

Non-Judicial Adjustment Study

Systematic Review of Diversion Programs

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Executive Summary

Juvenile diversion is a process whereby youth who commit status or delinquent offenses are directed away from formal involvement in the juvenile justice system. Formal system processing and/or confinement may have criminogenic effects and diversion is theorized to produce better long-term youth development such as reduced recidivism, accountability, academic improvement, and stronger connections with family, friends, and community.

The purpose of the current study is to assess the recent literature on the efficacy of diversion programs. Specifically, we are interested in whether there is a consensus among studies that diversion programs are successful in reducing future involvement with the juvenile justice system. The current study differs from past studies in that we are only reviewing studies examining pre-adjudication diversion programs, which exclude warn and release, law enforcement-led, and international diversion programs. Included studies had to include a comparison group, and the range of dates for study completion was from 1990 to 2020. In total, 31 studies were included in the review.

Our review indicated that diversion programs have, for the most part, been shown to contribute to reductions in recidivism when compared to other juvenile justice practices (e.g., traditional processing). Studies of diversion programs have provided support for the risk-need-responsivity model. Specifically, diversion programs are more likely to lead to reductions in recidivism if the program assesses for risk and criminogenic needs and tailors services to meet the individual needs of the youth it serves. Programs that refer youth to evidence-based community interventions and offer case management along with other opportunities like victim-offender mediation and restorative justice interventions have the greatest potential to impact youth behavior. Teen courts and brokered-services were found to be more limited in their ability to reduce recidivism among diverted youth.

While this study did not find a consensus on the efficacy of diversion programs due to a lack of a common definition, our findings highlight several programs that are effective at reducing recidivism as well as best practices for implementation.

Programs

- Case management – Diversion programs that offer case management services increase the potential impact on youth behavior. The findings from this review indicate that case management services can significantly impact behavior change, especially when they focus on youth risk and needs.
- Counseling-based treatment – These programs are typically characterized by a relationship between the youth and a counseling professional who attempts to exercise influence on the youth's attitudes, values, beliefs, and behavior. The findings from this review suggest that community-based treatment, especially those that focus on influencing youths' feelings, cognitions, and behavior, have the greatest potential to impact youth behavior.
- Family treatment – Research in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention has consistently demonstrated that family-based programming is effective in reducing delinquency and recidivism. Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) are two examples of family-based programming that have consistently been shown to reduce recidivism and have a positive impact on other youth outcomes (e.g., life domains, emotional needs, child risk behaviors).

- Skill-building programs – Skill-based programming was found to be the most effective in diversionary settings than in the context of probation/parole or incarceration. The findings from our review indicate that skill-based programming significantly reduces recidivism compared to traditional justice processing and other diversion programs, especially if these programs target individuals’ criminogenic needs.
- Restorative justice programs – Research has shown that restorative justice programs are associated with reductions in recidivism; although the effects can vary considerably by program type, implementation, and fidelity. Studies have also found that the effects of restorative justice programs may diminish over time. The findings from this review also indicated that restorative justice programs can have a greater effect on reducing recidivism when compared to traditional justice processing.
- Teen court – Although individual studies have revealed that teen courts are associated with slight reductions in recidivism, the findings from this review as well as others indicate that teen courts were more limited in terms of reducing recidivism. In some instances, traditional justice processing and other diversion programs were more likely to lead to reductions in recidivism compared to teen courts.
- Wraparound services – Wraparound services are designed to address the multiple determinants of delinquent behavior. Studies have found that wraparound services are associated with improved youth outcomes; however, wraparound services have not consistently been found to reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

Practices

- Target population – Clearly identifying a target population has important implications for the efficacy of diversion programs. The target population should be carefully considered in order to limit the potential net widening effect and to ensure that the program serves the intended population. Agencies should consider targeting youth who would otherwise have contact with the juvenile system or be forwarded for court processing, unless they have committed a serious violent felony, have a serious history of juvenile justice involvement, or have been assessed as high risk of rearrest.
- Standardized risk needs assessments – There has been an overall lack of attention to youth risk and needs in the implementation and evaluation of diversion programs. Assessing for risk of recidivism and criminogenic needs is important to correctly identifying the target population as well as matching youth to services based on their specific needs. Programs should also consider responsivity factors (e.g., educational deficits, gender, learning style, motivation to change, mental health, cognitive abilities).
- Community and cross-agency partners – The findings from this review indicate the importance of establishing a strong network of community and cross-agency partners. Diversion programs that refer youth to evidence-based community programming were found to lead to greater reductions in recidivism when compared to other diversion programs and traditional justice processing. Research also suggests that diversion programs are more likely to thrive when there is a strong relationship between law enforcement, other juvenile justice agencies, and community organizations.
- Written diversion agreements – Diversion programs should clearly outline the specific objectives, expectations, and conditions in a written agreement between the youth and their family. Youth should also be allowed to pursue expungement of the arrest record if they successfully complete the terms of the agreement.

- Evaluation of program effectiveness – There is a lack of formal evaluations of diversion programs, especially with respect to recidivism and other youth outcomes (e.g., education, social functioning). Agencies should strive to collect data that allows them to monitor and study the efficacy and fidelity of diversion programs.
- Ensure equity and cultural competency – it is important to consider whether diversion services/interventions and youth outcomes vary by youths’ race/ethnicity and gender. One way to mitigate potential race/ethnicity and gender disparities is to train all staff in cultural competency and adolescent development.

This report examines diversion in the juvenile justice system as an alternative to formal justice processing and dispositional outcomes. One important goal of diversion is to reduce juvenile justice adjudications and residential placements, especially among youth who engage in low-level delinquency and/or status offenses. Additionally, diversion is a practice that can be used to limit the use of detention (Krisberg & Austin, 1993; Sheldon, 1999). Diversion is based on the notion that exposure to the juvenile justice system and formal processing may be more harmful than beneficial – especially for some youth (Sheldon, 1999; Whitehead & Lab, 2001). Unnecessary exposure to the juvenile justice system can lead to iatrogenic outcomes for certain justice-involved youth (e.g., low-risk youth; Whitehead & Lab, 2001). Additionally, Whitehead and Lab (2001) suggest that diverting low-risk, nonviolent youth from formal justice processing into community-based treatment/interventions has been shown to lead to reductions in future delinquency. This report is structured into several key sections. First, we begin by discussing the various definitions of diversion; its history and purpose; its goals; the various types and features of diversion; and the theoretical underpinnings of this juvenile justice practice. We also discuss the findings from several reviews and meta-analyses that have examined juvenile diversion and its effects on recidivism. Next we provide an overview of the methodology used to review the relevant research on juvenile diversion in this report. Third, we present the findings from our review and discuss the characteristics of youth and the programs that are used in the process of diversion as well as whether they are associated with reductions in subsequent delinquency. Lastly, we discuss the implications of the findings from this review in the context of juvenile justice policy and practice.

Background

Definitions

In this review, we define juvenile diversion as a process that allows youth who commit status offenses or delinquent acts to be directed away from formal involvement in the juvenile justice system (Bynum & Thompson, 1996; see also Chapin & Griffin, 2005)). Youth whose cases are diverted from the system have their cases officially suspended from continuing with formal juvenile justice proceedings (e.g., adjudicatory hearing; Wood-Westland, 2002). In order to have the case dismissed and avoid further involvement in the system, youth must fulfill certain requirements established by the juvenile justice system (e.g., good behavior; improved education outcomes; community-based treatment; Wood-Westland, 2002). Others have defined diversion as a process in which the juvenile justice system handles delinquency cases by other means with minimal contact/penetration into the system (Lemert, 1981). Diversion has also been characterized as the process when youth are referred to a community-based alternative as opposed to formal processing/sanctions (Lemert, 1981; Kurlychek, Torbet, & Bozynski, 1999).

Diversion has been described as a juvenile justice practice whereby youth are referred to a variety of interventions as an alternative to formal processing (Kammer, Minor, & Wells, 1997). Scholars have noted that juvenile justice agencies “invoke the idea of diversion in a multitude of ways, meaning that the term has a lack of precision” (Sullivan, 2019, pp. 55). Torbet and Griffin (2002) conclude that the process of diversion is often practiced loosely by agencies. For example, the authors observed that justice-involved youth are oftentimes not officially charged with an offense and the arresting officer releases the youth with a warning and the promise of no future delinquency (i.e., warn and release). However, Kurlychek and colleagues (1999) suggest

that an effective diversion program holds youth accountable for their actions, takes the steps needed to repair the damage caused to the victim and/or community by their actions, and provides swift and certain consequences.

History of Diversion

The idea of diversion dates back to 1899 when the first juvenile court was established in Cook County, Illinois (Zimring, 2000). The juvenile court was created in part to keep youth out of the adult criminal court and incarceration settings (Platt, 1977; Zimring, 2000). It was also at this time that the child-savers movement was taking place. The purpose of the juvenile court was to intervene with wayward, neglected, and/or delinquent youth to rehabilitate them to become productive members of society. This was much different than the philosophy of the adult criminal court and prison systems at that time, whose main goal was to deter individuals from engaging in crime by incapacitating those people who committed an offense.

Since the inception of the juvenile court, the process of juvenile diversion has varied based on the availability of treatment and punishment options across a particular time and place (Singer, 2014). As previously mentioned, in earlier times, diversion was intended to divert juveniles into rehabilitative, as opposed to penitentiary, interventions. The focus then shifted to diverting cases out of the adult criminal court and into the juvenile court (Schlossman, 1977). More recently, diversion refers to diverting youth out of the juvenile court and into informal and community settings (Miller, 1979).

In the 1960s, the political focus on juvenile justice policy and practice led to the creation of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. Their purpose was to evaluate crime and delinquency in order to inform national criminal and juvenile justice policy (Gensheimer et al., 1986). The Commission recommended that the juvenile justice system be utilized as "a last resort for dealing with delinquency" (Whitehead & Lab, 2001, pp. 268). The Commission also recommended that the juvenile court play a more diminished role in the handling of delinquency cases and suggested a process that focused on referring justice-involved youth to community-based treatment programs (i.e., diversion). Following the Commission's report, there was a notable increase in the number of diversion programs across the United States (Gensheimer et al., 1986).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the implementation of juvenile diversion programs continued to gain traction throughout the United States. Diversion programs were seen as an alternative approach to dealing with status offending youth as well as 'low-risk,' non-violent delinquent youth (Dunford et al., 1982). Juvenile diversion programs were viewed as having the potential to reduce delinquency and recidivism at a time when the juvenile justice system was perceived as ineffective at addressing these concerns (Chapin & Griffin, 2005; Whitehead & Lab, 2001). Furthermore, scholars have suggested that the proliferation of diversion programs is in part due to its appeal to two groups (Mears et al., 2016). Proponents of a get-tough approach to delinquency can find appeal in diversion because it provides the juvenile system with the ability to hold justice-involved youth, even those who engaged in low-level offenses, accountable for their actions. Although some critics may argue that diversion is a "slap on the wrist" and that it does not achieve the goal of holding youth accountable for their behaviors. Diversion also appeals to supporters of a rehabilitative approach to juvenile justice because it provides the

system with the opportunity to intervene with youth, reducing the likelihood that they progress onto more serious delinquency.

Purpose and Goals of Diversion

One of the main goals of juvenile diversion is to exclude certain youth from entering and penetrating the juvenile justice system – especially youth who are deemed inappropriate for formal processing (Sullivan, 2019). The notion is that formal system processing and/or incarceration may have criminogenic effects and that alternatives to these may produce better long-term youth development (Development Services Group, Inc., 2017; Loeb, Waung, & Sheeran, 2015). Criminologists have long argued that increased delinquency and recidivism will occur if low-risk youth come into contact with the juvenile justice system, are in increased contact with delinquent peers, and referred to intensive services (Shelden, 1999; Whitehead & Lab, 2001; see also Bonta & Andrews, 2016). Additionally, these youth may internalize the stigmatizing labels associated with the juvenile justice system and formal processing, increasing their risk to recidivism. Diversion programs provide youth with opportunities to correct their antisocial behaviors with the assistance of their families and the community, rather than formal juvenile justice intervention (Kammer, Minor, & Wells, 1997).

Although diversion programs are intended to remove certain youth (e.g., low-risk, non-violent youth; status offending youth; limited juvenile justice history) from the system, these programs attempt to hold youth accountable for their actions and reduce recidivism (Development Services Group, Inc., 2017). For example, Beck and colleagues (2006) found that 84.5% of parents of a sample of youth who participated in a community courts program reported their child accepted responsibility for their delinquent actions. Additionally, only 10.1% of the youth recidivated within one year. Of those that recidivated, the vast majority engaged in a similar or less serious offense. Diversion programs connect youth to a greater variety of community-based service alternatives that may have not otherwise been offered to them through formal processing. These programs are also designed to reduce involvement with antisocial peers, instill discipline, and improve school engagement and overall youth functioning (Loeb et al., 2015; Beck et al., 2006).

Another primary goal of juvenile diversion is to reduce recidivism (Mears et al., 2016). Additionally, diversion programs are anticipated to have an impact on other youth outcomes including education, substance use, and mental health (Howell et al., 2014; Kretschmar et al., 2016). The unique benefits of diversion programs come from the emphasis on sanctions to hold youth accountable for their behaviors as well as providing or facilitating access to interventions specific to a youth's risk level and criminogenic needs (Mears, 2012; Ray & Childs, 2015). So long as diversion programs are emphasizing evidence-based interventions (Howell et al., 2014), the expectation is that improved outcomes will result across a variety of life domains (Mears et al., 2016).

Diverted youth may also avoid acquiring an official record of delinquency if the conditions of the diversion program are met (Mears et al., 2016). By avoiding an official record, youth may be spared the financial burden associated with sealing or expunging their record. Furthermore, this has implications for obtaining employment, applying to institutions of higher education, and obtaining financial aid (Coleman, 2020). Many individuals assume that justice-involved youth have their records expunged when they turn 18; however, the laws pertaining to whether a

juvenile record is sealed or expunged varies from state to state (Nellis, 2011). For example, the state of Colorado can deny occupational licenses to youth if they have a juvenile justice record (Shah & Strout, 2016; Coleman, 2020; Radice, 2017). In 2006, approximately 800 colleges and universities started using the “Common Application”, which asks applicants to disclose previous criminal and juvenile justice adjudications. It is estimated that approximately 20% of these institutions have denied admission to those who disclosed their records (Shah & Strout, 2016). At the very least, diversion provides youth the opportunity to avoid the stigma and potentially more severe sanctions associated with formal processing.

Researchers have also suggested that diversion can help to reduce the costs of formal juvenile justice processing in addition to reducing the burden on juvenile courts and detention facilities (Whitehead & Lab, 2001; Development Services Group, Inc., 2017). Diversion has been shown to decrease the caseloads among juvenile court judges, prosecutors, and juvenile probation officers. Research has indicated that the cost of formally processing youth and housing them is generally greater than the cost of diversion programs (Petrosino et al., 2013; Mears et al., 2016). Some have argued that these cost savings can be reallocated to better address the needs of youth who commit more serious offenses (Klein, 1979; Cuellar et al., 2006), while improving the overall efficiency of the juvenile justice system (Patrick & Marsh, 2005).

Criticism of Diversion Programs

Scholars have argued that there is unclear theoretical logic for achieving the intended impacts of diversion (Mears et al., 2016). The main impetus for diversion is that youth avoid the harms associated with formal processing while receiving treatment and punishment (Wilson & Hoge, 2013; Sanborn & Salerno, 2005). However, the definition of diversion is ambiguous and does not describe the activities that constitute particular diversion programs (Klein, 1979; Sullivan, 2019). It is possible that diversion programs may not address factors that are related to risk of delinquency and recidivism (Howell et al., 2014). Mears and colleagues (2016) note that without a clear theoretical logic to guide the activities of a diversion program, juvenile justice agencies are at risk of engaging in what has been referred to as “correctional quackery” (see Latessa et al., 2020). This occurs when youth are required to participate in activities that are not related to the risks or needs that contributed to their delinquency (e.g., community service hours, job training, restitution; Mears et al., 2016). If this occurs, the diversion program is unlikely to be effective at changing youth behavior and reducing recidivism.

Diversion may offer youth needed treatment for delinquent behavior (Binder & Geis, 1984); however, the treatment received and how noncompliance with diversion is handled impacts the balance between being helpful to the youth with less penetration into the system and further penetration and any associated collateral consequences (Sullivan, 2019; Pogrebin, Poole, & Regoli, 1984). Similarly, diversion can be influenced by the *parens patriae* orientation of the juvenile court. In this instance diverted youth may have similar amount and length of contact with the justice system as do non-diverted youth. For example, Frazier and Cochran (1986) examined a sample of 1,200 cases in a diversion program and found that diverted youth often experienced the same amount and length of contact as non-diverted youth. The authors also conducted field observation and interviews with program personnel and identified that program personnel had an inclination to intervention and they also equated success with intervention. The

authors suggest that this likely increased program personnel connection with and supervision of diverted youth.

There are also inconsistencies in the implementation of diversion across agencies (Mears et al., 2016). This has created a number of challenges in identifying what activities constitute diversion as well as assessing the quality of the specific activities. Research has identified that many juvenile justice programs are poorly implemented and/or do not address criminogenic needs (Lipsey, 2009; Mears et al., 2016). It is important for agencies to collect information on the activities used in diversion programs (i.e., amount and quality), and how these affect recidivism and other youth outcomes.

Diversion programs may be harmful if they involve substantial requirements (e.g., restitution, mentoring, community service, counseling, fines/fees, drug testing) – especially if these conditions exceed those if they were placed on formal probation (Krisberg & Austin, 1993; Sanborn & Salerno, 2005). Therefore, some of the same concerns about formal processing and sanctioning may exist for some diversion programs (see e.g., Schwalbe et al., 2012).

There has been some concern that diversion has “widened the net” of the juvenile justice system. Stated differently, there is some support that diversion has expanded the boundaries of the juvenile justice system by bringing in youth who might otherwise never have come into contact with the system (Binder & Geis, 1984; Curran, 1988; Chapin & Griffin, 2005; Development Services Group, Inc., 2017). Binder and Geis (1984, pp. 627) exemplify this net-widening effect in the following quote, “It is widely proclaimed by critics that an inauguration of a diversion program will extend the bite of social control to youngsters who otherwise would have escaped its jaws.” Researchers have also found that diversion programs may be selecting youth who would not generally continue to reoffend, which gives the impression that a program is successful even though the youth’s behavior likely would have improved without intervention (Sullivan et al., 2007). Blomberg (1983) concludes that diverting youth who would otherwise have no contact with the system runs counter to the original goal of diversion, which is reducing the number of youth who come into contact with the system.

Although diversion programs provide juvenile justice agencies with an avenue to offer youth more appropriate and effective interventions, they often have lesser due process safeguards, which creates the possibility for coerced participation and for racial/ethnic disparities (Sheldon, 1999; Mears et al., 2016; Hirschfield, 2009). For example, research has indicated that police decision making can be influenced by personal biases (e.g., youth’s race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, demeanor; Schulenberg, 2003; Tapia, 2010; Johnson & Dipietro, 2012). In these instances, officers may use their discretion to provide youth with more lenient sanctions or charges based on these factors. The eligibility criteria for diversion programs may also be arbitrary and potentially benefit youth on the basis of their racial/ethnic identities (Kammer et al., 1997; Mears et al., 2016). Research has consistently demonstrated that Non-White youth, in particular Black youth, are more likely to be formally processed and receive more severe sanctions than their White counterparts (Cochran & Mears, 2015; Pope & Leiber, 2005; Leiber et al., 2016).

Types and Features of Diversion

As previously mentioned, the lack of precision in the definition of diversion has opened the door for juvenile justice agencies to interpret the idea of diversion in a variety of ways (Sullivan, 2019). Although the decision to divert a youth typically occurs at the intake stage (e.g., police or intake officers), multiple juvenile court personnel can be involved in these decisions depending on the jurisdiction and offense characteristics (e.g., juvenile probation officers, district attorneys). A variety of factors are considered in these decisions, such as: admission of guilt, education/employment status, parental supervision, family engagement and willingness to participate, youth's age, and nature of the offense (Whitebread & Heilman, 1988). In some jurisdictions, there are also specialized diversion programs for youth with specific risks or needs (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, truancy; Sullivan, 2019).

Development Services Group, Inc. (2017) conducted a review of the diversion literature and identified six key features of diversion programs that have implications for who the diversion program serves, the type of interventions youth receive, and how the program is structured (see also, Mears et al., 2016; Hoge, 2016; Hamilton et al., 2007; Cocozza et al., 2005).

Setting. Diversion programs operate both in justice settings (e.g., drug court, teen court) as well as in the community. The setting of diversion programs has implications for how charges are handled, such as whether sentencing has been formally processed or suspended.

Point of contact. Although diversion decisions are typically determined during intake, programs vary with respect to the contact point. Diversion programs and decisions can occur at various points in the justice process ranging from arrest to post-adjudication. The diversion decision is typically determined by juvenile court personnel prior to an adjudicatory hearing (e.g., juvenile probation officer, district attorney). In some instances, diversion programs are designed to occur immediately following an arrest; whereby, an intake officer or police officer are responsible for determining whether a youth is eligible for diversion. Juvenile court judges or district attorneys are generally responsible for determining a diversion disposition for youth after an adjudicatory hearing (i.e., post-adjudication diversion).

Target population. The target population of diversion programs oftentimes differ depending on the jurisdiction. These criteria are established by the diversion program and generally are oriented around the offense severity of a charge as well as a youth's criminal history (e.g., first-time offense, status offense, misdemeanor offense, non-violent felony). As previously mentioned, diversion programs may also target specific offenses (e.g., truancy), youths' needs (e.g., mental health, substance abuse), or specific ages (see Sullivan, 2019).

Program structure. Diversion programs vary greatly in terms of how they are structured. For example, some are highly structured with specific eligibility criteria, utilize standardized and validated risk/needs assessment, assess criminal history, and consider seriousness of charges and the age of the youth. These programs typically require that youth agree to and meet specific conditions to successfully complete the program. Structured programs typically have a formal system of incentives and sanctions at their disposal to motivate youth to meet program requirements. When youth fail to meet these terms they are often dismissed from the program and may have their case referred back to the juvenile court for formal processing.

Types of intervention. One of the largest sources of variation in diversion programs relates to the types of interventions that are used by juvenile justice agencies. Diversion programs may include interventions that are therapeutic, focus on behavior modification, involve community service activities, and/or require youth and their families to pay restitution, fines, and fees. The selection of services for youth should be geared toward a youth's individual criminogenic risk and needs (see Lipsey, 2009; Latessa et al., 2014; Sullivan, 2019). Diversion programs may take the form of certain juvenile justice practices such as: restorative justice, teen court, mentoring, cognitive-behavioral interventions, or case management/brokered services. Given that the vast majority of diversion programs are designed for youth with limited juvenile justice histories and who were referred for a lower-level offense (e.g., misdemeanor, status offense), the selection of interventions should be precise (i.e., match criminogenic needs) and minimal (i.e., match risk level; Development Services Group, Inc. 2017; Bonta & Andrews, 2016).

Formal vs. informal diversion programs. Informal diversion programs, also known as caution or warning programs, are the least intrusive type of diversion program. Juvenile justice actors, most commonly law enforcement, who come into contact with status-offending or delinquent youth generally warn youth about their behavior and potential consequences if these behaviors continue. In most instances little to no further action occurs and youth are released to their parents/guardians (Wilson & Hoge, 2013). Community-based referrals may be made by law enforcement or other juvenile justice actors. If the youth has no further contact with law enforcement or the juvenile justice system, the charges are dismissed after a specified period of time (Mears et al., 2016).

Conversely, formal diversion programs occur at some point after an arrest is made for an offense. Generally, these programs involve a justice component (e.g., intake, informal probation supervision, court processes, fines/fees/restitution), and a service component (Dembo et al., 2005). In most instances after an arrest, charges are filed and then reviewed by a prosecutor or juvenile court judge who determines whether the case is eligible for diversion. When a case is deemed eligible for diversion, youth are commonly required to admit their role in the offense and agree to the conditions of diversion established by a juvenile justice actor. If the terms of the diversion program are successfully completed by the youth, the case does not go onto the juvenile court for formal processing and the charges are dismissed.

National juvenile court statistics from 2018 provide an overview of the various configurations of formal and informal youth involvement in the juvenile justice system (Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2020). Approximately 43% of the estimated 744,500 juvenile cases in 2018 were not petitioned and diverted away from formal processing. Of those cases, roughly 40% were dismissed outright with no intervention. The remaining 60% of those cases involved some sort of sanction involving either probation (15%) or other sanction (44%; e.g., community service, restitution, treatment). When considering cases that were petitioned (approximately 57% of total juvenile cases), 47% of the cases were not adjudicated delinquent. Even when youth were not adjudicated delinquent, approximately 45% of those cases received some sort of sanction (i.e., 36% probation and 9% other sanction) with the remaining 55% of cases being dismissed. These estimates highlight that youth whose cases are not formally processed may still face sanctions or treatment as a result.

Diversion Process in Utah

The diversion process in Utah, also known as a non-judicial adjustment, is a formal and highly structured diversion program. Utah's program operates in both the community and justice settings. The diversion process is initiated after the juvenile probation receives a referral but prior to the adjudicatory hearing (i.e., preadjudication diversion). Cases are screened by juvenile probation officers to determine whether the youth is eligible to enter into a non-judicial adjustment during the preliminary inquiry. Non-judicial adjustments are automatically offered to youth if they are: 1) referred for a misdemeanor, infraction, or status offense, 2) have no more than two prior adjudications, and 3) have no more than three prior unsuccessful non-judicial adjustment attempts. If the youth is referred to the court for multiple offenses from a single episode, the youth will be offered one non-judicial adjustment for all offenses arising from the single episode. If there are multiple episodes, a non-judicial is completed for each one.

After the preliminary inquiry, the court conducts a validated risk and needs assessment with the youth. If the results of the assessment reveal that the youth is high risk or moderate risk and the referral offense is a class A misdemeanor, a request can be made to have the district attorney's office review the case to determine whether traditional justice processing is a more suitable option. Youth cannot be denied an offer of a non-judicial adjustment due to his/her or his/her family's inability to pay a financial penalty. The acceptance of the non-judicial offer cannot be predicated on an admission of guilt. Youth that enter into a non-judicial agreement have 90 days to complete the requirements. Non-agreement resources are only offered to the youth/family based on the screening/assessment results. Utah has devised a matrix of responses and interventions for non-judicial adjustments, which is based on the offense level and risk level. The matrix contains interventions that are required or recommended when considering these two factors. Youth may be asked to participate in a variety of interventions including but not limited to: check-ins with probation, meetings with probation, educational plans, truancy mediation, case plan, community-based interventions based on criminogenic needs, substance abuse assessments, no contact orders, victim-offender mediation, restitution, and fines/fees. For example, a youth referred to the juvenile court for a driving under the influence arrest and scoring moderate- or high-risk on the assessment is required to: pay restitution, complete a substance abuse screening and follow identified treatment recommendations, develop a case plan and meet with probation, actively engaged in meeting case plan goals, and participate in an intervention based on criminogenic risk factors. If the youth had scored as low-risk on the assessment, they would only pay restitution and complete a substance abuse screening and follow the recommendations based on those results.

As previously mentioned, fines, fees, and restitution are based on sliding scales. With respect to fines, the requirements are based on the age of the youth and whether the youth's family falls below the poverty line or is in Juvenile Justice Services (JJS) or Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) custody. For youth above the age of 16, the presumption is that a fine is assessed (unless community service is more appropriate). For youth under the age of 16, it is presumed that community service hours be assessed (unless a fine is more appropriate). In the situation where a youth's family is below the poverty line or the youth is in JJS/DCFS custody, community service hours are assessed. Lastly, youth that complete 100% of the requirements in

the agreement within the 90 day period are considered successful.¹ Youth that meet 100% of the terms of restitution, no contact conditions, developed a case plan, attend at least 75% of meetings with probation, and have mostly complied with other terms in the agreement are considered in substantial compliance. For youth that do not fall into one of these two categories, their non-judicial agreement is considered unsuccessful and the referral is forwarding on to the district attorney's office for further screening. The prosecutor then determines whether the case should be dismissed, sent back to probation for another non-judicial attempt, or file a petition to initiate the formal justice process. The non-judicial adjustment legislation was last updated on July 1, 2020. Since HB 239 was signed into law, there has been a marked increase in the number of non-judicial adjustments that are offered to justice-involved youth and a dramatic increase in petitions to juvenile court. In the year following HB 239, the number of non-judicial adjustments increased by 35%, while the number of petitions to juvenile court decreased by approximately 39% (Valle & Thomas, 2020). As of 2019, youth entered into 9,672 non-judicial adjustments.

Theoretical Framework

Labeling Theory

In the continued search for the causes of crime, labeling theorists argued that the process of labeling and treating individuals who do not abide by the law as criminals has the unintended consequence of fostering the behavior that it was intended to prevent. Edwin Lemert is most famous for his contributions to labeling theory (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). In his work, Lemert (1951) distinguished between two types of deviance (i.e., primary and secondary). Primary deviance is developed from sociocultural and psychological sources. The individual attempts to rationalize their misbehaviors as a temporary deviation or views it as part of being socially acceptable. Therefore, the individual does not conceive of himself or herself as a deviant nor does he or she orient his or her life around this identity. Secondary deviance is brought forth by the responses of others to the initial misbehaviors. When reactions intensify with each act of primary deviance, the individual becomes stigmatized through labeling, name calling, or stereotyping (pp. 76-77). With the emergence of others' reactions, the initial sources of misbehavior lose their importance. In most instances, the individual solves this problem by accepting the deviant status, which leads an individual to orient his or her life around this identity and the facts of deviance. Diversion may be effective in addressing the unintended consequences associated with formal, state intervention – especially for lower-risk youth. Specifically, diversion allows lower-risk youth with limited juvenile justice histories to be held accountable for their actions without experiencing the labeling and stigmatization associated with traditional justice processing and a juvenile record.

Risk-Need-Responsivity Model

The risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model may also provide theoretical support for the efficacy of diversion. RNR is based on three core principles. The risk principle indicates that an intervention designed to reduce recidivism is more likely to be effective when its intensity matches the delinquent youth's risk of reoffending (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge,

¹ It should be noted that for youth or their families who cannot pay the fine within 90 days, the probation officer may file an extension for an additional 90 days.

1990; Bonta & Andrews, 2016). According to this principle, too much intervention² is iatrogenic: low-risk youth who receive intensive interventions are likely to have an increased risk of recidivism. Diversion may be effective relative to formal system processing to the degree that it serves to ensure that the intervention matches the risk level, especially for low-risk youth. The need principle indicates that treatment to reduce recidivism should focus on those client characteristics that have been empirically shown to be associated with antisocial behavior³. In combination with the risk principle, this suggests that diversion programs may be effective because they keep low-risk youth from receiving too much intervention while diverting higher risk youth to treatment that targets crime-producing needs. Finally, the responsivity principle indicates that effective treatment for reducing recidivism must address non-criminogenic needs that are barriers to treatment engagement and also identify strengths that support that engagement. The responsivity principle suggests that diversion programs may be effective to the degree that they divert youth into a setting where the focus is on treatment engagement and positive development rather than punishment.

Impact of Diversion

In the last decade, several meta-analyses⁴ have examined the effectiveness of juvenile diversion programs for reducing youth recidivism. Those studies synthesize the research on diversion back to 1970 and demonstrate mixed results. Petrosino et al. (2010; k=27) found that, when compared to diversion, formal processing by the juvenile justice system was associated with significant increases in the prevalence, incidence, and severity of recidivism, including self-reported recidivism. Of particular relevance for the current discussion, those impacts were greatest when comparing formal system processing to diversion programs that referred youth to services after a formal charge⁵. This post-charge and pre-adjudication diversion, which includes services, is similar to the diversion process in Utah (referred to as a non-judicial adjustment or NJA). The authors theorized that the difference in efficacy between diversion programs that provide services and those that simply release youth may be due to the deterrent effect of having to participate services; alternatively, it may be that the services provided were effective at reducing criminogenic risk.

Wilson and colleagues (2012; k=45) also found a positive impact for diversion on recidivism, including post-charge diversion with services (33% average recidivism rate for diverted youth vs 41% recidivism rate for those that were formally processed). Of note, Wilson included programs that diverted youth at sentencing (e.g., post-adjudication, wherein youth are diverted from incarceration but not formal processing) in the post-charge analysis; as such, the implications of this research for Utah's pre-adjudication diversion program are unclear. Wilson also found evidence supporting some aspects of the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) principles as applied to

² In this case, intervention refers to any action by the juvenile justice system, including supervision, sentencing, and treatment.

³ Antisocial attitudes, antisocial peers, problems with education/work, lack of prosocial leisure opportunities and interests, problem in family supervision and support, problems with substance use, and antisocial personality pattern.

⁴ A meta-analysis summarizes the impact of an intervention across studies.

⁵ In contrast to programs where the youth is simply released without a charge or further intervention.

diversion programs: programs targeting higher risk youth had bigger effects as did programs that employed skill-based interventions and those that included processes for ensuring program fidelity. For low-risk youth, pre-charge programs with limited services were more effective than post-charge programs. For higher risk youth, diversion alone (without services) was not effective for reducing recidivism. The authors noted that the studies did not provide sufficient information to look at the impact of treatment dosage or adherence to the need principle⁶ on recidivism. Furthermore, there were too few studies that reported on alternative outcomes (changes in school performance, social functioning, overall well-being, or attitudes towards delinquency) to conduct an analysis on those outcomes.

One caveat to Wilson's study is the fact that the positive impact of diversion on recidivism disappears when only looking at studies that were scored as having a more rigorous research design, raising the possibility that the results reflect differences in study quality rather than actual changes in youths' behavior. Similarly, Schwalbe and colleagues (2012; k=45) examined pre-adjudication diversion programs, with stricter criteria for methodological quality than Wilson (2013), and found no overall impact of diversion on recidivism. However, these results are not directly comparable because Schwalbe and colleagues included programs that referred youth to diversion from both law enforcement and the juvenile court (e.g., both pre- and post-charge diversion). The authors identified substantial heterogeneity between programs, which means the pooled effect is not a good representation of the individual studies. Subsequent moderator analyses showed that some diversion programs were effective at reducing recidivism: those that employed family-based interventions, used case management services to increase treatment engagement and completion, and included researchers in the design and implementation of the program.

Several meta-analyses have examined diversion programs that rely on specific interventions. Wong and colleagues (2016; k=21) examined the impact of restorative justice-based diversion programs, which are characterized by their focus on repairing the harm committed, rather than punishing, the delinquent behavior (e.g., through strategies such as victim-offender mediation). When compared to formal system processing, there was a significant positive impact on recidivism. However, similar to Wilson (2013), those impacts were no longer significant when only looking at studies with the strongest research design. Wong concluded there was weak support for the effectiveness of restorative justice-based diversion at reducing recidivism. Moderator analyses also indicated that those type of programs, as implemented in the extant research, may do a better job meeting the needs of white youth than youth of color. Bouchard and colleagues (2017; k=14) examined the impact of diversion programs that include a teen court intervention, wherein peers assume the role of the formal justice system to sanction antisocial behavior. Teen court-based diversion was no more effective than formal processing, or other types of diversion, for reducing recidivism. Schwalbe (2012) also showed no significant impact on recidivism for teen court-based diversion programs. Tolan and colleagues (2013; k=46) examined the impact of mentoring interventions on delinquency, drug use, academic functioning, and aggression. Mentoring was defined as an ongoing interaction between a youth and an adult who was not spending time with the youth in a professional capacity (e.g., not a therapist or case manager). Modest and significant positive effects were found for the impact of mentoring interventions on delinquency and academic functioning with marginally significant positive

⁶ In particular, studies provided limited information on specific treatment targets, such as anti-social thinking.

impacts on aggression and substance use. The study also showed that mentoring programs that provided advocacy and emotional support showed stronger positive effects. Of note, the included studies examined programs that targeted youth identified as at-risk for delinquency as well as those with prior delinquency; moderator analyses showed no difference in program impact based on study population. However, only two of the included studies examined mentoring in the context of diversion and it was not possible to determine what effects could be attributed to diversion and which were the product of the mentoring intervention.

Finally, Wilson and colleagues (2018; k=14) examined the impact of police-led (pre-charge) diversion programs, which may result in a caution, reprimand, or warning and may also include a referral to services. Such programs are theorized to work by protecting youth from the negative impacts that criminal justice processing may have on a youth's identity and also by protecting youth from developing anti-social peer networks through justice system contact. Overall, the study showed that police-led diversion had a positive, but small, impact on future delinquent behavior of low-risk youth (OR=.77, which indicates a relative recidivism rate of 50% vs 44%). Additional analyses showed that there was no difference in the impact of diversion based on program type: for example, caution-only programs were no more effective than programs that included a referral to services or those with a restorative justice component.

In summary, prior meta-analyses suggest that diversion programs are an effective strategy for reducing youth recidivism, particularly when they focus on the relationship between youth and pro-social adults such as parents or mentors (Schwalbe et al., 2021; Tolan et al., 2013). For low-risk youth, simple diversion, with minimal contact or services, appears to be more effective at reducing recidivism while higher risk youth appear to benefit from targeted interventions that reduce criminogenic risk. The impact of diversion on recidivism is stronger in programs that include mechanisms to ensure the intervention is being implemented to fidelity. The research also suggests that diversion may have positive impacts on other youth and system outcomes (academic functioning, antisocial attitudes, substance use, costs associated with court process) and these should be included in future evaluations.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to assess the recent literature on the efficacy of diversion programs. Specifically, we are interested in whether there is a consensus among studies that diversion programs are successful in reducing future involvement with the juvenile justice system. As noted in the background section of this report, diversion programs may look vastly different depending on the juvenile justice jurisdiction (e.g., requirements, target population, setting, and stage of the justice process). In this study, we evaluate the research on preadjudication diversion programs that occur in juvenile justice settings (i.e., formal diversion program). Although law enforcement diversion (e.g., caution/warning diversion programs) technically fall into preadjudication diversion, they do not meet the eligibility criteria established below and are not included in this study. This study has two main research questions:

Research Question 1: How do diversion programs differ in their target populations, structure, requirements, and services/sanctions across studies?

Research Question 2: Do formal, preadjudication diversion programs lead to reductions in recidivism among youth under the age of 18? We are also interested in whether these diversion programs produce better recidivism outcomes when compared to alternative juvenile justice approaches (e.g., traditional processing). Additionally, we consider whether diversion programs led to a reduction in risk of recidivism and a resolution of needs

Study Identification

Electronic Search Engines

In order to identify studies for inclusion, the research team utilized four categories of strategic search terms. Those four categories included (1) search terms describing the target population; (2) search terms representing justice involvement; (3) search terms explaining the diversion process; and (4) search terms describing potential outcomes. The categories were selected based on the number and variety of studies that were generated through searches wherein terms were combined across categories. There was a fifth category with search terms describing study methods (e.g., random, controlled, comparison); however, this category was eliminated to broaden the search due to the limited number of studies that were returned with the inclusion of this fifth category. Search results were carefully noted and stored for further review to maximize search relevance. After 14 modifications were made to the search terms, the following search terms were chosen based on the relevancy of the retrieved studies:

Category 1: Population

juvenile* OR youth* OR delinquen* OR adolescen* OR child* OR teen*

Category 2: Justice involvement

justice* OR arrest* OR crim* OR court* OR offen* OR probation* OR detention* OR offen*

Category 3: Diversion

divert* OR diversion* OR preadjudicat*

Category 4: Outcomes

rearrest* OR recidiv* OR first*

These search terms were applied to the following EBSCO databases: Academic Search Ultimate, APA PsycArticles, APA PsychInfo, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Family & Society Studies Worldwide, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and Social Work Abstracts. In addition to the EBSCO databases the above search strategy was applied to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Other Search Recourses

In addition to accessing the above electronic search engines, we screened all articles used in six rigorous meta-analysis and systematic reviews. During the review of these studies, nine additional articles were identified for inclusion by scanning the reference list and assessing the studies for eligibility.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Included studies must evaluate the impact of formal, pre-adjudication diversion (with or without services) as compared to traditional juvenile system processing. This requires that the diversion program was offered to youth prior to an adjudicatory hearing. Additionally, we screened out diversion programs that occurred at the arrest decision point.

Outcome

The research team only included studies that examined at least one outcome measure of recidivism or reduction of future risk of recidivism (e.g., subsequent arrest, adjudication, or petition). This can be measured through official records, self-report, or assessment score (in the case of risk of recidivism). We also included studies that captured outcomes for other criminogenic needs (e.g., academic functioning).

Setting

In order to be included in the review, studies had to evaluate a formal diversion program (this would exclude pre-charge, caution/warning programs run by law enforcement as well as programs where the referral is pre-charge from a non-juvenile justice agency). The diversion program must also be set in the United States. International studies will be excluded due to geographical differences as well as differences in juvenile justice/correctional ideologies, policies, and practice.

Timeframe

Many of the systematic reviews and meta-analyses on diversion programs include studies that evaluate diversion programs prior to the 1990s. Due to major shifts in juvenile justice policy and practice over the last several decades, the research team determined that it was best to include studies that were published after 1990. Additionally, diversion programs prior to 1990 may have relied on outdated program approaches compared to more contemporary approaches, which may affect the generalizability of the findings of the review.

Methodology

A broad spectrum of study methods was included to see a range of interventions and gain both qualitative and quantitative insight into the impact of diversion programs as well as the design/implementation and range of outcomes. In order to meet the eligibility criteria for inclusion, studies must have included a comparison group.

Population

Included studies must have a sample of justice-referred youth (under 18 years old). This will exclude studies of prevention programs (at-risk youth that have not been referred to the juvenile justice system) and those that include samples wherein youth younger than 18 are combined with older youth.

Publication

Included studies do not have to be published in peer-reviewed journals. Technical reports and other research conducted by government agencies and public or private research institutions will also be included.

Report Screening and Inclusion

The total number of titles and abstracts generated from the above search strategy was 2,627. In the next step, the research team screened all report titles and abstracts to further assess eligibility. The titles and abstracts were screened for our key inclusionary criteria (e.g., recidivism outcomes, preadjudication diversion, comparison group). After this elimination process, we were left with 222 reports to be further reviewed and assessed for final inclusion. While assessing titles and abstracts for the studies identified in the electronic searches, we removed all duplicates, and requested full-text reports that seemingly met the eligibility criteria (n = 26). The remaining reports were cross-reviewed by three members of the research team to ensure that the reports met eligibility requirements and overall relevancy (n=22). The research team also conducted the same process for the studies identified from the systematic reviews and meta-analyses (n=157). Of those, nine studies were deemed eligible for inclusion.

The final phase of review yielded 31 reports to be included in the systematic review. We created a flowchart of the study identification and inclusion process based on the PRISMA guidelines for reporting systematic reviews (Page et al., 2020; see Appendix A for study identification figure). Among these 31 reports, authors began coding the reports to compare study design, methods, population characteristics, diversion type, and outcomes. These coding sheets were also cross-reviewed at random to ensure continuity among authors. These coding sheets were then used to create study summaries and allowed the research team to identify trends in diversion program aspects and outcomes.

The included studies were coded by the research team (n=4) to identify the following constructs for both the treatment and comparison group: target population, diversion process/other process, intervention, sample characteristics, study quality, outcomes, and differences between the treatment and control group (see Appendix B for code sheet). We also coded studies to identify whether diversion programs are part of an integrated system or part of a fragmented system. Specifically, integrated juvenile justice systems operate as one (e.g., state-run juvenile justice system) where juvenile justice policy and practice are consistent across jurisdictions. In fragmented systems, juvenile justice policy and practice may vary considerably across juvenile justice jurisdictions – even within the same state. Approximately 10% of studies were double-coded to ensure consistency in coding; however, since this is not a meta-analysis, no tests of inter-rater reliability were conducted.

Findings⁷

Methodology

Of the 31 studies included in this review, 9 used a matching technique to generate the comparison group. Comparison groups were often only matched on demographic controls (e.g., age, sex, race/ethnicity) and not factors related to recidivism (e.g., risk-level/score; k=7). Two studies utilized matching techniques to ensure that the samples were comparable according to risk of recidivism. For example, Colwell et al. (2012) used demographic controls, offense characteristics, and the MAYSI-2 risk scores to match youth in the control group to the treatment group. Even when studies utilized matching to create a comparable control group, analyses showed the treatment and control samples often varied in a variety of demographic factors and factors that may be associated with recidivism outcomes. As such, differences in outcomes between the treatment and control groups could not clearly be attributed to the intervention (e.g., diversion) rather than *a priori* differences in risk of recidivism.

Intervention Programs

Preadjudication diversion programs varied drastically depending on the juvenile court jurisdiction. In 27 of the 31 studies, it was possible to discern whether the diversion program was part of a fragmented juvenile justice system or an integrated system. The included studies that were conducted in states with an integrated or largely integrated system were in: Alaska, Florida, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri (k=9). Those conducted in states with fragmented systems were conducted in: Arizona, California, Colorado, Indiana, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington (k=19).⁸ The system structure has implications for consistency in the implementation of diversion programs as well as the interpretation of findings in the evaluation. Specifically, fragmented states appeared to be more innovative (i.e., specialized programs for sex offenders and youth with mental health needs. Studies of diversion programs within fragmented systems were also more likely to reveal null results than programs in integrated systems. This may be due to difficulty in studying/tracking data and/or inconsistency in implementation. There was also variation in diversion programs that were offered within jurisdictions. For example, at one point in time there were at least 19 different diversion programs available to first-time offenders in Indianapolis, IN (McGarrell & Hipple, 2007). Across studies included in this review, there were notable differences in the operationalization of diversion programs. The type of diversion programs evaluated in the studies fell into one of six categories: teen court (k=4), diversion with services (k=14), drug court (k=1), education-based (k=2), restorative justice (k=9), or victim/community mediation/impact panel (k=3). In a couple of studies, the authors grouped intervention types in the treatment group (e.g., drug court and diversion with services). Of these program types, diversion with services was consistently found to reduce recidivism. Diversion with services may include a variety of community-based interventions that are designed to address individual youth needs. Unfortunately, many of the studies included in this review did not describe the process of referral

⁷ See Appendix C for summaries of included articles.

⁸ Note that one study included site from both fragmented and integrated systems and is therefore included twice in these figures.

to these services nor did they describe the type of services. There was more limited support for the ability of teen courts, restorative justice programs, and education-based programs to reduce recidivism. However, Winder and Denious (2013) found that youth who participated in treatment services, restorative justice programming, and/or received supervision had the lowest levels of recidivism. The length of diversion programs often varied based on intervention type and available programming. The shortest diversion program reviewed consisted of two weeks of legal educational programming (Diaz, 2005); whereas, one of the specialty courts lasted as long as 12 months (Dembo et al., 2012). Twenty-three of the 31 studies did not report on the duration of the diversion program.

Risk level

Eight studies considered risk-level or a proxy of risk to recidivism in the interpretation of the findings. Three studies examined recidivism outcomes of youth in diversion programs, while directly accounting for risk level. In each of these studies, the authors found that higher risk youth were less likely to complete the program and more likely to be rearrested during the follow-up period or report higher levels of subsequent delinquency (Dembo et al., 2008; Gase et al., 2017; Dembo et al., 2012). Other researchers compared recidivism outcomes by risk level and compared those to the outcomes of similarly situated youth in the comparison group (Rempel et al., 2013; Sheldon, 1999). These findings revealed that low risk youth who completed the diversion program were more likely to be rearrested than low risk youth who were traditionally processed; whereas, higher risk youth who completed the program were less likely to recidivate compared to high-risk youth in the comparison sample. Another important consideration regarding 'risk' was identified in a study conducted by Bergseth and Bouffard (2012). The study revealed that the comparison group seemed higher risk (i.e., age and prior criminal history) than the treatment group. These differences have important implications for the interpretation of the findings. Of the studies that considered risk-level in their evaluation of diversion programs, none directly assessed whether the diversion led to a reduction in risk-level. However, two studies considered whether the diversion program led to a decrease in "risky-behavioral intentions" and found that it did decrease these scores (Winder & Nunes, 2018; Winder & Denious, 2013).

Gender

Gender was often considered in the context of comparing the treatment sample to the comparison sample. Few studies considered whether there were differential outcomes based on gender. Stewart (2008) found that boys were more likely to reoffend within one year after completing a diversion program than were girls (see also, Winder & Denious, 2013; Rodriguez, 2007; de Beus & Rodriguez, 2007). Conversely, Gase et al. (2017) found that girls who completed an informal diversion program were more likely to recidivate than boys. When discussing the type of diversion services that were received by youth in the state of Colorado, Winder and Nunes (2018) noted that boys were less likely to receive treatment services (i.e., diagnostic assessment, multi-agency assessment, mental health treatment, drug/alcohol treatment, and offense-specific treatment) and more likely to receive accountability services (i.e., community service, restitution, and teen court) than girls. It is worth noting that Winder and Denious (2013) found that youth who participated in treatment services, restorative justice, and/or received supervision had the

lowest levels of recidivism. Lastly, research has shown that girls are more likely to have their cases diverted compared to boys, even when accounting for other demographic characteristics, school status, juvenile justice history, and offense-related measures (Rodriguez, 2010).

Race/ethnicity

Similar to gender, race/ethnicity was commonly discussed in these studies when comparing the prevalence of race/ethnic subgroups in the treatment sample to the comparison sample. In some studies, there were major discrepancies between the treatment and comparison samples based on race/ethnicity. For example, when describing the analytic sample, Colwell et al. (2012) note that the overwhelming majority of youth in the comparison sample were Hispanic (80.5%); however, Hispanic youth only made up 36.9% of youth included in the treatment group. This finding suggests that youth of color may differentially have their cases formally processed as opposed to receiving diversion. Research has also supported this notion. Rodriguez (2010) found that Black youth and American Indian youth were significantly less likely to have their cases diverted or informally processed when compared to White youth. However, the author did not find a significant difference in the decision to divert youth between Latino/a youth and White youth. These findings remained consistent when controlling for other demographic characteristics, school status, offense characteristics, and prior juvenile justice history.

Researchers also have considered differences race/ethnicity in outcomes related to diversion programs. When examining program completion, studies have revealed racial/ethnic differences in outcomes. For example, race/ethnicity was associated with decreased odds of program completion (de Beus & Rodriguez, 2007; see also, Dembo et al., 2008). Black youth were 35% less likely to complete the program than White youth, and Hispanic youth were 13% less likely to complete the program than White youth. When examining two diversion programs in Cuyahoga County, OH, Stewart (2008) did not detect a race effect when examining program completion or recidivism. Due to the unique racial/ethnic makeup of Los Angeles County, CA, Gase et al. (2017) compared the likelihood of recidivism between Hispanic youth and other racial/ethnic subgroups. The authors found that Black youths were 1.95 times more likely to recidivate compared to Hispanic youth; although this effect was rendered not statistically significant after accounting for prior child welfare history. However, Black youth were 2.34 times more likely to have a subsequent case filed against them compared to Hispanic youth. This finding held after accounting for DCFS history (OR=2.15). Other studies also have not detected a race effect when examining recidivism (de Beus & Rodriguez, 2007; Stewart, 2008; Dembo et al., 2008). Research also has found a race effect when examining recidivism outcomes for youth that participated in diversion programs (Winder & Nunes, 2018; Winder & Denious, 2013; Jeong et al., 2013). For example, when examining 2.5 years of official record data, Winder and Nunes (2018) found that Black youth were significantly more likely than other racial/ethnic subgroups to recidivate in one year following diversion programming. Jeong and colleagues (2013) found that Black youth were more likely than White youth to recidivate for felony and misdemeanor offenses following participation in a diversion program. The authors also detected a race effect for Hispanic youth, indicating that Hispanic youth were more likely than White youth to engage in all offense types after participating in a diversion program.

Recidivism

The majority of studies included in this review indicated that diversion programs decreased the likelihood of recidivism when compared to other programs or traditional juvenile justice processing (k=21). The differences in recidivism rates and effect sizes varied across studies and generally decreased as the follow-up period increased. Twelve studies found that diversion programs were not associated with either an increase or decrease in recidivism. In several studies the finding of no difference in recidivism can be attributed to a longer follow-up period. For example, Bergseth and Bouffard (2007) initially found that a restorative justice, diversion program was associated with a decrease in recidivism at six-month, one-year, two-year, and three-year follow-up periods; however, there was no difference between the likelihood of recidivism after the third year. Other studies likely found no effect of diversion programs on recidivism because the researchers were comparing them to other diversionary programs (see, e.g., McGarrell, 2001). In a few instances, researchers found no effect on recidivism when comparing diversion programs to more traditional forms of sanctions/interventions used by the juvenile justice system (see Rempel et al., 2013). Three studies indicated that diversion programs increased recidivism when compared to other juvenile justice dispositions. For example, youth who participated in a community-board mediation diversion program were more likely to recidivate than youth that received traditional juvenile justice processing (URSA, 1993). In a more recent study, Povitsky (2005) found that youth who participated in a teen court diversion program were more likely to recidivate than youth who went through traditional processing (29.4% and 17%, respectively).

Other youth outcomes

Researchers examining within program effects on the attitudes or other characteristics and behaviors of program participants have done so by surveying a cross-section of participants in diversion programs or compared results from pre-and post-test surveys of program participants. Other studies (e.g., McGarrell, 1999; McGarrell, 2001) compared results from surveys with the youth in the diversion program to youth in a control group (e.g., other diversion program, traditional probation). In general, these studies have found that participation in diversion programs has led to parent and youth improvements in attitudes and perceptions of diversion programs, the juvenile justice system and program staff, and indicators of adjustment (e.g., school functioning). Additionally, survey results revealed that program staff (e.g., juvenile probation officers) have noted improvements in indicators of youth well-being (e.g., school functioning, problem severity, life satisfaction, service satisfaction, and perceived function). Seven of eight studies that assessed for participant satisfaction produced favorable results for participants' satisfaction with diversion programs. In two of these studies, participants indicated higher levels of satisfaction in the control group (i.e., other diversion programs) when compared to youth in a restorative justice diversion program. One study revealed mixed findings in that participants in a Missouri teen court diversion program indicated low levels of satisfaction; however, youth across three other states indicated higher levels of satisfaction with teen court.

Six studies assessed for changes in other youth outcomes (e.g., functioning). Of those, five studies found support that diversion programs led to improvements in other indicators of adjustment (e.g., school functioning). One study found that the diversion program had no effect

on a scale that assesses for improvements in family environment (e.g., cohesion). This specific diversion program was a short term, educational-based program (i.e., two weeks in duration) with no specific treatment component.

Discussion

The practice of diversion is an intervention strategy that redirects youth away from traditional justice processing, while attempting to hold them accountable for their misbehaviors. This review has highlighted the varied approaches that juvenile justice agencies, jurisdictions, and/or systems have taken to divert youth from penetrating the juvenile justice system. Preadjudication diversion programs may consist of minimal supervision and/or more intensive treatment programming, in lieu of formal justice processing. Youth and their families often enter into an agreement with juvenile probation officers or the juvenile court, which outlines requirements for successful completion of the diversion program. If youth do not comply with the terms in the agreement, their cases are typically referred back to the county district attorney's office for review. The district attorney then decides whether the case should be formally petitioned and proceed through the traditional justice process. There has been some consensus among juvenile justice policymakers and practitioners that diversion programs are less costly than traditional processing because they reduce the burden on the court system, lessen the caseload of juvenile probation officers or limit the frequency of contact with youth, and allow for resources to be shifted to provide better services for high-risk justice-involved youth. Another main goal of diversion is to reduce recidivism by addressing problem behaviors of youth without having to formally process them in the juvenile justice system. Research has shown that traditional processing of low-risk youth, who engage in low-level offending (e.g., status offenses, misdemeanors), may actually do more damage than good.

Critics of diversion programs have cited several limitations associated with diversion that might 'widen the net' of the juvenile justice system as well as contribute to increased racial/ethnic disparities at yet another juvenile justice decision point (Development Services Group, Inc., 2017). 'Net-widening' occurs when the juvenile justice system reaches more youth whom would otherwise not have had contact with the juvenile justice system or would have not had their cases processed through the system. Therefore, the juvenile justice system would be coming into contact with more youth than they would have if they continued to process youth in the traditional manner. The other major concern is that diversion practices may be discriminatory in nature due to inconsistent patterns in juvenile justice decision making. Some have argued that the process for selecting youth may be arbitrary in some jurisdictions, which can lead to the disproportionate representation of minority youths at later stages of the justice process (Mears et al., 2016; Rodriguez, 2010). For example, Rodriguez (2010) found that Black, American Indian, and Hispanic youth were significantly less likely to have their cases diverted than White youth when controlling for a host of individual factors and a macro-level indicator of structural disadvantage. Conversely, Black youth were significantly more likely than White youth to receive preadjudication detention, have their cases judicially dismissed, and receive out-of-home placements.

The purpose of this review is to examine the research on preadjudication diversion programs. Specifically, we were interested in whether preadjudication diversion programs reduced

recidivism. We also consider whether these programs have an impact on other youth outcomes (e.g., education). We identified 31 studies for inclusion. Overall, the majority of studies in this review support that diversion programs reduce recidivism. Several studies found that diversion programs do not have an impact on recidivism when compared to traditional justice processing. Three studies found that diversion programs increase recidivism when compared to other juvenile justice practices/programs. The findings also revealed that diversion programs can positively impact youth functioning across a variety of domains (e.g., education, perceptions of self, and attitudes).

These findings are not without their limitations. Specifically, there are methodological concerns in many of these studies that have implications for accurately interpreting the findings (see also, Development Services Group, Inc., 2017; Schwalbe et al., 2012). A number of studies in this review include a comparison group that was qualitatively different than the treatment group in indicators of risk of recidivism. For example, the demographic characteristics, offense severity, and offense history often varied between the two groups, suggesting that the researchers may perhaps be comparing outcomes for distinct groups. If this is in fact the case, then the observed differences in recidivism may not be reflective of the intervention but rather differences between the youth in the two groups. It may be possible that these studies speak more about how the system functions—in terms of decision-making related to perceptions of risk and danger--than how youth behave. Research has indicated that the process of selecting eligible youth for diversion may be arbitrary (Regoli & Hewitt, 2000; Mears et al., 2016). Research has found that some court administrators perceive that police discretion contributes to inconsistencies in the diversion process (e.g., overcharging youth; Maclure et al., 2003). In this way, the functioning of the system may run counter to the goals of fairness and justice by subjecting certain youth to undue processing and more severe consequences. Additionally, it has hard to compare findings across studies because the target populations, duration of the diversion programs, and interventions differ depending on the juvenile justice jurisdiction. Lastly, there is a lack of discussion on the specific interventions used as part of the diversion programs and whether these interventions align with evidence-based practices.

Few studies examining the effectiveness of diversion programs have discussed the role that risk/needs assessments play in identifying the target population and/or assigning youth to appropriate interventions. When considering the programs that are offered to youth as part of a diversion program, research indicates that they will be most effective when they are based on the youths' level of risk of recidivism and their criminogenic needs, and when the intensity and duration of services match these levels (August et al., 2016; Bonta & Andrews, 2016). Chapin and Griffin (2005) indicate that one of the most important issues for diversion programs involves matching youth to a program that fits their individual, criminogenic needs. By assessing for risk/needs and linking youth to services based on these results, agencies can improve the type and quality of services that youth receive in diversion programs (Wilson & Hoge, 2013) as well as create more consistency in their implementation and increase the accuracy when assessing the impact of diversion programs on recidivism (Development Services Group, Inc., 2017). Additionally, research has long demonstrated that approximately one in five justice-involved youth have serious mental health needs and as many as 50% have co-occurring disorders (Chapin & Griffin, 2005). Screening for these issues allows agencies to identify and treat those youth whose delinquency is related to substance abuse and mental illness, who may require additional

attention, monitoring, immediate treatment/programming, or more in-depth assessments. In the end, assessing for risk/needs should lead to more effective and better informed decision making among juvenile justice personnel (Hoge, 1999). In Utah, the diversion process relies heavily on the results of risk and needs assessments. All youth eligible for a non-judicial receive the Pre-Screen Risk Assessment (PSRA) and the MAYSI-2. Youth that score as moderate- or high-risk on the PSRA are assessed on the Protective and Risk Assessment (PRA). Based on the results of these assessments, responses and interventions are tailored to the individual needs of youth.

Diversion programs also vary as to whether the juvenile justice system within a state is ‘fragmented’ or ‘integrated.’ For example, the juvenile justice system in Ohio can be considered fragmented because it varies across juvenile court jurisdiction (i.e., county). Each county follows state guidance but has the autonomy to implement services in a variety of ways. The availability of diversion programs and the type of diversion programs may look different from county to county. Conversely, Utah operates an integrated juvenile justice system. Each juvenile court jurisdiction follows the same set of policy and practice guidelines, which are set by the state. This creates a level of consistency in juvenile justice processing, available programming, and youth outcomes; although, there may be minor geographical differences due to the accessibility of certain juvenile justice services. Fragmented systems make it challenging to evaluate the effectiveness of diversion programs at the state level due to between county differences in juvenile justice processing and availability of services/interventions. Additionally, there is the potential that justice-involved youth may experience differential treatment in one county when compared to similarly-situated youth in another county. In 27 of the 31 studies, identified whether the diversion program was part of a fragmented juvenile justice system or an integrated system. We included nine studies that were conducted in states with an integrated or largely integrated system. There were 19 included studies that were conducted in states with fragmented systems.⁹ The findings revealed that diversion programs in integrated states had more studies that favored treatment (i.e., diversion over traditional justice processing). Specifically, one study in an integrated state favored traditional justice processing over diversion compared to five studies in fragmented states that showed no significant effect of diversion or favored traditional processing over diversion. However, more studies in fragmented states had a unique target population (sex offender k=1; specialized mental health k=2) compared to studies in integrated states (k=1). The findings may speak to the flexibility in fragmented systems but also indicate that there may be difficulty in implementation across those states and/or difficulty in studying the effectiveness.

It is evident that diversion programs have evolved over the last several decades, especially with respect to the setting of the services and the types of interventions (Development Services Group, Inc., 2017). In regard to setting, diversion programs have shifted more toward community-based settings. Research has indicated that there has been a tendency of diversion programs located within institutional settings to resemble formal incarceration, increase associations with antisocial peers, and have no greater impact on youth outcomes than programs without juvenile justice supervision (Andrews et al., 1990; Dodge et al., 2007; Lipsey, 2009). Each of these factors can reduce any positive effects associated with the treatment/interventions.

⁹ Note that one study included site from both fragmented and integrated systems and is therefore included twice in these figures.

The types of interventions used in diversion programs have also changed over the last several decades. There has been a concerted effort on the part of agencies to identify the needs of youth and provide them with more direct therapeutic services, which target those needs within the diversion process (Wilson & Hoge, 2013). More and more diversion programs fit within the risk/need/responsivity framework, which suggests that the intensity of interventions should reflect the level of risk, criminogenic needs should be targeted, and decisions about programming should consider responsivity needs (e.g., academic skills, emotional problems; Bonta & Andrews, 2016). Additionally, those interventions that are most effective at behavioral change are those that are cognitive-behavioral in nature. Diversion programs are most typically reserved for youth who score as low or moderate levels of risk, indicating that the interventions should be minimal and precise (Development Services Group, Inc., 2017).

Evidence-Based Practices/Programs in Juvenile Diversion

Programs

Case Management

Results from this study, along with the findings from other reviews and meta-analyses, reveal that diversion programs that offer case management services increase the potential impact on youth behavior. Although Schwalbe and colleagues (2012) found that case management/broker services had a limited effect on recidivism, the authors noted that other studies have found that they are effective when they emphasize client engagement and involve careful matching to services. For example, Colwell et al. (2012) examined a specialized probation model for diverting youth with mental health needs. Youth in the program were less likely to be adjudicated for the offense and more likely to receive psychological services, family interventions, medication management, and intensive case management when compared to similar youth who received traditional supervision. Youth in the treatment group were also more likely to show improvements in the areas of school functioning, problem severity, life satisfaction, service satisfaction, and received more contacts with their probation officers. The findings from this review indicate that case management services can significantly impact behavior change, especially when they focus on youth risk and needs.

Counseling-Based Treatment

Counseling-based treatment generally involves the use of counseling as one of the main intervention techniques. These programs are typically “characterized by a personal relationship between the [youth] and a responsible adult who attempts to exercise influence on the juvenile’s feelings, cognitions, and behavior” (Lipsey, 2009, pp. 134). Reviews often include the following interventions as part of individual-based treatment: individual counseling, crisis interventions, group counseling, mentoring, peer programming with a therapeutic component, etc. (see Lipsey, 2009; Schwalbe et al., 2012). Based on findings from a meta-analysis of interventions for juvenile offenders, counseling-based interventions produced greater reductions in recidivism than surveillance-, deterrence-, and discipline-based interventions (e.g., intensive probation, scared straight programs, boot camps; Lipsey, 2009).

Schwalbe et al. (2012) considered many of the same intervention types as Lipsey (2009) in a meta-analysis examining juvenile diversion programs. Specifically, the authors found that individual treatment-based diversion programs did not produce significant reductions in recidivism when compared to other intervention types. Individual treatment-based diversion programs included similar intervention types as Lipsey's (2009) counseling-based treatment category. However, Schwalbe et al. (2012) indicated that the interventions included in the individual treatment category produced heterogeneous effects, suggesting that some of the programs may lead to reductions in recidivism. The authors recommend that program planners consult several evidence-based program registries to identify interventions that have been found to reduce recidivism/delinquency (e.g., the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Model Program Guide and the Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development) when considering interventions for diversion programming. The findings from this review suggest that community-based treatment, especially those that focus on influencing youths' feelings, cognitions, and behavior, have the greatest potential to impact youth behavior.

Family Treatment

Research in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention has consistently demonstrated that family-based programming is effective in reducing delinquency and recidivism. For example, Schwalbe et al. (2012) found that diversion programs consisting of family-based treatment led to significant reductions in recidivism among participants. Lipsey (2009) also found support for family-based treatment when compared to other intervention types (i.e., deterrence, surveillance, and discipline). Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) are two examples of family-based programming that have consistently been found to reduce recidivism and have a positive impact on other youth outcomes (e.g., life domains, emotional needs, child risk behaviors). Furthermore, these programs have been rated as effective programs for reducing recidivism on crimesolutions.gov.

Skill-Building Programming

Skill-building programs have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism (see, Lipsey, 2009), especially when compared to deterrence-, surveillance-, and discipline-based interventions. Lipsey (2009) did not find a significant difference between the types of skill-based programs in terms of their impact on delinquency; however, programs that were behavioral and cognitive-behavioral in nature tended to have the greatest effects on recidivism. Furthermore, behavioral and cognitive-behavioral programs produced greater effects on recidivism than job-related skills programming. Skill-based programming was found to be the most effective in diversionary settings than in the context of probation/parole or incarceration. The findings from our review indicate that skill-based programming significantly reduces recidivism compared to traditional justice processing and other diversion programs, especially if these programs target individuals' criminogenic needs.

Restorative Justice

Research has shown that restorative justice programs are associated with reductions in recidivism; although the studies have found heterogeneity program types (Wong et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the researchers found that restorative justice programs that primarily serve White youth led to reductions in recidivism; whereas, restorative justice programs that primarily served Non-White youth did not have a significant effect on recidivism. The authors note that these findings may be attributed to the programs inadequately addressing the unique needs of Non-White youth and/or racial/ethnic disparities. Schwalbe et al. (2012) found that program oversight and fidelity were moderating factors as to whether restorative justice programs were effective at reducing recidivism. Specifically, restorative justice programs where a researcher was actively involved in the program as a trainer, supervisor, or developer contributed to more successful implementation with respect to fidelity. McGarrell & Hipple (2007) found that youth who participated in family group conferences were more likely to complete the program and have lower incidence rates of recidivism when compared to controls. However, the study indicated that the effects may diminish over time. The findings from this review also indicated that restorative justice programs can have a greater effect on reducing recidivism when compared to traditional justice processing.

Teen Court

Although some research has found support for teen courts, findings from a meta-analysis conducted by Schwalbe and colleagues (2012) did not find that teen courts were not more effective in reducing recidivism compared to traditional processing and other diversion programs. The findings from this review also revealed that teen courts were more limited in terms of reducing recidivism.

Wraparound Services

Wraparound services are designed to address the multiple determinants of delinquent behavior, which include important individuals in the youth's life (e.g., family and peers) and the community (e.g., school and neighborhood). Although few reviews have examined the effectiveness of wraparound services for justice-involved youth, studies have found that wraparound services are associated with improved youth outcomes. For example, Carney and Buttell (2003) found wraparound services were not associated with a decreased likelihood of recidivism when compared to conventional juvenile justice services. However, the findings revealed a decreased likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors for youth who received wraparound services relative to the comparison group (i.e., school absences, expulsions/suspensions from school, and official contacts with the police).

Practices

Define Target Population

When implementing a diversion program, it is particularly important for agencies to ensure there is a clearly defined target population. In fact, Hoge (2016) has indicated that this issue presents as one of the major challenges to the efficacy of diversion programs. Specifically, there is no common definition nor set of policies or practices for agencies to follow. There is also a considerable amount of variation in diversion programs. Farrell and colleagues (2018) recommend that the target population be carefully considered in order to limit the potential net

widening effect and to ensure that the program serves the intended population. Agencies should consider targeting youth who would otherwise have contact with the juvenile system or be forwarded for court processing, unless they have committed a serious violent felony, have a serious history of juvenile justice involvement, or have been assessed as high risk of rearrest (see Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018, pp. 25). Eligibility criteria should be clearly established, including guidelines on who can make referrals, which assessment tools should be used, and other relevant acceptance criteria.

Use of Standardized Risk Needs Assessments

This review, along with others, have found that there has been an overall lack of attention to youth risk and needs in the implementation and evaluation of diversion programs. Assessing for risk of recidivism and criminogenic needs is important to correctly identifying the target population as well as matching youth to services based on their specific needs. Programs should also consider responsivity factors (e.g., educational deficits, gender, learning style, motivation to change, mental health, cognitive abilities). The responsivity principle also states that interventions that are behavioral or cognitive-behavioral in nature have the greatest impact on behavior change. If diversion programs are designed to include special populations of youth (e.g., mental health, youth arrested for a sex offense, substance abuse), agencies should use standardized and validated assessment tools to address their unique needs in addition to general risk/needs assessment tools.

Network of Community and Cross-Agency Partners

The findings from this review indicate the importance of establishing a strong network of community and cross-agency partners. Diversion programs that refer youth to evidence-based community programming were found to lead to greater reductions in recidivism when compared to other diversion programs and traditional justice processing. Additionally, diversion programs are likely to serve youth with a variety of needs and diversion services should include community-based programming to address the needs (Cocozza et al., 2005). Research recommends that diversion services should be offered in the community as opposed to within probation and other formal justice agencies, be developmentally appropriate, and evidence-based (Farrell et al., 2018). Research also recommends that diversion programs are likely to thrive when there is a strong relationship between law enforcement and juvenile justice agencies (e.g., juvenile probation, juvenile courts, district attorneys' offices, and public defenders' offices), as well as with other community organizations (e.g., schools, managed care organizations, community members, and advocates).

Written Diversion Agreements

Diversion programs should clearly outline the specific objectives, expectations, and conditions in a written agreement between the youth and their family (Farrell et al., 2018). These agreements should outline the completion timeline, graduated sanctions for not meeting program objections, verification of victim input, notify the youth and family that program participation is voluntary, and emphasize family input and participation (see also, Models for Change, 2010). As part of the

agreement, youth should be precluded from prosecution for the same offense if the conditions are met. Additionally, youth should be allowed to pursue expungement of the arrest record.

Evaluation of Program Effectiveness

The findings from this review suggest that there is a lack of formal evaluations of diversion programs, especially with respect to recidivism and other youth outcomes. It is particularly important to assess whether all of the responses/interventions utilized in diversion programs directly address criminogenic needs and whether they impact recidivism (e.g., Lipsey, 2009; Winder & Nunes, 2018; Winder & Denious, 2013). Furthermore, agencies should strive to collect data that allows them to monitor and study the efficacy and fidelity of diversion programs, including: type of service referral, completion status, matching of youth risk/needs to interventions, changes in risk, dosage and duration of interventions, recidivism, and other youth outcomes (e.g., life domains, education, at-risk behaviors). Without these data elements, agencies cannot assess the full extent of the impact of diversion programs.

Ensure Equity and Cultural Competency

In addition to evaluating diversion programs for effectiveness, it is important to consider whether diversion services/interventions and youth outcomes vary by youths' race/ethnicity and gender. It is possible that diversion programs operate in a discriminatory manner, albeit intentional or unintentional, such that Non-White youth are more likely to experience formal case processing. One way to mitigate these potential issues is to train all staff in cultural competency and adolescent development (Farrell et al., 2018). This will help staff to, "identify potential behavioral health symptoms, understand relevant policies, and be aware of diversion opportunities" (pp. 13).

Conclusion

In conclusion, findings from this review also highlight the potential impact that diversion programs can have on recidivism as well as other important youth outcomes. This study adds to the previous reviews on diversion in several different ways (see Schwalbe et al., 2012; Wilson & Hoge, 2012). First, our study coverage dates started in 1990 and ended in 2020; whereas, previous reviews dated as far back as to 1972 and examined research through 2012. The use of diversion has expanded drastically over the last several decades (Sickmund et al., 2021), so it is important to consider more recent research on this topic. Second, we did not include studies of diversion programs that allowed police to establish eligibility criteria. We were specifically interested in examining diversion programs initiated by juvenile intake officers, juvenile probation officers, or other juvenile court personnel. We also did not limit the inclusion of studies to only those that compared outcomes of diverted youth (i.e., treatment group) to youth that went through traditional processing (i.e., comparison group). This allowed us to consider whether specific diversion programs led to a greater decrease in recidivism when compared to other diversion programs. Wilson and Hoge (2012) also excluded studies that evaluated teen court and drug court, or if the diversion program accepted referrals from educational institutions. We determined that it was necessary to include studies examining programs that accepted

referrals from educational institutions because they are the source of approximately 60% of referrals for status offenses in 2018 (Hockenberry & Puzanchera, 2020). Additionally, we excluded studies that came from outside of the United States. Wilson and Hoge (2012) included 11 studies that evaluated diversion programs outside of the United States. Due to differences in correctional ideology, resources, and juvenile justice definitions, we determined that the inclusion of studies may have some impact on the interpretation of the findings. Although there were some notable differences in study inclusion criteria, we arrived at similar conclusions to other meta-analyses. Although Schwalbe and colleagues (2012) found that juvenile diversion programs did not have a significant effect on recidivism, the effect was in the correct direction.¹⁰ Wilson and Hoge (2012) found that diversion programs significantly lowered the average recidivism rate when compared to youth who went through traditional processing. We, too, found that the majority of studies included in this review indicated that diversion programs led to reductions in recidivism when compared to traditional justice processing or other preadjudication services.

Diversion programs have for the most part been shown to contribute to reductions in recidivism when compared to other juvenile justice practices (e.g., traditional processing). Crisesolutions.gov has rated the practice of diversion as promising, suggesting that there is moderate evidence of a positive effect. One of the major challenges to the efficacy of diversion programs is that there is no common definition nor set of policies or practices (Hoge, 2016). There is a considerable amount of variation across programs in each of the six key dimensions described earlier in this review. This has created difficulties for agencies with respect to implementation as well as evaluating their program(s) (Mears et al., 2016). Mears and colleagues (2016) recommended collecting systematic information on each of the activities that comprise various diversion programs, the number and quality of these interventions, and the extent that each intervention impacts recidivism or other youth outcomes, which may help to address some of the limitations of the diversion programs and studies included in this review.

The studies included in this review revealed several potential problems with the implementation and evaluation of diversion programs. First, the majority of the studies evaluated a diversion program being implemented within a fragmented juvenile justice system. In addition, differences in eligibility criteria create the potential of differential processing of youth from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Conversely, Utah operates an integrated juvenile justice system that has strict eligibility criteria for non-judicial adjustments (i.e., diversion). Although the non-judicial process has led to a substantial decrease in the traditional processing of justice-involved youth, there are still some questions as to why this approach has not decreased differential processing outcomes for youth of color (see Valle & Thomas, 2020). One would expect that offense severity would be the main explanation for these disparities, so it might be helpful to consider comparing cases that are diverted and those that are not by race/ethnicity and offense type/severity.

This review also revealed that there was an overall lack of attention to risk of recidivism in the descriptions and evaluations of diversion programs. We have discussed some of the potential concerns related to this including but not limited to: identifying a target population, mismatched

¹⁰ The inconsistent findings between the Schwalbe and colleagues (2012) meta-analysis and that by Wilson & Hoge (2012) may be due in part to differences in inclusionary criteria as well as sample size. With respect to sample size, it is more difficult to detect an effect in smaller samples.

services, and comparing diverted youth to a non-comparable control group. Diversion programs should clearly identify who the target population is for inclusion (e.g., low- and moderate-risk youth with non-violent offenses). Assessing for criminogenic need is also important for connecting youth to the most appropriate services to address their criminogenic needs. Additionally, assessing for risk of recidivism allows agencies to weigh the intensity and dosage of required services based on a youth's risk level. Taken together these factors have shown to enhance a program's ability to reduce recidivism. Risk of recidivism is also an important data element to consider in the evaluation of diversion programs in that it allows researchers to identify a comparable control group. The non-judicial adjustment process in Utah has strict eligibility criteria and relies on youths' assessed risk and needs in determining the interventions for diverted youth. With respect to the non-judicial process, it may be beneficial to evaluate whether each of the responses/interventions and other requirements (e.g., fines, community service) directly address criminogenic needs and whether they impact recidivism (see, e.g., Lipsey, 2009; Winder & Nunes, 2018; Winder & Denious, 2013).

It is important for agencies to collect data that allows them to monitor and study the efficacy of diversion programs, including: type of service referral, completion status, how referral matches assessed needs, reductions in risk, dosage and duration of intervention, recidivism, and other youth outcomes. Many of these data elements have specific implications for recidivism and other youth outcomes and without them, agencies cannot assess the complete impact of diversion programs. Additionally, it is important to consider whether diversion services/interventions and recidivism among diverted youth vary by race/ethnicity or gender. If, in fact, the services/interventions vary by these subgroups of youth it may help to explain why there is evidence that boys – in particular, Black boys – are more likely to recidivate following diversion programming than other diverted youth (see, e.g., Winder & Nunes, 2018).

Results from this study provide a review of the current state of juvenile diversion programs. Overall, these results revealed that diversion programs can reduce recidivism. Programs that refer youth to evidence-based community interventions, and offer case management and other opportunities like victim-offender mediation and restorative justice interventions have the greatest potential to impact youth behavior. Teen courts and brokered-services were found to be more limited in their ability to reduce recidivism among diverted youth. Nevertheless, it is important, for the efficacy of diversion programs, that agencies closely supervise the implementation of the program(s) and interventions(s) to ensure fidelity to the model.

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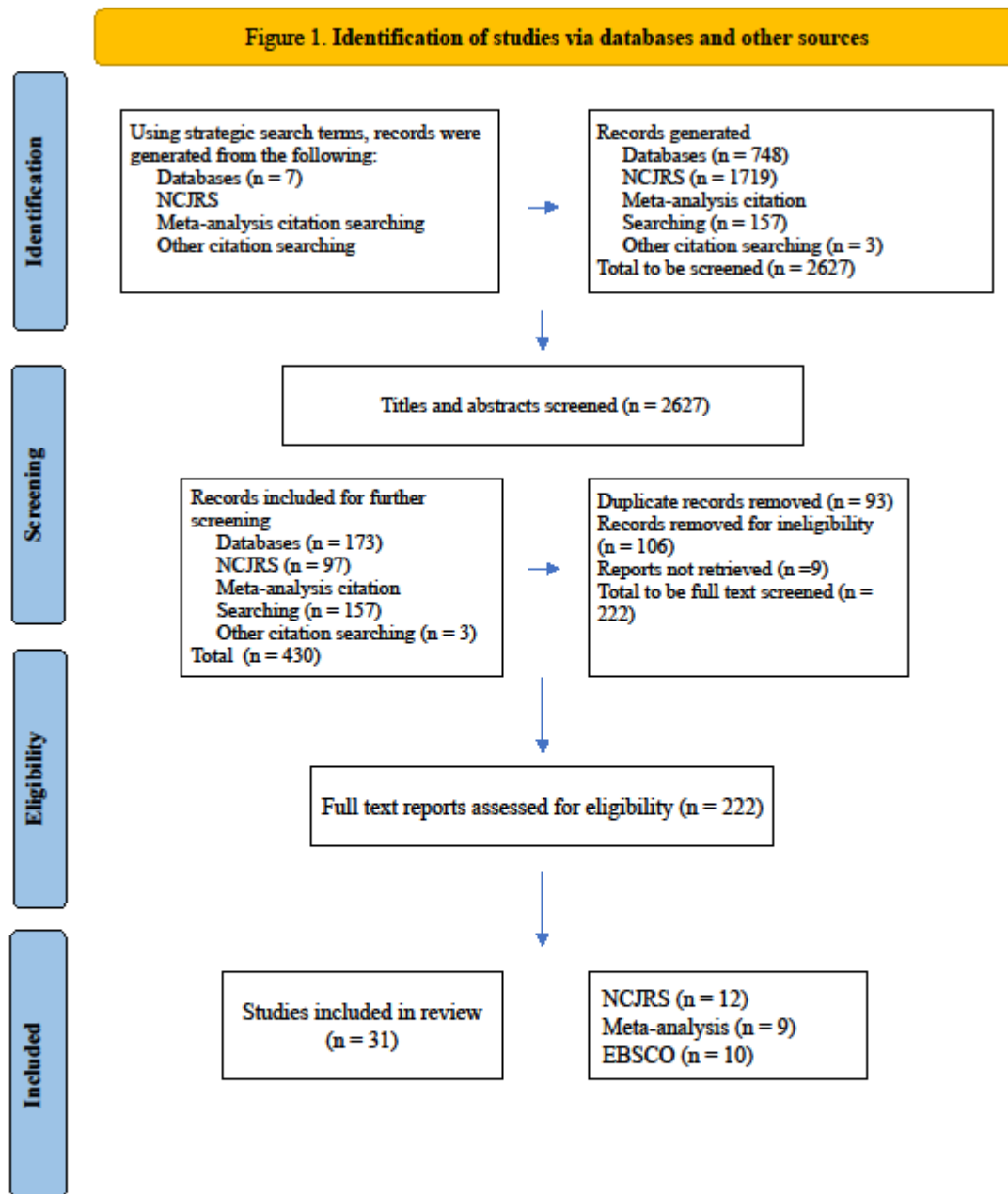
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Appendix A: Study Identification Flowchart



Format from: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

Appendix B: Coding Sheet Variables

- Coder Date
- StudyId
- Included or Excluded
- Access
- DbfCode
- StudyRelated
- PubType
- PubYear
- State/Country
- Intervention
- IntCharacteristics
- IntDescription
- OffendType
- OffenseLev
- OffendSystem
- IntSetting
- IntLength
- IntSess
- IntSessLen
- IntDosage
- CgGrp
- CgInt
- CgIntLen
- CgIntSess
- CgIntSessLen CgDosage
- StudyDesign
- CntrlVar
- CntrlVarList
- StudyQual
- InterventionN
- CgN
- IntAge CgAge IntGend
- CgGend
- IntEthnicityA...F
- CgEthnicityA...F
- RiskAssess
- RiskAssessTool
- IntRiskLow
- IntRiskMed
- IntRiskHigh
- CgRiskLow
- CgRiskMed

- CgRiskHigh
- OutcomeMeasure
- OutcomeOffense
- OutcomeSource
- OutcomeTime
- OutcomeIntN
- OutcomeCgN
- Results favor treatment (y/n)
- Effect Size (OR, d, r, etc)
- Confidence Intervals for Effect Size
- Percent Recidivate Int
- Percent Recidivate Cg
- Summary of Findings
- Critique

Appendix C: Studies of the Effects of Juvenile Diversion on Recidivism and Other Youth Outcomes

Study	Agency (Avg. Length of Stay)	Interventions	Sample Sizes & Youth Ages	Outcome Measure(s)	Effects of Diversion Programs
Bergseth & Bouffard (2007)	Mostly rural, Midwestern County (unreported)	Face-to-face dialogue, indirect mediation, victim-impact panel, or a community panel.	Restorative justice sample: n=164; 13.9 years old Traditional court sample: n=166; 15.5 years old	Number of official contacts, offense level, and offense type (at 6 months, one year, two years, three years, and four years after referral).	<p>A smaller percentage of the restorative justice sample had an official contact compared to the traditional court sample (i.e., within six months, one year, two years, and three years of referral) as well as a significantly lower average number of official contacts.</p> <p>Of the youth that recidivated, the restorative justice sample was involved in less serious offenses and had a greater time to first official contact after the referral than the traditional court sample.</p> <p>Restorative justice significantly decreased the odds of re-offense at 6 months, one year, two years, and three years after referral. It was not a significant predictor of re-offense at four years.</p>
Butts, Buck, & Coggeshall (2002)	Teen Courts in Alaska (Anchorage Youth Court; unreported length of stay), Arizona (Maricopa County Teen Courts; unreported length of stay), Maryland (Montgomery County Teen Court; unreported length of stay), & Missouri (Independence Youth Court; unreported length of stay)	Community service, restitution, apology letter, essay, participate on juries for other teen court cases, and/or drug/alcohol classes or other classes	Teen Court sample: n=534; (between one-third and one-half of youth were under age 15) Comparison sample: n=458; (matched on age; unreported)	<p>Recidivism defined as subsequent police contact (Maryland) or subsequent referral to juvenile justice intake (Alaska, Arizona, and Missouri).</p> <p>Youth and parent attitudes.</p>	<p>In each state, the comparison groups was more likely to recidivate at six months compared to the teen court participants. However, these differences were only statistically significant in Alaska and Missouri. Youth that reported low levels of prosocial attitudes and bonds before teen court were more likely to recidivate.</p> <p>Youth in Missouri reported lower levels of satisfaction and more cynicism about teen courts after participation. Youth in the three remaining teen courts reported that the process was fair. Parent across all four sites reported they were happy to have gone through teen court versus traditional justice system.</p>
Campbell & Lerew (2002)	Diversion program in Colorado (unreported)	Diagnostic intake, individual mental health counseling, group mental health counseling, family	Diversion program: 112 juvenile sex offenders (mean ages range between 14 and 15 years old)	Successful completion, arrest for new offense while in program, noncompliance,	Youth across each of the sex offense charges were most likely to receive the following services: diagnostic intake and case management.

		mental health counseling, supervision/case management, life skills, employment/vocational, education, substance abuse, recreation, and/or victim offender mediation.	Compared program outcome by sex offense charge category: Sex assault 1 (n=6); sex assault 2 (n=12); sex assault 3 (n=34); sex assault on child (n=51); incest (n=4); aggravated incest (n=2); and indecent exposure (n=3).	moved from area, out of home placement, and transfer	Across most of the sex offense charges, the majority of youth successfully completed diversion (i.e., sex assault 1, sex assault 2, sex assault 3, sex assault on a child). Only 3 youth were charged with a new offense while in the program (i.e., 2 youth originally charged with indecent exposure, and 1 youth charged with sex assault 3)
Chernoff & Watson (2000)	Philadelphia's Youth Aid Panel (unreported)	Victim and/or community impact panels, contract with interventions that address the interests of the youth, essays, community service, class at Philadelphia Service Institute (education classes), apology letter, curfew, restitution, make amends with parents, or referrals for other services such as Office of Drug and Alcohol Abuse and counseling at Department of Human Services.	Youth Aid Panel sample: n=300 (6.9% between 10-11 years; 23.4% between 12-13 years; 39% between 14-15 years; and 30.7% between 16-17 years) Comparison sample: n=300 (3.3% between 10-11 years; 10.5% between 12-13 years; 37.6% between 14-15 years; and 48.7% between 16-17 years)	Rearrest(s) during 36 months after first arrest	29.9 percent of YAP youth were rearrested at least once compared to 44.4% of non-YAP youth. Characteristics of non-YAP may be associated with higher levels of recidivism (i.e., the reasons why they were deemed ineligible for YAP). 10 percentage point gap in recidivism occurs in first 3 months and remains relatively consistent throughout the 36 month follow up period.
Colwell, Villarreal, & Espinosa (2012)	Texas Probation-Based Diversion Initiative for youth with mental health needs (unreported)	Specialized supervision, referrals to community resources, motivational interviewing, family engagement, crisis intervention, and ongoing training and coaching on behavioral health management.	Treatment group: n=65 (mean 14 years old) Matched comparison group: n=64 Nonequivalent groups design; however, comparison group was systematically matched to treatment group on ethnicity, sex, age, MAYSI-2	Ohio Scales to measure youth's and parent perceived level of function, number of contacts and referrals to community services, adjudication(s) in 90 days following enrollment.	The treatment and comparison groups differed in race/ethnicity. An overwhelming majority of the comparison group were Hispanic (80.5%) compared to 36.9% in treatment group. Youth that participated in the specialized diversion scored lower in problem severity, indicating improvement. Youth and their parents also reported increased levels of service satisfaction after participating in the specialized diversion program.

			scores, and offense level.		<p>Specialized probation officers made significantly more contacts with and referrals for youth than traditional supervision.</p> <p>Youth in the specialized diversion program were significantly less likely to face adjudication (i.e., 7.7%) compared to youth in traditional supervision (22%). Four youth in the specialized diversion program committed subsequent offenses, compared to three on traditional supervision. Youth on traditional supervision were approximately 11 times more likely to receive an adjudication in the 90 days after enrollment than youth in specialized diversion program.</p>
De Beus & Rodriguez (2007)	Maricopa County Restorative Justice Program, Maricopa County Juvenile Probation (unreported)	<p>Standard cite-in diversion program: supervision, unpaid community service, and/or approved counseling, education, rehabilitation, and/or restitution.</p> <p>CJC program (restorative justice): family group conferencing program, victim offender mediation, community impact panel, restitution, community service, fine, counseling, and/or educational sessions.</p>	<p>Standard cite-in diversion program: n=5,057 (15.1 years old)</p> <p>CJC program: 4,198 (15.1 years old)</p>	<p>Program completion, recidivism (i.e., any complaint filed with juvenile court during 24 month period).</p>	<p>Some notable differences between program participants. Youth in the CJC program were more likely to be White, boys, attending school, charged for a property offense, have higher number of prior offenses, and more impoverished.</p> <p>The CJC program did not have a significant effect on program completion when compared to traditional supervision. Race (i.e., Black), number of prior offenses, and having committed a person offense decreased the odds of program completion. Black youth were 35% less likely to complete the program than White youth, and Hispanic youth were 13% less likely to complete the program than White youth. School status (i.e., enrolled) increased the odds of program completion.</p> <p>In regard to recidivism, the CJC program was associated with a reduction in the odds of recidivism within a 24 month period. Specifically, the CJC program reduced the odds of recidivism by 47% compared to traditional supervision. Boys were also more likely to reoffend than girls.</p>

					Race/ethnicity was not significantly related to recidivism.
Dembo et al. (2008)	Miami-Dade County, FL Juvenile Assessment Center, Post-Arrest Diversion program (range 90 days for low risk youth to a year or more for high-risk youth)	Supervision (weekly or bi-weekly), community-based programming based on individual needs, educational assistance, counseling, drug testing, and/or youth and family treatment	Completed PAD program: n=293 (14.9 years old) Failed to complete PAD program: n=116 (14.7 years old)	Recidivism (i.e., number of arrests and number of arrests charges) during 12 month follow-up period.	Black youth and Hispanic youth were more likely to fail to complete the PAD program than White youth. A greater percentage of youth that scored moderate and high on the YLS/CMI failed to complete the PAD program. Youth that have also previously or are currently in special education classes were more likely to fail to complete the program. Youth that failed to complete the program were more likely to have an arrest and an arrest charge during the 12-month follow up period. Youth with a drug charge were more likely to have an arrest during the follow-up period. Successful completion of the PAD program was significantly related to a decrease in the number of arrests during the 12-month follow-up period. Risk level was also related to an increase in the number of arrests during follow-up. Similar findings emerged when examining number of arrest charges.
Dembo et al. (2012)	Hillsborough County, FL Juvenile Assessment Center, Juvenile Drug Court and Juvenile Diversion Program (6 to 12 months, and 5 weeks to 6 months, respectively)	Juvenile Drug Court: Drug Court orientation, drug testing, psychosocial, community-based treatment programs based on assessment results, satisfactory school progress, and behaving well at home. Juvenile Diversion: restitution, community service, apology letter, psychoeducational interventions based on type of offense youth arrested for, treatment, drug screening for	Combined n=240 (63% of families agreed to initial in-home meeting, of those 66% completed baseline assessment)	Delinquency (youths asked how many times in past 3 months they engaged in 23 delinquent behaviors since date of last intervention)	The findings from the latent class analysis revealed two distinct groups of youth across the six variables (i.e., higher risk and lower risk youth). High risk youth report more delinquency, higher ADHD scores, and higher rates of exposure to traumatic events, more likely to report having a substance use problem, receiving services for emotional/behavioral health, and a DSM substance use diagnosis of dependence. At 3 months follow up (after date of last intervention), high risk youth were more likely to be using substances, more likely to have a substance use diagnosis of dependence and report greater participation in delinquent behavior than youth that were identified as low risk.

		substance abusing youth not referred to juvenile drug court,			
McGarrell (1999)	Juvenile justice system in Indianapolis, IN, Restorative Justice Conferences program (unreported)	RJ conferences: youth, victim, supporters of both youth and victims participate in conference to discuss harm done to victim and community. Other Diversion Programs: variety of services offered by 23 diversion programs	RJ conferences: n=232 (median 13 years old) Other diversion programs: n=226 (median 13 years old)	Program satisfaction (victim, youth, and parent), program recommendation (victim, youth, and parent), completion of diversion program, contact with court since incident and completion of diversion program (6 months and 12 months)	In terms of program satisfaction, a much greater percentage of victims in the RJ program indicated that they were satisfied with the program (93%) than the other diversion programs (68%). A slightly higher percentage of youths and their families expressed satisfaction with the other diversion programs compared to the RJ program. Victims were also more likely to report recommending the RJ program to a friend in a similar situation than victims in the other diversion programs. Youth assigned to the RJ program were significantly more likely to successfully complete the program (83%) compared to youth assigned to the other 23 diversion programs (58%). The 6 month recidivism rate for the RJ program was 13.5% lower than the recidivism rate for the other diversion programs. Among youth that successfully completed either program, the RJ program youth had significantly less contact with the court at 6 months follow-up. Although the pattern in findings remained at 12 months post incident and completion of diversion program, the differences were no longer statistically significant.
McGarrell (2001) reanalysis of McGarrell (1999)					
Povitsky (2005)	Department of Juvenile Services, one county in Maryland (unreported)	Teen Court: no description of services/sanctions Traditional processing through DJS: no description of services/sanctions	Teen Court: n=211 (11-16.5 years old, mean=14.4 years old) Matched comparison group who experienced traditional processing: n=781 (11-	Recidivism (arrests and charges over 18 month follow-up period)	A higher percentage of youth in teen court recidivated compared to youth who experienced traditional processing (29.4% and 17.0%, respectively). This differences indicates that teen court youth were 2.03 times more likely to recidivate than the DJS youth. When controlling for demographics and offense characteristics, the effect of the

			16.5 years old, mean=14.6 years old)		teen court program on recidivism remained unchanged; whereby, participating in the teen court increased the odds of recidivism.
Rempel et al. (2013)	9 counties in New York, the Adolescent Diversion Program (unreported)	ADP: YASI assessment, community service, individual counseling, family mediation, 3 to 6 months of drug or mental health treatment, or educational/vocational programming. Comparison: matched comparison group received a variety of traditional forms of sanctions/interventions. Used propensity score matching (demographic, criminal history, and offense characteristics)	ADP: n=1,192 (ages 16-17 years old) Comparison: n=1,539 (ages 16-17)	Recidivism (rearrest over 6 month follow-up period)	No statistical difference in rearrests between ADP and comparison groups (i.e., 22% and 21%, respectively). ADP participants significantly less likely to be rearrested for felony charges within six month follow-up period compared to comparison group. No significant difference in time to first rearrest between the two groups. With respect to risk level, ADP was found to be most effective with high-risk youth. Among high-risk cases, ADP participants less likely to be arrested than similar comparison cases (39% and 46%, respectively). Among low-risk youth, ADP participants actually were rearrested more than the comparison cases (10% and 6% , respectively).
Rodriguez (2007)	Maricopa County, AZ Community Justice Committees (restorative justice program; 60 to 90 days)	CJC: committees composed of 2 to 4 volunteers, juvenile probation officer, and victim. Youth receive life skills training and participate in the CJC. Youth also receive community service, ordered to pay restitution, and some are referred to counseling and/or educational programming. Other diversion programs: variety of services/sanctions.	CJC: n=1,708 (mean 14.0 years old) Other diversion programs: n=3,262 (mean 14.1 years old)	Recidivism measured as new juvenile petition to juvenile court system within 24 month follow-up period.	Some notable differences between the samples include youth's sex, race/ethnicity, school status, referral offense, year of referral, and location of program. Participating in the CJC program reduced the likelihood of recidivism by 30 percent when compared to other diversion programs. Boys were also more likely to recidivate in the 24 month follow-up period compared to girls. However, both boys and girls in the CJC sample were less likely to recidivate than boys and girls in the comparison group. Youth referred for a property offense were less likely to recidivate than youth referred for a person offense. When accounting for number of prior offenses, the probability of recidivism is higher for youth with two or more prior offenses in the CJC group compared to youth in the comparison group. Youth in the CJC group with less than two prior

					offenses were less likely to recidivate than youth in the comparison group.
Rodriguez (2010)	Arizona juvenile justice system, diversion decision point (unreported)	Several diversion programs. Youth agrees to program requirements and upon successful completion, the county attorney will not file charges. If the youth doesn't comply, the county attorney files a petition alleging delinquency or incorrigibility.	Youth referred to Arizona juvenile justice system during 2000: n=23,156 (mean 15.2 years old)	Diversion (yes/no)	Black youth were 0.6 times less likely than white youth to have their cases informally processed. American Indian youth were also less likely than White youth to have their cases diverted (0.7 times). Girls were more likely than boys to have their cases diverted. Youth with more serious offense types were less likely to have their cases diverted (e.g., felony person offenses). School attendance also increased the odds of the case resulting in diversion.
Sheldon (1999)	San Francisco, CA, The Detention Diversion Advocacy Program (unreported)	DDAP: youth deemed high-risk on assessment instrument and who ordinarily would be detained on this basis. Youth receive a community service plan, which addresses a variety of personal and social needs. Youth are also placed on community supervision.	DDAP sample: n=271 (15.1% 14 years old and under) Comparison sample: n=542 (27.3% 14 years old and under)	Recidivism (referral to the juvenile court on a new offense, subsequent petitions to juvenile court, and subsequent out-of-home placements).	Youth in the DDAP group were significantly more likely to score high risk than the comparison group. The overall recidivism rate of the DDAP group was 34% compared to 60% in the comparison group. When accounting for risk level and DDAP participation, the recidivism rate for high-risk youth in DDAP group is 32.8% compared to 58.4% of high-risk youth in the comparison group.
Smith et al. (2004)	Adolescent Diversion Project, four different city precincts (16 weeks)	ADP (diversion with services): involves behavioral contracting. Youth and families guided in developing behavioral goals, rewards and sanctions for compliance related behavior, and assisted in identifying community resources. Diversion without services: youth were returned to parents with no further program or court contact.	ADP sample: n=137 Diversion without services sample: n=134 Treatment as usual condition: n=124 Mean age across experimental groups is 14 years old.	Delinquency obtained by coders who searched records of 44 law enforcement jurisdictions, the juvenile court, and the Law Enforcement Information Network. Labeling measures: examined both perceived delinquent labeling from others and self-labeling.	At one-year follow-up, ADP significantly decreased recidivism rates when compared to diversion without services and treatment as usual (22%, 32%, and 34%, respectively). The latter two groups did not differ significantly from one another in terms of recidivism. Diversion did not directly impact the labeling variables. The measures of family relationships were related to the labeling variables and delinquency variables.

		Treatment as usual: traditional processing which resulted in a petition to juvenile court.		Family relationships measure included items that assessed family communication, time spent with parents and subjective ratings of family relationships.	
Urban & Burge (2006)	St. Louis, Missouri Family Court, Victim Offender Mediation program (unreported)	VOM includes community service restitution and victim apology letters. The main intervention involves bringing the victim and youth together to share feelings, repair harm, discuss the facts of the offense and to develop restitution and restoration agreements.	Control group: n=434 VOM: n=532 (n=51 non-randomly assigned to VOM)	Juvenile summary records which include official delinquency history. Recidivism was measured as a subsequent referral that contained sufficient evidence for court action. Victim satisfaction survey to assess for satisfaction with VOM and restitution received.	389 of the 494 youth assigned to the VOM condition met with VOM staff (79%). 102 youth did not appear for the mandatory office visit with the most common reason being that the youth refused to participate (n=31). Of the 61 victims that completed satisfaction surveys, 96.7% agreed with or strongly agreed with the statement that meeting with the offender was helpful for them. 93.4% of victims reported that they were satisfied with the amount of restitution they received. Findings revealed that the mean number of subsequent referrals was significantly lower for youth that completed VOM than the control group. The percentage of youth that recidivated was also lower for the VOM group (i.e., youth that completed VOM and youth that did not complete VOM) compared to the control group.
Urban and Rural Systems Associates (1993)	San Francisco, CA Juvenile Court, Community Involvement in Mediation of First and Second Time Juvenile Offenders (unreported)	Community board mediation: mediation session consisted of panels of three to four. Youth were accompanied by a parent/guardian, the victim (if juvenile they were accompanied by a parent/guardian), and the mediator. The victim and youth	Community board mediation: n= 249 (n=136 did not participate) Traditional justice processing (matched cases): n= 157	Recidivism was captured by arrests and sustained petitions during a six-month follow-up period. Youth satisfaction measured by five item questionnaire. Court cost savings.	A significantly higher percentage of the experimental group were arrested for at least one subsequent crime than the comparison group (43.8% and 18.5%, respectively). The differences in recidivism between the two groups is not surprising as the samples differed in several important ways. A greater percentage of youth were charged with more serious offense types than youth in the comparison group.

		discussed the incident/conflict. Average time of the sessions ranged between 1 ½ hours and 2 ½ hours. Traditional justice processing			Youth consistently rated their experiences relatively high. However, the comparison group rated each item slightly higher than the experimental group. The authors estimated that the project saved the court an approximate \$3,073. Probation officers indicated that the project kept approximately 15 cases out of the court process for a total savings of \$11,531.
Walker (2002)	Honolulu County, HI, Conferencing (restorative justice program; unreported)	Conferencing involves participants (i.e., youth, victim, representatives from the community) to sit in a circle. Youth must admit what they did and how their actions have impacted others involved. The other individuals then discuss how they have been impacted by the youth's behavior. The group then decides what can be done to repair the harm. Lastly, a written agreement is decided upon by the group.	Conferencing: n=102 Matched control group: n=82	Participant satisfaction. Youth compliance (complied; did not comply; compliance unknown) Recidivism measured as rearrest rates six months after the conference.	Overall, the satisfaction survey revealed that victims and the youth, and community representatives for both the victim and youth reported positive levels of satisfaction (range: 83% to 88%), with the youth reporting the highest level of satisfaction. Of the 102 youth that were referred to conferencing, 90 complied with the terms compared to 6 who did not comply and 6 whose compliance status is unknown. The overall recidivism rate between youth in the conferencing group and youth that went through traditional juvenile justice process were similar (28.4% and 29.3%, respectively). The author found support that conferencing led to lower levels of offense escalation compared to the recidivism outcomes for the comparison group.
Winder & Denious (2013)	Juvenile diversion program, Colorado (unreported)	The services received vary based on the individual youth's risk and needs and fall into 5 main categories (supervision, treatment, competency, accountability, and restorative justice).	Diversion: n=1,323 (ages 10-17; mean age is 15.0 years old)	Substance and mental health needs. Changes in protective factors (i.e., accountability, self-esteem, connection to community, decision making, future aspirations, locus of control, and risky behavioral intentions).	The most common service categories include supervision, accountability, and competency. More than three quarters of diverted cases received at least one of these services. Treatment and restorative justice services were utilized in 38% and 28% of diverted cases, respectively. Treatment, restorative justice, and supervision services were associated with reduced recidivism. Across each protective factor domain, youth showed significantly increased post-test scores, indicating improvement in each of these areas. Youth that successfully completed the diversion program also

				<p>Recidivism in one year following completion of diversion contract.</p>	<p>reported decreased levels of stress and risky behavioral intentions.</p> <p>Approximately 13.4% of youth who participated in diversion recidivated in the year follow-up period. When compared to the youth that were unsuccessful in completing the diversion contract, youth that were successful had significantly lower recidivism rate (i.e., 29.5% and 10.6%, respectively).</p> <p>Males were more likely to recidivate than females (15.4% and 9.2%, respectively).</p>
Winder & Nunes (2018)	Juvenile Diversion Grant program, Colorado (unreported)	The services received vary based on the individual youth's risk and needs and fall into 5 main categories (supervision, treatment, competency, accountability, and restorative justice).	Diversion: n=3,087 (ages 10-17; mean 15.1 years old); the majority of diversions were pre-file (52%) or pre-adjudicated (39%).	<p>Substance and mental health needs.</p> <p>Changes in protective factors (i.e., accountability, self-esteem, locus of control, connection to non-familial adult, connection to familial adult, and connection to community).</p> <p>Recidivism in one year following completion of diversion contract.</p>	<p>83% of diverted youth successfully completed their diversion contract.</p> <p>13% of diverted youth assessed as needing substance use treatment, of which 70% received the substance use treatment. 32% of youth were assessed as needing mental health treatment, of which 96% received those services.</p> <p>Boys were less likely to receive treatment and more likely to receive accountability services than females.</p> <p>Across each protective factor domain, youth showed increased post-test scores, indicating improvement in each of these areas. Youth that successfully completed the diversion program also reported decreased levels of stress and risky behavioral intentions.</p> <p>Approximately 10% of youth who participated in diversion recidivated in the year follow-up period. When compared to the youth that were unsuccessful in completing the diversion contract, youth that were successful had significantly lower recidivism rate (i.e., 29.0% and 10.6%, respectively).</p>

					Lastly, recidivism rates were higher for youth that received supervision services than those that did not (13% and 8%, respectively). Youth that received restorative justice services were less likely to recidivate compared to youth that did not (8% and 11%, respectively).
Stewart (2008)	Two diversion programs in Cuyahoga County, OH, Community Diversion Program operated by the Juvenile Court (unreported)	<p>Program one: operates more like a restorative justice program</p> <p>Program two: operates like other typical diversion programs throughout the county.</p> <p>Youth are referred to a Community Diversion Program (CDP) hearing where the case is either dismissed or you are enrolled in formal diversion programming</p>	<p>Restorative justice CDP: n=208</p> <p>Typical CDP: n=325</p> <p>The average age of youth in either program is 14.7 years old.</p>	<p>Program completion status.</p> <p>Recidivism measured as whether youth committed another status or delinquency offense within one year follow-up period.</p> <p>Escalation measured as an increase in the level of delinquent offense committed by youth</p>	<p>75% of youth completed the programs and cases were dismissed.</p> <p>No race effect detected when examining factors that predict program completion. Race was also not significantly related to recidivism.</p> <p>No correlation between offense type and gender or race but black youth were committing crimes younger overall. Males were more likely to reoffend than females. Youth under 13 were more likely to reoffend than youth older than 13.</p> <p>There were no significant differences between programs in terms of recidivism rates, program completion, or offense escalation.</p> <p>The completion rates between the two programs were 88% for the restorative program and 89% for the typical CDP program.</p> <p>The recidivism rates were 15% for the restorative program youth and 16% for the typical program youth.</p> <p>45% of the restorative program youth that recidivated engaged in a more serious offense than the referral offense compared to 55% of youth in the typical CDP program.</p>
Robst (2017)	Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and Medicaid claims	Compared variety of juvenile justice dispositions including	943 youth eligible for inclusion (mean age 14.0 years old). Youth	Recidivism examined over 6-month follow-up	41.3% of the sample was rearrested within 6 months. When compared to the other dispositions, youth that received diversion

	to compare outcomes for probation, diversion, Medicaid-funded out-of-home mental health treatment (unreported)	probation, diversion, and out-of-home mental health treatment. The interventions must have occurred within 90 days of arrest.	had to have a mental health diagnosis. 38.8% of the sample received diversion compared to 34.9% who received probation. The remaining youth community-based residential treatment services.	period while youth was residing in the community.	were more likely to recidivate (39.2%) than youth in the statewide inpatient psychiatric program (38.7%) and treatment foster care (28.4%). Conversely, youth that received diversion were less likely to recidivate than youth who were placed in a therapeutic group home (44.6%) and youth who received probation (46.2%). Youth that received diversion were approximately 25% less likely to recidivate than youth that received probation.
Jeong et al. (2013)	North Texas County Special Needs Diversionary Program (unreported)	SNDP a statewide program that involves juvenile justice and mental health agencies. Provides youth with mental health services and specialized programming to divert them from formal justice system processing. A variety of services are available to SNDP youth.	SNDP: 328 youth referred to program, of which 168 participated. Comparison group: 160 youth who did not participate in program but were identified as having mental health needs through a screening assessment.	Recidivism measured as a new charge within a 12-month follow-up period.	The SNDP group were more likely to be male, White, have higher mental health domain scores, greater criminal histories, and more likely to recidivate than the comparison group. When accounting for a range of covariates, the authors found that the SNDP program was not associated with either a significant increase or decrease in recidivism when compared to other dispositions. However, youth in the SNDP program recidivate more slowly than those who did not participate. Black youth were more likely than White youth to recidivate for felony and misdemeanor offenses following participation in a diversion program. The authors also detected a race effect for Hispanic youth, indicating that Hispanic youth were more likely than White youth to engage in all offense types after participating in a diversion program.
Diaz (2005)	SHORTSTOP program overseen by Long Beach (CA) Bar Foundation (2 weeks)	SHORTSTOP program: 2 week legal education, diversion program for youth ages 11-17. The program combines scared straight tactics with homework assignments, and a test. The program closes if youth successfully complete all	SHORTSTOP: n=64 (ages 11-17; mean age 15 years old)	Knowledge of laws (40 questions related to California laws and status offenses). Family Environment Scale (i.e., cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict).	Results indicate that participation in the SHORTSTOP program increased participants' knowledge about laws and consequences for delinquency. Program participation was not associated with any changes in the family environment score. Youth generally reported favorable views of the program and its impact on their behavior.

		assignments and pass the exam.		Satisfaction Survey (11 items related to program participation and experiences)	The author compares recidivism outcomes for youth that participated in the program to that of the overall youth recidivism rate in the Long Beach area during the same time. 4.3% of participants recidivated during the 5-month post referral and 2-month post intervention period (n=3). This compares to a recidivism rate of 10% in the Long Beach area.
Bergseth & Bouffard (2012)	Restorative justice program in a small city in the Upper Midwest area (unreported)	Restorative justice includes face to face victim mediation (or victim panel if victim refuses). Support persons are included in process and there is a pre-mediation prep meeting. There is no information on comparison group intervention except that it is traditional processing and short, comprised of a few interactions and 90-180 days on probation.	RJ sample: n=352; includes first-time and repeat-offenders including those w low-level violent offense. Comparison group: n=353; includes those individuals referred to court at the same time for same type of offense aggregate; no individual matching).	Recidivism was measured as all official contacts that occurred after date of referral.	Groups differed on age, prior criminal history, and lived in urban vs rural area. Included all youth whether or not they completed intervention. Nonetheless, control group seemed 'riskier' at referral (older, more criminal history), which likely reflects who got referred to RJ vs traditional processing. Outcomes were any future contact, level of contact, number of contacts and time to contacts; individuals (n= ~164 in each group) were followed up to 4 years with a Mn=39 mos. Results favored RJ sample for most outcomes and treatment timeframes (first year the only time frame with all cases present). For RJ sample, agreement reached in 100% of cases with 93% completed as intended (apologies, written report, service work, financial restitution). In multivariate models, age, residing in city, number prior police contact associated with higher contacts; referral to RJ program associated with lower recidivism; tends to hold for all timeframes and outcomes). Group differences, with traditional processing having older youth with more serious offense histories; multivariate should reveal better outcomes for RJ sample even after controlling for differences. Poorer outcome, in terms of

					recidivism, were predicted by living in city, number of prior criminal contacts; RJ referral related to better outcomes. Lack of significant findings for some of the 4 year outcomes is due to possibility of uncontrolled selection effects.
McGarrell & Hipple (2007)	Marion County Juvenile Court; Indianapolis, IN; Family Group Conferencing experiment (unreported)	FGC group: n=400 Other diversion program (non-conferencing): n=382	Youth had to be 14 or younger, have no prior charges filed, admitted to committing the offense, and committed one of five offenses: criminal mischief, disorderly conduct, theft, conversion, or battery. Randomization overseen by research staff and intake team at juvenile court. Youth assigned to FGC group (n=400; mean age 12.5 years old) or one of 19 other diversion programs (n=382; mean age 12.7 years old). Majority of youth were assigned to one of four other diversion programs, which included: teen court, shoplifting program, community service, or victim-offender mediation.	Recidivism measured as time until first rearrest.	Some demographic differences were revealed between the FGC group and comparison group. More White youth were assigned to FGC and youth in the FGC group were on average significantly younger. The authors found that 48.3% of the FGC group recidivated by the end of the 24-month follow-up period compared to 53.9% of the comparison group. Survival analysis revealed that both samples failed (i.e., recidivated) at similar rates for first 12 weeks; however, the control sample fails at a faster rate after week 12. Assignment to the FGC decreases the hazard rate by 17.4%. When controlling for offense type, arresting agency, program completion, and demographic variables, group assignment is no longer significantly related to the hazard rate.
Forgays & DeMilio (2005)	Whatcom County Teen Court Program; Whatcom County, Washington (unreported).	Whatcom County teen court is offered to youth who have had a previous arrest and sentence through court diversion. All court	Second-time Teen Court sample: n=26 (mean age 15.4 years old)	Harter Self-Perception Profile provides information on an adolescent's self view.	24 of 26 teen court participants successfully completed their sentence. Five of the 26 teen court participants were charged with a crime within 6 months of teen court.

		<p>personnel are trained in restorative justice principles. Teachers recruited student volunteers to serve as court personnel roles. Attorneys served as judges.</p>	<p>First-time Court Diversion sample: n=26 (age not reported for comparison group)</p>	<p>Exit survey to assess perceived fairness of sentence and teen court process.</p> <p>Recidivism measured as rearrest within 6 month follow-up period.</p>	<p>13 of the 26 youth in the CD group successfully completed their sentence. Recidivism data was only available for 18 youth in the CD group. Of those, 4 youth recidivated within the 6 month follow-up period.</p> <p>The vast majority of teen court youth indicated that their sentence was fair (73%). A similar percentage of teen court youth indicated that the experience was okay (72%).</p> <p>When compared to same age, same gender normative sample, teen court youth scored within one standard deviation of each domain on the Harter Self-Perception Profile scales.</p>
Myers et al. (2000)	Project Back-on-Track; after-school diversion program (4 week program)	<p>BOT: short-term program designed to address youth needs (e.g., parenting, impaired parent-child communication, negative peer influences, low self-esteem, and poor problem-solving skills). This program occurs in a child and adolescent psychiatry outpatient clinic setting. Possible interventions include: anger management, community service projects, communication skills, self-esteem groups, assertiveness skills training, stress management, diversity awareness, drug/alcohol education. A variety of programs are also</p>	<p>BOT sample: first 30 youths to be referred to and complete the BOT program (73% of 41 enrollees; mean age 13.15 years old).</p> <p>Community control sample matched on age, sex, race, and delinquency stage: n=30 (mean age 13.47 years old)</p>	<p>Recidivism data obtained through Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.</p>	<p>Youth in the community control group were significantly more likely to commit a new offense during the 12 month follow-up period than BOT completers. Youth in the community control group also committed a significantly higher number of subsequent offenses than youth in the BOT group. Youth in the community control group also committed more serious offenses when compared to the youth that recidivated in the BOT group.</p> <p>Given the cost of the BOT program (\$600 per youth) and the reduction in recidivism, the authors conclude that the BOT program would result in cost savings when compared to standard community control (e.g., supervision)</p>

		available for parents and families.			
Gase et al. (2017)	<p>Teen Court Program in Los Angeles County, CA (up to six months).</p> <p>The teen court program was compared to an alternative informal probation diversion program (i.e., the 654 Contract program; up to 6 months).</p>	<p>Teen Court program: The Superior Court in LAC coordinates 24 teen court programs. School sites house the program, probation officers identify eligible youths, and volunteer judges preside over the hearings. This program involves a hearing, and issuing of sentences by volunteer judge using recommendations from peer jurors and a six-month period of supervision by a probation officer.</p> <p>654 Contract program: Participation in the program is voluntary. Youth must regularly meet with probation officers and comply with any terms in the contract (e.g., counseling, mental health services, drug treatment or other community based resources). Contracts can be set up to six months.</p>	<p>Teen court program: n=113 (mean age 15.6 years old)</p> <p>654 Contract program: n=194 (mean age 14.7 years old)</p>	<p>Recidivism measured in two ways: subsequent arrest(s) and cases filed with district attorney.</p> <p>Program participation and completion (yes, no, or pending).</p>	<p>The 654 contract youth were significantly younger than the youth that participated in the teen court program. The 654 contract youth were also more likely to have a history with the Department of Children and Family Services. Youth in the 654 program held in probation offices spent less time in the program than the 654 contract program in schools as well as teen court (166.9 days, 210.3 days, and 200.8 days, respectively).</p> <p>The multivariate analysis reveals that youth in the 654 Contract program were 3 times more likely to be arrested for a subsequent offense than youth in teen court. High risk youth were 1.05 times more likely to be arrested for a subsequent offense than low risk youth. Females were also more likely to recidivate than males. Black youths were 1.95 times more likely to recidivate compared to Hispanic youth; although this effect was rendered not statistically significant after account for prior DCFS history. However, Black youth were 2.34 times more likely to have a subsequent case filed against them compared to Hispanic youth. This finding held after accounting for DCFS history (OR=2.15).</p> <p>Results from a survival analysis revealed that youth in the 654 school-based program had 127% increase in the rate of being rearrested compared to the teen court program. Youth in the office-based 654 Contract program had a 54% increase in the rate of being rearrested; although, this finding was no statistically significant. Higher risk youth had a 3% increase in the rate of being rearrested compared to lower risk youth.</p>
Fox et al. (1994)	Kentucky's Law-Related Diversion	All delinquents and status offenders, age 12	LRE group: n=33	Social- and self-perceptions using an	LRE participants had significantly lower pretest perceptions of themselves, parents,

	<p>program; Administrative Office of the Courts, Juvenile Services Division. (12 week instruction period)</p>	<p>to 17, who meet the criteria for diversion are eligible for the LRE program. The program teaches youth about the law, legal process, and principles underlying responsible citizenship (e.g., rules, authority, justice, due process, responsibility, decision making, problem resolution, and interpersonal empathy). Some coverage is also given to drug education and community issues.</p>	<p>Control group comprised of public school students attending the same schools as the LRE sample at three of the state sites: n=28</p> <p>The LRE group and control group were matched on age, race, and gender. Youth ages range from 12 to 17 years old, with a mean of 15.24 years. Approximately 92% of the youth were White and 68% were male.</p>	<p>18 item scale. The instrument was administered prior to the first LRE lesson and also given to separate groups of the control subjects.</p> <p>The authors want to examine perceptions of self, police, friends, neighbors etc. and how they differed between programs. Although there was no direct comparison of recidivism, participants were asked to rate themselves as being either law-violating or law-abiding.</p>	<p>neighbors, best friends, and police officers compared to the controls. After the LRE lessons, youth in the treatment group exhibited positive change on each scale. The posttest perceptions of LRE subjects did not significantly differ from those of the control group. The authors also indicate that 10.5% of the all LRE participants were referred back for an offense within a one-year follow-up period.</p>
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