

(CAUSAL COMPARATIVE)

DOES Substance Abuse Treatment
Reduce~~s~~ Recidivism ?

The newspaper headlines suggest "gang" activity at Riverchase Galleria in Birmingham, Alabama. "Gangs" threaten to terrorize Montgomery Mall and Eastdale Mall at Christmas time. The five o'clock news is constantly headlining drive-by shootings, holdups, rapes, murders, etc. All of the above incidents can be remembered by most residents living in this area for the past two years. Most of the incidents involved adolescents fourteen to eighteen years of age. Those unlucky enough to get caught, sent to Juvenile Court, and found guilty of the offense, usually found themselves in one of the three state facilities for incarcerating adolescents.

The state run and owned facilities are always at their capacity. The only beds that are ever vacant are located in the Intensive Training Unit (ITU) at Mt. Meigs. The ITU might have a vacant bed since it is designed for the "hardest of the hard," the non-compliant, or the dangerous adolescent who can't be trusted any other place. The programs designed for the three state facilities are intended to ensure once an adolescent is released, all needs have been satisfied and there is a better than 50 per cent chance that he/she will not need to be incarcerated again during their adolescence.

Currently the recidivism rate is beyond acceptable limits and creates a backlog in adolescent detention centers. It is not uncommon for an adolescent to spend three months in a detention facility before a bed becomes available at the appropriate state facility. The recidivism must be reduced to save the state

money, help the incarcerated adolescent assume the correct role in society, and reduce the need for new facilities. Will substance abuse treatment positively affect the recidivism rate?

(SUGGESTED REVISION TO QUESTION: "CAN SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT REDUCE RECIDIVISM RATES?")

Statement of the Problem

Over the past ten years, about a hundred different experimental programs have been tested at state facilities to reduce the recidivism rate. Several programs such as the "Boot Camp" program seemed to work for a short period of time. Probation officers saw a distinct change when the adolescent returned to the streets. Without the rigid structure the adolescent had become accustomed to, he/she quickly returned to old habits and went back to the state facility - usually for a more serious offense. The Sunburst Program also seemed to work in reducing the recidivism rate but broke down for the same reasons. The High Intensity Training (HIT) program is more effective, but it also breaks down due to lack of structure on the streets. The cost of confining adolescents is enormous and there are not enough Department of Youth Services facilities available to hold adolescents needing incarceration. Some system must be found to help adolescents remain in socially acceptable control of themselves once released from incarceration.

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WHAT DO YOU
MEAN BY
"SYSTEM"?

Purpose of the Study

This study will examine the recidivism rate of adolescents incarcerated at Mt. Meigs, Alabama between January 1, 1993, and June 30, 1993 to determine if substance abuse treatment might have an impact on reducing the recidivism. ~~The results will be reported to Department of Youth Services to help reduce recidivism.~~

Significance of the Study

Over the years there has been much speculation that the adolescents of today are not of the same moral fiber as those prior to the 1970s. Of course each generation feels that the next generation is worse than they were, have no values, and probably have it too easy. Everyone has heard the old story about grandfather or father having to walk five miles through the snow every day to get to school. Today's children cannot believe what their mother's and father's did for amusement, dates, or other social activities. They seem to believe the 1960s and earlier were the dark ages. Parents reflect back with fond memories ^{on} ~~of~~ the things they did while growing up and the generalizations their parents made about their values, music, and leisure time activities. Parents and older people tend to generalize about the youth of today.

Middle age adults look at today's youth and see the tattoos, hear the rap music, the skin heads, read about gang violence, and

make gross generalizations about how the world is going to the dogs. One thing does appear to be on target; the youth of today are more inclined to violence, breaking the law, and experimenting with alcohol and other drugs.

In the 1950s and 1960s, youth did get into trouble with parents, were uncontrollable, and did get sent to state reformatory schools. In those days, it was a disgrace to the adolescent and the parents if the child had to go to court. Things were much more secret then than now. Because of the stigma attached to breaking the law, children were much less likely to get into such trouble. Once a child was sent off, one was almost certain that when he/she returned home, they were changed individuals. They did not want to return to the reformatory. One possible explanation for their desire to stay out of state schools is the fact that very little time was spent in school. Most of the time was spent in behavior modification such as "hard labor." Today, students getting into trouble with the law really have it "easy." They go to school approximately four hours a day, possibly engage in learning a trade for three hours a day, and have physical activity for an hour each day. At night they "MUST" watch the news, study for about an hour, and then watch television until its time for bed. The social mores seem to have accepted that it is not unusual for adolescents to run afoul of the law. When they are released, they usually return home to the same environment, same friends, and same problems. Their P.O. watches them a little closer but they can do pretty much as they please. It is not unusual for a P.O. to have

seventy-five to one hundred twenty-five adolescents to watch. Due to the "easy" life in state schools and lack of supervision once released, the adolescent recidivism rate is extremely high.

The Department of Youth Services is constantly attempting to try new models that might reduce the recidivism. According to knowledgeable sources, if the recidivism could be cut by 8 per cent per year, there would be no adolescents waiting in detention facilities for a bed at one of the state facilities. This would reduce the cost to the counties of the state in the size of the facility and the number of staff needed to supervise the adolescents. The state coffers would also benefit due to a reduction in manpower to operate its three facilities which are currently over crowded. If the hypothesis "substance abuse treatment reduces recidivism" is true, adolescents, the state of Alabama, and the counties of Alabama will benefit by reducing building and staff expenses.

Limitations of the Study

The Mt. Meigs population is made from all counties in the state. The majority of adolescents come from poor socioeconomic households which may not be indicative of the adolescent distribution throughout the state. Additionally, the racial distribution of Mt. Meigs is 65 per cent black, 30per cent white, and 5 per cent rating themselves as "other" which does not match the general population of the state. The majority of

adolescents come from Mobile county, Jefferson county, and the Huntsville area which are primarily the urban centers of the state. This sample does agree with the population of all Department of Youth Services facilities thereby allowing generalization to the appropriate population but not state wide.

Random selection of participants for this study is not possible. While all adolescents entering Mt. Meigs during the assigned period will be divided into two groups, only those having abused alcohol or other drugs are available for substance abuse treatment.

The only adolescents at Mt. Meigs are males. Therefore no females will be considered in the study. Since females are all consolidated at one facility, future studies may want to consider replicating this study at that facility.

Due to the difference in size of the two groups, the control group will be randomly selected from the group not receiving treatment.

One problem that cannot be addressed is the commonality of all students attending the same programs. Some students will complete five programs before their release while others may only complete one or two. This study can only identify a possible correlation. ←

(THEN YOU NEED TO CHANGE YOUR PURPOSE STATEMENT BECAUSE IT IMPLIES YOU'RE SEARCHING FOR CAUSE-EFFECT.)

I THINK YOU MEAN CAUSE-AND-EFFECT

Once identified as needing treatment, that adolescent might not have completed the treatment program due to behavioral issues. Some adolescents are not suitable for treatment but enter and never complete the program. This will possibly cause a negative skew to the study if there are a large number not

completing the program.

Definition of Terms

Recidivism. For this study recidivism is defined as returning to incarceration within one year of release.

Serious Juvenile Offender. Any adolescent under the age of eighteen who committed a crime punishable by incarceration of at least one year.

P.O. Probation officer is normally referred by his initials or P.O. often if one asks a student who his probation officer is the answer will be "I don't know." If one asks who the P.O. is, an answer is always forthcoming.

Methodology

*IF THIS STUDY CAN ONLY IDENTIFY CORRELATIONS, IT MAY NOT BE CAUSAL COMPARATIVE. SEE PREVIOUS PAGE.
↓ I THINK YOU MEANT TO SAY POSSIBLE CAUSE RATHER*

This causal-comparative study will include all male *THAN POSSIBLE CORRELATION* adolescents who entered Mt. Meigs Correctional facility between Jan 1, 1993 and June 30, 1993 who were not serious juvenile offenders. Their Department of Youth Services records will be evaluated to decide if they received substance abuse treatment while at the facility. The recidivism rate of those receiving treatment will be calculated. The recidivism rate of those

adolescents not receiving treatment will then be calculated. The recidivism of both groups will be compared to determine if the difference is statistically significant. Serious juvenile offenders will be excluded from the study since there is no tracking method available to determine their recidivism.

The length of time before recidivism for both groups will be calculated from the records. A time scale of "weeks" on the outside will be used in the calculation. This will allow interpretation of whether treatment had a short term effect or not. All comparisons will be made using the two-sample t-test.

Those students who received treatment and return within the year will be interviewed to learn what influenced them to break the law and return to Mt. Meigs or another facility. The questions used during the interview will be pilot tested on adolescents currently in treatment. ← GOOD!

Those students receiving treatment who have not returned to a facility within the year cannot be contacted directly due to the confidentiality of their treatment. These adolescent's^s probation officers will be contacted via telephone and interviewed to see what differences the P.O. observed after release and while on probation. These interview questions will be pilot tested on probation officers GOOD! visiting adolescents at Mt. Meigs. All questions causing confusion will be restated and tested again before use in the study.

At the completion of the study, conclusions will be drawn and appropriate recommendations will be made. Since these findings can affect other facilities throughout the state, they

will be made available to the Department of Youth Services personnel and Department of Corrections personnel since their situation and population is similar.