**Reducing Juvenile Delinquency in the United States**

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**SECTION 1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Overview of the Project**

Juvenile delinquency is a problem in the United States that costs taxpayers billions annually (Youth.gov, 2022). According to an Office of the Justice Programs report, about 2.1 million youths under 18 get arrested yearly for juvenile-related crimes (Youth.gov, 2022). Although there has been a positive impact on reducing the number of incarcerated juveniles, more effort must be put into realizing this goal (Delcea et al., 2019). About 1.7 million delinquency cases are filed in the courts each year. The government also spends about $588 per day per incarcerated youth. Similarly, there were about 9,014 youths in juvenile facilities in Illinois in 2018, with the state spending close to $85,000 per year per incarcerated youth (Pritzker & Hou, 2020). This issue results in the state government spending more on juvenile detention facilities instead of investing in other areas such as education and health.

The study is needed since there are increasing juvenile delinquency cases despite measures to prevent the problem and help the youth through juvenile justice. The identified gaps include an inadequate risk assessment to determine the at-risk youths and the predisposing factors (van der Put et al., 2021). Additionally, the literature identifies insufficient family and youth engagement in juvenile prevention programs (Love et al., 2016). Moreover, inappropriate re-entry programs contribute to recidivism, increasing the number of juveniles (Jain et al., 2018).

**Problem Statement and Purpose**

The problem being addressed is that juvenile delinquency is still a national problem despite the existing measures to curb the issue. According to an Office of the Justice Programs report, about 2.1 million youths under 18 get arrested yearly for juvenile-related crimes (Youth.gov, 2022). Although there has been a positive impact on reducing the number of incarcerated juveniles, more effort must be put into realizing this goal (Delcea et al., 2019). About 1.7 million delinquency cases are filed in the courts each year. The government also spends about $588 per day per incarcerated youth. Similarly, there were about 9,014 youths in juvenile facilities in Illinois in 2018, with the state spending close to $85,000 per year per incarcerated youth (Pritzker & Hou, 2020). This issue results in the state government spending more on juvenile detention facilities instead of investing in other areas such as education and health.

According to Karibo (2020), peer pressure and access to illicit substances were the primary enablers of crime among the youth. The study indicated the association of US teens with Mexicans greatly affected their behavior and upbringing, hence engaging in criminal activities (Karibo, 2020). However, Kantemirova’s (2018) article indicated incomplete families also contributed to juvenile delinquency. Such a problem occurs when children fail to get good parenting from either parent (Hoffmann et al., 2018). These instances show that despite the efforts of the prevention programs, more adolescents find themselves in crime due to social factors. According to the Crime Report (2022), there was a 50% increase in juvenile cases filed by police in Chicago in 2021 compared to 2020. Thus, the topic will investigate these causes and recommend the appropriate measures for the issue.

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**Theoretical Framework**

The study will involve the strain theory as the main theoretical framework for the program. According to the strain theory, stressors such as drug abuse and antisocial behaviors would increase the likelihood of crime among adolescents. Liu et al. 2020 indicated that committing a crime helps delinquents escape the strain. Furthermore, the theory describes the difference between males and females in juvenile delinquency. Based on the definition of the strain theory, more males than females are exposed to higher risk factors. This aspect explains the difference in having more male juveniles than females.

Therefore, this theoretical framework will guide the study by providing information on the various risk factors of juvenile delinquency. Besides, the framework will help identify the programs that consistently prevent juvenile delinquency. The framework will also inform the effective juvenile delinquency prevention programs by highlighting those that had not worked in the past. This approach will help assess and identify at-risk youth for appropriate intervention. Additionally, the method will improve family and community engagement when collaborating to help at-risk youth.

**Project Context**

This study aims to investigate various strategies for reducing juvenile delinquency among teens in the United States. The expected study outcomes will include developing policies that reduce recidivism rates within the US. The study will also help decongest juvenile detention centers while providing alternative sentencing methods for the accused individuals (Bobbio et al., 2020). The study will benefit the juvenile justice system and the teens since fewer will be incarcerated. Additionally, the research will inform justice and social services about the different methods they could implement for continuous success (Karibo, 2020). The community will also benefit from the research by reducing crime rates and developing youth programs. Moreover, the study’s outcome will impact social change through community policymaking (Raposa et al., 2019). Therefore, studying this topic will allow an understanding juvenile delinquency’s risk factors to create awareness.

**Historical Background and Current Trends**

Various factors contribute to the rise of crime among adolescents. According to Bobbio et al. (2020), there is a correlation between criminal risk, antisocial behavior, and criminal opportunities. A similar study indicated that family and education issues could contribute to juvenile crime (Delcea et al., 2019; Walters, 2016). The authors demonstrated that children from broken families (divorced or single-parent households) and low education levels were likelier to engage in crime than their peers (Kantemirova, 2018). Similarly, parental religious involvement was not responsible for preventing teen crime (Guo, 2018). Instead, good parenting practices may prevent teens from committing crimes (Fearnow-Kenney et al., 2016). Hoffmann and Dufur (2018) indicated that weak family bonds contributed to high adolescent crime rates due to a lack of guidance. Although previous studies recommended policies for juvenile delinquency prevention, some organizations failed to adopt these measures (Love et al., 2016). This move created more problems as the agencies failed to prevent increased crime and recidivism rates.

**Synthesis of the Scholarly Literature**

According to Pappas and Dent (2023), intervention programs could effectively reduce juvenile recidivism when combined with rehabilitative models. The authors conducted a meta-analysis on 48 different studies and ascertained a significant association in reduced recidivism for young offenders who participated in rehabilitation programs (Pappas & Dent, 2023). The authors explored two different models where the rehabilitative model suggested successful reintegration in the community for released offenders. However, the punitive model examined the effects of harsh punishment, such as intensive community supervision or incarceration for juveniles (Pappas & Dent, 2023). Further analysis by the researchers revealed a significant reduction in repeat offenders who underwent the rehabilitative programs. The suggested rehabilitative programs included relationship building, accountability, conflict resolution, and target reflections (Pappas & Dent, 2023). The authors suggested these recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to help reduce juvenile delinquency.

A similar study by Jugl et al. (2023) explored the effectiveness of sports programs for crime prevention, violent behavior, and delinquency. According to the authors, sports programs were promoted in communities as they were considered to promote pro-social behavior. Besides, the authors hypothesized that “sports are believed to be related to psycho-social factors which may help to abstain or desist from crime (Jugl et al., 2023).” Similarly, the hypothesis that “sports participation is also frequently linked to psychological correlates such as mental health, which is considered to be relevant for promoting resistance (Jugl et al., 2023)” also informed the study. The sports programs were implemented in both the tertiary prevention and prison settings. Moreover, the individual sports included fitness exercises, swimming, and boxing, while the team sports involved rugby and football.

The authors’ findings indicated engagement in sporting activities significantly reduced engagement in criminal activities among the youth (Jugl et al., 2023). The participants in the sporting groups also had higher outcomes than those in the control groups. Furthermore, the participants in the sporting program had lower incidences of recidivism, anger issues, drug use, and aggression. This study indicated the effectiveness of these activities in improving the youth’s psychological well-being, hence preventing delinquency behaviors (Jugl et al., 2023). Additionally, the authors suggested future researchers study the effects of peers and coaches on the youth’s well-being.

Aazami et al. (2023) conducted a study to research the different risk factors, protective factors, and different juvenile delinquency interventions. According to the authors, the incarcerated youth had higher chances of being re-incarcerated as adults (Aazami et al., 2023). Therefore, finding preventive measures to rehabilitate the juveniles for better behavioral outcomes was important. The findings indicated family conflicts to be among the top factors for juvenile delinquency. Besides, neglect and maltreatment contributed to the delinquent behavior. However, the authors found various factors that reduced the chances of juvenile delinquency, including school satisfaction, parental closeness, and higher academic achievements (Aazami et al., 2023). Similarly, family and community interventions, including the youth, families, and social workers, also improved the well-being of the adolescents. In their conclusion, the authors highlighted most of the identified issues and intervention measures around families and the community, hence the need to integrate and work closely to address juvenile delinquency (Aazami et al., 2023).

**Synthesis of the Practitioner Literature**

A study by Javdani (2021) examined the effectiveness of intervention programs among adolescent girls between 12 and 17 years. This study utilized the ROSES (Resilience, Opportunity, Safety, Education, Strength) program for the interventions. Thus, the ROSES program ensured the girls had access to community resources and their needs (Javdani, 2021). Advanced undergraduate students delivered these interventions to the adolescents to implement the program at a practitioner level. The participants in these programs were girls in New York City who had had a history with the juvenile justice system or were at risk of delinquent behaviors (Javdani, 2021). Besides, the participants were grouped into intervention and control groups, where the intervention group showed improvements in violence and delinquency, substance use and risk-taking, and mental health and well-being (Javdani, 2021). Thus, the study proposed the ROSES program to be used by practitioners to find ways of mitigating juvenile delinquency.

Singh and Azman (2020) found that a comprehensive development approach was necessary to prevent juvenile delinquency. In this study, the researchers studied the integrated social work practice that focuses on the individuals and their environment in preventing crime (Singh & Azman, 2020). The authors indicated social workers needed to find the link between human behaviors and their immediate environment to understand the factors influencing delinquency. Thus, the findings showed community crime prevention programs were effective since the members would utilize crime watch to prevent crime (Singh & Azman, 2020). Similarly, the youth in these communities would perceive criminal activities as unacceptable through the regular action by the community members.

Additionally, the authors showed that community youth development projects would help the youth participate in some local ventures to deter criminal engagement (Singh & Azman, 2020). While ensuring the effectiveness and continuity of these programs, the social workers would assume roles such as client advocates, case managers, counselors or therapists, group leaders or facilitators, community organizers, administrators, supervisors, evaluators, educators, program developers, researchers, or policy analyst (Singh & Azman, 2020). This study showed these practitioners’ importance in actualizing and implementing programs to reduce juvenile delinquency.

**Alignment of the Project with the Literature and Discipline**

Although there has been a positive impact on reducing the number of incarcerated juveniles, more effort must be put into realizing this goal (Delcea et al., 2019). About 1.7 million delinquency cases are filed in the courts each year. This project will assist in analyzing the root cause of juvenile delinquency and the relevant measures to curb the vice (Yun & Cui, 2020). Furthermore, this project is crucial as it will impact positive social change by informing policymakers and social agencies in Chicago about impactful community programs (Singh & Azman, 2020). The awareness created by the project will also promote positive behavior among adolescents in Chicago to prevent any involvement in crime. Hence, the study will deter adolescents from committing crimes and disrupting their social life. The study will also help parents and community agencies adopt the proposed strategies to prevent crime (Singh & Azman, 2020). The juvenile justice system and policymakers will also benefit from the study by adopting the approach to ensure crime prevention and reduced recidivism rates among juveniles who have been incarcerated.

Additionally, this project will focus specifically on creating awareness of the programs and policies in Illinois that reduce juvenile crime (Bobbio et al., 2020) and additional methods that show evidence of reducing juvenile incarceration. The programs identified will include community-based initiatives, family, and school-based plans for at-risk youth (de Vries et al., 2015). Consequently, this topic will provide critical insight to help reduce the mass incarceration of the youth. The strategies and programs presented will help human services organizations by reducing the burden personnel may feel by giving data to support the efficacy of specific community interventions.

Furthermore, the project is significant to human services since it seeks to reduce the negative consequences of incarcerating juveniles, such as trauma, overcrowding of prisons, and suicide risk (Javdani, 2021). The project will promote positive social change by teaching the community various effective strategies for reducing juvenile delinquency (Valasik & Barton, 2018). The topic of this capstone project is the effectiveness of early prevention programs among the youth to prevent possible involvement in crime. The prevention will reduce violence and aggression among the youth to avoid further participation in crime (Farrington et al., 2017). Similarly, the program will implicate moral values in the juveniles through school and family-based programs to promote good behavior.

**Action That Will Result from This Project**

This project seeks to find strategies for reducing and preventing juvenile delinquency. Based on the research questions, the project aims to formulate reliable and consistent methods to prevent juvenile delinquency. These strategies will involve those proven to work in previous studies and early intervention (Bobbio et al., 2020). Additionally, the project seeks to reduce juvenile recidivism rates by identifying and addressing the risk factors.

According to a study by de Vries et al. (2015), programs that have effectively prevented juvenile delinquency include educating adolescents and providing recreation facilities. These strategies are essential as they create awareness among the youth and keep them occupied to avoid involvement in crime (de Vries et al., 2015). Similarly, community involvement effectively prevents juvenile crime through special groups such as the church, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Volunteer Groups (de Vries et al., 2015). The study also indicates parenting skills are a successful method in preventing juvenile delinquency through appropriate parent-child interaction to identify early signs among the children (de Vries et al., 2015). School programs like bullying prevention and peer support are also valuable for reducing juvenile delinquency.

The action plan will be implemented by involving the stakeholders responsible for youth programs in the community from Chicago. These individuals will include administrators of youth programs, teachers, service workers, parents, and community members (Jain et al., 2018). Moreover, the stakeholders at the community level will ensure community involvement and home visitation to assess the youth’s welfare. This approach will create awareness of the role of community groups in preventing juvenile delinquency. Besides, the teachers will oversee bullying prevention programs and education programs for teenagers in school (Jain et al., 2018). Similarly, the administrators of the youth organizations will formulate and implement policies that support strategies that would prevent repeat offenders, such as re-entry programs (Jain et al., 2018). Therefore, the project will require stakeholders to collaborate to implement the proposed interventions.

This project will contribute to the existing knowledge base in juvenile delinquency prevention by implementing risk assessment among the youth in school. This approach will allow the stakeholders, such as teachers, to identify and apply intervention measures such as bullying prevention among those affected. Similarly, the project will emphasize the importance of matching youth with service workers to identify issues that may predispose them to juvenile delinquency. Therefore, the study will address these gaps to improve juvenile delinquency prevention programs among youth in the US.

The barriers to presenting this information to the stakeholders will include resource constraints and competing priorities among the stakeholders. This challenge may make it difficult to convince the stakeholders to implement the recommended strategies. Additionally, resource constraints may make getting essential tools and software for the presentation challenging. Still, the project will succeed if adopted by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

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