participant 5: I lived in a home where some of everyone lived with us at some point. If they needed a home and we had a place, sometimes it was the couch or a mattress on the floor. It did not matter they could stay. That is not a good environment for little girls. I was molested by a family friend when I was about ten. I told no one it

created an angry little girl because I felt no one was there nor cared to protect me. I lived with my parents, and they were angry drunks.

Participant 6: I grew up in a single-parent home in an urban community. My mom worked long hours, which left my sister and me home alone a lot. My mom was a teen mom, having my sister at 16. She was very strict and vowed not to have her daughters become a product of our environment like her. My mom had high expectations for us, and education was very important. She always said to us that we will not be like her and will have more than a high school diploma.

Participant 7 said, "I grew up in a household with my mother, stepfather, and stepbrother. It was a decent atmosphere most of the time."

Participant 8: The family structure consisted of my mother, stepfather, and sister. We were on well-fare and lived in a commonly known Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY. Although we were on welfare, my sister and I had no idea, and we had no idea what poverty was because we were satisfied with what we had. My mother was very family-oriented. We went to the library together, walked to school, she went to PTA meetings, we had group therapy (I had no idea until I got older and asked why we went to those meetings every week).

Participant 9: I do not know my family. I grew up in foster care and bounced from home to home. Some of the foster families were great, while others not so much.

Participant 10: My immediate family structure as a child were two married parents with three minor children. Growing up in the home was normal to the since of a

church going family, middle class workers, and positive surrounding of family and friends.

Participant 11: Growing up, my immediate family structure consisted of my mom, grandmother, and two younger brothers. My grandmother was the caretaker, and my mother was the breadwinner. My grandmother ensured me and my brother went to school every day, our life very structure, taught my brother and me how to stay on track and out of trouble. My mother taught us what hard work was about. I don't remember a day my mother didn't have to work one of three jobs.

Participant 12: Growing up, my family consisted of my mother and father, who were married at an early age. My father only had a middle school education, and my mother had just finished high school when she had me. I was the oldest of three boys. My dad worked as a sanitation worker and showed his boys what hard work really was. My mother worked at a school for girls who were pregnant at an early age, similar to her. My family was very structured. When adults were talking, the kids stayed quiet, and beating came often. I usually got the most beatings because I was the oldest and should have been there to stop my brothers from doing anything wrong.

Participant 13: My immediate family consisted of two separated parents. I spent one week in one household and the alternate week in the other home, both of which were located in the same school district. My father was married to my step-mother at the time, and they together had one child, my half-sister. From my teenage perspective, my mother was single and could not provide the same quality of life in terms of financial accommodations, though she worked twice as hard. Growing up in two separate

households with completely different rules and social determinants was challenging and confusing. I remember easily being able to manipulate one parent over the other for my gain because their communication as co-parents was poor, to say the least. I lacked structure and ultimately became a very rebellious adolescent. I didn't feel like I completely fit into my father's new, somewhat blended family, nor did I completely resonate with my mother's approach to mother, daughter bonding, or parenting; she herself coming from a broken and tumultuous upbringing where her Mother murdered her Father after years of physical and emotional abuse.

Participant 14: My immediate family structure as a juvenile was that I was raised in a single-family home, being the second oldest out of 4 children, myself, two sisters, and one brother. I saw the struggles that my mother had being a single parent. My mother not only had to take on a lot of responsibility but still manage to show us love, attention, guidance, energy, discipline, etc. Not having the experience of being raised in a two-parent home has influenced me as an adult, as I believe in family and fully believe that children would have a better upbringing being raised in that dynamic.

Participant 15: My family structure as a juvenile was strict but not extreme. My dad and stepmom raised me after the death of my mother at birth. I am the oldest of the four. Growing up in that atmosphere was rewarding.

Interview Question 2: How did growing up in the southeast region of the United States influence your behavior between the ages of 13 and 18?

Participant 1: The neighborhood I grew up in was not the best, and a lot of bad things surrounded me. That tempted me to do things that were not right.

Participant 2: The neighborhood I lived in was not the best, but she and I made sure I stayed out of trouble.

Participant 3: No influence at all. I was a good kid.

Participant 4: I would probably say the different cultures and the way of doing things.

Participant 5: I do not know if it had to with what region I lived in I just believe it was because of the stability of my parents that made me the way that I was.

Participant 6: My behavior was influenced by my environment. We were raised to defend ourselves and never let anyone take advantage of you. I grew up speaking my mind and had an I don't care attitude. This type of behavior prevented others from bothering me but also got me in trouble in school. I had to learn the hard way that I didn't have to respond or say something back. I guess it was learning to pick and choose my battles.

Participant 7: Growing up between the ages of 13 and 18, I had to develop a tough skin, as well as independence.

Participant 8: During this age range, my family and I moved from Brooklyn, NY, to Orlando, FL, then finally ending in Miami, FL. Orlando was the scariest time of our lives. My stepfather was still in NY, and many times we were left home alone because my mother had to work. She taught us not to open the door for anyone, how to catch the bus, and how to make quick meals. Then we moved to Miami and were introduced to aunts and uncles, and I felt like we had other families outside of our immediate families, felt like we belonged. In schools, we were introduced to Haitians versus Americans and

often saw the violence when walking home from school. I graduated from middle school, went on to high school, and felt I had a purpose because I joined the band, and that was my ticket to any HBCU.

Participant 9: I don't believe my growing up in the southeast region influenced my behavior. It was the way I was brought up in general. Being tossed from home to home affected the way I thought and acted towards society.

Participant 10: Growing up in the southeast region didn't have a negative effect on my behavior. My childhood was more sheltered from negative in the world, and our parents kept us in summer programs or community activities.

Participant 11: Living in the southeast region of Florida, I learned that there will always be some type of confrontation or event that could get you in trouble, but it's up to you to make the right and best decision.

Participant 12: Growing up in the Southeast region of Florida was fun but dangerous at the same time. My community had a major drug issue. Shootings and killings happened often. Certain neighborhoods were better than others, but kids were usually safe because respect was giving or else. My dad's family was very large, and people knew not to sell drugs or shoot on particular blocks.

Participant 13: Growing up in the United States' southeast region exposed me to a very fast-paced way of living. Constant exposure to people who seemingly had it all, money, cars, perfect bodies, perfect families made me feel that lifestyle was so attainable yet so far-fetched for someone like myself. I felt the constant need to go above and beyond, be better, do better and never settle. This internal turmoil served as a driving

motivator for me to develop an unrelenting ambition that served as a gift and a curse. I knew that hard work and determination were key, but I sometimes lacked the self-awareness to establish my limitations and boundaries. Like many of my peers, I lived by the mantra of; “by any means necessary.”

Participant 14: My immediate family structure as a juvenile was that I was raised in a single-family home, being the second oldest out of 4 children, myself, two sisters, and one brother. I saw the struggles that my mother had being a single parent. My mother had to take on a lot of responsibility and show us love, attention, guidance, energy, discipline, etc. Not having the experience of being raised in a two-parent home has influenced me as an adult, as I believe in family and fully believe that children would have a better upbringing being raised in that dynamic.

Participant 15: Growing up in the United States’ southeast region influenced me to be a mixture of a follower and a leader. I wanted to fit in, but I also didn’t want to look stuck up.

Interview Question 3: While in school as a juvenile, what would your teachers say about the type of student you were?

Participant 1: I kept to myself, and my grades were okay.

Participant 2: “Teachers Pet”

Participant 3: I tried to do the best that I could. If I did not understand, I got the help that I needed.

Participant 4: In my house, discipline played a big role. I did what I was told end of story, in school or out. I made good grades and was a good student behavior wise.

Participant 5: I was not a pleasant child to have in class because of my anger crying out for attention.

Participant 6: In school, I was the student that talked when bored. So, to some teachers I would be the talkative student but to other teacher they saw it as I needed to be challenged in class. I got the nickname Ms. P by the teachers in school because they said because of my love for education, they could see me as being a teacher. In middle and high, I was more focused on trying to figure out what I wanted to be in life so I spent a lot of time with my guidance counselors to help push me towards the right path by selecting education and psychology, elective classes.

Participant 7: My teachers would say that I was a smart but shy student.

Participant 8: I cannot recall specifically, but never any negative comments. Once I got closer to graduating teachers were pushing for us to take the SAT and ACT and fill out college applications.

Participant 9: I was a good student academically but a terrible student far as behavior.

Participant 10: While in school (elementary, middle, and high), my teachers would say I was only concerned about my appearance. I was always considered the child that would make an excuse to not do something or an excuse to get out of any outside side event. My teachers loved me but always would have said I was a spoiled person with only thoughts of self

Participant 11: When I was younger, my teachers would say that I am a go getter, very driven, and pays close attention to details. My teachers would also say that sports kept me focused.

Participant 12: In school, my teachers would say I was very respectful and helpful. I would finish my classwork and help other students with their work, but at times I would get in trouble for talking.

Participant 13: As a school aged child, my teachers would say I was polite, attentive, completed my assignments on time, and was always respectful. I was engaged in the classroom, asked questions, and was eager to understand the lessons being taught.

Participant 14: Teachers described me as an outspoken student, always willing to learn, not a classroom interrupter.

Participant 15: My teachers would tell me I had potential.

Interview Question 4: As a juvenile, how did your friends influence your decision making and the behaviors you displayed?

Participant 1: They influence a lot of my decisions, whether good and bad. My mother was rarely home, and I do not blame her, but I learned a lot from my friends that were older than me.

Participant 2: I have seen the things that can happen to people when they make bad decisions dead or in jail and I did not want to be like that. So, I was not worried about what others were doing, I did the right thing.

Participant 3: I did my fair share of dirt but mostly for attention. My friends were never the influence that's was all me.

Participant 4: None what so ever.

Participant 5: I had no friends, really no one wanted to be around or deal with me, and I do not blame them. I was a complete mess.

Participant 6: Growing up I had limited friends. I didn't trust a lot of people, and I learned dearly that females could not be trusted. The only friend I did have growing up talked me out of getting in trouble by being a positive influence instead of encouraging some of the negative behaviors that I wanted to do out of anger. During high school, I hung out with older kids which got me in trouble a lot because of skipping school and going to house parties. During this time, my childhood friend was diagnosed with cancer, and it couldn't be my voice of reasoning.

Participant 7: My friends influenced my decision making a lot at this age, everything was done in groups or pairs. Luckily, I had a respectable/responsible group of friends.

Participant 8: There was not much of an influence for anything negative. The group of friends that I had in middle school ended up being the same students in high school with the addition of a few neighborhood kids that we grew up with. We ate lunch together, rode on the same school bus together, so our main focus was what college or university we were going to. We also influenced each other to skip class from time to time and go to the movies. We did this during our senior year, either during test week or when a teacher was absent.

Participant 9: No one influenced me, I was just that way on my own, I was mad at the world because I felt no one cared.

Participant 10: As a juvenile I was never pleased or influenced by others. I would say I was never a follower but also a person that would dare others to do things that I would have never done.

Participant 11: My friends did influence much in my life because if it didn't revolve around sports, I was not participating in it.

Participant 12: My friends didn't influence my behavior at all because I was afraid of my mom or dad coming out to where ever I was and beat me on the spot.

Participant 13: In high school, many of my friends came from backgrounds far more disadvantaged than my own, and they influenced many of the poor decisions I made. Luckily however, I was usually able to pull on my Christian upbringing, and morale when faced with decisions that could land me in bad situations with long term consequences, and made the right choices even when ridiculed for doing so.

Participant 14: As a juvenile my friends and other peers had no direct influence on my actions. I did not do anything I didn't feel comfortable with nor was I concerned with any potential backlash or ridicule that could potentially come from not following the crowd. Indirectly, I may have been influenced to keep up with certain trends in terms of fashion, music and other cultural social issues that were at the forefront at that time.

Participant 15: My friends influenced my decisions to a certain extent. I would weigh out the pros and cons and take a friend's side or choose my own way.

Interview question 5,6 and 7 supports research question 2, which is: How has the NCLB act narrowing of the classroom curriculum affected juveniles' ability to learn? The No Child Left Behind, (NCLB) Act was enacted by lawmakers to reform education

because of the nationwide state of education in our country (US. Dept. of Education n.d.). The purpose was to make schools accountable through standards and standardized testing (US. Dept. of Education n.d.). With an increase in standardized testing forcing the education system to narrow the curriculum, there has been an increase in student limitations. Standardized tests have been said to have limited students learning because they focus only on cognitive dimensions, ignoring many other qualities that are essential to student success (NCTE 2014).

Interview Question 5: After the implementation of standardized testing, how did you view the quality of your education thereafter?

Participant 1: The curriculum had totally changed and I did not feel like I learned anything at all other than how to get by on the test. The quality was low.

Participant 2: There was no room for the kids to learn the curriculum change drastically. The quality has changed.

Participant 3: I felt a lot of pressure was placed on us as well as the teachers. The quality of education was not the best because some things were taken out such as Music and Spanish.

Participant 4: This act was implemented when I was in High school about to enter my senior year. It did not affect the way I learned. I was not affected by it and the quality of education stayed the same, they were getting prepared for the change.

Participant 5: This system was created in my opinion not to help the children but to establish failures. The amount of stress that was placed on the schools around the

country staff and students. To uphold a certain standard just to prove what seems to be a ridiculous stat is crazy.

Participant 6: The implementation of standardized testing made education a little hard for me because I am not a good test taker. I feel like the quality of the test did not align with skills mastered in class.

Participant 7: After standardized testing, education became dull and more focused on testing specs vs. engagement.

Participant 8: The quality of my education in my opinion was still diverse and rich, although I did not pass the reading part of the FCAT as of yet, I was not in any intensive reading classes. I still had AP Biology, music, and a technology class just to name a few.

Participant 9: The No Child Left Behind Act seems to be catered to standardize testing for students more so than the actual curriculum. This puts extreme pressure on the Teachers trying to make the state or school quota then the actual success of the students. This is not helping the students at all. They are not being prepared for tomorrows future just for tomorrow test. It's terrible you judge children based on testing but some of these students have excellent grades but are not great test takers. It's terrible you judge children based on testing but some of these students have excellent grades but are not great test takers.

Participant 10: I attended private schools which there were no such things as a standardized testing but when I did attend public school and the test were required, my

mindset was at ease of not so much of things giving but more of individual independent studying.

Participant 11: After the implementation of standardized testing, it seemed like school was no longer a challenge, I didn't feel like I was learning anything new. I felt like I learned just enough to get through the test. I received less school work, accountability and classroom structure.

Participant 12: Though I was a great student, I felt that the education system failed me. I was a straight A and B student. After school implemented standardized test my grade fell to Bs and Cs. I hated taking test. It was so bad that I failed the FCAT twice and had to take it again over the summer in order to graduate high school. Many of my friends failed and have not gone back to get their high school diploma.

Participant 13: Standardized testing consisted of painfully long weeks with very structured testing rooms with little social interaction outside of the lunch period. While it was not fun in the moment, the tests always made me feel like I had been taught material worthy of state examinations and comparisons to students in schools throughout the state. I felt the tests compelled my instructors to teach the material we'd be tested for, so that we would be prepared to perform on the standardized exam; which ultimately, in my opinion promoted preparation for the SAT and college readiness.

Participant 14: The program did not add or subtract to my approach to learning.

Participant 15: I viewed it in a negative way. I felt that it created stress in the classroom and at home.

Interview Question 6: How did the focus on standardized testing change the resources in the schools you have attended?

Participant 1: We got more funding that afforded us a new library.

Participant 2: There were plenty of resources given so that the testing could be a success.

Participant 3: As I stated before, things were taken out so that other things can be put into place to focus on the test.

Participant 4: The school was preparing for the change and holding meetings to do so.

Participant 5: The resources in some respects were great and lack in other areas.

Participant 6: Teachers stopped teaching the standards but started teaching the test (how to take the test, process of elimination, and skills that were only on the test).

Participant 7: I would not say that resources have changed because of testing.

Participant 8: Resources have changed in a sense where teachers are now being forced to teach to meet the needs of the students as it pertains to a test. Simple trade classes such as home economics are no longer offered in schools. Instead, we have intensive reading 1, 2, and 3. Realistically this will not help a student succeed in life.

Participant 9: The resources were there but just was not used as if they were not needed other than what was used to prepare you for testing.

Participant 10: When standardized testing was given to school, it appeared as if it was to fail the students that didn't have the solid foundations. But for the schools it

offered teachers more money for curriculums and equipment for classroom setting (materials).

Participant 11: It honestly seemed like we got less books, classes were limited to English, reading and math. Science was a focal point but only for certain great levels. It seemed like less funding went into elective courses such as art, learning a second language and even after school programs that didn't revolve around test taking.

Participant 12: Many of the fun programs such as afterschool art, musical theater and sports were substituted for test prep. This left many students like myself with nothing to do to past time away from test taking. Funding seemed nonexistent to school if it didn't have something to do with testing. You could even see that teachers weren't up for just teaching test prep stuff.

Participant 13: I think that the focus on standardized testing improved the resources in the schools, because the school wanted us students to perform well academically, and therefore invested in evidence-based learning materials to produce the best outcomes.

Participant 14: Resources were indeed allocated to the school that I attended. In some respect it may have added a certain degree of stress for the teachers and administrators as they were more concerned with the school having a passing grade as opposed to focusing their efforts on the behaviors that would drive a better grade.

Participant 15: The resources at my school were there but only during school hours. Not too much after school resources.

Interview Question 7: What economic impact has the no child left behind act have on your educational and employment opportunities?

Participant 1: It provided more funding.

Participant 2: More funding was given to hire the best quality of Teachers to get the job done.

Participant 3: I cannot really say.

Participant 4: I believe that more funds were granted to get the job done effectively for the next school year. It had no real effect on me I don't believe.

Participant 5: I am not sure

Participant 6: I honestly don't think the no child left behind law had an effect on my education. Far as employment, it made the passion for education stronger. I love working with kids and watching their educational journeys expand no matter their background.

Participant 7: The no child left behind act has given me access to resources to help with my educational and employment opportunities.

Participant 8: This law holds teachers and students accountable for their academic performance, it also creates anxiety, insecurities, and a level of uncertainty for both teacher and student. As a result of this we've experienced dropout rates increase, and graduation rates decrease.

Participant 9: I was not able to get my high school diploma, instead I got a Certificate of Completion because I could not pass the test. I got a good score in reading, but I kept failing the Math portion by one or two points of the passing score. I got

accepted into College, but I had to pass the test by a certain time, or I was not allowed to get in. That frustrated me because I graduated with a B average that seem like it did not matter. So, I ended up transferring my credits to a private school that was not testing to get my High School diploma to get into College but that was years after I graduated high school.

Participant 10: I honestly couldn't say, because I went to a private school, so I did not see how it helped or brought about change.

Participant 11: I don't feel that it affected me first hand but I've seen where students were still left behind in some way or fashion. For example, students who had learning disabilities were just pushed through the different grade levels which limited the amount of skill to obtain a career or work a steady job.

Participant 12: I wouldn't say it changed much for me but many of my friends that did not graduate because they didn't pass the FCAT work jobs and can't say they have a career. Some that do have some type of career went and got a GED to become police officers or firefighters. I was able to pass the test after a few tries and headed to college.

Participant 13: The no child left behind law had little impact on my education and employment opportunities because I was still permitted to choose from a variety of electives, extracurricular activities and cooperative education (co-op) opportunities that provided practical hands-on experience and alternate academic study.

Participant 14: It has not had an impact positively or negatively.

Participant 15: It affected me because I wasn't allowed a diploma unless I passed a state test. My grades in all my classes didn't matter. It was embarrassing and caused unnecessary stress and some depression.

Interview Questions 8,9,10 and 11 supports research question 3, which is: How did the Zero Tolerance policies of 1990s affect student's educational opportunities in your community? With the implementation of zero-tolerance policies brought about a term that is believed to be a process that criminalized school setting over the years known as the School to Prison Pipeline (American Civil Liberties Union 2018). The School to Prison Pipeline has been defined as "a collection of punitive laws, policies, and practices that push young students out of schools," which in many cases pushed youth into the juvenile or criminal justice system (Monterastelli, S 2017). This process leads to school implementing punitive approaches to discipline students due to politicians and the media expressing that juveniles are dangerous and is the cause of hardships and fear in communities (Monterastelli, S 2017). Policies that were adopted into school included the War on Drugs mandatory minimum sentencing policies, three-strike laws, and federal governments' gun-free school act of 1994 (Monterastelli, S 2017). Schools would use these policies to deter juveniles from bringing fear into schools and keep the school community safe.

Interview Question 8: Do you agree with zero tolerance policies in elementary, middle and high schools? Why or why not?

Participant 1: Yes, it helps the schools stay in order. Zero Tolerance was put in place when I was in school true, but I do not remember it being implemented.

Participant 2: No, not so much for elementary I feel they are still rather young. When you are a little bit older you know what you are doing. They were not able to get a good education due to not being able to go back to school.

Participant 3: No, I do not because it has not shown much improvement to the school system.

Participant 4: Although I was raised in a large household the school system was decent. Our parents work hard double shifts even so my brother, cousin and I can go to good schools. Yes, I am familiar, but I don't know if it was used by any of the students I was associated with. I do think that the Zero tolerance policies can be a bit harsh especially when you hear about some of the alleged things that got the children in trouble in the first place.

Participant 5: No, the school system has shown no improvement since this policy has been put in place. In fact, it has gotten worse. How many times do we see things that have happen across the country far as violence in school that should not have taken place? Education was no longer an option for some.

Participant 6: I do not agree with the zero tolerance policies in elementary, middle, and high school because it targets African American males. I have witnessed how African American males are suspended at a higher rate than any other race because no one takes the time to get to know them and meet them halfway with their education and behavior.

Participant 7: I agree with having a policy in place; however, I don't agree with how it is being abused in the education system. There is a difference between major and minor infractions, they should not be handled the same.

Participant 8: I do not believe in the zero tolerance policies in elementary schools. However, I do believe in these policies as it pertains to middle and high schools. There would need to be a clear distinction of behaviors that would require being expelled or suspended from school.

Participant 9: No, I believe at times they can be a bit extreme and unfair, especially when it comes to minorities. The kid's opportunities to continue their education or slim to none.

Participant 10: Well, the zero tolerance in schools is good and bad. For some students who have parents are home for the follow up discipline would be fine with zero tolerance but for the child that doesn't have that solid foundation at home is like giving a child a choice with no guidance behind it.

Participant 11: I don't believe in zero tolerance policies in school because juveniles mature at different levels and not all students will make the right decisions the first time.

Participant 12: I do not because not all kids think the same and some may not understand the consequences of their actions.

Participant 13: I do not agree with zero tolerance policies on any grade school level. While I believe children must learn from their poor choices, I find that positive reinforcement is often more widely accepted by adolescents vs. negative reinforcement.

Also, removing a child from school because of bad behavior has no positive impact and only leaves space and opportunity for more poor decisions to be made during the idle time of a child whose brain is not yet fully developed.

Participant 14: No. I do not agree with zero tolerance generally and especially at the various school levels. At the elementary, middle and high school levels, the child is still undergoing psychological development. Eliminating the chances of a child due to zero tolerance policies can be devastating and has been for many years.

Participant 15: No, I don't agree. Our children are growing up differently from the way we grew up. Every day there is a fight for these kids. They face struggles that kids shouldn't even have to worry about.

Interview Question 9: How have zero tolerance policies effect juveniles in your community?

Participant 1: It makes the Juvenile become better people in the future after they have had time to realize what they have done wrong.

Participant 2: It affected them in a major way because they felt like why do good if you are already labeled as something.

Participant 3: Made the community open to more violence.

Participant 4: Not sure if it made a difference

Participant 5: Children not being properly educated sent home a lot of times with no work.

Participant 6: Most of my classmates have dropped out of school because of high suspension and teachers not giving them a chance. This increases crime in the community

because without an education, what jobs are they qualified to work to make money? Not many based on what I see.

Participant 7: It has caused low self-esteem and no direction for juveniles in my community.

Participant 8: Many of my classmates dropped out because it took too much for them to catch up, some went to night school to catch up, but those were the ones who were motivated regardless of their situation.

Participant 9: I had been giving chances after chances to correct my behavior, so it did not affect me personally, but I knew of people that it did.

Participant 10: Seems like a kid can get in trouble for every little thing.

Participant 11: It seems like the first time a juvenile gets in trouble thing just seems to get harder for them.

Participant 12: It limited the likelihood of kids being law abiding citizens, because they are already seen as criminals before they get into their late teens.

Participant 13: Zero tolerance policies have led to poor academic performance and increased dropout rates among juveniles in my community.

Participant 14: In the African American community it has created a cycle of distinction and system that makes it challenging for juveniles to get a fair chance of living a balanced life.

Participant 15: It's affected my community because we have more juveniles in jail than juveniles at home with their families.

Interview Question 10: What do you believe has been the outcome of juveniles being punished under zero tolerance policies? Do you believe that those punishments lead to juveniles committing acts of delinquency?

Participant 1: Yes, because some don't learn they just keep making the same bad choices.

Participant 2: They were given zero chances for improvement. Yes!

Participant 3: They were eager to do more harm the good. Yes, it does, it created bad children to become monster adults.

Participant 4: The outcome of what I have read has not been good and it leads to a terrible society.

Participant 5: They feel as if they have no purpose, no one cares and then they become statistics.

Participant 6: The outcome of juveniles being punished under zero tolerance policies is suspension, expelled from school, and falling behind in class which qualifies them for being retained in the same grade. All of these factors lead to higher crime rates.

Participant 7: The outcome has caused juveniles to lose hope and get involved in a system that does care to guide them in the right direction. I do believe that these punishments lead to juveniles committing acts of delinquency.

Participant 8: There is no evidence or data that shows the zero-tolerance policy have improved school climate or safety, nor has its improved student behavior. A policy that was created during the war on drugs era; trying to avoid students bringing guns or drugs to school I do not see how beneficial this is on an elementary level. Honestly on a

high school level expelling student because they do not have uniform on, what is the expectation of these students that lives in a broken home. Where do you think this idle student would end up? In the very streets with the drugs and guns.

Participant 9: I believe that it created monsters. They felt that they were being bullied by the system that was supposed to be caring for them.

Participant 10: The outcome of the zero tolerance currently is more behavioral issues, anger and physical issues because there is no one to support that child at home which will lead to prison, DJJ, jail and even death.

Participant 11: Zero tolerance causes juveniles to be labeled as problem children, limits them from believing in their selves and doesn't give individuals the belief that they can achieve in whatever they put their mind to.

Participant 12: Zero tolerance policies make juveniles seem criminal when they may just be misunderstood. So, zero tolerance policies land juveniles in jail where they learn more criminal behavior around older men and women, get out of jail and repeat what they have learned.

Participant 13: It contributes to substance abuse, and leaves disadvantaged children vulnerable to the realities of their life outside of school. Recognizing that many children find solace at school, and see it as an escape from hunger, physical abuse, domestic violence and other hardships experienced in their own homes.

Participant 14: The outcome of these policies as mentioned before is that it creates a cycle of generational disfunction. It does lead to further acts of delinquencies and recidivism.

Participant 15: The outcomes are life changing. Both mentally and physically. I feel like it leads juveniles to doing more acts of delinquency because they believe that's what is expected of the them, no one believes in them.

Interview Question 11: Do you believe that zero tolerance policies lead to youth being incarcerated, which some would call the School to Prison Pipeline?

Participant 1: Yes

Participant 2: Yes

Participant 3: Yes

Participant 4: Yes, I do think they are doing a great service in reality; they are truly not.

Participant 5: Yes

Participant 6: Yes. Instead of working with the youth to provide counseling, mentorships, or the opportunity to catch up on school work, zero tolerance allowed students to fall behind, created low self-esteem, and pushed the youth to become defiant and commit crimes.

Participant 7: Yes, I do believe that these policies to lead young down the wrong path and unfortunately becoming incarcerated.

Participant 8: Absolutely! I have seen where zero-tolerance policies disproportionately affect minority students and play a major role in the school to prison pipeline. There needs to be an alternative approach when dealing with certain students that have disciplinary problems. As previously stated, if you suspend a student leaving

them with nothing to do in a certain environment with different influences, a broken home, or special needs.

Participant 9: Yes

Participant 10: Yes

Participant 11: Yes, I do believe that zero tolerance policies lead juveniles onto a path to entering into the criminal justice system for things as minor as missing a few days of school.

Participant 12: Yes, I have seen how kids who have been late to school multiple times went to jail and were charged with truancy. Many times, questions aren't even asked such as why aren't you in school, police just arrest them. I've seen on multiple occasions where police dragged kids off the city bus because school was already in progress.

Participant 13: Zero tolerance policies yield poor adult outcomes. Children who are rejected from schools and cannot receive a basic education are far more likely to choose paths that will ultimately lead them to poverty, crime, incarceration, or death.

Participant 14: In my opinion yes. It appears that the system is more geared towards punishing, which eventually leads to breaking the motivation and the spirit of juveniles. Programs and policies should instead focus on academics, skill development and career orientations.

Participant 15: Yes, I do.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to analyze three primary research questions, which were presented at the beginning of this research study. The researcher used data collected from face-to-face interviews, each answer from the participants was recorded and transcribed to the best of the researcher's ability and confirmed to be accurate by each participant. Overall, this research was intended to be a qualitative examination of the factors contributing to delinquent behavior and recidivism among juveniles in the Southeastern Region of the United States. The primary question which was: What are the social and environmental risk factors that may contribute to juvenile delinquency? Based on participants' answers, family structure, peer influences, community and schooling all play a part in the likelihood an individual will show signs of delinquent behavior or not. Many of the participants had a very structured family atmosphere and those that did not, still had similar outcomes of delinquent behavior.

With the questions of whether or not policies are a contributing factor when it comes to juvenile delinquency the second research question addresses a particular policy that may show that policies may contribute to an increase in delinquency. Research question 2 was: How has the NCLB act narrowing of the classroom curriculum affected juvenile's ability to learn? After the interviews data showed that the NCLB actually left behind students, even those that performed well in school, completed all core classes but was unable to receive a high school diploma because they did not pass standardized test. Policies such as NCLB affected the self-esteem of juveniles, minimized classes in schools that students enjoyed and made the education experience on that limited what

students learned due to testing being the priority. Moving towards a standardize form of education placed individuals in a position in which learned how to take a test was the primary goal but failed to teach real world experiences that would push juveniles to be law abiding citizens.

Last but not least, zero tolerance policies have made it harder for juveniles because the policies made juveniles seem criminal and keeps juveniles out of school for reason that were previously seen as just kid stuff. The third and final question was: How did the Zero Tolerance policies of 1990s affect student's educational opportunities in your community? Many of the participants believe that policies were a contributing factor and an introduction of juveniles into the criminal justice system not meeting certain guidelines that should be adult responsibilities. As the researcher reviewed many of the participants' questions it appeared that these standards were a pipeline to prison for juveniles in the Southeast region of the Unite States. So, participants believe that certain policies are used to label minorities and limit their opportunity to live a successful adult life before they even become adults.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter highlights important conclusions that were drawn from the information collected and documented in Chapter 4. This chapter also includes a discussion of the findings of the study based on data collected from interviews with individuals in Southeast Florida, a region that has demonstrated a steady increase in juvenile delinquency and recidivism. In this chapter, I present actions that can be taken to obtain positive outcomes for juveniles at risk for delinquent behaviors, as affected by behaviors and policies.

The purpose of this general qualitative research study was to explore how policies affect risk factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency and recidivism in the Southeast region of Florida. This research study was conducted to provide insight on the causes of juvenile delinquent behavior and recidivism and to identify actions that can be taken to lower the rate of recidivism among juveniles in Southeast Florida. Juvenile delinquency and recidivism have been ongoing problems; there has been a steady increase in juvenile incarceration. According to Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (n.d.) in Southeast Florida, juvenile offenders make up approximately 42% of the recidivism rate in the area; therefore, I attempted to identify how policies affect risk factors, such as a juvenile's family status, environment, schooling, and more. In prior research on environmental factors, researchers addressed the impact on juvenile delinquency, and numerous risk factors can contribute to delinquent behavior. In this study, I sought to explain how policies such as NCLB and zero-tolerance policies contribute to juvenile delinquency

rates and to assist in developing programs or intervention strategies to lower the rate of juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

In recent studies of NCLB, researchers have identified how narrowing school curriculums diminished juveniles' confidence and ability to obtain education and graduate from high school; this decreased the number of juveniles attending college or obtaining job (Wolbransky et al. 2013) Zero-tolerance policies have criminalized juveniles for actions consistent with normal adolescent behavior and development (Monterastelli, 2017) These policies can be improved if stakeholders (parents, community leaders, policy makers, school administrators, school boards, teachers, and law enforcement) allow room for error among adolescents and correct behaviors using tactics that build confidence and give adolescents the chance to learn from their mistakes without long-term or unresolvable consequences. Policy makers can aid in bringing about change by implementing comprehensive practices and policies to decrease the likelihood of juveniles being criminalized at home, in their communities, or at school. The key to this concept is understanding how policies contribute to juveniles' reactions to negative reinforcement when it comes to education and how adults address undesirable behavior.

The driving force behind this study was an examination of the factors contributing to delinquent behavior and recidivism among juveniles in Southeast Florida. This research was guided by three research questions:

RQ1: What social and environmental risk factors may contribute to juvenile delinquency?

RQ2: How has NCLB's narrowing of classroom curriculum affected juveniles' ability to learn?

RQ3: How did the zero-tolerance policies of the 1990s affect students' educational opportunities in their communities?

The data collected in this research study revealed that many undesirable behaviors displayed by juveniles were due to road blocks and stipulations that arose from harsh and ineffective policies. Many juveniles face different social and environmental realities, and family make up, peer interactions, and how educators see juveniles play a part in juveniles' decision-making process.

Within this study, I observed that despite the family structure and social history, juveniles still committed some type of act that led them to have an interaction with law enforcement. Similar outcomes were observed in family structures that were made up of multiparent households, single-parent households, and blended families. Those participants who did not allow their peers to influence their behaviors still received disciplinary actions for things they may not have had control over, such as not wearing school uniforms, arriving late to school, or being out after curfew. Juveniles who strived to succeed in school were still left behind because of policies in place. The results of this study revealed that, regardless of upbringing or community traits, there are negative implications when policies are the driving force.

With policies such as NCLB leading the way when it comes to how educators and school administrators grade students; juveniles can feel they are in a no-win situation. With educators forced to teach students only what will be on tests, many juveniles are left

with feelings of failure and incompetency. Zero-tolerance policies also make juveniles appear like criminals. Juveniles are punished as if they are adults and being placed in detention centers, jails, and prisons. Policy reviews and the implementation of counseling programs that increase confidence rather than punishment could be helpful in lowering the rate at which juveniles are placed in detention centers or suspended or expelled from school.

Interpretation of Findings

Throughout this study, I explored numerous topics highlighted in the literature review, such as implemented policies, zero-tolerance policies, the school-to-prison pipeline, risk factors, and recidivism. Prior researchers have identified factors that lead to juvenile delinquency that are known risk factors (Shader, n.d). Risk factors are variables associated with the increased likelihood that an individual will commit a particular act (Shader, n.d). Research indicates that the more risk factors an individual is faced with, the greater the chance that individual will show delinquent behavior or commit criminal acts (Shader, n.d).

In the last decade zero-tolerance policies have been implemented at schools, which has led to greater number of juveniles in detention facilities and in adult jails and prisons. This phenomenon has been referred to as the *school-to-prison pipeline*. Policies narrowed curriculums, removed juveniles from school, and increased juveniles' contact with the justice system and likelihood to repeat offenses. The data collected in this study and the themes identified have strong connections to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2

that contributes to delinquent behavior and recidivism among juveniles in Southeast Florida.

Risk Factors

In this study, I conducted face-to-face interviews with individuals who reside in Southeast Florida and who have had some type of police interaction and committed delinquent acts as juveniles. I asked each participant questions that would solidify what prior research and theorists believed to be a cause of delinquent acts and to determine whether policies increased the likelihood of delinquent behavior. In previous studies, researchers found that risk factors were a major contributing factor to juveniles displaying certain behaviors (Shader, n.d). Risk factors included family make up, peer influences, communities, and schooling. I asked the participants in this study about their family make up and whether their family atmosphere influenced the person they were as a juvenile. Responses varied, but based on the data collected, family structure did not appear to be a contributing factor to delinquent behavior. Some participants stated that they grew up in a two-parent household, some lived in single-parent households, and others grew up in blended families. Some of the participants' parents were identified as strict, others were lenient, and some participants indicated that their parents had no regard for their actions as children. Many participants believed their family make up did not influence their delinquent behavior, but did encourage them to think before they acted. Others endorsed that once they escaped the guarded environment of their parents, they rebelled immensely.

When participants were questioned about how their peers influenced their behaviors the participants' answers varied. Some participants believed that their peers influenced their behavior because they wanted to fit in. Other participants were the leaders amongst their peers and did their best to stay out of trouble. With each participant answering questions regarding peer influences, it can be said that peers have a little more influence when compared to a participant's family makeup on the likelihood of delinquent behavior. These same peers were said to be a part of the participants' daily social life.

Still looking to identify risk factors that contribute to delinquent behavior, I asked participants about their behavior in the school settings, and what they think their past educators would say about them. Participants responded with answers that would say that they were well liked by teachers, some participants were straight "A" students and others that were not the most studious were not trouble makers in school. Many responded that they were not challenged and that school did not give them the spark that they were looking for. Through my interviews I found that a number of students blamed their behavior on the lack of courses being available and the strict rules that were upheld in school. This led to questions regarding curriculum and policies implemented over the years.

Implemented Policies

When it came to questioning participants about policies implemented in the school setting such as NCLB and narrowing of classroom curriculum, a shift in moods and attitudes came about. During the face-to-face interviews, I asked participants about

how their education changed after the implementation of standardized testing which resulted in a narrowing of classroom curriculum. Many of the participants believed those implementations took the desire to learn and be in school away. Participants advised that teachers were forced to limit the curriculum to studies that students would be tested on such as math, reading and science. Teachers were no longer teaching art, music, social studies, physical fitness, and foreign languages; which participants advised that they enjoyed the most.

Interview questions revealed that resources that did not revolve around testing were limited. When school did not score high on tests, the schools lost funding and resources that students wanted and needed. Teachers' attitudes changed and it seemed like the teachers took out their frustrations on the students. Those participants that were studious and did their best in school got the short end of the stick if they were not good test takers. Interviews showed that even if you abided by school rules, did all your class work, if you did not pass your test you did not graduate and receive your high school diploma. This led to juveniles not being able to get good paying jobs once pushed into society. Narrowing of curriculums proved to be the downfall for a number of juveniles and may have contributed to students displaying delinquent behavior. Many participants made it known that the implementation of policies such as the NCLB, pushed juveniles to rebel and act out in school. This behavior eventually got them in trouble with administration and even the police. With schools setting stricter rules to ensure that students can focus on testing, those students that had behavior issues and interrupted the test taking process were punished and even kicked out of school. More policies were

implemented into the school system because test taking has become the focus of schooling and the school system moved towards a zero-tolerance view on school interruptions.

Zero Tolerance

For years government officials and policy makers have continued to look for ways to combat criminal and delinquent behavior. Policies such as the Sentencing reform acts of 1984 and the War on Drugs which set strict guidelines when it came to drug possession, selling of drugs and implemented mandatory minimum sentencing. Many of these policies bled into the school system and affected the lives of a number of juveniles. Zero-tolerance policies have also been implemented into schools to ensure students are meeting test standards. After interviewing participants about zero tolerance policies being implemented many of the responses showed that changes need to be put in place. When it came to asking participants questions about zero-tolerance policies, participants stressed their disagreement of these policies being implemented in elementary schools, middle schools as well as high school. Many participants believed that these policies made juveniles seem criminal and punished them for some things that were out of their control. Other participants believed that zero-tolerance policies made juveniles feel less than and limited their hopes to be model citizens. The interviews showed that these policies forced students out of school. Some students were kicked out for repeat offenses and others dropped out because of the pressures to act in a way that society believed was the right way. Participants felt that policies took away juveniles' individuality and forced them to grow up faster than they should. All participants explained that they believed that these

zero-tolerance policies in a school setting lead juvenile into what is being called a school to prison pipeline.

School to Prison Pipeline

With an increase in zero-tolerance policies being implemented in schools, a phenomenon known as the school to prison pipeline has emerged. With new sets of curriculum standards and strict guidelines juveniles must abide by, it has been seen how schools are now the gateway to juvenile incarceration. Juveniles as early as those in pre-school and elementary school are being suspended and even being expelled from schools for their behavior. Older juveniles are being arrested and incarcerated in juvenile detention centers and other juveniles are being referred to adult institutions (jails and prisons). Participants believe that placing juveniles in these types of institutions does not address the problem at hand, but places juveniles in a position to learn more delinquent behavior that may end up being classified as criminals. Participants believe that the school to prison pipeline also contributes to the increase in recidivism because when juveniles are housed with adult inmates, they will learn more behaviors that will surely be displayed and land juveniles back in jail. Participants in this study believed that this is unjust and targets juveniles of minority groups.

In chapter 2, according to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights; an example of this targeting consisted of African American students being suspended or expelled approximately 3.5 times more when compared to Caucasian classmates (Elias, Marilyn 2013). The numbers documented are alarming, in the school system African American students' make up about 18 % of the school's population but

are said to face punitive actions 46% on more than one occasion (Elias, Marilyn 2013). In schools throughout the United States students with a known disability that affects their ability to learn makes up only approximately 8.6% but these same students make up for nearly 32% of juveniles placed in some type of detention center for juveniles. When looking at these same numbers and comparing them racially about 1 in 4 African American students with disabilities would be suspended from school versus Caucasian students are being suspended are at a rate of 1 in 11 (Elias 2013).

Anomie Theory

The NCLB act and zero-tolerance policies that have been implemented throughout the past decade, has increased the likelihood that a juvenile will show signs of delinquency and encounter police. When reviewing participants responses and previous research, it has been concluded that implemented policies are flawed and present a great deal of biases, harsh and unequal punishment, institutional racism and targets minorities of low economic status. The NCLB act has narrowed school curriculums, making it harder for teachers to focus on engaging their students, because they are forced to teach how to pass a standardized test. Public schools are being underfunded and schools lose the ability to retain teachers that look to improve the education of juveniles. The NCLB place blame on students and their ability to learn, the curriculum schools put in place and teachers, when there are a number of other factors that may be to blame such as old schools' facilities, the lack of books, school overcrowding, homelessness and more.

These implemented policies do not work to obtain legit objectives when compared to the reasons they were implemented; policies cause disorientation among individuals and place psychological stress along with social conflicts. These policies do not have straightforward guidelines and contribute to delinquency because it creates an environment in which juveniles' rebel because they are not able to fit into the societal norm. The structure of the implemented policies creates a state of anomie in society and brings forth psychological stress along with social conflicts that places strains on juveniles. Strain Theory

The strain theory states that the pressures that society puts on individuals are the cause of individuals committing criminal acts. Throughout this research it has been seen that the NCLB act placed strain on juveniles through the narrowing of curriculum and the requirement of students passing standardized testing. Standardized testing caused schools to be defunded, limited what teachers taught their students and even caused some schools to close if the students were not meeting state standards. The government withheld funds which limited the retention of teachers and the quality of education has since diminished due to the strains of a number of policies. Zero tolerance policies forced juveniles to behave a particular way and some believe forces juveniles to act older than what they really are. Zero-tolerance policies added a great deal of stress to the lives of juveniles, because these policies lead juveniles into what is called the school to prison pipeline. The school to prison pipeline pushed juveniles into detention center and even the prison system because they did not display behaviors society deemed pleasing.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher interviewed participants who as a juvenile displayed and committed acts of delinquency. The participants reflected on a number of topics about risk factor, influences, policies and recidivism. The face-to-face interviews with participants produced meaningful data. The data obtained showed how policies cause issues that lead to environmental factors affecting the likelihood of juveniles showing signs of delinquency and signs of violence in Southeast Florida. However, new limitations did arise in the study. First, during the data collection process a global pandemic (Covid-19) arose. The pandemic limited person to person contacts due to social distance guidelines. Many public areas were closed along with stay-at-home order. This limited the recruitment of participants. With the researcher using snowball sampling the collecting of participants was not delayed. As the pandemic continued the interviewing of participants was delayed. The researcher offered each participant the option to take part in the interview process via Facetime, Zoom, Microsoft Teams or wait until the stay-at-home order was lifted. All fifteen participants wanted to wait until they could meet in person.

Juveniles are a vulnerable population and may be at risk when being studied, therefore obtaining consent could have been difficult. In order to reduce any limitations, this researcher used participants who are just outside of the classification of a juvenile and the names of each participant used within the study will be omitted. The participants in this study were between the ages of 21 and 25. The researcher believes that the participants would have given much more up to date information as to how zero-

tolerance policies and curriculum narrowing affected juveniles if the participants were still in grade school and under the age of 21. The data collected from the research participants did allow the researcher to see what was the outcome of those that experienced the implementation of policies that changed the education system and led to juveniles entering the school to prison pipeline.

Recommendations

Future research should be conducted on how policies affect delinquency and recidivism. With the juvenile population on the rise, researchers should look to prevent behaviors fueled by policies. As more studies are conducted on what causes delinquent behavior a more detailed look at risk factors should be evaluated. Policies should be added as a leading risk factor, due to the strains they may put on society and the likelihood that policies are tailored to a particular group of individuals or community. Future studies exploring how policies affect environmental factors should be conducted with a different group of participants such as teachers, juveniles under the age of 18 and administrators and policy makers. Conducting this same study using a quantitative approach could possibly allow researchers to compare policies and the positive or negative effects they may contribute to society. Zero tolerance policies should be removed from the education system and the addition of in school and community counseling should be the new way forward.

Narrowing of school curriculum should be reevaluated in order to give students the ability to learn a multitude of subjects with the addition of separate mandatory classes that is tailored to test preparations. Student performance on tests should not determine

what type of funding schools receive. Zero tolerance policies should be taken out of the school system because the school system is now seen as a pipeline to prison for juveniles. Policy makers should work towards implementing policies that are equal and fair across the board. Schools should look to nurture students, allow students to grow their imagination and feel safe being a kid. As a collective teacher, school administration, community leaders and policy makers should work together to implement sound policies to ensure that juveniles are learning behaviors that society believes is right and all stakeholders are on the same page. Juveniles are the future of the United States and a recommendation to build a village prior to implementing policies that may be detrimental to the future of our youth.

Implications

Rescinding policies such as the NCLB act and zero-tolerance policies has extensive implications. Rescinding these particular policies will dismantle the school to prison pipeline and minimize the likelihood that juveniles will be placed in detention centers, jails or prisons at an early age; and later repeating some of those same offenses. Juveniles will be able to increase their ability to learn and not fear punishment for each undesired behavior. School administration and teachers can all benefit from policies that reward good behavior and correct behaviors by using sound judgement and positive guidance. Schools can allocate funds to school programs in a manner that allows all juveniles to receive the same education. With changing from a mind frame of punishment to one that praising good behavior, juveniles may not feel that additional strains are being placed upon them. With all stakeholders being on one accord the southeast region of

Florida and other affected areas around the world will see a decrease in juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

Conclusions

For decades, we have seen an increase in juvenile delinquency and recidivism due to policies such as the NCLB act that narrowed school's curriculum to focus on test taking and zero tolerance policies that lead to a phenomenon known as the school to prison pipeline. In this qualitative study, an examination of the factors that contribute to delinquency and recidivism among juveniles in the southeastern region of the United States was conducted. After conducting this study, the findings show that policies such as the NCLB act and zero-tolerance policies contributed to juveniles committing delinquent behavior. Participants in this study were asked a number of questions that would address how risk factors played a part in them committing delinquent behaviors. The findings of this study present a new idea to include policies as a risk factor for juvenile recidivism and delinquency. Using the anomie and strain theory to justify the idea that policies are factors that lead juveniles to act in a manner that is not socially accepted helped to guide the experiment. The "get tough on crime" idea has failed the juvenile population repeatedly and has made juveniles continuously appear criminal.

Over the years, policymakers have seen the negative effects of implemented policies, but little to no effort has been put in place to minimize the criminalization of our youth. It is understood that the reason for implementing these policies was to make schools safe and weed out individuals who would be disruptive to the learning process. Though intentions were good, the outcome has been an increase in school dropouts,

juveniles being expelled from school or sent to jail for a number of different offenses.

The issues show that the methods of punishment and accountability do not build a healthier school environment. The study has shown that these policies fail juveniles because policymakers chose to punish students instead of understanding why juveniles display delinquent behavior. Policymakers need to resend these policies and include juveniles, parents, community leaders, school administration and teachers when composing policies that will affect juvenile's ability to learn and act in a manner that is socially accepted. The stakeholder involved in policymaking needs to join together to determine what juveniles need when being educated and what is the most affected correction behavior to address delinquent behavior.

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Appendix A: Participant Interview Questions

A Qualitative Examination of the Factors Contributing to Delinquent Behavior and Recidivism Among Juveniles in the Southeastern Region of the United States

RQ1: What are the social and environmental risk factors that may contribute to juvenile delinquency?

1. Please explain how your immediate family was structured as a juvenile, and how was it growing up in that family atmosphere?
2. How did growing up in the southeast region of the United States influence your behavior between the ages of 13 and 18?
3. While in school as a juvenile, what would your teachers say about the type of student you were?
4. As a juvenile how did your friends influence your decision making and the behaviors you displayed?

RQ2: How has the NCLB act narrowing of the classroom curriculum affected juvenile's ability to learn?

5. After the implementation of standardized testing, how did you view the quality of your education thereafter?
6. How did the focus on standardized testing change the resources in the schools you have attended?
7. What economic impact has the no child left behind law had on you educational and employment opportunities?

RQ3: How did the Zero Tolerance policies of 1990s affect student's educational opportunities in your community?

8. Do you agree with zero tolerance policies in elementary, middle and high schools? Why or why not?
9. How has zero tolerance policies effect juvenile in your community?
10. What do you believe has been the outcome of juveniles being punished under zero tolerance policies? Do you believe that those punishments lead to juveniles committing acts of delinquency?
11. Do you believe that zero tolerance policies lead to youth being incarcerated which some would call the School to Prison Pipeline?