

2021

Juvenile Justice Workers' Perceptions of Teen Court and Traditional Court

Kesla M. Holder
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Kesla MaryAnn Holder

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Gregory Koehle, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Mark Stallo, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Anne Hacker, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Juvenile Justice Workers' Perceptions of Teen Court and Traditional Court

by

Kesla MaryAnn Holder

MPA, Walden University, 2010

BS, Savannah State University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2021

Abstract

The impact of alternative programs for juveniles within the juvenile justice court system was not well understood. Studies such as research from the Annie E. Casey Foundation identified juvenile diversion approaches as an effective method of reducing recidivism in juvenile courts. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to seek understanding of the nontraditional juvenile court process from the perceptions of juvenile justice workers in a local teen court program. Deterrence theory provided the theoretical framework to guide the study. Open-ended survey questions were used to collect data from 11 juvenile justice officers from the local Department of Juvenile Justice in a southern U.S. region. Participants were questioned regarding their experiences and perceptions of working with juveniles who entered the teen court and the traditional court. Data were coded and categorized to identify three themes: forms of court, sentencing outcome, and overall experience. Juvenile justice systems may benefit from the results of this study through influencing policymakers to create or expand existing legislation on teen courts and further assist in decreasing recidivism among juvenile offenders.

Juvenile Justice Workers' Perceptions of Teen Court and Traditional Court

by

Kesla MaryAnn Holder

MPA, Walden University, 2010

BS, Savannah State University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2021

Dedications

This journey has been a life altering process and it is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He has been the lead pilot from the beginning to the end. To every young person who has entered a teen court program, this study is for you. Your paths have inspired me daily and I will forever support diversion programs. My mother, Marie B. Holder, who served tirelessly as an educator for thirty years, continues to be my number one cheerleader and never allowed me to give up. My father, Charles W. Holder, who has patiently waited a lifetime to tell friends his baby daughter completed her doctoral program, can finally shout it from the mountaintop. Mom and Dad, thank you for always believing in me when I did not believe in myself. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Acknowledgements

To Dr. Gregory Koehle, I would not have reached the finish line without your support and guidance. I appreciate your patience with every email, text, and phone call. Thank you for being a constant stream of encouragement.

To Dr. Mark Stallo, thank you for your contributions to ensure the overall goal was achieved.

To Dr. Anne Hacker, because of your provision I am able to present a scholarly piece that represents progressive change in the lives of all youth.

To Ms. Catherine Heck, thank you for your positivity and support. Having you as an academic advisor was indeed a blessing.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	1
Problem Statement.....	4
Teen Court Overview.....	7
Teen Court Orientation.....	9
Purpose of the Study.....	13
Research Question.....	15
Theoretical Framework.....	15
Nature of the Study.....	17
Definitions.....	18
Assumptions.....	19
Scope and Delimitations.....	19
Limitations.....	20
Significance.....	20
Summary.....	21
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	22
Juvenile Recidivism.....	22
Is Juvenile Crime Serious?.....	23
Problems of Juvenile Recidivism.....	25
Reducing Juvenile Crime.....	25

History of Juvenile Courts in the United States.....	27
Alternative Programs: Youth Court Models.....	28
Graduated Sanctions: Where Does Teen Court Fit?.....	31
History of Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court.....	36
Overview of Teen Court's Effectiveness.....	37
Positive Peer Pressure.....	39
Financial Impact of Teen Court.....	41
Summary and Conclusions.....	43
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	44
Research Design and Rationale.....	45
Role of the Researcher.....	47
Methodology.....	48
Participation Selection.....	48
Sampling Strategy.....	49
Instrumentation.....	50
Data Collection.....	50
Data Analysis Plan.....	52
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	52
Credibility.....	52
Transferability.....	52
Dependability.....	53
Confirmability.....	53

Ethical Considerations	53
Research Stakeholders	54
Summary	55
Chapter 4: Results	57
Research Setting.....	57
Demographics	57
Data Collection	58
Data Analysis	60
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	63
Credibility	63
Transferability.....	64
Dependability.....	64
Confirmability.....	65
Results.....	65
Theme 1: Forms of Court.....	66
Theme 2: Sentencing Outcomes	68
Theme 3: Overall Experience	71
Summary	75
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	76
Interpretation of the Findings.....	77
Forms of Court.....	77
Sentencing Outcome	78

Overall Experience.....	79
Limitations of the Study.....	79
Recommendations.....	80
Implications.....	81
Conclusion	83
References.....	85
Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation	94
Appendix B: Survey Questions.....	95
Appendix C: Letter of Permission	96

List of Tables

Table 1. Five-Year Recidivism Percentages of Traditional Court Cases vs. Teen Court Cases	8
Table 2. Explanations of Key Information From Case Study Research Design.....	15
Table 3. Demographics of Study Participants.....	58
Table 4. Codes, Categories, and Themes of Collected Data.....	62

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Forty states and the District of Columbia acknowledge persons under the age of 18 juveniles. However, eight other states consider youth under the age of 17 juveniles. Whether persons under the age of 18 are called troubled children, young criminals, or youth offenders, the term *juvenile delinquent* is defined differently in many states (Whitehead & Lab, 2015). The definition varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, meaning a juvenile in one state may be considered an adult in another.

It was during the Progressive Era (1880–1920) that juvenile courts were institutionalized. Due to the increasing number of immigrants, a lack of policies on mandatory schooling, poor working conditions, and demand for humanitarian reform, juvenile courts were established (Whitehead & Lab, 2015). However, according to Platt (1977), many people did not consider the modernized form of juvenile delinquency reform a benevolent act. It was seen as selfish, self-interest behavior among society's elite groups. Juvenile justice was becoming a movement of the rich for controlling the dangerous poor youth groups (Platt, 1977).

Background

The use of alcohol and drugs, drinking and driving, and other high-risk and delinquent behaviors are some of the issues young people face in society. Restorative justice could be considered a necessary form of rehabilitation to lessen the severity for juveniles facing consequences of delinquent criminal acts. Sound guidance and meaningful learning opportunities during this stage in life could aid in juveniles becoming responsible and productive citizens. The use of restorative justice strategies is a

modernized response to the traditional approach of justice, encouraging a heightened sense of moral behavior and self-accountability (McKibben & Penko, 2015).

The story of Ralph Brazel, Jr., who was born and raised in a poor New Jersey neighborhood, was introduced to a national audience by Ashley Nellis in 2015. Brazel rarely listened to his single mother's rules and did not take much interest in school attendance. Brazel bounced from different homes and several states as a teen between his grandmother, mother, and father. Brazel became a small-time drug dealer and was eventually arrested and convicted. These nonviolent mistakes as a juvenile eventually led to Brazel being sentenced to a lifetime in prison with no possibility of parole. Based on the current U.S. adult prison population, the story of Ralph Brazel has likely played out many times in the lives of other juveniles across the country (Nellis, 2015).

Nason and Sandow (2017) depicted the tragic life story of Kalief Browder on screen through a documentary. Browder was a New York teen accused of stealing a backpack. Browder was never convicted of the crime, yet he spent 2 years locked away in Rikers Island Penitentiary. Most of this time was in solitary confinement. Browder was beaten by correction officers and fellow teen inmates. His case was continually delayed in court and his time in prison increased. This form of neglect led to physical and psychological abuse that no youth deserves to experience and could have been avoided (Nason and Sandow, 2017). The internal demons Browder discovered and faced as a young, incarcerated person followed him after his overdue release from Rikers Island Penitentiary. Unable to cope with life outside of prison's gates and not able to verbally express what he battled daily, Kalief took his life in the summer of 2016.

Brazel's and Browder's stories represent a small percentage of the young lives stolen by harsh penalties toward teens in the juvenile justice system. Such examples indicate that children are targeted and affected in a system originally created to rehabilitate and house adults. Nellis (2015) proclaimed that most Americans consider juvenile crime to play a major negative role. However, many do not agree with policies being created to provide harsher penalties that lead to the incarceration of more young offenders (Nellis, 2015).

Restorative justice programs may have saved the lives and prevented the prolonged incarceration of Browder, Brazel, and others. If given the opportunity, positive peer pressure and adult guidance may prevent recidivism and reduce negative environmental influences. The techniques of restorative justice programs have been deemed beneficial to a variety of parties (McKibben & Penko, 2015). Youth offenders are encouraged to connect and positively relate to other youths, families are advised to participate in some of the treatment plans, and communities have the opportunity to heal and forgive through the reintegration of juvenile offenders and the victims (Latimer et al., 2005). Historically, the origins of restorative justice have not been only found in criminal justice systems, but also in the workplace, schools, and similar forms of social conflict (McKibben & Penko, 2015). Additional research on juvenile restorative or diversion opportunities could encourage the expansion of similar programs for juvenile delinquency throughout the state of Georgia.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study focused on first-time juvenile offenders and how the Dublin-Laurens Teen Court was more successful at reducing recidivism than the traditional juvenile court. Success in teen court programs was measured by the number of reoffending youths in the restorative justice program versus the number of reoffending juveniles who entered the traditional juvenile court system. To address the issue, I surveyed juvenile justice officers who worked directly with youths who had entered, completed, and been released from the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program and traditional court. The juvenile justice officers were able to provide valid insights on how the Dublin-Laurens Teen Court was more successful in reducing recidivism.

Programs such as teen courts are utilized to deter youths from entering a lifetime of criminal behaviors. Measures of effectiveness were discovered through the programs' discussion of successful completions and recidivism rates (Harris et al., 2011). Recidivism in juvenile delinquency was identified as a worrying factor for researchers. Rates of recidivism, which include teens, have been extremely high throughout recent years (Seigle et al., 2014). Due to a lack of research on the juvenile justice system's recidivism issues, the efforts to reduce recidivism were often incomplete and misguided. This has caused some prevention programs to be considered flawed and ineffective. A goal of the current study was to overcome the current obstacles of juvenile reoffending through understanding the strategies and how the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court is effective.

Researchers and governmental agencies advanced alternative mentoring programs for delinquent youths with some promising results and outcomes (Latimer et al., 2005). In their published work, Wilson and Hoge (2012) highlighted two examples of alternative strategies: (a) caution programs and (b) formal diversion programs. Caution groups aimed to remove the youths from the systems of law and provided no further court or criminal actions. This action was least troublesome for court officials and the youths. Formal diversion groups utilized a type of surveillance consequence. The program was conducted with youths who admitted their wrongdoings and agreed to participate in intervention groups. Support for using alternative juvenile justice programs was found when utilizing diversion practices. The completed reviews of Lipsey et al. (2001) on effective treatments for juveniles within the court systems highlighting community-based programs were found to be more productive and successful with youth recidivism than treatment of juvenile incarceration or out-of-home placement. The diversion programs were beneficial for low- and high-risk youths who had committed misdemeanors and a few more serious crimes (Lipsey et al., 2001). However, negative responses were increasing in the existing gap between reoffending outcomes and the assessments of the offenders' behavioral attitudes, background, values, and educational history and records. Limited research was found on the styles of diversion applied to the youths. The lack of available information from national reports suggested doubt and limitations on supporting sources and caused a missing link in the research field of understanding the possibilities and promising outcomes of diversion programs (Skowrya & Powell, 2006).

A disconnect was found in the proper rehabilitation provided per criminal act committed. Hoge (2008) and Hoge and Andrews (2010) stressed that each offender must be correctly assessed on risk levels and behavioral needs to provide the appropriate services to each individual based on accurate intake information. There should be effective alternative programs that cater to revitalizing, rejuvenating, and rehabilitating each youth and targeting their area of need. Communities focused on the behavioral health needs of delinquent youths by improving and providing therapeutic treatments in an effort to deter them from reoccurring criminal acts (Tossone et al., 2017). This was in response to an increasing number of youths in the justice system with behavioral health disorders. Effective behavioral health diversion programs aimed to reduce multiple incarcerations, psychological trauma, and overall recidivism among youths (Tossone et al., 2017).

Confidentiality requirements kept information of juveniles sealed; however, a small group of juvenile justice officers from the Department of Juvenile Justice were the first to encounter the youths as they entered the teen court program and these officers worked with them through the entire process. Utilizing these officers as study participants provided direct experience and testimonial accounts on the effectiveness and shortcomings of traditional juvenile courts and the nontraditional diversion court programs. The juvenile justice officers were knowledgeable of the youth judicial system and understood the importance of providing appropriate, accurate care to juveniles involved in the court system.

Teen Court Overview

The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court (Georgia) had been in operation since 1997 and operated as a juvenile diversion program. Laurens County and the City of Dublin worked collaboratively to reduce the number of juvenile offenders not only to make the community a safer place to live but also to provide opportunities for at-risk youths to receive the needed assistance. Dublin-Laurens County's Department of Juvenile Justice has a total of 11,250 at-risk youths in its community, according to the latest Georgia Juvenile Justice Data Clearinghouse (2016) for Reporting Period: January 2016 through December 2016. The Dublin-Laurens Teen Court was more successful in reducing recidivism than the traditional court for first-time juvenile offenders. Table 1 shows the significant difference from 2015 to 2019 for traditional court first-time offenders recidivism rate versus the Dublin-Laurens Teen Court recidivism rate. Over this 5-year period, the traditional court had a recidivism rate of 42% and the Teen Court had a recidivism rate of 2%. The focus of the current study was to understand the reasons the Dublin Teen Court was successful in reducing recidivism.

Table 1*Five-Year Recidivism Percentages of Traditional Court Cases vs. Teen Court Cases*

Year	Traditional court case first-time offender	Traditional court case first-time offender recidivism percentage	Teen court case first-time offender	Teen court case first-time offender recidivism percentage
2015	<i>n</i> = 59	<i>n</i> = 24 (41%)	<i>n</i> = 38	<i>n</i> = 1 (3%)
2016	<i>n</i> = 58	<i>n</i> = 32 (55%)	<i>n</i> = 37	<i>n</i> = 1 (3%)
2017	<i>n</i> = 60	<i>n</i> = 22 (37%)	<i>n</i> = 22	<i>n</i> = 1 (5%)
2018	<i>n</i> = 33	<i>n</i> = 11 (33%)	<i>n</i> = 21	<i>n</i> = 0 (0%)
2019	<i>n</i> = 27	<i>n</i> = 10 (37%)	<i>n</i> = 22	<i>n</i> = 0 (0%)
Total	<i>N</i> = 237	<i>N</i> = 99 (42%)	<i>N</i> = 140	<i>N</i> = 3 (2%)

Note. Recidivism is defined as a re-offense within 1 year of the first offense (Southern Region [GA] Department of Juvenile Justice).

Globally, teen courts were built as a volunteer alternative to the traditional criminal justice system for youths who found themselves involved with the law. The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court was a juvenile diversion program for first-time offenders who committed misdemeanor crimes, recognized the error of their ways, and desired a second chance. Juveniles who admitted guilt before the juvenile court judge were eligible for the program. The goal of the teen court was to intervene and reduce future incidents and escalations of law-breaking behaviors (i.e., recidivism). The teen court strived to promote feelings of self-esteem and a desire for self-improvement among the youths.

The process began when a police officer came in contact with a juvenile who was believed to have committed a misdemeanor offense. The police officer filled out a juvenile complaint form and gave it to the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice. The

program manager of the Department of Juvenile Justice screened the complaints and referred the cases that met the criteria for teen court to the juvenile court judge. The judge ordered the teen to participate in teen court. An interview with the juvenile and their parents was conducted by a coordinator. A court date was selected for the juvenile to appear in teen court. Meanwhile, the coordinator worked with attorneys and judges in the community who volunteered their time to train young people interested in teen court.

The types of cases heard in Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court were misdemeanor cases. Some cases included shoplifting, simple battery, simple assault, driving without a license, disorderly conduct, possession of alcohol by a minor, and speeding up to 23 miles over the speed limit. The courtroom setting involved trained youths serving as the defense attorney, prosecuting attorney, clerk, bailiff, and jury members. The judge was a volunteering judge or attorney in the local community to ensure the court process was accurate.

The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court was a positive, win-win opportunity for the community and youths involved. Volunteers were able to gain firsthand experience of the court process. Juvenile offenders acknowledged their mistakes and gave back to their community through weekly service. Some offenders returned after completing their sentence as a new and improved youth volunteer. This program was not a punishment; it was a family of volunteers who promoted restorative justice for youths by youths.

Teen Court Orientation

The orientation portion of the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program was also recognized as its intake process for the newly recommended juvenile defendants.

After the youths' cases were referred to the Teen Court Program, the families of the defendants were mailed a packet. This package consisted of documents to explain the Teen Court process in detail. The entire program and what to expect was described to the youth and family. There was also an option to opt out if they found this was not a journey they wanted to take.

If the youth selected not to continue with the Teen Court, their cases were sent back to the referring source. This usually led back to the district courts, juvenile court judge, or Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice. Once this action was complete, the youth could no longer return to the Teen Court Program. They would then stand before the juvenile court or district court judge and be sentenced to harsher consequences than those of the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court. Without the support of the Teen Court Program, the defendant faced punishments such as juvenile detention, probation, fines, and out-of-home placement.

By entering the Teen Court, the juvenile was admitting guilt and was also agreeing to accept the court's decision as final and binding. Furthermore, choosing the Teen Court meant certain constitutional rights were forfeited. The coordinator set a court date and location for the defendant to appear with their parent(s) for trial.

The at-risk population included youths ages 11 through 17 who were White, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, American Indian/Alaska Native, and other/mixed. Assessment instruments used for the selected target population to screen youths included cases referred from the juvenile court and the Juvenile Justice Decision Points Report. The coordinator worked

with attorneys and judges in the community who volunteered their time to train young students interested in this Teen Court. The training program involved instruction on legal procedure, proper conduct, and job duties with each position. The cases were distributed to the student attorneys. The attorneys reviewed their cases an hour before trial was scheduled. They took into consideration circumstances surrounding the defendant. Prior to trial, the defense attorneys were expected to interview the defendant and prepare opening statements, questions, and closing arguments. The prosecuting and defense attorney possessed a copy of the juvenile complaint. At all times the volunteers adhered to the confidentiality requirements as to the identity of the defendant and the facts of their case.

The jury consisted of seven to 13 youths. The jury included as many of Laurens County's schools' youths as possible. The coordinator assigned teen volunteers to specific cases on specific dates. A portion of the jury consisted of previous defendants who served their required duty in Teen Court. Every defendant admitted to Teen Court was required to serve as a Teen Court juror at least twice.

After the jury issued a constructive sentence to the defendant, the juvenile had 90 days to complete the sentence. If the juvenile did not complete the sentence requirements, the juvenile was referred back to the juvenile court judge for further legal action and risked a possible juvenile record. Thus, the Teen Court Program had a deterrence-based component.

Goals

The goals of the teen court orientation were (a) to increase the number and percentage of youths completing program requirements, (b) to increase the use of evidence-based practices in Georgia's juvenile justice system by initiating community-based juvenile justice programs, (c) to reduce the recidivism rate of youths involved with Georgia's juvenile justice system, and (d) to demonstrate a cost savings to citizens of Georgia through provision of research-informed services to youths in the juvenile justice system.

Performance Objectives

The performance objectives of the teen court orientation were (a) to demonstrate project specific reduction in recidivism, (b) to maintain the number of evidence-based services over the previous year and the overall percentage of the court's evidence-based programs, and (c) to report cost savings per youth by calculating average cost to provide targeted intervention subtracted from average cost to detain youths.

The objective of the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court was to increase the number and percentage of youths completing program requirements. The goal was to reduce recidivism and give first-time offenders an opportunity to participate in a program that was not only educational but also beneficial. The Dublin-Laurens Teen Court existed to present first-time juvenile offenders with an opportunity to receive community help in correcting their inappropriate behavior and to be tried by a jury of their peers rather than by an official court. It was the Dublin-Laurens Teen Court's policy to uphold local, state,

and federal laws; provide support for first-time offenders; and encourage the community to become an integral part of restoring personal worth to their children.

The aim was also to improve juvenile accountability for offending behaviors through increased accountability programming for juvenile offenders and improved juvenile justice system accountability to juvenile offenders. Calculating the number and percentage of youths completing program requirements began once the youths had been allowed to participate in the Teen Court program. The youths were not considered to have completed the program until the executive director signed all necessary paperwork indicating all requirements assigned for the youths had been met.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to seek understanding of the nontraditional juvenile court process from the perceptions of juvenile justice workers in a local teen court program. The research focused on the perceptions of juvenile court officers who administered the Teen Court to understand why this approach was effective in reducing recidivism. Understanding all aspects of the Teen Court model utilized in Dublin-Laurens County may assist in the improvements of not only this program but also the effectiveness of other youth justice programs around the world. The results of this study could lead to a positive shift of the criminal justice reform in Georgia as it relates to juvenile recidivism.

Juveniles who were charged with a crime and summoned to the juvenile court system when they committed a misdemeanor for the first time, were presented with the option to be referred to an alternative court program. Youths entered the teen court or

they remained in the traditional court system and received a traditional sentencing. The local Department of Juvenile Justice contributed recidivism data from their program for Laurens County, Georgia teens. Two hundred thirty-seven juveniles who selected to enter the traditional court system in Dublin-Laurens County for committing misdemeanor crimes for the first time had a total of 99 delinquents who reoffended within their first year over a 5-year span. This totaled a recidivism rate of 41.77% from 2015 to 2019. The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program proved to decrease the number of reoffending youths labeled as first-time offenders of misdemeanor crimes. From 2015 to 2019, the Teen Court Program had a total of 140 youths who successfully completed the program. Out of this total, three juveniles reoffended over the next 3, 6, or 12-month periods. These data were a stark contrast to data provided by the region's Department of Juvenile Justice and also illustrated the effectiveness of the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program on juveniles reoffending in their community.

However, research was lacking on youth courts. I aimed to fill the gap in research literature by exploring additional information and insights regarding alternative approaches to juvenile delinquency. Findings may be used to support state funding of similar teen courts and diversion programs and the creation of a Georgia State Association for Youth Courts to provide secondary support for cities interested in creating a teen court program but lack financial and physical resources.

I used a descriptive case study approach. Yin (2009) identified five components of case study research designs that were especially important and are presented in Table 2.

Table 2*Explanations of Key Information From Case Study Research Design*

Case study item	Explanation
Research question	How is the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court more successful in reducing juvenile delinquency recidivism than traditional juvenile court?
Propositions	1. The teen court is effective at reducing recidivism because it provides skills to juvenile offenders. 2. The teen court is effective at reducing recidivism because juveniles fear the punishment of traditional court.
Unit of analysis	Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program
Logic linking data to propositions	The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program is effective at reducing recidivism. The design of the Program is aimed at providing proper skills to avoid recidivism. The Program also includes the threat of punishment for non-completion.
Criteria for interpreting findings	Thematic content analysis of individual surveys with juvenile justice officers. The focus of the surveys will be on their experiences with juveniles in both traditional and Teen Court and specifically how Teen Court reduces recidivism.

Research Question

The research question was the following: How is the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court more successful in reducing juvenile delinquency recidivism than traditional juvenile court?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study was deterrence theory, which was a modernized extension of Beccaria's 1764 "Essay on Crimes and Punishments" and Bentham's 1781 "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (Introduction to the Principles)." Deterrence theory's foundational support revived in the 1970s once researchers questioned the reason for committing crimes while also seeking

an understanding of how to solve crime (Pratt et al., 2006). There are three assumptions to the theory: (a) a message of possible sanctions is delivered to a group, (b) the receivers ingest the information and perceive it as a possible threat to their freedoms, and (c) the group now considers sanctions prior to making criminalistic choices and decisions (Tomlinson, 2016). Society faced the same laws and ordinances, yet not everyone dissected the risks of sanctions and considered consequences the same. Deterrence theory was used in the current study to explore how the court requirements of the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program were effective in deterring repeat offenses as compared to the harsher sanctions of the traditional juvenile courts.

Deterrence theory has a three-level approach to crime: (a) certainty, (b) celerity, and (c) severity. Once a juvenile has committed a crime, been apprehended, and been referred to the teen court program by the juvenile courts, the processing and sentencing of the youth is completed expeditiously. Compared to traditional courts, the consequences of teen court are not as harsh; however, teen court requirements for sentencing completions are more time-consuming and are an extended invasion of the delinquent's daily freedoms. Dublin-Laurens County, Georgia's traditional juvenile court sentences include an immediate charge dismissal after paying a fine, 15–20 hours of community service, in-home placement, out-of-home placement, and detention centers. Teen Court does not detain any youths or order youths to serve in-home detention. Teen Court requires an in-program stay of 3 months for any referred juvenile. The severity of punishment decreases in Teen Court programs, but the length of stay within the Court's monitoring system outweighs the traditional system.

Stafford and Warr (1993) challenged the original components of deterrence theory and questioned the possibility of indirect deterring. The belief that persons were encouraged to avoid a life of crime due to witnessing sanctions placed on others in their personal environment was introduced. Paternoster and Piquero (1995) supported Stafford and Warr's findings with their study results involving the testimonies of young adults and their peers. Individuals were deterred from crimes not only to avoid societal consequences but also from witnessing peers face punishments, which introduced new perceived risks that deterred as well. The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court involves the youth offenders in the courtrooms, but the court officers are youths as well. The volunteering youth officers witness firsthand accounts of sanctions placed on their peers. Success of the program is based on the deterrence of reoffending criminal behaviors from the point of entry into the program for youth defendants and the point of contact of peers in the courtroom for volunteering youth officers.

Nature of the Study

I used the descriptive qualitative research method identified as a case study. Detailed accounts of juvenile offenders' behaviors were recorded. This information depicted the delinquent activities of juveniles who selected to enter the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court (Georgia) and the Department of Juvenile Justice traditional courts. All participants had direct interactions with 100% of the youths, and the study's data were based solely on the numerical rates of juvenile recidivism from both court systems and the retrieved information from the juvenile officers.

Definitions

Department of Juvenile Justice: An agency working to aid in the justice, change, reshaping, and guidance in the lives of young people, hoping they will eventually be able to lead responsible lives on their own (Hay, Ladwig & Campion, 2018).

Deterrence: A method of dissuasion against certain goals or situations by embedding anguish and worry of the outcome (Frank, 2017).

Diversion: An altercation that changes people from their original course or plan of action (Azim, 2021).

First-time offender: An individual who has been charged with any type of crime for the first time (Tolou-Shams et al., 2019).

Juvenile courts: A youth court for delinquents under the age of 18 (Frank, 2017).

Juvenile delinquent: A person under the age of 18 who commits behavior in which the rights of others are violated, often including parents (Azim, 2021).

Misdemeanor: An act less serious than a felony but serious enough to warrant prosecution and confinement; crimes are normally settled by monetary fines (Tolou-Shams et al., 2019).

Recidivism: A person's return to criminal behavior during a timed period after being released from the justice system's care (Baglivio et al., 2018).

Restorative justice: An opportunity in which the convicted criminal can face up to their wrongdoings and satisfactorily admit guilt to the victim and community (Jufri et al., 2019).

Teen court: A court program within the Department of Juvenile Justice System where most participants are teens. Peers of the same age are entrusted to decide the sentence of the offender (Walker et al., 2018).

Assumptions

I assumed that the study's participants would be truthful during data collection. I also assumed that the survey questions would be fully understood. Confidentiality was vital during the study. The participation process was voluntary, and participants had the right to excuse themselves at any time. Based on the population of the study and their employment duties, I assumed all participants were experienced and knowledgeable regarding the youth court program.

I also assumed the selected theory would provide a strong foundation for the study and the supporting information would accurately illustrate the research findings. Survey questions were used to elicit data for the study, and I assumed the information collected would yield reliable conclusions.

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused solely on the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program and the completion results of youths who were arrested for first-time misdemeanor crimes. A goal was set of completing all actions associated with the research. The program's youth offenders had 90 days to complete their sentencing requirements; therefore, they were tracked upon their entering and dismissal of the program.

Limitations

The collected data were obtained from the Department of Juvenile Justice's officers. There was a risk that my role as researcher would not be trusted and that participants' responses would not be trustworthy. Confidentiality played a key role in mitigating these limitations.

Regarding the social science foundation used in the study, the outcomes could be limited by the selected use of terms and definitions. The results of the study may be limited based on my choice of defined terms. The data collection instruments were limited based on the reliability and validity of the survey.

Significance

This study may be important in the criminal justice field because of its ability to shed light on an ongoing problem in the juvenile justice system: recidivism. The goal of diversion programs is to lead all youths away from delinquency and crime (Development Services Group, 2017). The current study may inform and possibly advance policy and similar studies from practitioners locally and abroad.

When reducing recidivism, training for the offenders that provides guidance and counseling for personal needs outside of the correctional gates is beneficial. The transitional process into the community for offenders is important. If they are not properly guided and prepared, they have a higher risk of committing acts of equal or higher crime levels later in life.

I assumed individual differences, communal surroundings, family, and goals determine which offenders are not successful. However, others argue that the incoming

juvenile offenders have not been correctly assessed during the intake process. This leads to low-risk and high-risk offenders being placed on the same level of treatment. When selecting an area in which more focus should be applied, researchers should identify risk factors that lead to the repeated offenses of youths. It is vital to understand who needs to be targeted. Ineffective diversion ends with negative results. My goal was to conduct research and to pique interest in this topic.

Summary

The effectiveness of juvenile diversion programs, such as the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court, was highlighted in this study. The problem that was addressed in this study focused on first-time juvenile offenders and how the Dublin-Laurens Teen Court has been more successful at reducing recidivism than traditional juvenile court. The first chapter included the history of juvenile justice and how diversionary programs like teen courts have been a potential alternative to traditional court. Accurate statistics were provided to support the study's problem statement. The first chapter also outlined the procedures undertaken by the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program. Chapter 2 provides a review of the related research and literature on these topics.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the importance of juvenile diversion programs and teen courts. The issue of juvenile recidivism and the effects of teen court programs was addressed. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to seek understanding of the nontraditional juvenile court process from the perceptions of juvenile justice workers in a local teen court program. Selecting case study as the qualitative method and the program's definition of measuring success was revealed. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of vital sources that allowed me to strengthen the study base, improve plans of action, and provide a clear understanding of the data, results, and overall study. Juvenile delinquency and reoffending are highlighted throughout the chapter and its connection to deterrence. Challenges arose during this review, such as maintaining the ability to ensure quality and credibility of sources. Evaluating the credibility of sources was one of the most difficult aspects, especially with the ease of finding information on the internet (see Shuttleworth, 2009). The best research is that which can be reproduced by other researchers with similar outcomes.

Juvenile Recidivism

Successful juvenile diversion organizations were considered productive evidence-based programs with detail-oriented strategies to deter youths from reoffending (Seigle et al., 2014). Programs such as the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court created policies and practices to address the needs of entering teens and present educational courses within the agency to prepare delinquent youths to face a life free of criminal activity upon a successful completion. The program's success was proven through its low recidivism

rates compared to the high numbers of reoffending youths who were adjudicated through the traditional juvenile court system.

It was vital to recognize and acknowledge the different levels of juvenile delinquency. Upon entry into the Department of Juvenile Justice, the teens were labeled within a high- or low-risk assessment. For juveniles who were considered low risk, providing the most accurate court sentencing was vital to ensure the best corrective measures. It was possible to over intervene with low-risk youths (Seigle et al., 2014). Programs such as teen courts were needed for the sentencing and corrections of low-risk youths. Introducing a low-risk teen to the same sanctions as high-risk juveniles who enter the traditional court system would present a harsher way of life to a teen who may not have considered more serious crimes.

Is Juvenile Crime Serious?

Small differences exist between crime and juvenile crime. Status offenses are considered as troubling behaviors committed by juveniles but are not seen as criminal acts from adults. The suggestion that status offenses are miniscule on crime scales is a misguided claim, for it is still considered a crime for juveniles (Rowland, 1996). The attention of decreasing the number of crimes committed and the lowering of recidivism rates are placed upon individuals considered as juveniles just the same as they are on adult offenders (Rowland, 1996).

Puzzanchera et al. (2011) found juvenile offending and especially repeat juvenile offending to be a serious public health concern. In 2009, law enforcement agencies in the United States arrested approximately 1.9 million persons under 18 years of age. The

Department of Juvenile Justice unit responsible for the cases from the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court estimated over 11,000 youths were considered at risk of criminal behavior in the area of Laurens County and the surrounding counties the unit covered (Puzzanchera et al., 2011).

Statistics illustrated that when offending occurs at a young age, which is not limited to delinquency recidivism or violent criminal acts, it is easier to predict adult offending (Loeber & Farrington, 2011). Barrett et al. (2014) completed sample studies showing the effects of demographic and early experiential factors causing a difference in teenage delinquent behaviors versus nondelinquents and juvenile recidivists versus nonrecidivists. The researchers found there was a stronger relationship between early environmental factors and juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

Taskiran et al. (2017) deemed juvenile delinquency as an increasingly common issue that required respect and a deeper understanding from others due to its close history of deeply rooted psychosocial challenges. Their research depicted a recent survey of juvenile crime in the United States, which indicated that juvenile crime had increased by 18.4%. Taskiran et al. (2017) feared an unwarranted increase of adult criminal activities if the juvenile crime rates were not targeted and successfully addressed.

Barrett et al. (2014) maintained that any juvenile who committed one or more criminal offenses had a higher chance of being arrested as an adult. Barrett et al. (2014) also argued that youths who were incarcerated at a young age had a 50% greater likelihood of being arrested as an adult than youths who were never incarcerated. For juveniles who had a later start of criminal activities, Barrett et al. (2014) found them to be

twice as likely to be arrested by the age of 30 and three times more likely to be incarcerated due to committing felony offenses. Barrett et al.'s 2014 study indicated that juvenile crime is a serious problem.

Problems of Juvenile Recidivism

Adverse childhood experiences and their relationship with negative emotionality has received a sizeable amount of research over the years (Wolff & Baglivio, 2016). These studies highlighted the impact of juvenile recidivism based on the upbringing and personal environments of the juveniles. It was vital for courts to understand the individual backgrounds and histories of youths to better understand what contributed to the delinquent behaviors of these young people.

The study of Wolff and Baglivio (2016) exposed the direct and indirect effects of adverse childhood experiences and negative emotionality on youths who reoffend in their juvenile years or into their adulthood stages. Their results supported the argument that due to influences of adverse childhood experiences, there was a substantial effect on recidivism and a direct precursor to the cause of juvenile negative emotionality. Wolff and Baglivio (2016) found that negative emotionality had a significantly higher possibility of causing juveniles to reoffend, be re-arrested, and be reincarcerated. Adverse childhood experiences were responsible for a high percentage of juvenile recidivism.

Reducing Juvenile Crime

A definitional change could hold ground between reducing juvenile crimes or not. If a program eliminated status offenses from under the category of criminal activity, then the program showed a major deduction in the number of juvenile crimes committed.

However, this led to an increase of youths skipping school, spraying graffiti on abandoned buildings, participating in underage drinking, and committing other offenses. Not labeling these offenses as crimes did not mean crimes were not being committed. A simple change of definitions was not a means of depicting a decrease in crimes among youths (Rowland, 1996).

The main challenge of these definitional changes was proving the programs that chose to redefine what juvenile meant would manipulate the system by working with definitions and policy codes. If a juvenile program reduced reports of status offenses, statistical data would display newsworthy deductions in youth crime rates and reduce the overall number of youths being sent to detention centers. Supporters claimed now the system would concentrate on juveniles who were dangerous criminals as opposed to those who were only breaking petty rules (Rowland, 1996).

An immediate response to solving juvenile crime was to apply harsher consequences to young lives. Political leaders and community citizens grew tired of the repeat offenses of teens but failed to create an effective solution. Tougher penalties were desired due to a rising number of juvenile criminal acts, but this change in the criminal justice system lacked a solid foundation of support (Rowland, 1996).

The end results differed due to specific situations of each individual young delinquent. The threat of harsher penalties deterred one youth from a life of crime, but another youth might choose to ignore established laws regardless of possible consequences. Some researchers did not admit that stiffer court sentences could make it appear that youth crime was decreasing, but the statistics did not provide a completely

accurate assessment of juvenile crime rates and did not demonstrate substantive positive change while it appears diversion strategies do show positive change (Rowland, 1996).

History of Juvenile Courts in the United States

The 19th century introduced a new wave of strategies and laws design to address the criminal infractions of delinquent youths. Social change agents, also known as social reformers, advocated that facilities be opened that were designated for youths only. This was seen largely in the heavily populated cities (Shelden, 2006). Youths were no longer being detained within the adult detention centers. The forward-thinking reformers of New York City led the movement by opening the New York House of Refuge to house juvenile delinquents in 1825. The Society for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency established this operation. They were followed by the Chicago Reform School in Illinois in 1855 (Sheldon, 2006).

Not only were these reformers aiming to separate the juveniles from adult criminals, they also hoped to focus on rehabilitation for the youths to deter them from reoffending throughout life. In 1899, the United States introduced its first juvenile court program. Several states soon followed (Shelden, 2006). By 1924, most states had mirroring courtrooms catering to juveniles only.

Following the model of the first juvenile justice reformed schools, the early youth courts held the same expectations and goals when addressing juvenile offenders. The courts worked toward rehabilitating the youths in place of punishing them with jail time. The legal doctrine used to describe their 19th century efforts is *parens patriae*, meaning parents of the country. The doctrine provided power to the states to serve in the role of

guardian to any offenders, whether adult or juvenile, who possessed legal disabilities. Instead of harsh punishments, courts sought for the best interests of the juvenile. Most cases were treated as civil action cases. The courts' overall goal was to lead the juveniles to a crime-free life. Due to some cases being above the status of civil or misdemeanor, courts had the power to remove juveniles from the rehabilitative homes and place them within institutionalized rehabilitation centers (Sheldon, 2006).

Judge Julian Mack was one of the founding judges of Cook County, Illinois's juvenile courts. Mack (1909) penned the original goals of the juvenile justice court system in the Harvard Law Review as follows:

The child who must be brought into court should, of course, be made to know that he is face to face with the power of the state, but he should at the same time, and more emphatically, be made to feel that he is the object of its care and solicitude. The ordinary trappings of the courtroom are out of place in such hearings. The judge on a bench, looking down upon the boy standing at the bar, can never evoke a proper sympathetic spirit. Seated at a desk, with the child at his side, where he can on occasion put his arm around his shoulder and draw the lad to him, the judge, while losing none of his judicial dignity, will gain immensely in the effectiveness of his work. (p. 120)

Alternative Programs: Youth Court Models

Butts et al. (2002) described teen courts as effective alternatives to the traditional juvenile court process. Statistics showed that the number of teen court programs increased throughout the United States and world over the past 15 years (Gase et al.,

2016). Research data improved and gained validity due to there being a larger pool of programs to conduct statistical analysis comparisons (Butts et al., 2002). In the past, evaluations of teens courts depicted the positive effects of the program, but researchers lacked a definitive reason for why these programs were promising for youths' future. This study (Butts et al., 2002) proved otherwise.

Though aiming for similar goals and outcomes, not all teen courts were the same. Some programs were run strictly by the youths, while others were youth-inspired but had an adult as the leader in the courtroom. Godwin et al. (1998) labeled the four main models of teen courts globally used. The following list includes the most popular to the least popular teen courts (National Youth Court Center, 2006):

1. Peer jury: Teen volunteers served as jury members with the group leader being a trained teen bailiff. The youth offender was sworn under oath into the courtroom and seated in front of the jury. No attorneys were present, for the jury acted as the sole questioner of the defendant. Once the examination process was complete, the jury deliberated and provided the final sentence to the court.
2. Youth judge model: The youth judge model closely mirrored the adult judge model; however, the courtroom's highest rank, judge, was a trained teenager. Teen volunteers held every court position and witnessed the court process as completed thoroughly and effectively under the lenient guidance of adult volunteers.

3. Youth tribunal: The tribunal model differed due to there being no jurors in the court proceedings. The teen defense and prosecuting attorneys presented their cases before a panel of one to three youth judges. The most experienced teen judge sat between the two others and acted as the guide for the court hearing. The juvenile defendant in question sat before a group of trained teens and had the facts of their case presented to the panel. Once all information was shared, the tribunal leaders discussed their options and delivered the results and sentencing to the youth offender.
4. Adult judge model: In adult judge models, teens were the leaders of the courtroom. Though an adult, normally an adult volunteer attorney, held the highest position of court judge, the youths were responsible for ensuring the court process was successful. Teens served as jurors, juror assistants, forepersons, court bailiffs, court clerks, and defense/prosecution attorneys. Attorneys were responsible for meeting with their juvenile offenders, writing their cases, and presenting their information before a jury of peers to receive a final sentence. The court clerk retained all the commentary from the proceedings and typed or wrote it on official documents to later file in court records. The bailiff was responsible for maintaining a peaceful courtroom where all attendees were expected to abide by the courtroom rules. The Dublin – Laurens County Teen Court Program practiced this model.

Though these models were quite different and were utilized across the world, each program still had one goal: Decreased recidivism among youth offenders. Jeffery A.

Butts, Janeen Buck, and Mark B. Coggeshall conducted an Evaluation of Teen Court Project (ETCP) in 2002. The results supported the findings of juvenile diversion programs, such as youth courts, significantly lowered the chance of teens reoffending and being re-referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice and juvenile courts system. It was found that the youth court process successfully “outperformed” the strategies and effectiveness of traditional juvenile justice court process (Butts et al., 2002).

Graduated Sanctions: Where Does Teen Court Fit?

Graduated response systems use a tiered-system with array of sanctions and incentives to reduce incidences of delinquent behaviors while avoiding detention and/or incarceration (Farrell et al., 2020). The dual elements of prevention programs and secured youth prisons were in the planning process of implementing the practices of graduated sanctions. The underlying belief was youth offenders labeled as dangerous and high risk should be sentenced to detention centers, but youth considered as low risk, nonviolent offenders needed to be rehabilitated (Rowland, 1996) by implementing programs targeting restorative justice procedures and not stricter punishment.

A staunch supporter of the graduated sanctions approach was the Clinton Administration (Rowland, 1996). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention advocated for the three-tiered system, which addressed each youth based on their level of societal need and crime levels. The approach was compared to the “social development model” and was deemed effective in preventing severe and violent criminal acts amongst juveniles. Social development model is supported by a combination of theories in deviance and focused on enhancing the overall well-being of juveniles while

targeting delinquency, crime, and substance abuse. Susan Guarino-Ghezzi and Edward J. Loughran supported the graduated sanctions style by teaching their similar approach entitled a “balanced model”. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency also endorsed a very close system of their own that displayed a similar balanced model (Rowland, 1996).

There are five major components within graduated sanctions: risk assessment, support for prevention, low level punishment in combination with rehabilitation programs, mid-level punishment with rehabilitation programs, and high-level punishment for the most dangerous offenders (Rowland, 1996; Farrell et al., 2020). No one system of graduated sanctions was perfect, though many have been implemented.

Juvenile courts practiced extreme caution when selecting the appropriate sanction for youths. It was vital to acknowledge and understand standards and requirements for categorizing juveniles into their respective tiers. These standards were effective and necessary (Rowland, 1996). The programs in the sanctions had clear, definite goals and strategies in the curriculum and lessons; there were adequate, goal-oriented methods and objectives available; and a trusted selection process of each tier which ensured all youths were paired with their best suited program. If courts lacked such a system, youths who were sent to the juvenile court system were not properly sentenced to the correct or appropriate rehabilitation program (Rowland, 1996). Farrell et al.’s 2020 study also added that graduated responses systems that combined sanctions for violations and incentives for continued progress can significantly reduce incarcerations, limit racial disparities and improve overall completion rates for youths (p. 6).

Richard Wiebush, Christopher Baird, Barry Krisberg, and David Onek (1994) illustrated supporting evidence of effective, rational standards being formed. Juvenile offenders possessed the ability to transform the negative, learned behaviors through the proper form of educational sentencing. Adjudication, removed the youth from troubled environments, fostered a supportive atmosphere, introduced social skills, encouraged academic achievement and community and school behavior, limited substance abuse, practiced stable family, parental, and peer relations (Wiebush et al., 1994).

Prevention programs were rated through levels of risk for the youths. Risk factors were identified as the single or collective characteristics which animated negative influence on youths to practice criminal behaviors. Barry Krisberg, Elliot Currie, David Onek, and Richard Wiebush (1995) supported the risk factor approach toward youth prevention programs based on over thirty years of research. Krisberg et al. (1995) asserted that behavior assessments should be properly conducted to ensure the youths received the correct model treatment. David Hawkins and Richard Catalano (1995) highlighted five main categories of risk in juvenile justice: community, family, school, individual, and peer risk factors. The Dublin – Laurens County Teen Court Program addressed each of these risk factors. Once the youths were placed into their respective risk sections, Hawkins and Catalano (1995) believed federal grants should be utilized to provide a secure foundation of support for the formulated interventions aimed to promote protective factors which would counteract the existing risk factors in young criminals' lives.

In the graduated response system, the least serious criminal offenses were categorized under first level punishments. John Wilson (1995) maintained juveniles who were charged for minor misdemeanors should be punished with educational, corrective consequences. He found rehabilitative services most effective, such as least intensive drug treatment programs, peer juries, counseling, informal probation, and other similar solutions. Farrell et al.'s 2020 study of a graduated response system in the Maryland Juvenile Justice System underpinned by the deterrence theory appears to agree with the Wilson (1995) study by suggesting that sanctions need to be certain, swift and proportionate to the severity of the behavior as an effective means of deterring criminal actions.

After offenders were found guilty, Rowland (1996) confirmed it is vital for youth to receive immediate sentencing and placement in successful programs toward reducing recidivism. He believed immediate introduction to a case worker and professional confidant lowered the risk of repeat offenders amongst at-risk youth. This step was beneficial toward youth; however, it was important for the contact to include intensive sessions, educational classes, behavioral development training, and more of the like.

In the current study's described program, Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court, random school and home check-ins were daily practices. After school programs were included as well, such as tutoring, community service projects, arts and craft projects, individual and group counseling, life and social developmental skills, anger management, teen dating violence preventions, and fines. Rowland (1996) described a Pennsylvania program where youths were involved in day and afterschool intensive programs. Krisberg

et al (1995) noted the strongest form of support for community-based diversion programs was from Massachusetts and their deinstitutionalization attempts. Krisberg and his team of researchers (1995) studied the Massachusetts strategy of moving the majority of their first level teen offenders into community-based diversion programs. Only 15% of the teens, who were considered the most dangerous, were placed in detention facilities. According to Krisberg et al. (1995), the change in Massachusetts' system brought a decrease in teen offending rates and the recidivism rates either improved drastically or remained the same as other routes taken by juvenile court systems. The recidivism rates did not increase. In addition to the positive results in youth offending, \$11 million per year was also saved with this deinstitutionalized experience. Similar to Dublin – Laurens Teen Court, these northeastern programs have found success by focusing on individual and group educational services, family counseling, and individual or group therapy and drug prevention (see Krisberg et al., 1995).

Krisberg et al (1995) believed in the importance of diverting youth to community run programs instead of a jailed institution. Their research included a detailed summary of several studies spotlighting community sanctions. Krisberg et al. (1995) claimed diversion programs from community organizations, such as Dublin – Laurens County Teen Court, act as non-hazardous, cost efficient solutions that can replace the need for juvenile incarceration.

The juvenile justice system introduced several strategies toward limiting teen criminal behavior, recidivism, and juvenile incarceration rates, and Rowland (1996) argued graduated sanctions gained the greatest support. Combining these sanctions of

community-based and law enforcement programs and placing accountability on diverted teens resulted in successful outcomes. Graduated response strategies, like the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court had the highest probability of deterring teens from continuing criminal acts and being sentenced to jail or prison time with their focus on relating to and addressing the needs of the youths within their community environments (Wilson, 1995). Krisberg et al. (1995) demonstrated strong justification for graduated response programs by highlighting how the most well-grounded programs of graduated sanctions possessed proven records of being highly effective and costing significantly less than incarceration alternatives. This proposal of graduated sanctions was the most efficient approach to juvenile crime and justice in today's literature (Rowland, 1996; Farrell et al., 2020).

History of Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court

The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program was founded by a visionary named Julie S. Driger. Mrs. Driger was a twenty-seven-year veteran city councilwoman, former secretary to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., civic leader, and an effective social change agent. While representing the City of Dublin, Georgia during a National League of Cities – Cities Summit Conference in Texas, Mrs. Driger witnessed a group of teenagers perform a mock trial. The court case presented illustrated the steps of a traditional court session, yet was led by teenaged attorneys, jury members, clerks, and court officers. Intrigued, Mrs. Driger returned home and introduced the idea to her mayor and city council. The year was 1996. After collaborating and networking with various

groups throughout the community, the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program opened its doors on July 1, 1997 in Dublin, Georgia.

The program initially targeted reducing the local drug / alcohol abuse and limiting moving and nonmoving traffic violations amongst teenagers. The Georgia Governor's Office of Highway Safety (GAOHS) provided a grant to assist in the funding for Dublin's teen court early years. The support and funding from GAOHS played a major role in the community issues being addressed in the community. As the program continued to evolve, it began to gain the attention of the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice. This collaboration introduced an additional source of juvenile court cases and types of misdemeanor cases in the teen court system. The program now served youth who were arrested for misdemeanors such as theft, affray, simple battery, obstruction, and disorderly conduct; in addition to the existing drug abuse and vehicular crime cases.

The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court granted expunged criminal records to hundreds of local youths. The program continued to serve as a safe haven for troubled teens who sought individual or family counseling, assistance with restoring positive behaviors, academic tutoring, mentorship, and a second chance in the criminal justice system. Such services were implemented to contribute to the juvenile recidivism reduction efforts.

Overview of Teen Court's Effectiveness

The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program was founded in Dublin, GA in 1997. It was considered the first Teen Court Program in the State of Georgia. Presently, there are over 1,800 teen/peer court programs globally. Since its inception, first time

youth offenders have entered, endured, and completed the program successfully.

Examples of the program's involved cases included, but are not limited to: Affray, Bullying, Curfew, Disorderly Conduct, Moving Traffic Violations, Non – Moving Traffic Violation, Possession of Drug (less than 1 ounce), Runaway, Simple Assault, Theft by Taking – Shoplifting – Deception, and Truancy.

Once a case was heard, several sentencing options were available to the teen jury for selection during deliberations. Verdict requirements ranged from a list of mandatory, optional, and recommended sentences. Examples of optional sentencing included: viewing videos (relevant to the crime), essays (relevant to the crime), curfew with specified time and duration, and completing a driving course with parent(s) in attendance at the City of Dublin Police Department. Mandatory requirements included community service hours and \$25 court fee. Recommended services included tutoring, counseling, individual and/or family therapy, anger management, City of Dublin Police Department Transformers Program, and the City of Dublin Police Explorers Program. There were more services available in the community for recommendation, but they were not currently suggested by the program's teen juries.

Due to the efforts and effectiveness of the programs and services in Teen Court, reoffending occurrences in juvenile delinquency dropped locally. The Dublin – Laurens County Teen Court Program reached success through decreasing the rate of recidivism for first-time juvenile offenders of misdemeanor crimes. The reoffending rates of the program were compared to the reoffending rates of the Department of Juvenile Justice's traditional courts and illustrated the successes of restorative justice practices in Dublin-

Laurens County's Teen Court. An understanding of the Teen Court's success was presented through the perceptions of juvenile justice officers. The current case study used juvenile officers' individual perspectives to explain why teen court was more effective at reducing recidivism than traditional court.

Positive Peer Pressure

Deterrence Theory, the theoretical framework used to underpin the current study, posits that people learn from others' experiences. Courts, specifically the Dublin – Laurens County Teen Court, served as a great example of positive peer influence (Butts, 2002) due to introducing teen offenders to an alternative system for justice and acting as a major element within the program (Dick, Pence, Jones, & Geersten, 2004). Evidence suggests that the act of having to testify about one's criminal activities before a jury and courtroom of peers served as a positive motivator to shift mindsets and future behaviors away from additional criminal acts.

The Dublin – Laurens County Teen Court Program was devoted to ensuring the teens entering the program as defendants and youth offenders were immediately introduced to peers who had not committed a crime. Though they were not like-minded initially, the positive influences of the non-offending youths encouraged offenders to remove themselves from current illegal activities and migrate toward becoming law abiding teens. Teens who were recommended to the Teen Court organization from the Department of Juvenile Justice were in desperate need of a change in environment and peers and were more vulnerable to reoffend by returning to their previous relationships (Hirschi, 2005).

All people, regardless of their age have things and/or people that exert influence over them or their choices. Having an influence in one's life only becomes an issue when the influence is negative. Parents, teachers, commercial advertising, and more encouraged youths to avoid negative people, dangerous neighborhoods, and participating in criminal behaviors with peers. H. Swadi and H. Zeitlin (1988) claimed positive influences had just as powerful of an effect on young lives as negative. Recreational use of drugs and alcohol influenced teens, but Swadi and Zeitlin (1988) believed if youth were exposed to the opposite behavior or not abusing drugs/alcohol, it would have the ability to discourage substance abuse usage.

E. K. Drake's 2018 study which looked at the costs associated with the shift in sanctions from incarceration (the most severe and expensive sanction) to other strategies, including graduated response strategies, like the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court program, found that since 2009, approximately 161 jurisdictions have adopted similar models. There is a limited amount of evidence related to how well juvenile justice programs are doing with implementation of graduated response programs, but toolkits are being made available (Center for Children's Law and Policy, 2016). As more data are collected on the effectiveness of graduated response systems for juvenile offenders, evidence seems to indicate that graduated systems work best for reducing recidivism.

The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group (1999) supported Swadi and Zeitlin's claims. Their study reported higher increases of positive behavior changes from parental and teacher reports. The research participants illustrated not only decreased use of substances, but improvements in social interactions, problem solving, and a reduction

in physically aggressive actions. Smith and Chonody (2002) admitted a spotlight is needed on the impact of positive peer pressure amongst youths and an increase of research is warranted on the matter.

Financial Impact of Teen Court

For the traditional court systems in our country, the value of a young person's life was equated to a few hundreds of dollars per day. In stark contrast, taxpayers are paying hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to incarcerate a single juvenile (Justice Policy Institute - JPI, 2015). Of 47 reporting states, the average costs for a single confined juvenile was \$400/day, \$36,000/three months, \$72,000/six months, and \$146,300/year. Funding for juvenile incarcerations came from a variety of county, state and federal funding sources. Despite the fact that juvenile incarcerations were never intended to be long-term nor revenue-generating enterprises, large amounts of money were beginning to accrue to the entities responsible for housing juvenile offenders.

Not all youths were placed in an institutional setting when sent before the juvenile court judge. Some received a much lesser sentencing of probation. Though the juvenile had the potential to remain in the safety of their home and continue their regular lifestyle with peers, most states had monthly supervision fees for the teen and their families to cover. At the time of adjudication, many juvenile offenders were unemployed. Reports from the National Juvenile Defender Center (NJDC, 2017) reported that families of juvenile delinquents had financial burdens to face prior to receiving additional costs from juvenile probation. Twenty U.S. states reported they did not charge probationary fines for the juveniles; however, they did charge other fees (NJDC, 2017). Rates varied per state,

but the average cost for probation supervision fees was fifty dollars per month. Depending on the judge's sentencing, probation lasted from an average of four months to five years. From these numbers provided by the National Juvenile Defender Center (2017), supervision fees reached up to \$3,000 for some youth.

Similar to teen courts, juvenile probation required the teens to have accountability and maintain a crime free life while promoting positive behaviors. Yet, the practice of charging juveniles for probation supervision fees risked the teens having an extended stay in the system and also incurring debt at a young age. Probation fees provided the exact opposite of what restorative justice and rehabilitation programs were attempting to achieve with juveniles (NJDC, 2017).

As part of the data collection process, I was allowed to observe the Teen Court processes in person. The Dublin – Laurens County Teen Court and similar youth/peer/diversion court programs required a less dramatic budget for survival. The teen offenders were not removed from their homes or placed inside of the traditional court rooms. Costs were not accumulated to cover typical judicial court charges. In Dublin-Laurens County, Georgia, a male juvenile was stopped for speeding on a state highway by a Georgia State Trooper. The teen was traveling ninety-one miles per hour in a fifty-five miles per hour zone. The ticket was considered a max-super speeder violation. Additionally, the youth had several teenagers in his vehicle and received extra criminal charges. According to the local Department of Juvenile Justice, his ticket would potentially cost up to \$2000.00. Thankfully, this was the teen's first offense and he was recommended for the Teen Court program. His expensive traditional juvenile court fine

was now reduced to a one-time fee of \$25 for court services required by Teen Court. This was a stark difference in comparison to the fees charged by traditional court systems. Through this teen court program, no youths were incarcerated and separated from their families; nor were they placed in a probation system which required monthly fees which could function as an additional penalty for the teens and their guardians if they failed to pay the assessed amount. The financial impact of Teen Court assisted in the stabilization of families by not forcing debt into homes and introducing additional stressors into the lives of juveniles.

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter two presented supporting literature of diversion programs' effectiveness toward juvenile recidivism. The histories of America's juvenile court system and the Dublin – Laurens County Teen Court were explained to illustrate the background of two differing court systems for first-time youth offenders. Additional relevant information was provided including discussion of the financial burden traditional courts placed on juveniles versus the money saving strategy of teen courts. Chapter three introduced an in-depth view of the study's research design.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This third chapter introduces the methodology that was used for this study and is separated into different sections. The first section depicts the role of the researcher, collection procedures, and how data were analyzed. The problem, purpose, and research question of the study are then covered. The selected research design (case study) is explained, including what steps were taken to select the study's participants. Ethical considerations of the work with adult participants are shared, as well as the research stakeholders. Appendix C displays a letter of permission from the City of Dublin, Georgia's interim mayor. As the researcher, I received clearance to use the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court's name and to provide the location of the program in Dublin-Laurens County, Georgia.

The problem addressed in the study was to document the personal perspectives of juvenile officers as they compared the reduction of juvenile recidivism in a graduated response system Teen Court in Dublin, Georgia to the recidivism rate for juveniles involved in the traditional court system. There was an established need for effective diversion programs for youths in the juvenile justice system (Latimer et al., 2005). To address the issue, diversionary programs such as the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court were implemented. This Teen Court was never evaluated, although its impact on juvenile recidivism was significant compared to traditional court. From 2015 to 2019, the recidivism rate for traditional court for first-time juvenile offenders in Dublin-Laurens was 42%, and the recidivism rate for Teen Court was 2% (Dublin-Laurens (GA) Department of Juvenile Justice). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to seek

understanding of the nontraditional juvenile court process from the perceptions of juvenile justice workers in a local teen court program.

Research Design and Rationale

There was one research question that was addressed in this study: How is the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court more successful in reducing juvenile delinquency recidivism than traditional juvenile court? To provide the most accurate answer, I used the case study qualitative design. Gaining insight into participants' professional livelihood required asking quality interview questions. The qualitative approach was deemed best suited to this inquiry (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This form of research that encouraged understanding and discovery from the viewpoints of active participants had the strongest promise of bringing positive change into the lives of others. Compared to quantitative research paradigms that involve numeric data and statistical analysis, qualitative methodology is used to obtain textual data from participants as they interact and absorb information from life's occurrences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The current investigation of the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program, the study's unit of analysis, qualified as a qualitative case study due to being considered a bounded system (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Research is characteristically categorized into separate groupings of basic and applied. The foundation and motivating goal of basic research is to extend knowledge in a program, phenomenon, or activity. Applied research aims to expand the customs of a specific discipline or field. Outside of the researcher's knowledge, the study addresses insight gathered from associated audiences. It was my hope the information presented

from the current study would assist in updating policies and informing administrators of the teen court programs' importance (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court Program (Georgia) followed each teen who successfully completed the program for a year following the exit from the program. The data were gathered through follow-ups of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) agency for 3-, 6-, and 12-month increments. If a teen reoffended within this time period, the teen court program was notified by the DJJ office. A teen who had not yet reached the age to no longer be considered a juvenile, but they had been released from the Teen Court for a year, the Teen Court, the teen court staff would follow up with the juvenile offender's records. If a former teen court defendant had reoffended any time after being released from the program, their data were updated and saved with the teen court program.

Case study had been used in conjunction with qualitative research. However, case study had enough strength to stand on its own when compared to phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, or narrative inquiry (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In the current case study, the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court served as the unit of analysis and not the group being investigated. The unit was analyzed based on its success and effectiveness on juvenile recidivism. Case study research had the potential to become historical works from its impact on programs (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Typically, the cases were individuals, but some cases consisted of families, organizations, or some other unit of analysis. The teen court program was the unit of analysis for the current study. The youths were observed when entering the Dublin-

Laurens County Teen Court program. They had already encountered the DJJ officers prior to being sent into the diversion program. The juvenile justice officers were surveyed to obtain information on the transformation and new developments of the juveniles.

To maintain validity and reliability in the study, I selected a design that aligned with the research question and was consistent with my personality and skills. Before selecting the case study design, I acquired a full understanding of all other research designs and their philosophical foundations (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To properly present this work as a case study, I needed to ensure that the data collection would provide in-depth, highly descriptive information. The data were collected from multiple participants with detailed accounts and themes (see Creswell, 2013). Similar to other forms of qualitative research, case studies are conducted to enhance understanding by allowing the researcher to act as the main data collection instrument. Through case studies, the collection of data gathered through investigative techniques is considered to produce vivid, descriptive information (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The importance of the case study design was emphasized in the emails and personal communications with participants. Researchers who spend time defining the problem, planning the study, debating it with others, and reviewing related research improve their work and experience fewer disappointments and wasted efforts (see Creswell, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative researcher, I explored how the DJJ officers expressed their thoughts and ideas on the teen court program and investigated their firsthand experiences with the juveniles' journey from entry to dismissal. Data were collected by emailing eight

open-ended questions to each participant. To maintain high energy and excitement over the survey process, the participants were not held for extended periods of time with survey time of receiving and completion. During the first point of contact between me and the participant, the participant was emailed a detailed explanation of the study, the consent form, and the survey questions. The participants had 2 weeks to complete the questions and return them. The entire process was confidential and separated from the normal daily office activities and events. The use of emailed survey questions had been approved by the supervising personnel from the target agency and confidentiality had been identified as a necessity.

The gathered information was received from the study's participants and reviewed in great detail. As the researcher, I reviewed the responses and created a categorized code system. Following these steps, themes and labels were formed with the participants' and organization's well-being in mind. All collected data were analyzed to provide the most accurate depiction of the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court's officers' perspectives of the graduated system's effect on juvenile reducing delinquency and recidivism.

Methodology

Participation Selection

Juvenile justice workers act as the first entry point into the juvenile court system. When teens commit a crime, the local police department contacts these justice workers at the scene of the crime to be advised of their next steps: send the teen to jail or release them to their legal guardian for a future court date. In the current study, the juveniles were under the care of the justice workers before entering Dublin-Lauren County Teen

Court. Once the program they finished the program, the teens were returned to their placement with the DJJ officers until they were successfully dismissed by the juvenile justice judge. DJJ officers had firsthand experience and perspectives regarding the effect of the teen court on the juveniles. Through detailed, descriptive email responses, the officers provided their personal observations regarding the successes and areas needing improvements in the Teen Court program.

These participants were responsible for the teens being referred from the DJJ office into the diversion program. The study participants, juvenile justice officers, personally observed the teens before adjudication in the juvenile justice courts and after they had completed the Teen Court process. Teens who had successfully completed the program but reoffended after transitioning back to their home communities, were reported to the DJJ, who then contacted the teen court office and updated the reoffending youths' records for the program. Based on the interactions between the DJJ officers and the juvenile offenders, the officers had firsthand experience of happy endings and sad endings of juvenile reoffenders. The survey questions were open-ended and allowed the participants to speak without limitations (see Appendix B). All participants' identities remained confidential.

Sampling Strategy

The research plan was to retrieve a list from the agency's authorization official, which contained names and contact information of DJJ officers who may have been willing to participate in the study. These persons were contacted individually and informed of the study and its purpose. They were asked if their interest had been piqued

and if they would like to participate. Ten officers were contacted, and a date and convenient time were selected for emailed surveys to be received, completed, and submitted. Participation in the study was voluntary. The goal was to recruit enough participants to complete the study in one round of questioning. Due to the survey questions being open-ended and available through email, the expectation of follow-up questions was decreased. Once surveys were completed, the participants were no longer expected to contribute to the study.

Instrumentation

I served as the sole instrument in the study. My duty was to collect data through notes, complete thorough journaling of the experience, respond consistently to any questions from participants, and ensure all data were reliable and valid. The COVID-19 pandemic was not a barrier to data collection. The quality of the data was ensured due to the use of email questions enhancing the study experience for me and the participants (see Fritz & Vandermause, 2017). The study was not exposed to any threat of missing information.

Data Collection

I used a survey technique that was considered a form of qualitative research. The collected data revealed the effectiveness and value of the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court program and its effect on recidivism. An important objective of the study was to present an accurate judgment of the program and to identify strategies to improve future programming (see Patton, 2015). The officers' words were collected from open-ended questions through surveys, and the responses were analyzed to identify themes (see

Braun & Clark, 2013). This form of qualitative research was different from other types of qualitative research due to the study's focus on a unit.

Due to limiting any interactions with juveniles and risking the validity of the study, the juveniles were not contacted directly during data collection. The teens were observed firsthand by officers as their court-involved experience started, during the assignment to and matriculation through the Teen Court program, all the way through to their completion and exit from the DJJ.

The study's emailed surveys depicted the views of this diversion program through collected data. Introducing the qualitative steps of the research brought the lives and experiences of these teens to life through the responses of the DJJ workers. The purpose of the interviews was to collect deep, rich qualitative data discussing juvenile officers' personal perspectives on the effectiveness of a teen court as compared to a traditional court system. Due to the heightened threat of Covid-19 in our community, the survey process was conducted through the participants' workplace emailing service. Millions of institutions and places of employment relied heavily on technology to ensure the continuation of their agency's production. Currently, social distancing guidelines and a sharp increase of local coronavirus active cases caused the offices of the local juvenile justice offices to no longer allow in-person public access or to function at full capacity of employees on a daily basis. Though this introduced a new challenge to the study's data collection process, technology served as an appropriate solution.

Data Analysis Plan

The study's emailed survey questions were answered via a typed email response. This guaranteed the data was automatically transcribed. The plan utilized Nvivo to complete thematic coding of the study. The text was coded and any similarities or themes were identified properly. Thematic analysis presented itself as a cost-effective tool to assist in the analyzation and triangulation of data retrieved from the study's participants (Bree and Gallagher, 2016). Nvivo was widely accessible and contained the necessary services to code, organize, and categorize the data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

The study provided a strong foundation of truth and realistic testimony from participants. The study's audience was confident in the collected data and the final results of the research. This was achieved by allowing adequate time span for the participants to complete their questions. It was also vital for the researcher and participants to be knowledgeable of the study's unit of analysis – Dublin – Laurens County Teen Court Program.

Transferability

The importance of transferability was depicted in the ability to apply this study with other populations and settings while achieving similar finalized results. A goal of this research was to successfully apply and introduce the present research process to groups beyond the current study's scope. Applicability, externally, was key.

Dependability

Establishing a detailed account of each research period was necessary to ensure dependability in the study. Descriptive accounts of methods and procedures were recorded to depict key findings. Examples of recorded measures in need of uniformity included participant selection, coding strategies, context, and the collection process. As the researcher, each phase of the study was found reliable.

Confirmability

Confirmability highlighted the importance of fellow researchers having the ability to confirm the study's findings (Nowell et al., 2017). Results were neutral and any interpretations of the data was not founded from my own interpretations or beliefs (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). As the researcher, I acknowledged the need to remain self-aware and unbiased when practicing descriptive note taking during data collection process.

Ethical Considerations

Nolen and Putten (2007) argued action research studies raised complex ethical issues that were not present in traditional research. Nevertheless, such projects, like this one, were valuable when knowledge, working relationships, access, and credibility are established. It was vital the nature of the research created a special relationship between the researcher and the participants (O'Sullivan, Rassel, and Berner, 2008). The study required the cooperation of all participants in order for the data collection to be conducted. Those surveyed relied on me to treat them respectfully and ethically. They expected to not be harmed by merely participating in the research. As a researcher who is

familiar with the juvenile justice environment, it was my responsibility to introduce an atmosphere of trust and respect while conducting the study. My background and history in the field helped build a rapport with the study's participants and provide an understanding of their testimonies. Prior to completing the survey, all participants received a contract – Consent Form (Appendix B) - IRB approval number is 03-30-21-0083212.

Confidentiality is common to the criminal justice system; however, there were certain concerns with underage persons. For this reason, juveniles did not play a role in the study. In today's era, most judicial information or records remained accessible, but everyone was accountable for confidentiality. Caution was practiced when asking questions and receiving answers from the adult DJJ participants during the survey portion. Examples of this included: questions were respectable, the participants acted individually, and their identity remained confidential. Specific information was not included to protect juveniles' cases.

Research Stakeholders

As the researcher, I paid great attention to managing relationships and communicating with those outside the research team who had an interest in the project's outcome (The Strategy Unit, 2004). Stakeholders were the individuals and groups affected by and capable of influencing the development and implementation of strategy and policy proposals. Identifying key stakeholders and their issues was therefore a valuable exercise that was conducted as early on in the study as possible. Stakeholders made an extreme contribution to the success of the study. Effectively engaging with

stakeholders was key to motivating them and obtaining their commitment. This was done through contact and involvement throughout the project's lifecycle. It helped to reduce the risk of any surprises later on. Developing a stakeholder engagement plan was a useful way of planning how to effectively engage with each stakeholder.

A major practice among the researcher and the stakeholders was communication. It was critical to have the voice of other agencies and volunteer organizations in the incident planning process of restorative justice. They all had a strong comprehension of their duties and responsibilities. This involved being aware of potential risks in the community, program, and teens' lives. Personal plans needed to be available, and it is vital for all to adhere to their local government's regulations. These individuals and stakeholders included immediate families, the public, state and community officials, case managers, Department of Juvenile Justice probation officers and staff, volunteer groups, counselors, therapists, school officers, and local law enforcement. However, this caused a challenge amongst these stakeholders. Governmental organizations were not willing to admit appropriate services for first time juvenile offenders were not provided in some instances.

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the study's methodology, research design, unit of analysis, researcher's role, trustworthiness, stakeholders, and ethical considerations. The researcher identified the greatest source of testimonies to illustrate the experience of juveniles in teen court programs in the form of juvenile justice workers. Nvivo was utilized to effectively decipher the participants' responses. The software was also applied

to categorize, code, and reveal themes. The study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were also discussed in the chapter. Chapter 4 discusses the necessary steps and procedures for collecting detailed information from all study participants. Highlighted sections in the chapter included the study's research setting, demographics, collection process, analyzation, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to seek understanding of the nontraditional juvenile court process from the perceptions of juvenile justice workers in a local teen court program. The study answered one main research question: How is the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court more successful in reducing juvenile delinquency recidivism than traditional juvenile court? The primary focus of the collected research data was to document and report the officers' personal experiences with juveniles in traditional and teen court, respectively. Chapter 4 includes detailed accounts of the emailed survey results, the setting of the study, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Research Setting

Due to precautionary measures being taken by the local offices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the study's survey process was transformed into electronic correspondence of open-ended questions via email. Participants of the study were located in their personal environment. No known professional or personal conflicts affected the experience of the participants during the duration of their study participation, and the results were not affected by outside forces.

Demographics

The recorded demographics included race, gender, years of experience, and number of cases involved. Twelve surveys were conducted. One survey was not included in the final study due to insufficient information. The 11 participants included seven

females and four males. The race of the participants was seven African Americans and four White (see Table 3).

Table 3

Demographics of Study Participants

Participant	Race	Gender	Years of experience	Number of cases involved
Participant 1	White	Female	2	30
Participant 2	African American	Male	8	50
Participant 3	African American	Female	5	100
Participant 4	White	Male	6	70+
Participant 5	African American	Male	18	NA
Participant 6	African American	Female	2	30
Participant 7	African American	Female	6	300+
Participant 8	White	Female	22	900+
Participant 9	African American	Female	5	100
Participant 10	African American	Female	2	200
Participant 11	White	Male	27.5	1,000–2,000

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through electronic surveys with open-ended questions. An authorizing official provided the names and contact information of 15 juvenile justice workers. Once the names and contact information were received, I sent an invitation with a consent letter to each potential participant through individual email. Due to system security, not all invitations were received by potential study participants. Adjustments to the email correspondence was completed and a second attempt was made.

To maintain confidentiality and to not reveal justice workers' identity, all contacts on the original list were sent the same invitation and consent form again.

Participants were provided a timespan of two weeks to submit their emailed survey responses. At the end of Week 1, one submission was received. After 14 additional days, 11 other officers agreed to participate. The goal was to successfully interact with 10 justice workers. This was surpassed. The plans presented in Chapter 3 were accomplished and not changed during any portion of data collection. Data collection ceased once the received information no longer provided new testimony from participants. As the researcher, I determined saturation of the data had been reached.

Each participating justice worker responded to the invitation and consent form with two words: "I consent." The study involved the personal experiences and thoughts of juvenile justice workers. Original communication between participants and me was through the workers' employee email address. Employers had the capability to access the email accounts of each employee. Because responses of participants would be personal and could have a negative effect on job environment if employers were not pleased with retrieved information from the study, participants may not have felt comfortable expressing their true experiences if they feared possible retaliation from their administration. To ensure the protection and confidentiality of the participants and eliminate the possibility of employers gaining access to study surveys, private email addresses were created for each participant. Everyone had their own email and password for the data collection process. The only access for each account was through the single participant.

Data Analysis

Thematic qualitative analysis was used to code the collected data through NVivo software. Thematic analysis is considered a direct form of analysis by categorizing nonnumerical data and by recognizing the formation of patterns through theme development (Roberts et al., 2019). Transcription of the email surveys was not necessary due to all submissions being typed responses. After receiving enough suitable information from participants, I labeled each submission as Participant 1 to Participant 11.

To gain a thorough understanding of the retrieved data, I repeatedly read the responses for complete comprehension. This method assisted me in identifying similar experiences or interpretations of the officers, and I was able to apply codes to the information. As the researcher, I detected appropriate themes through data repetition. This process was accomplished by the participants' detailed accounts that provided replications of information (see Roberts et al., 2019). An example of this is seen with Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 5, Participant 8, Participant 9, and Participant 10. Participant 2 stated

If a youth fails to abide by the conditions of the orders set forth by Teen Court, their case that was held in abeyance (a temporary halt) will be forwarded to the juvenile court for disposition. In juvenile court they could then be ordered to probation or placed in detention for their committed offense.

This was coded as failure to comply within the analyzation process. A total of 42 codes were identified in the original steps of combing through the data. These codes were

then decreased into a smaller number of categories, which then revealed the common themes throughout the data (see Table 4).

Table 4*Codes, Categories, and Themes of Collected Data*

Code	Category	Theme
Alternate court process		
Juvenile offenders		
Case intake process		
Juvenile defendant	Teen court	
Juvenile complaint		
Successful completion		
Stakeholders		
Volunteers		
Support		Forms of court
Juvenile court		
Standard court proceedings		
Criminal courts		
Formal court setting		
Court system		
Court setting	Traditional court	
Court cases		
Juvenile delinquent		
Juvenile judge		
Lacks support		
House arrest		
Detention center		
Monitor tracking		
Juvenile probation	Court punishment	
Disposal of youth		
Community service	Behavior diversion	Sentencing outcome
Restorative services		
Learned criminal behaviors		
Sentencing violations		
Recidivate	Habits of nondiversion court juvenile participants	
Failure to comply		
Reoffenders		
Rejecting authority		
Educational experience		
Second chance		
Learning		
Rehabilitate		
Commitment to change	Customs of juveniles in the teen court system	Overall experience
Positive impact		
Knowledgeable		
Positive peer pressure		
New opportunity		
Respecting authority		

The formation of categories was my second stage in the thematic analysis process. These categories were created by collecting groups of familiar data through the larger number of codes. By dissecting the codes and placing them into smaller pods, I was able to introduce six categories into data results. The thematic analysis process was completed in three steps.

The final phase was to identify the themes. Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019) maintained that a study's themes should be innovative but also should be capable of illustrating the participants' experiences and unfiltered feedback without losing its purity. The final step of data analysis revealed three themes for the study: forms of court, sentencing outcomes, and overall experience. The themes are discussed later in this chapter.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Prior to participants completing the survey process, they were encouraged to provide truthful, unbiased testimony. Because the participants were in the comfort of their personal environment and were assured confidentiality, they felt no stressors toward concealing their truths or giving false testimony. Participants were able to feel confident in their responses and had time to make corrections to their original feedback due to having a longer time span to complete the survey. Once participants indicated their consent by typing "I consent" in an email after reading the invitation letter and consent form, many participants submitted their responses within the first week. However, others took the full 2 weeks to complete their survey. This presented no threat to the credibility

of the study and indicated the participants took their time to provide well thought-out responses. Every participant had a connection with the juvenile offenders within the juvenile justice system. Participants provided firsthand accounts of the juveniles' experiences while transitioning through the traditional court and the teen court system. Due to participants' understanding of both systems, their testimony was considered valid and reliable.

Transferability

In Chapter 3, I mentioned the importance of applying this work to several populations and settings. With teen courts being formed worldwide, cities, states, and countries face similar challenges or concerns. The current study may provide information that will serve as an effective blueprint for other teen courts. Mirroring the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court, other populations with similar programs may work together with juvenile justice workers, social services, and school disciplining boards. The audiences may change throughout different contexts, but readers may apply findings from this study. Who has access to the juvenile offenders will not make a difference in the program's effectiveness. The foundational guide of this study may be applied in various contexts.

Dependability

Chapter 3 described the importance of highlighting key findings from the collected data. In order to depict the results accurately, there was a need for uniformity in participant selection, coding strategies, context, and the collection process. As previously explained, all participants were required to serve the juvenile courts as justice workers.

They also must have a connection with the young offenders entering and exiting the traditional juvenile courts and the teen courts systems, respectively. All retrieved data was coded utilizing the same software and coding methods. Nothing changed from the planned coding strategies. The study's contextual framework remained steady in the questioning and answering process. No information deterred from the exploration of juvenile recidivism and its relationship with the traditional and non-traditional courts.

Confirmability

As the researcher, I was challenged with remaining self-aware and unbiased of any received data. Confirmability, as stated in chapter 3, means ensuring the chance of other researchers being free to solidify the findings of the study (Nowell et al., 2017). While processing the data and through the stages of formalizing codes, categories, and themes I did not attempt to interpret any findings from the participants. The data collection process changed due to the dangers of Covid-19, the planned in-person surveys became electronically delivered responses. As a researcher, it was my duty to ensure each participant's feedback is what drove the study's results and not my own beliefs. Receiving the information electronically and having the ability to adjust testimonies to my own desired outcome was not an option. Neutrality was key in the completion of the study.

Results

This research study was conducted and completed through 11 open ended surveys of juvenile justice workers via email correspondence. The surveys were solidified with eight open-ended questions which focused on the experiences of juvenile justice workers

within the teen court and traditional court environment. Officers provided direct insight of the effects traditional juvenile court and teen court, respectively, have on recidivism rates of juvenile offenders. Three themes developed after the data were collected, coded, and categorized. The themes were forms of court, sentencing outcomes, and overall experience. The study's research question, "How is the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court more successful in reducing juvenile delinquency recidivism than traditional juvenile court?" was answered with the emerging themes.

Theme 1: Forms of Court

The two main types of judicial systems discussed in the study and during participant participation were traditional juvenile court and teen court. Courts were mentioned 113 times, traditional court was shared 39 times, and teen court was stated 39 times throughout the survey process.

When asked to describe the differences between teen court and traditional court, the issue of stress was shared. Participant 2 highlighted their viewpoint of teen court and traditional court having strong differences. Based on P2's accounts, youth potentially encounter extreme "levels of anxiety not knowing if they can possibly be detained for their offenses" when experiencing the traditional court system. "In teen court, a youth can have certain assurances that if they are compliant with the orders that are given, they will not face any possible detention time". Participant 11's feedback paralleled Participant 2's testimony by explaining the teen court process as using the defendant's peers to provide rehabilitation guidelines for the youth. Whereas traditional court utilizes an adult judge to provide sentences in hopes of a change from the juvenile defendant. Participant 4 stated

that teen court provides court room experience while reducing the stress by students acting in the roles of prosecutor and defender. Participant 5 provided a similar response with their testimony by expressing the youths' participation in their own court procedures. "Teen court teenagers have more input in the process than with traditional court. They are more aware of the process".

Another example of court differences were the types of cases heard within the systems. Participant 7 shared, "Teen court deals with more misdemeanor offenses and traditional court handles teens with high level felonies and more likely to require intensive rehabilitation".

A third trend in the responses for teen court and traditional court differences was the high demand from case involvement and case workers within traditional court. Participant 5 explained that unfortunately, traditional court is much busier and has constant high caseload counts. This included the probation caseloads being high, too. There is not extra time to focus on all youth needs. Participant 8 expressed similar concern by stating the case load counts for traditional court and for the juveniles on probation were very high. Participant 8 continued to say that if a juvenile is in traditional court and being disposed of there, they are not receiving a second chance as they would in teen court. They are already "in the system so to speak and therefore feel they have nothing to gain. Youth in the system are also unfortunately labeled and therefore are treated differently".

Participant 10 presented an important factor in what separated teen court and traditional court. The participant added that teen court was successful because there was

buy-in from key stakeholders within the community. Examples of these stakeholders include judges, local attorneys, mayor, city council members, local board of commissioners, parents, and students. The teen volunteers committed their time and efforts to the forward progression of the program and that's what makes it work. "I believe traditional court lacks this support component. In teen court, juvenile offenders have an opportunity to get the support they need (counseling - small group/individual and someone to check on them and their progress in the program).

Theme 2: Sentencing Outcomes

The sentencing of juveniles from traditional and teen court programs can determine the future of youth offenders, if effective strategies are not in place to assist the youth. Informational codes of house arrest, monitor tracking, disposal of youth, probation, and detention centers as sanctions of traditional courts derived from the collected data from the study's participants. Examples of community service and restorative justice practices were mentioned when explaining teen courts. The differences of these court practices will be dissected below to highlight the positive outcomes that can result when restoration of juvenile offenders is the focus of the intervention as opposed to a traditional system, which has punishment as its primary focus.

Outcomes of the juvenile court process are vital to the success of a program or court method. If delinquent behavior is not corrected or a juvenile offender fails to abide by the court's requirements, the approach to the criminal acts of the youth is not beneficial or effective. The sentencing process is important and carries a large impact on the success or unsuccessful outcomes.

The selection of sentencing guidelines or court requirements have a direct effect on the juveniles' outcome in the respective court programs. Participant 1 felt teen court acted as a diversionary program to teach accountability in a manner less punitive than the traditional justice system. Participant 2 continued this discussion with their response of teen court delivering various non-punitive options that do not involve any time in detention – community service, completing essays on various topics, or other options that do not involve out of home or detention placement of the youth. In traditional courts, youth do not have the option of a jury trial. The decision of adjudication is left in the hands of the adult juvenile judge. The judge has the discretion to order the youth to complete an informal adjustment period, a period of probation or be detained for a period of time based on the severity of the offense. Participant 6 discussed teen court having additional resources to provide in their sentencing requirements and when handling the teens. Teen court focuses on the needs of the juvenile to ensure future criminal acts are not committed. Participant 6 listed tutoring, counseling, one on one mentoring, and more are offered to youth who enter the program, as opposed to the traditional court system procedures.

All participants were asked their thoughts on the recidivism rates of teen court vs. the recidivism rates of traditional court. Participant 2 shared they felt teen court is more successful in reducing recidivism because it gives youth offenders the opportunity to experience a formal court setting and allows them the opportunity to hear how their actions impact their victims as well as the impact that criminal activity has on the community as a whole. Participant 7 stated that teen court is helpful to the teens who

successfully complete the program. “You rarely see kids who took advantage of teen court return to the traditional court on new charges. The majority of teens who complete teen court are not repeat offenders”.

Another topic was found to trend in the participants’ feedback. Authority. Participant 9 expressed that in teen court juveniles are respected and taught to respect authority and others. Services are provided to help in reducing recidivism and increasing rehabilitation. “Youth will respond better to peers than to adult authority figures”. Participant 11 stated, “The recidivism is higher with traditional court due to the rebellion to authority. Teen court provides positive peer pressure that directs youth to proper behavior and decision making. In contrast, an adult judge is often seen as another authority figure telling the young person what they need to do. The young person continues rebelling against authority by disobey the authority.”

The explanation of traditional court and teen court sentencing was prevalent throughout the data collection process. Participant 9 explained that having a criminal history because of traditional court limits future employment opportunities and wages for young offenders. Yet, if the teen had the chance to complete teen court, his or her record would be wiped clean. Participant 10 shared similar thoughts like Participant 9 with, “The sentencing options (of teen court) were designed to encourage and give the offender a second chance without having a juvenile criminal record. Also, a requirement of sentencing would be for the offender to return and serve on the jury. This provided the teen an understanding of the judicial system and an opportunity to serve in an important

role. Traditional court often operates on the premise of punishment and not rehabilitating the individual.”

The final outcome of the traditional or teen court programs depends on sentencing. Through observations, Participant 2 shared that youth who fail to abide by the conditions of the orders set forth by teen court, their case which had been held in abeyance would be forwarded to the juvenile court for disposition. Once back in juvenile or traditional court the juvenile could be ordered to have extended probation or placed in detention for their crimes. Participant 11 explained the opposite side of the journey through his observation on teen court. “Teen court is a positive program and is effective. Administrative violations of probation that send many youths deeper into the juvenile justice system could be sanctioned through teen court and possibly end a cycle that is sending many cases and youths deeper into the traditional court system.”

Theme 3: Overall Experience

The final theme is a result of themes one and two. Selecting the appropriate court program for youths and providing the most beneficial sanctions impacts the overall experience of juveniles within either court system. Six codes formed when discussing the experiences of traditional court systems: learned behaviors, sentencing violations, recidivism, criminal behavior, reoffenders, and rejecting authority. Eleven codes developed when participants shared the witnessed experiences from teen court: educational experience, second chances, learning, rehabilitation, commitment to change, positive impact, complete court process, knowledgeable, positive peer pressure, new

opportunity, and respecting authority. These codes were categorized and formed into the final theme: overall experience.

The theme of overall experience was seen throughout the responses. The juvenile officers provided their views on the differences between the journey of traditional juvenile court and teen court. Expressions of learned criminal behaviors, reoffending, new opportunities, and commitments to making positive changes are examples of codes which appeared throughout the surveys.

Throughout the process of analyzation, officers presented concerns of why the experience in traditional courts differed from teen court. Participant 1 stated recidivism rates are lower in teen court defendants “due to a combination of factors including, but not limited to: the types of charges which were diverted, the lessened stigma of teen court as opposed to the adversarial open-court set up of traditional court, and the lessened chance of receiving technical violation that led to new charges such as Violations of Probation and Felony Tampering with Electronic Monitors”. Participant 5 added additional factors to Participant 1’s stance. “The youths feel like everybody is against them. If a youth is in traditional court and being disposed of there, there is no second chance. They are in the system already”. Participant 6 mentioned the experience of going through traditional court as, the youth being “already judged before his or her case is heard. The youth is almost always labeled as a bad kid for getting into trouble”.

A second code which appeared under this theme is educating the teens on the process. Participant 2 stated that traditional courts are more formalized and do not actually make appeals to youth where they understand the consequences and impacts of

their behaviors. In teen court, the group of volunteers that help to make the program work are able to speak with the youth on a personal level to help them understand the impacts of their actions with the hope the teen will not reoffend. Participant 6 said, in teen court, “juveniles can have more of a learning experience because they are involved in the process”. Participant 8 agreed by sharing, “While both (traditional and teen court) are formal, I feel teen court is a more valuable learning experience in that time is taken to ensure all parties completely understand the process. I feel the juvenile has more of a learning experience in teen court and also feel the juvenile may take the process more serious since they are surrounded by their peers”. Participant 9 believed, “...with the onset of delinquent behavior, peer pressure from peers may push youth toward improved behavior. Teen courts can also make an impact on juvenile offenders by increasing their knowledge of the criminal justice system and influencing their perceived fairness of the system”. Participant 10 provided a detailed explanation of the overall teen court experience:

Nothing compares to the experience that an individual receives in teen court, whether they are a defendant or volunteer. It gives the offender an opportunity to learn about the judicial system, an opportunity to correct their behavior by receiving services that will help them make better choices (individual counseling, group sessions, etc.). Having to come back and serve as juror says to the offender that they do matter and they have the opportunity to extend empathy and compassion to the other offenders that come in. Teen court is a great self – esteem booster. Teen volunteers can decide if they are interested in the field of criminal

justice because they are being exposed to different positions within the court system. They receive training to do their jobs and are given opportunities to develop leadership skills. The goal of providing a second chance to teen offenders send a message of “we care”. Knowing that someone cares and is willing to give you a second chance is sometimes all a person needs to change their behavior. At the end of the program, offenders knew they had key people cheering them on wishing for their success.

Participant 11 supports Participants 10’s stance through his explanation. “I perceive the experience of the youth as an opportunity to make amends for their behavior and the majority utilized the opportunity to make the needed changes in their life. I believe juveniles respond to peer pressure, both negative and positive.”

Participant 3 spoke from another view in stating teens can receive guidance from the wrong side as well. Through traditional court, “our goal is to rehabilitate the youth with treatment and services to help the youth not to reoffend and become a law-abiding citizen”, but “because of the youths’ environment, ... the youth will reoffend because they return back to the same environment with no discipline and supervision”. Participant 7 continued this understanding of learning incorrect behaviors by sharing, “Traditional court will sometimes place juveniles in detention or group homes with other delinquent juveniles. The juveniles then learn criminal ways from other juveniles that can cause them to reoffend.”

In closing, the participants were asked if they would recommend any changes to the teen court program. Out of the 11 participants, 10 stated they recommended no

changes for the program. Participant 7 requested for the teen court program to check in on the juveniles who completed the program. Participant 2 declared, ““My first experience with teen court I was totally amazed at how the program was organized for it not to be a formal traditional court setting. I was impressed with the knowledge of the youth that participated in the program as volunteers as well as the adult mentors that help to guide and instruct the youth volunteers as well as the youthful offenders that appear in the court. At the present time, I would not change anything about the teen court process.”

Summary

The study’s research question was answered by three discovered themes: forms of court, sentencing outcome, and overall experience. The themes derived from a strong set of categories and group of codes which were provided through detailed testimonies from juvenile justice workers. The collected information illustrated the stark contrast between teen court and traditional juvenile courts. The data proved the form of sentencing provided to juvenile offenders has a major influence on if the youth will successfully complete sentencing requirements. The data also proved the court experience of the juvenile begins the moment they are detained. Within the traditional court system, youth feel labeled and treated differently. Juveniles in teen court are not as exposed and their experiences are not open for public viewing. Chapter 5 addresses the implications of study’s findings, limitations of the research, recommendations for the program, and implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to seek understanding of the nontraditional juvenile court process from the perceptions of juvenile justice workers in a local teen court program. The research and collected data focused on the perception of juvenile court officers who work in the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court to understand why this approach was more effective in reducing recidivism. I used the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court as the unit of analysis, and the case study method was applied. Purposive sampling was used for the recruitment of participants. Thematic analysis through NVivo software was used to identify emerging codes, categories, and themes.

The current study was necessary to understand diversion program strategies to counter juvenile recidivism. Similar programs serve as an accountability technique toward youth criminal activities. Acting as a replacement to traditional court settings, teen court programs are intended to reject the stigma of juvenile court systems, eliminate intimidation and forced entry into youth courts, lower recidivism rates, introduce effective rehabilitation and programming for youths, and redirect appropriate services to troubled youths (Harris et al., 2011; Leve & Chamberlain, 2005; Osgood & Weichselbaum, 1984).

The findings revealed three themes within the teen court and traditional court systems. These themes were confirmed through the direct responses of juvenile justice workers. The three themes were forms of court, sentencing outcome, and overall experience.

Interpretation of the Findings

The center of Beccaria's (1764) beliefs was founded upon the argument "it is better to prevent crime than punish them" (p. X). The participants in the current study provided detailed accounts that confirmed the findings in the literature review. The collected data were consistent with Beccaria's stance on correction in place of harsher punishments. The following section illustrates the participants' stance on the positives and negatives of traditional juvenile courts and teen courts, respectively.

Forms of Court

This study addressed two forms of juvenile courts: teen court and traditional court. Each participant provided feedback on both forms and shared insight on their personal experiences inside both systems. Participants also identified the teen court program as the better option for juvenile defendants in terms of rehabilitation and correcting their behaviors. Similar to studies addressed in Chapter 2, the current study indicated that juvenile diversion programs, such as youth courts, significantly lower the chance of teens reoffending and being re-referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice and juvenile court system. Butts et al. (2002) found that the youth [teen] court process can outperform the strategies and effectiveness of the traditional juvenile justice court process.

The present study indicated that juveniles who had committed serious offenses should be sentenced with more severe consequences. Participants agreed that teen court strategies are for lesser offenses and will not work on juveniles arrested for violent crimes. This supports findings from other studies. The argument is youth offenders

labeled as dangerous and high risk should be sentenced to detention centers, but youths considered low-risk, nonviolent offenders need to be rehabilitated (Rowland, 1996) in less harsh programs targeting restorative justice procedures and not stricter punishment.

Sentencing Outcome

The current study spotlighted the importance of the sentencing process. Participants acknowledged that the success or lack of success of juvenile sentencing outcomes weighed heavily on court sentencing. This was consistent with findings reported in Chapter 2. Teens are assessed with high- or low-risk labels upon entering the juvenile justice system. For juveniles who are considered low risk, providing the most accurate court sentencing is as important as ensuring the best corrective measures for high-risk youths (Seigle et al., 2014). Introducing a low-risk teen to the same sanction as high-risk juveniles who enter the traditional court system can present a harsher way of life to a teen who may not have considered more severe crimes. The threat of harsher penalties may deter a youth from a life of crime, while another youth may ignore the laws regardless of possible consequences. Hardening the court sentences could assist with temporarily lowering youth crime, but this effort would not produce substantial positive change (Rowland, 1996), unlike diversion strategies and programs.

Another finding in the current study was how teen court ensures the youth is never incarcerated. Youths who were incarcerated at a young age had a 50% greater chance of being arrested as an adult than youths who were never incarcerated (Barrett et al., 2014). Juveniles who are incarcerated are more likely to be arrested as adults based on the participants' responses in the current study.

Overall Experience

The final theme of the present study was the full experience of youths within the traditional and teen court systems. Findings were consistent with those reported in Chapter 2. Financial challenges, positive or negative peer pressure, types of sentencing guidelines, and more were highlighted by current participants. Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court serves as a great example of positive peer pressure (see Butts et al., 2002) due to introducing teen offenders to an alternative system for justice and acts as a major element within the program (see Dick et al., 2004). Teens hearing testimonies of peers' criminal activities in the courtroom have the ability to positively shift mindsets and future behaviors. Positive influences can have as powerful an effect on young lives as negative influences (Swadi & Zeitlin, 1998).

Present study findings indicated that juvenile upbringings, individual home environments, and lack of adult discipline or supervision affected the experience of youths in the separate court systems. This discovery was consistent with the literature review. Demographic and early experiential factors cause a difference in teenage delinquent behaviors versus nondelinquents and juveniles recidivists versus nonrecidivists (Barrett et al., 2014). Experiential factors indicated a strong relationship between early environmental factors and juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation identified in the study was the number of participants in the study. The sample size was low due to the study being restricted to the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court program. The program is located in Laurens County, Georgia, and the

number of juvenile justice workers involved with the program is limited. However, the population was an excellent, diverse representation of the location and program.

The second limitation was from the use of emailed survey questions to collect data from participants. Though the emailed questions were answered thoroughly, the use of email limited eye contact, nonverbal gestures, immediate follow-up questions, and the ability to read the body language of participants. Using email as a data collection technique for surveys also presented the possibility of misreading or misinterpreting data. Email surveys were needed in response to COVID-19 pandemic protocols prohibiting face-to-face interviews. Due to closed offices and limited numbers of juvenile officers allowed in the office at a time, survey responses took time being received. Some participants did not have adequate data, internet connection, or appropriate devices to complete the survey questions in the comfort of their home environment.

Recommendations

The first recommendation for future research is to replicate the study in other court systems. Data from these studies could provide additional understanding of juvenile recidivism rates among teen and traditional courts when applying the same methodology. This would strengthen the validity and reliability of the current study's findings by providing detailed insight into other diversion programs and their successful or unsuccessful outcomes.

To acquire statistics on these programs, additional research is necessary. Statistical analysis can be completed on the data in quantitative studies. Collected qualitative data are not available for statistical analysis following the completion of a

qualitative study. To successfully quantize the qualitative findings, consistency is required. Common wordings from the data must be transformed into numerical findings by identifying patterns, variable relations, and common frequencies in responses. This approach would also strengthen the current findings of the study.

The third recommendation is to use the mixed-methods approach to solidify the findings and reduce the possibility of data inconsistency. Future studies can include numerical comparisons of recidivism rates of teen courts and traditional court youths. This quantitative approach would allow for an increased number of participants and would help eliminate researcher or sampling bias. The statistical data could be paired with results from face-to-face interviews.

Implications

The Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court program is parallel to the three commitments of Walden University's Center for Social Change, and this study affirmed that commitment: (a) by empowering change-makers, the Teen Court instills positivity, educational resources, and self-love into the youth entering and volunteering with the program; (b) by building community, the community stakeholders and sponsors maintain a strong connection to the administration, city officials, and governing board of directors of the program, and this allows numerous resources, such as tutoring, individual/group/family counseling, community service projects, internships, food bank, clothing closet, and more to be provided at no charge for teen volunteers and juvenile defendants in the program; (c) by elevating social change outcomes, the program in this study strives to heighten the self-awareness, self-accountability, and self-belief of the

youths involved. The life of every teen entering the organization is focused on to provide a positive life-changing experience. The current study's outcome may help the program continue its push toward positive social change and promise of "making a difference, one teen at a time."

Currently, the program follows its juvenile defendants after program completion for 3, 6, and 12 months. The first recommendation is to expand this time frame beyond 1 year. Youths in the teen court program as juvenile defendants can be contacted and a connection can be maintained until they reach adult age. Although not noted in the current study findings, extending contact for these youths until they reach the age of maturity would be wise. This service could be implemented into the program addressed in the study. This would assist in the fight to deter reoffending among young offenders. Though recidivism rates are extremely low in the program, the goal is to reach zero. This recommendation could be effective in reaching the goal.

The second recommendation is to use the findings of this study to help other cities create similar diversion programs. The effectiveness of the program has been provided and supported by literature, personal accounts, and numerical data. The current study indicated how communities can lower their recidivism rates among juvenile delinquents, decrease the financial burden of families due to traditional court and probation costs, and provide educational and effective rehabilitative resources to youths in need of assistance.

The third recommendation for the program is to extend the provided services to juvenile offenders. To date, the program focuses on first time misdemeanor youth with less severe crimes. The findings of the study can be applied toward youth who may be in

the midrange on the graduated sanctions chart. For teens who are arrested with higher degree of crimes, yet they are still nonthreatening and nonviolent, they too, may benefit from restorative justice practices.

Conclusion

Juvenile recidivism has played a major role in youth offenders aging into adult offenders. Organizations such as teen courts and similar diversion programs shed a spotlight of hope and provide a guide to deter this issue from growing. Similar to Beccaria's Deterrence Theory, teen court programs are not negating the importance or need for punishment of criminal acts. Yet, the program believes the sanctions of juvenile courts should be based upon protecting the public and maintaining public safety and order without harsh punishments. One punishment does not and will not fit every crime committed. Originally, the juvenile court system was created to rehabilitate and evoke effective changes in the lives of young offenders. Yet, old practices lost their efficiency to deter newer crimes committed by teens. The purpose of this study was to provide a clearer understanding of how alternative approaches to juvenile delinquency and recidivism can promote a positive change in a youth's outlook and deter them from continuing a life of crime.

The study revealed three themes from the collected data: 1) forms of court; 2) sentencing outcome; and 3) overall experience. These themes introduced unfamiliar practices within diversion programs and the traditional court systems. The study's audience gained a deeper understanding of juvenile offenders after the court's sentencing and how it affects their livelihoods and future outcomes. Lastly, the study explained the

process of a youth's court experience including the arrest, the court room proceedings, and the aftermath.

This research is applicable to communities and juvenile justice systems, alike. Local civic leaders, judges, and officers can utilize this study as a guidebook and work toward forming diversion programs within local police departments, school systems, juvenile justice systems, or within municipal governments. Once communities begin to witness the positive outcomes of the programs, state and federal policies should be pursued. This can assist with grant funding, local government funding, expansion of stakeholders, and updated policies to ensure program support remains a priority. Strategies such as these can eliminate the gaps identified in the study and contribute to the already existing literature.

References

- Azim, N. (2021). The Role of the Correctional Hall of Serang in the Settlement of Child Offender Through Diversion in Juvenile Justice System. *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, 4(1), 9-15.
- Baglivio, M. T., Wolff, K. T., Jackowski, K., Chapman, G., Greenwald, M. A., & Gomez, K. (2018). Does treatment quality matter? Multilevel examination of the effects of intervention quality on recidivism of adolescents completing long-term juvenile justice residential placement. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 17(1), 147-180.
- Barrett, D. E., Katsiyannis, A., Zhang, D., & Zhang, D. (2014). Delinquency and recidivism: A multicohort, matched-control study of the role of early adverse experiences, mental health problems, and disabilities. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 22(1), 3–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426612470514>
- Beccaria, C. (1764). *On crimes and punishment*. Bobbs-Merrill.
- Bentam, J. (1789). *The principles of morals and legislation*. Prometheus Books.
- Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. SAGE Publications.
- Bree, R., & Gallagher, G. (2016). Using Microsoft Excel to code and thematically analyze qualitative data: A simple, cost-effective approach. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 8(2), 2812-2819. [http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/\[281\]](http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/[281])
- Butts, J., Buck, J., & Coggeshall, M. (2002). *The impact of teen court on young*

offenders. Urban Institute.

- Center for Children's Law and Policy. (2016). *Graduated responses toolkit: New resources and insights to help youth succeed on probation*. Washington, DC.
- Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group. (1999). Initial impact of the fast track prevention trial for conduct problems: II classroom effects. Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 67(5), 648–657.
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Development Services Group, Inc. (2017). Diversion programs. Washington, D.C. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Diversion_Programs.pdf
- Dick, A. J., Pence, D. J., & Jones, R. M. (2004). The need for theory in assessing peer courts. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(11), 1448–1461. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1177/0002764204265344>
- Farrell, J. L., Betsinger, S. A., Flath, N., & Irvine, J. (2020). Assessing the impact of a graduated response approach for youth in the Maryland juvenile justice system. *Annotation*.
- Frank, H. (2017). Unambiguous deterrence: ambiguity attitudes in the juvenile justice system and the case for a right to counsel during intake proceedings. *Vand. L. Rev.*, 70, 709.
- Fritz, R. L., & Vandermause, R. (2018). Data collection via in-depth email interviewing:

Lessons from the field. *Qualitative Health Research*, 28(10), 1640–1649.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316689067>

Gase, L.N., Schooley, T., DeFosset, A., Stoll, M., Kuo, T. (2016). The impact of teen courts on youth outcomes: A systematic review. *Adolescent Res Rev* 1, 51–67.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40894-015-0012-x>

Georgia Juvenile Justice Data Clearinghouse. (2016). *Juvenile justice decision points report: 2006–2014*. Atlanta, GA: Author. <https://juveniledata.georgia.gov/>

Godwin, T. M., Steinhart, D. J., & Fulton, B. A. (1998). *Peer justice and youth empowerment: An implementation guide for teen court programs*. American Probation and Parole Association.

Harris, P. W., Lockwood, B., & Stoodley, B. H. (2011). Measuring recidivism in juvenile corrections. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 25(1), 137–158.

Hawkins, D., Arthur, M., & Catalano, R. (1995). Preventing substance abuse. In *Crime and justice: Building a safer society: Strategic approaches to crime prevention* (Vol. 19, pp. 343–427). University of Chicago Press.

Hay, C., Ladwig, S., & Champion, B. (2018). Tracing the rise of evidence-based juvenile justice in Florida. *Victims & Offenders*, 13(3), 312-335.

Hirschi, T. (2005). *Causes of delinquency* (4th ed.). Transaction Publishers.

Hoge, R. D. (2008). Advances in the assessment and treatment of juvenile offenders. *Annual Report for 2007 and Resource Material*, 75, 81–104.

Hoge, R. D., & Andrews, D. A. (2010). *Evaluation for risk of violence in juveniles*. Oxford University Press.

- Jufri, M., Nazeri, N. M., & Dhanapal, S. (2019). Restorative justice: Alternative process for solving juvenile crimes in Indonesia. *Brawijaya Law Journal: Journal of Legal Studies*, 6(2), 157-169.
- Justice Policy Institute. (2015). *The tip of the iceberg: What taxpayers pay to incarcerate youth*.
https://justicepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/factsheet_costs_of_confinement.pdf
- Korstjens, I. & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and Publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 120–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>
- Latimer, J., Dowden, C., & Muise, D. (2005). The effectiveness of restorative justice practices: A meta-analysis. *Prison Journal*, 85(2), 127–144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885505276969>
- Leve, L. D., & Chamberlain, P. (2005). Association with delinquent peers: Intervention effects for youth in the juvenile justice system. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 33(3), 339–347. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-005-3571-7>
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *Naturalistic Evaluation*, 1986(30), 73–84.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.1427>
- Lipsey, M., Chapman, G., & Landenberger, N. (2001). Cognitive-behavioral programs for offenders. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 578, 144–157.

- Loeber, R. & Farrington, D. (1998). *Serious and violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions*. Sage Publications.
- Loeber, R., & Farrington, D. P. (2011). *Young homicide offenders and victims: Development, risk factors and prediction from childhood*. Springer.
- Mack, J. (1909). The juvenile court. *Harvard Law Review*, 23(2):104-122. The Harvard Law Review Association.
- McKibben, D. and Penko, P. (2015). Does restorative justice have a realistic place in today's criminal justice system? *The Police Chief* 82: 72–77.
- Merriam and Tisdell (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass.
- Nason, J. (Creator), and Sandow, N. (Creator), Furst, J. (Director). (2017). *The Kalief Browder story*. [Film]. The Weinstein Company.
- National Juvenile Defender Center. (2017). *The cost of juvenile probation: A critical look into juvenile supervision fees*. https://njdc.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NJDC_The-Cost-of-Juvenile-Probation.pdf.
- National Youth Court Center (2006). *National program directory and national resources 2006-2007*. Lexington, KY: National Youth Court Center.
- Nolen, A. L., & Putten, J. V. (2007). Action research in education: Addressing gaps in ethical principles and practices. *Educational Researcher*, 36(7), 401–407. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.3102/0013189X07309629>
- Nowell, L., Norris, J., White, D., Moules, N. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 16,1-13.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>

- O'Sullivan, E., Rassel, G., & Berner, M. (2008). *Research methods for public administrators*. New York, NY: Pearson Longman.
- Osgood, D. W. & Weischelbaum, H. F. (1984). Juvenile diversion: When practice matches theory. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*: 21(1): 33-56.
- Paternoster, R. & Piquero, A. (1995). Reconceptualizing deterrence: An empirical test of personal and vicarious experiences. *Journal on Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 32(3), 251-286.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Platt, A. (1977). *The child savers: The invention of delinquency (critical issues in crime and society)*. Rutgers University Press.
- Pratt, T., Cullen, F., Blevins, K., Daigle, L., & Madensen, T. (2006). The empirical status of deterrence theory: A meta-analysis. In F.T. Cullen, J.P. Wright, & K. R. Blevins (Eds.), *Taking Stock: The Status of Criminological Theory*, vol XV. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Puzzanchera, C., Sickmund, M., & Adams, B. (2011). *Juvenile court statistics*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- Roberts, K., Dowell, A., & Nie, J. B. (2019). Attempting rigor and replicability in thematic analysis of qualitative research data: A case study of codebook development. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*: 19(66).
- Robertson, P. (2018). Ashley Nellis: A return to justice: Rethinking our approach to

juveniles in the system; Lantham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc. 2016, 126 pp, ISBN-13: 978-1442227668. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 7, 1549. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1007/s10964-018-0854-1>.

Seigle, Walsh, & Weber (2014). Core principles for reducing recidivism and improving other outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system. New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center.

Shelden, R. (2006). *Delinquency and juvenile justice in American society*. Waveland Press.

Shuttleworth, M. (2009). *Matched subjects design*. Explorable.com.

<https://explorable.com/matched-subjects-design>.

Skowrya, K., & Powell, S. (2006). *Juvenile diversion: Programs for justice-involved youth with mental health disorders*. Delmar, NY: National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice.

Smith, Scott & Chonody, Jill M.: (2002). The teen court peer influence scale (TCPIS): Determining an effective way to measure and model positive peer influence - youth violence and juvenile justice 8(2) 148-159.

Stafford, M. & Warr, M. (1993). A reconceptualization of general and specific deterrence. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 30(2), 123-135.

Swadi, H., & Zeitlin, H. (1988). Peer influence and adolescent substance abuse: A promising side? *Journal of Addiction*, 83, 153-157.

Taşkıran S, Mutluer T, Tufan AE, & Semerci B. (2017). Understanding the associations

between psychosocial factors and severity of crime in juvenile delinquency: a cross-sectional study. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, *ume 13*, 1359–1366.

Tolou-Shams, M., Brown, L. K., Marshall, B. D., Dauria, E., Koinis-Mitchell, D., Kemp, K., & Poindexter, B. (2019). The behavioral health needs of first-time offending justice-involved youth: substance use, sexual risk, and mental health. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, *28*(5), 291-303.

Tomlinson, K. (2016). An examination of deterrence theory: Where do we stand? *Federal Probation Journal*. Vol. 80(3), 33-38.

Tossone, Butcher, & Kretschmar (2017). Measuring the impact of psychological trauma change on recidivism among juvenile justice-involved youth. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Vaismoradi, M. & Snelgrove, S. (2019). Theme is qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *20*(3), Art. 23.

Walker, L., Rodgers, K., & Umbreit, M. (2018). What is restorative about teen court? *Internet Journal of Restorative Justice, Special Issue Restorative Justice and Complex Crimes*.

Wiebush, R. G., Baird, C., Krisberg, B., & Onek, D. (1995). Risk assessment and classification for serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders. In James C. Howell, Barry Krisberg, et. al., eds.), *A Sourcebook: Serious, Violent, & Chronic Juvenile Offenders*, 171-212. Sage Publications.

Whitehead, J. & Lab, S. (2015). *Juvenile justice: An introduction*. New York, NY.

Routledge.

Wilson, H. and Hoge, R. (2012). The effect of youth diversion programs on recidivism: A meta-analytic review. *Juvenile Justice Update*, 18(6), 9.

Wolff, K. & Baglivio, M. (2016). Adverse childhood experiences, negative emotionality, and pathways to juvenile recidivism. *Crime and Delinquency*. 63(12), p1495-
p1521, 27p.

Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

October 6, 2020

Dear Ms. Holder,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled, Juvenile Justice Workers' Perceptions of Teen Court and Traditional Court, within the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice office. As part of this study, I authorize you to interview eligible juvenile justice probation officers. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: 1. Providing a private, secure room for interviews to be held and 2. Allowing officers to participate in the study without penalty. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study or make changes to interview methods due to Covid-19 guidelines at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in ProQuest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

C. S. Stokes
Authorization Official

Appendix B: Survey Questions

1. How long have you been in your current position?
2. Approximately how many juvenile court (both teen and traditional) cases have you been involved in?
3. Can you describe the differences between the Teen Court and traditional court?
4. How do you perceive the experience of the juvenile delinquent in Teen Court vs. traditional court?
5. What happens to a juvenile who enters Teen Court, but fails to complete it?
6. Why is the Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court more successful in reducing recidivism than traditional court?
7. Why does traditional court result in higher recidivism rates?
8. Would you recommend any changes to the Teen Court Program?

Appendix C: Letter of Permission

**DUBLIN- LAURENS COUNTY TEEN COURT**

DLC Teen Court Chairwoman &
Interim Dublin City Mayor, Julie S. Driger

July 13, 2021

Dr. Gregory Koehle, Chairperson
Dr. Mark Stallo, Committee Member
Dr. Anne Hacker, URR
Walden University
Minneapolis, MN

Greetings:

Please accept this statement as a formal offer of permission for Ms. Kesla M. Holder to use the name Dublin-Laurens County Teen Court within her current study. She can use the program's name and share our geographical location. Example: the city of Dublin, GA (Laurens County).

Sincerely,


✓ CHAIR PERSON

Julie S. Driger
Interim Mayor
Teen Court Board Chairwoman
City of Dublin, GA

