Focus: Collaborative court models in juvenile justice and quantitative research on juvenile offenders

Goal: Examine benefits and risks of specialty court systems and ability to predict trajectory based on initial offense

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

Youth courts are whole-system case management interventions that work with young adults post-conviction promoting positive life outcomes and reducing recidivism.

- Successful completion of program often results in removal of felony from youth’s record
- Early results show lower self-reported offending and higher school enrollment & employment
  - Without intervention, latter are reduced drastically due to disruption & stigma associated with arrest and conviction
- Key aspects include:
  - Resources, incl. therapy, food, employment, and housing assistance
  - Help using the resources
  - Consistent check-ins
- Pandemic-related disruption of social services and court operations has had large impact

Collaborative and specialty courts are powerful interventions for their participants, but their principles should ultimately extend to the justice system as a whole.

- Social services should be available without interaction with criminal justice system
- Carving out legal processes for specific groups risks eroding the integrity of the system
- Particularly for juveniles, never entering the system remains the best option

A US study found juvenile offenders fall into consistent groups typified by number and type of offenses. It isn’t however possible to predict cohort “membership” based on initial offense or characteristics.

- High stable group (10%) of frequent offenders,
- Drop-off group (21%) falling to low level of offending within year or two of first offense,
- Late onset group (12%) whose rates of offending rise around age of 18, and
- Mid- and low-level stable groups (57% cumulative) reporting very little offending after their initial involvement

Variability in the groups and ultimate membership appear to derive primarily from the intervening events and a youth’s development.

- System’s response and support networks are critical factors in improving outcomes
- Usually there is no single “reformation”, but a process of moving in and out of the system
- Youths should not be written off based on their initial offenses

Data can drive change when advocates and researchers work closely together.

- Research on development of young brains was conducted to specifically address central legal questions around competence, culpability, and the capacity to change, which drove US reforms treating juveniles differently from adults
- Important to balance objective and subjective measures of success
  - Particularly important for researchers from backgrounds dissimilar to those affected

Data alone does not create change. Tactics to improve policy implementation include:

- Meeting with the real decision-makers
- Ensuring broad representation when framing a research project
  - Aids useful and accurate data generation and reduces debates regarding data validity later
- Providing comparisons, e.g. between locales, which prompts audience to ask “why”
- Working iteratively and adjusting data-gathering according to early analyses of data collected

**KEY EXAMPLES**

- Orange County Collaborative Courts (California)
- Community Courts (Israel)

**REFERENCED RESOURCES**

- Pew Trust Public Safety Performance Project
- The Crossroads Study
- Pathways to Desistance Project