

Who is Most Likely to Graduate From Teen Court?

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This article contributes to the literature by identifying variables that predicted graduation from an Indiana teen court. Findings indicated that interventions that are commonly used in teen courts to promote positive behavioral change, such as community service and jail tours, paradoxically predicted noncompletion of teen court. Specifically, youths who completed community service or jail tours were less likely to graduate than those who were not ordered to complete these interventions. Minority youths, those in special education, and having more violations throughout the program also show less likelihood of graduation. Implications for teen court practice and future research are discussed.

The juvenile justice system continues to be an area of great focus for state and federal governments. One reason for this focus is the continued effort to reduce government spending wherever possible. A second reason is the need to help rehabilitate delinquent youths who, without successful

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intervention, may grow to be adults involved with the criminal justice system. According to a report published by the Justice Policy Institute, roughly 93,000 youths were placed in residential facilities in 2008 alone (Justice Policy Institute, 2009). This same report estimated that the cost to provide residential services to these youths was more than \$240.00 per day (national average). In sum, states spent nearly \$5,700,000,000 each year providing services which removed the youths from their home community. Furthermore, this report found that nearly seven in ten youths in residential facilities who were involved in the juvenile justice system were involved with the system for a “nonperson offense,” such as status offenses, drug related offenses, and runaway charges (Justice Policy Institute, 2009, p. 3).

Many states have made attempts to find effective interventions that will allow them to reduce the number of costly out-of-home placements. For example, Connecticut has focused on four goals: reducing the number of youths going to out-of-home placements, improving the quality of residential facilities, investing in community-based interventions, and keeping youths on status offenses out of placements and court altogether when possible (Justice Policy Institute, 2013). These efforts have seen the number of out-of-home placements in Connecticut fall from 680 in 2000 to 216 in 2011 (Justice Policy Institute, 2013). This has led to a significant cost savings, particularly as the average cost per day for a youth in placement in Connecticut was the most expensive in the nation in 2008, at \$726 per day (Justice Policy Institute, 2009). Economically, then, the reduction of out-of-home placements can be a major cost savings to state and federal governments.

Teen courts are community-based interventions that aim to reduce the costs associated with juvenile justice by supervising youths in the community, as compared to formal criminal justice settings. This provides youths the opportunity for rehabilitation in their natural environments. The overall goal of teen courts is to reduce criminal recidivism by offering a rehabilitative approach to juvenile justice, as compared to incarceration. According to the National Association of Youth Courts (2014), there are over 1,000 such courts operating in the United States currently. The Center for Global Justice, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law, Regent University School of Law (2013) completed a survey of 34 teen courts throughout the United States and found that each court varies in terms of what types of cases they hear, the individuals involved, and the types of sentences issued. Interestingly, of the 34 courts surveyed, none were from Indiana, which highlights the need to evaluate teen courts from this state. This article will conceptualize teen courts, provide a review of the literature of teen court evaluations, present the findings from an evaluation of a teen court in Indiana, and offer implications for practice and future research.

ELKHART COUNTY TEEN COURT

The Elkhart County teen court has been a program of Bashor Children's Home since June 2009. Teen court is a diversion program that serves first-time youth offenders. The goal of the program is to provide juveniles with consequences for their actions without having to go through the formal court system. Youths who successfully complete the program will not have the charge officially filed, which means that it will not show up on their permanent record. There will always be a record of the offense/arrest in police department records but not in those of the court system.

Teen courts do not determine the guilt or innocence of youths. Rather, youths must admit to the charges against them to qualify for teen court. Common offenses addressed in teen court include battery, disorderly conduct, criminal mischief, and theft. Teen court is run by a combination of staff, volunteers, and interns. All teen court judges are local attorneys who volunteer their time. Teen court "attorneys" are youth volunteers from the community. The teen court jury is made up of a combination of youth volunteers and defendants serving part of their teen court sentence. Staff and interns conduct intakes, coordinate and keep track of consequences served, communicate with other agencies involved in the process, and ensure the fidelity of the teen court model.

In Elkhart County, the Juvenile Deputy Prosecuting Attorney determines which youths qualify for teen court. Upon determination, the youths and their parents receive notification to attend an informal hearing at the Elkhart County Juvenile Court. At this hearing, groups of youths referred to the program attend court where the Juvenile Magistrate explains the process. After this explanation is given, the youths and their parents must decide if they wish to sign a 6-month informal contract. If they choose not to sign, their case is referred back to the Deputy Prosecuting Attorney who files formal charges. If they choose to sign the contract, they meet with staff from teen court and the admission process begins. After the informal hearing, the next step in the teen court process is an intake appointment. At that time, the youth and his or her family meet with Bashor staff for a psychosocial assessment and the teen court hearing is scheduled. On the evening of the hearing, the youth and his or her parent(s) meet with youth volunteer "attorneys" who prepare them for the questions they will be asked at their hearing while on the stand later that evening. As teen court does not determine innocence or guilt, but rather conducts a sentencing hearing, the youth is the only person questioned on the stand. After questioning, the teen jury deliberates and announces consequences before the youth leaves that evening. Common interventions used in the Elkhart County teen court include serving on the teen court jury in future cases, community service, jail tours, writing assignments, and educational programming (e.g., anger management classes).

There is also a \$100 fee for the program. If all interventions are completed within 90 days of the teen court hearing, the youth is considered successfully completed and the charge will not be on their permanent record.

Teen courts are guided by social control theory. Social control theory assumes that strong social bonds are protective factors against criminal behavior. Conversely, individuals who have weak social bonds are at higher risk of engaging in criminal behavior. According to Hirschi (1969), both individuals with strong and weak social bonds have similar desires to engage in criminal behavior; however, those with strong social bonds are better able to resist the impulses. There are four concepts that underpin social control theory: (a) attachment, (b) commitment, (c) involvement, and (d) belief.

First, attachment suggests that an individual is less likely to engage in criminal behavior if they have a strong relationship with family, friends, and community institutions (Hirschi, 1969). Teen courts attempt to strengthen family relationships by encouraging participants to have their family members involved in the program. Families are invited to attend court hearings, for example, and participate in family counseling if needed.

Second, commitment refers to the level of involvement an individual has with social activities and institutions (Hirschi, 1969). Individuals who are involved in education and employment, for example, are assumed to be less likely to deviate from social norms because engagement in criminal activity may interrupt their career goals. Teen courts often include vocational and educational counseling to assist participants in developing these protective factors in their lives. Furthermore, it is common for key stakeholders in teen courts to communicate with participants' schools to support them in achieving their educational goals.

Third, involvement is related to the amount of time an individual participates in prosocial behaviors, such as employment, education, parenting, and religious activities; as the amount of time involved in prosocial behaviors increases, the risk of engaging in criminal behavior decreases (Hirschi, 1969). Teen courts implement a variety of interventions to promote prosocial development, such as serving as a juror to support their peers in being successful in the program and completing community service.

Fourth, belief is associated with the cognitive process an individual goes through in accepting and complying with societal norms and laws (Hirschi, 1969). Teen courts are rehabilitative programs that acknowledge that change is a process, and violations in the program are an opportunity for therapeutic interventions that may assist participants in changing their cognitions related to criminal behavior. Counseling, for example, may be used in lieu of punitive sanctions for noncompliance which provides participants opportunities for change. Referrals to counseling are consistent with the concept of belief, as engagement in treatment may assist participants in developing internal motivations to avoid criminal behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The teen court is a form of restorative justice. According to Fagin (2010), restorative justice programs incorporate restitution, such as community service, as well as rehabilitation of the offender, such as group therapy sessions. The idea behind restorative justice is to restore the damage done to the community and/or victim, as well as the offender. One of the main goals of teen court is to reduce recidivism rates within juveniles. By reducing recidivism rates, this also reduces the costs associated with processing juveniles through the justice system. Much of the previous research done on teen courts appears to focus on whether or not teen courts successfully reduces recidivism rates, variables contributing to recidivism, and comparing teen court to traditional programs, such as probation and/or juvenile detention centers.

Teen Court Graduation and Recidivism

Examining variables that predict successful graduation from teen court is crucial given that graduation from teen court could be a predictor of recidivism when compared to those who have been terminated from the program. Recidivism rates are higher in teens who do not graduate from teen court (Harrison, Maupin, & Mays, 2001; Norris, Twill, & Kim, 2011; State Justice Institute [SJI], 2013). When evaluating teen court, SJI (2013) found that in Baltimore City, Maryland, youths who did not complete teen court were two and a half more times likely to recidivate within 12 months. SJI (2013) also reported in Montgomery County, Maryland, youths were seven times more likely to recidivate within 6 months and four times more likely to recidivate within 12 months if teen court was not completed. As with much of the literature examining teen court, there is evidence that speaks to the contrary. For example, Stickle, Connell, Wilson, and Gottfredson (2008) randomly placed youths in either teen court or Department of Juveniles Services to examine the effectiveness of reducing recidivism by using teen court. They reported that juveniles who completed teen court had higher self-reported delinquent behavior than their control group did. These findings suggested that teen court was actually less effective than the traditional juvenile process.

Predictors of Teen Court Graduation

CRIMINAL HISTORY

If graduating from teen court can in fact be a predictor of recidivism, variables contributing to graduation rates would appear worth examining. Literature suggests that criminal history may impact teen court graduation rates (SJI, 2013). Previous research indicates that juveniles who have no prior contact with the justice system (first-time offenders) are more likely to benefit

from teen court (Dick, Geertsen, & Jones, 2003; Norris et al., 2011; SJI, 2013). For example, Dick et al. suggested teens with a history of delinquent behavior, having four or more violations, are less deterred by teen court. Forgays (2008) suggested that juveniles with several prior offenses may not benefit as highly from teen court given that behavior modification, or willingness to change behavior, is a key component of restorative justice. Therefore, if teens are not willing to modify their delinquent behavior, teen court would most likely be an ineffective intervention. Teen courts promote self-determination, as participants are responsible for their behaviors and changing their thought patterns related to criminal activity. This may suggest that first-time offenders might be more likely to graduate teen court than offenders with criminal histories, as they have yet to become habitual offenders, increasing the odds that behavior modification can occur. In fact, Minor, Wells, Soderstrom, Bingham, and Williamson (1999) found that teens with prior records were less likely to complete their sentences than teens without prior records. On the contrary, Rasmussen (2004) reported that there was no association between prior offenses and actual graduation rates. These findings suggest that teens are capable of graduating from teen court, regardless of habitual delinquent behavior.

TYPE OF OFFENSE

In addition to criminal history, the type of admitting offense into teen court may also impact graduation rates. The most common juvenile offense seen in teen court is shoplifting (Harrison et al., 2001; Rasmussen, 2004). Harrison et al. (2001) found that juveniles with shoplifting offenses were less likely to graduate from teen court than those with offenses such as alcohol and/or marijuana possession. Drug-related offenses might also be related to graduation rates. However, although Stickle et al. (2008) found that 75% of teen court graduates were ordered to complete alcohol and/or drug treatment as part of their sanctions, only 23% actually completed treatment. This indicates that teens are still graduating the program even though they are not always completing the required sanctions agreed to during sentencing, such as alcohol and/or drug treatment.

TYPES OF SANCTIONS

The most common sanction required during sentencing is community service (Dick et al., 2003; Forgays, 2008; Minor et al., 1999; Vose & Vannan, 2013). As previously mentioned, teen court follows the restorative justice model that not only focus' on rehabilitation of the offender, but also mending the damage done within the community. However, Minor et al. (1999) discovered that juveniles were less likely to graduate from teen court if community service was required of them. The study suggested this may be because

community service required more time and effort on the part of the teens when compared to other sanctions such as apology letters and/or jury duty within teen court. Norris et al. (2011) made note that eight of the 32 participants who did not graduate the program either moved or had no transportation. Providing a possible explanation, Rasmussen (2004) suggested that individuals in lower socioeconomic status are less likely to have reliable transportation, thus decreasing the likelihood of graduation from teen court. If community service is the most common sanction required, and lower socioeconomic status teens do not have transportation to their community service requirements, it could be concluded that lower socioeconomic status teens may be less likely to complete teen court. Interestingly, socioeconomic status seems to play a role in recidivism as well. African American juveniles who reside in impoverished neighborhoods with families that receive public assistance are at an increased risk to recidivate when compared to juveniles living in higher income families (Mennis et al., 2011). Also, Dick et al. (2003) reported those who were sentenced to community service recidivated at a higher rate than teen court participants receiving other sanctions. However, Harrison et al. (2001) argued that recidivism decreased in juveniles who were not only more involved in the community but who were required to participate in future teen court processes, such as serving as “jurors” or “lawyers” as part of their sanctions.

AGE

In regards to school age juveniles, Harrison et al. (2001) reported participants in high school were less likely to graduate teen court than those in middle school. The same study also found that the highest rate of recidivism was with youths aged 12 to 16. In addition, Smith and Blackburn (2011) suggested younger juveniles would benefit the most from teen court because positive peer influence is most influential between the ages of 10 and 12. Both of these studies suggest that youths under the age of 12 would not only be more likely to graduate teen court, but also benefit the most from it.

GENDER

Gender may also be a predictor of successful teen court graduation, although previous research is inconclusive. Evaluation of a teen court in Baltimore County, Maryland found that males had a higher graduation rate (59.7%) than females (53.7%; SJI, 2013). Offering an explanation for this, Rasmussen (2004) stated that females reported feeling less guilty than males and suggested that it was also possible they might have felt as though they should not be punished thus had decreased motivation to complete all required sanctions. Other studies, however, have found no gender differences regarding teen court graduation rates (Harrison et al., 2001; Norris et al., 2011).

RACE AND ETHNICITY

In regards to race or ethnicity, most studies have not examined these as predictors of graduation. Montgomery County, Maryland was the only teen court that reported a difference in graduation rates based on race. In this study, Caucasian teens graduated at the highest rate (95.3%), followed by 89.7% of Asians, 84.1% of Hispanics, and 72.6% of African Americans (SJI, 2013). The majority of existing literature only mentioned race in sample demographics, but did not examine race as key factor predicting graduation. However, many existing studies included small sample sizes or primarily Caucasian participants that precluded testing race as a predictor of graduation.

In summary, previous studies suggest race, gender, age, offense type, number of previous offenses, and sentence given by teen court all might be related to completion rate; however, findings related to many of these predictors are mixed and not definitive. The current study contributes to knowledge on this topic by further examining variables that contribute to successful teen court graduation.

METHODOLOGY

This study has one research question: What variables are most predictive of teen court participants graduating the program? To answer the research question, the data for this study were secondary data from a convenience sample of teen court participants at Bashor Children's Home in Goshen, Indiana, the provider of Elkhart County teen court services. It is important to note that the sample is not representative of all teen courts or even every teen court in Indiana. Bashor Children's Home has been collecting data on the teen court since the agency began providing clinical services to teen court participants in 2009. An employee of Bashor Children's Home collected data on all teen court participants that were in the program from 2009 through 2013, which became the sample for this study ($n = 579$). The data were first recorded by an employee of Bashor Children's Home in an Excel spreadsheet. Once the data collection was complete, identifying information was removed from the Excel spreadsheet, including participants' case numbers. The Excel spreadsheet was then emailed to researchers at Indiana University where the data analysis was completed. The data were analyzed using SPSS 21 software. This research was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Indiana University and it was determined that the data collection methods did not involve human subjects; therefore, the research was not subject to IRB regulations.

Measures

The dependent variable was teen court graduation. Independent variables were age (at time of admission into teen court), gender, ethnicity, drug use

TABLE 1 Coding Scheme and Descriptive Statistics for Model Variables ($n = 579$)

Predictor	Range	Key	M (SD)	%
Teen court outcome	0–1	0 – Did not graduate 1 – Graduated		16.2 83.8
Age	10–18	Age in years	14.65 (1.57)	
Gender	0–1	0 – Female 1 – Male		37.3 62.7
Ethnicity	0–1	0 – Minority 1 – Caucasian		44.6 55.4
Mental health history	0–1	0 – Yes 1 – No		41.8 58.2
Drug use history	0–1	0 – Yes 1 – No		12.9 87.1
Special ed	0–1	0 – Yes 1 – No		21.6 78.4
Criminal history	0–1	0 – Yes 1 – No		12.5 87.5
Jury duty	0–15	# of times performing jury duty	4.11 (2.43)	
Community service	0–1	0 – Not required 1 – Required		43.0 57.0
Jail tour	0–1	0 – Not required 1 – Required		50.4 49.6
# of violations	0–16	# of violations during teen court	1.07 (2.04)	

history, mental health history, criminal history (previous conviction prior to the current conviction), special education, jury duty (number of times performing jury duty while in teen court), community service while in teen court, jail tour while in teen court, and number of violations while in teen court. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and coding scheme of all variables.

FINDINGS

Approach to Analysis

Before multivariate analysis, data were screened to check for missing data and potential violations of assumptions. Chi-square tests, bivariate correlations, and t -tests were then conducted to examine the relationships between participants' teen court outcomes and other model variables (see Table 2 for bivariate relationships). Finally, the primary analysis was conducted using hierarchical binary logistic regression. A hierarchical model was tested to detect the specific impact of blocks of variables on the outcome variable. The first model examined how individual and social characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, mental health history, drug use history, previous criminal history, and special education placement, predicted teen court outcomes. The second model examined how the addition of intervention variables, including jury duty, community service, and jail tours increased the ability to predict teen court graduation. The number of violations while in teen court was added to the third model to determine whether that variable

TABLE 2 Bivariate Relationships Between Predictors and Outcome Variable

Predictor		% or <i>M</i>		<i>t</i>	χ^2
		Graduated	Did Not Graduate		
Age		14.66	14.61	-.326	
Gender	Male	83.7%	16.3%		.00
	Female	83.8%	16.2%		
Ethnicity	Caucasian	88.2%	11.8%		10.24***
	Non- Caucasian	78.3%	21.7%		
Mental health history	Yes	84.2%	15.8%		.04
	No	83.6%	16.4%		
Drug use history	Yes	85.1%	14.9%		.12
	No	83.5%	16.5%		
Special ed	Yes	73.4%	26.6%		12.18***
	No	86.5%	13.5%		
Criminal history	Yes	73.9%	26.1%		5.49*
	No	85.1%	14.9%		
Jury duty		4.00	4.68	2.10*	
Community service	Yes	79.7%	20.3%		9.34**
	No	89.2%	10.8%		
Jail tour	Yes	79.1%	20.9%		9.13**
	No	88.4%	11.6%		
# of violations		.39	4.54	14.16***	

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

improved the ability to predict teen court graduation. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 21.0.

Model Fit

Statistics demonstrating model fit were examined before interpreting coefficients (see Table 3). The -2 log likelihood values decreased from 453.88 in the first model to 190.83 in the third model, indicating improvement of fit with each subsequent model tested. The Omnibus χ^2 for each model was significant and increased with each subsequent model. The Nagelkerke pseudo- R^2 value increased with each subsequent model and indicated that the final model accounted for a substantial amount of variance in the dependent variable (Nagelkerke = .704). In addition, the hit rate improved with each subsequent model, increasing from 84.1% to 93.5% with all variables included in the final model. Notably, the addition of the number of violations in the third model resulted in a large increase in Omnibus χ^2 value and Nagelkerke R^2 , and a large decrease in -2 log likelihood, when compared to the first two models.

Summary of Model Variables

Personal characteristics, including age, gender, ethnicity, mental health history, drug use history, previous criminal history, and special education

TABLE 3 Hierarchical Logistic Regression Results

Predictor	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	Wald	Exp(B) 95% CI	B	Wald	Exp(B) 95% CI	B	Wald	Exp(B) 95% CI
Age	.03	.11	1.03 .88, 1.20	.06	.61	1.07 .91, 1.25	.05	.16	1.05 .81, 1.37
Gender	.01	.00	1.01 .61, 1.67	.07	.06	1.07 .64, 1.78	-.09	.05	.91 .39, 2.13
Ethnicity	.79	9.94**	2.21 1.35, 3.62	.77	9.07**	2.16 1.31, 3.57	.33	.60	1.39 .61, 3.16
Mental Health History	.08	.09	1.08 .66, 1.78	.08	.11	1.09 .66, 1.80	.51	1.40	1.67 .71, 3.92
Drug Use History	-.20	.28	.82 .38, 1.74	-.29	.531	.75 .35, 1.63	-.43	1.40	.65 .17, 2.44
Criminal History	.72	5.01*	2.05 1.09, 3.85	.68	4.16*	1.96 1.03, 3.76	.96	3.09	2.62 .90, 7.68
Special Ed	.86	10.46***	2.36 1.40, 3.98	.79	8.38**	2.20 1.29, 3.74	.90	4.13*	2.45 1.03, 5.83
Jury Duty				-.04	.67	.96 .87, 1.06	.11	1.17	1.11 .92, 1.34
Community Service				-.48	3.08	.62 .37, 1.06	.28	.42	.52 .57, 3.07
Jail Tour				-.61	5.07*	.55 .32, .92	-.01	.00	.99 .43, 2.29
# of Violations				13.94**			-1.51	86.80***	.22 .16, .30
Block χ^2	26.59***			40.53***			249.12***		
Model χ^2	26.59***			.123			289.64***		
Nagelkerke R ²	.081			439.95			.704		
-2LL	458.88						190.83		

Note. CI = confidence interval.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

placement, were entered in the first model (see Table 3). This block of variables resulted in a Nagelkerke R^2 of .081. Age, gender, mental health history, and drug use history were not significant, but ethnicity, criminal history, and special education placement were significant. Caucasian participants were over twice as likely to graduate from teen court than minority participants, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.21$, Wald $\chi^2 = 9.94$, $p = .002$. Participants without a criminal history were over twice as likely to graduate, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.05$, Wald $\chi^2 = 5.01$, $p = .025$. The odds of graduation were 2.36 times lower for participants who were in special education than those without special education, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.36$, Wald $\chi^2 = 10.46$, $p \leq .001$.

The intervention variables (jury duty, community service, and jail tour) were added in the second model. All three previously significant variables remained significant with the addition of these variables in the model, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.16$, Wald $\chi^2 = 9.07$, $p = .003$ for ethnicity; $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.96$, Wald $\chi^2 = 4.16$, $p = .04$ for criminal history; and $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.20$, Wald $\chi^2 = 8.38$, $p = .004$ for special education. Of the three interventions added in this model, jail tour was the only one that was significant, $\text{Exp}(B) = .55$, Wald $\chi^2 = 5.07$, $p = .02$. With the addition of these variables in the model, the Nagelkerke R^2 increased to .123. Participants who were assigned a jail tour were 44% less likely to graduate than participants not assigned a jail tour.

Finally, number of violations was added in the third model and was highly significant, $\text{Exp}(B) = .22$, Wald $\chi^2 = 86.80$, $p \leq .001$. For every violation received by participants during teen court, they were 78% less likely to successfully graduate. The Nagelkerke R^2 was increased considerably with the addition of this variable from .123 to .704. Special education placement retained significance in this model, $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.45$, Wald $\chi^2 = 4.13$, $p = .04$, but ethnicity, criminal history, and jail tour lost significance. The loss of significance for these variables indicated that the number of violations potentially mediated the relationship between these variables and teen court graduation outcomes.

Because findings indicated potential mediation, significance of indirect effects was tested by computing bias-corrected (BC) bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals (Cis) based on 1,000 resamples of the dataset using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). This method and macro were used since they can test indirect effects of mixed models that contain dichotomous outcome variables and continuous mediators and can also correct for data non-normality. Findings indicated that there were significant indirect effects of ethnicity ($B = 1.05$, BC 95% CI = .40, 1.62) and jail tour ($B = -.62$, BC 95% CI = -1.24 , $-.02$) on teen court outcome via number of violations (see Table 4). Total effect of ethnicity on graduation was $B = .77$ (BC 95% C.I. .27, 1.27), and total effect of jail tour on graduation was $B = -.61$ (BC 95% CI = -1.13 , $-.08$).

Further analyses were examined to explore whether there were potential differences in participants in racial/ethnic subgroups that might have

TABLE 4 Confidence Intervals for Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

Predictor	Mediator	Direct effect Effect (95% BC CI)	Indirect effect Effect (95% BC CI)	Total effect Effect (95% BC CI)
Ethnicity	# of viola- tions	.33 (-.50, 1.15)	1.05 (.40, 1.62)	.77 (.27, 1.27)
Jail tour		-.01 (-.84, .83)	-.62 (-1.24, -.02)	-.61 (-1.13, -.08)

Note. BC CI = bias-corrected confidence interval.

contributed to these findings. Notably, although minority participants had poorer outcomes than Caucasian participants, they were less likely to have a mental health problem (28.3% vs. 52.8%, $\chi^2 = 35.24$, $p \leq .001$), substance abuse problem (7.4% vs. 17.4%, $\chi^2 = 12.51$, $p \leq .001$), felony conviction (9.7% vs. 18.4%, $\chi^2 = 24.00$, $p \leq .001$), or violent conviction (20.2% vs. 28.3%, $\chi^2 = 5.16$, $p = .02$).

Study Limitations

The findings should be interpreted within the context of the study's limitations. First, there could have been additional factors predictive of teen court graduation not captured in the current secondary dataset, particularly other environmental or psychological factors. For example, barriers to successful completion of requirements such as difficulty with transportation (Norris et al., 2011; Rasmussen, 2004) or low motivation for change (Forgays, 2008) have been suggested as important predictors but were not able to be included in the current analysis. Second, the current sample was not representative of all teen court participants, thus the findings cannot be generalized. Similarly, there could be factors related to how interventions were applied at the Elkhart County teen court that are different from other teen courts across the country which also affects generalizability of the findings. Although each teen court seems to use similar approaches to treating youth offenders, the fidelity of the model from one court to the next cannot be assured. Therefore, the variables that predicated graduation outcomes in this study are not necessarily applicable to other programs.

DISCUSSION

This study was the first evaluation to be completed on the Elkhart County teen court and the findings can be used to guide future practices within the program, as well as inform other teen courts on the variables that may impact graduation rates in their programs. The majority of teen court literature has focused on predicting recidivism rates for participants (Forgays, 2008; Harrison et al., 2001; Minor et al., 1999; Norris et al., 2011; Stickle

et al., 2008); however, less attention has been given to exploring the many variables that may predict graduation outcomes, which is a noticeable gap in the literature because previous studies have found that youths who completed teen court are less likely to recidivate than those who did not complete the program (Harrison et al., 2001; Norris et al., 2011). This study, using a relatively large sample of 579 participants, adds to the existing literature by identifying the variables that predicted graduation in a teen court and thus could also be related to reduced recidivism.

One of the goals of this study was to assess the potential impact key interventions have on graduation outcomes, including participants being assigned to jury duty, community service, and jail tours. These interventions are assumed to have a positive impact on graduation rates. For example, an assumption of community service is that youths who are actively engaged in helping their communities will enhance their motivation to not commit crimes because they experience a sense of belonging and connection with members of their neighborhood or, at the very least, community service results in less opportunity to reoffend (Harrison et al., 2001). Despite these assumptions, participants from this study sentenced to community service were 44% less likely to graduate than participants not sentenced to community service. This finding is consistent with a Kentucky teen court where being sentenced to community service also decreased the likelihood of youths completing their sentence (Minor et al., 1999). Community service also appears to impact recidivism outcomes. Dick et al. (2003) found in a Utah teen court that youths who received community service were 1.50 to 1.61 times more likely to recidivate than youths who did not receive this intervention.

Perhaps the reason for this finding is related to how and to whom the intervention is applied; for example, this study found that participants with more severe crimes were more likely to be assigned community service than those with less severe crimes. Therefore, their prognosis for a positive outcome in teen court may have more to do with the severity of their crime and less to do with the intervention used. In addition, youths sentenced to community service also had a higher number of violations in teen court and for every violation, participants' odds of graduating the program decreased. The natural propensity of this teen court to assign interventions more often for participants with more severe or more frequent criminal convictions might have confounded the results regarding the potential effect of the intervention. However, the finding that participants sentenced to community service were less likely to graduate still suggests this intervention may not be helpful in improving behavior of teen court participants. These findings suggest that, for youths with more severe crimes and who have multiple violations during the program, interventions other than community service might be developed and given to support youths in modifying their behaviors. Jail tours had a similar impact on graduation rates; participants

who were assigned a jail tour were 40% less likely to graduate than participants not assigned a jail tour. Similar to community service, the expected outcome of a jail tour, designed to help modify behaviors towards compliance and motivation to complete teen court, was not met, further suggesting the need to tailor interventions to participants' individualized needs. Not only were participants sentenced to jail tours less likely to graduate, but they also had higher numbers of violations while in teen court; mediation testing indicated that the number of violations received was then predictive of lower graduation rates. Thus, new interventions should be developed specifically to attempt to reduce the number of new violations received by youth while in the program. In addition, because number of violations was the strongest predictor of graduation rate in the model, further research should be conducted to examine other factors potentially contributing to participants receiving multiple violations as well as identifying specific at-risk groups for continued violations. Understanding more about participants who commit multiple violations while in the program and subsequently developing more effective interventions will be important to increase graduation and reduce recidivism in the future.

Mediation testing also revealed a particularly troubling finding that racial disparities existed in this sample, not only in graduation rates, but also in number of violations received while in teen court. This finding is particularly surprising in the current sample, considering that some risk factors that may increase the chance of violating program conditions and decrease the likelihood of successful outcomes were not found as often with minority participants as with Caucasian ones. Specifically, minority participants had fewer mental health problems, substance abuse problems, felony convictions, and violent crime convictions than Caucasian participants. Despite these risk factors not being present with minority participants, they still had a higher number of violations in the program than Caucasian participants, and, for every violation, participants were 77% less likely to graduate. These racial disparities should certainly be the focus of future research. In the current study, Caucasian participants were over twice as likely as minority participants to graduate from teen court. This finding replicates a previous study indicating that Caucasian teen court participants have better outcomes compared to non-Caucasians (SJI, 2013).

Practice Implications

The findings from this study help guide several suggestions that can improve teen court practice. First, the interventions of community service and jail tour are assumed to have a positive impact on a participant's behavior in teen court; however, the opposite was found with community service and jail tour decreasing the likelihood of graduation. Although it is unknown whether participants would have had even poorer outcomes if not participating in

these interventions, these findings recommend teen courts monitor and further evaluate the use of these interventions in their programs and track whether or not they are achieving their intended outcome. The teen court model relies heavily on community service (Harrison et al., 2001) despite some evidence of its potential ineffectiveness. It is recommended that teen courts develop an expansive list of other interventions to offer participants, as this may better individualized needs. Interventions, for example, may include providing incentives designed to enhance motivation for positive behavioral change. Perhaps the teen court model could follow that of the problem-solving court model (Lindquist, Krebs, & Lattimore, 2006) where incentives are coupled with interventions, like community service, to help improve outcomes. Incentives could include applause in court, verbal praise from the teen court judge, receiving a gift card, movie passes, later curfews, or a reduction of time in the program.

Future Research Implications

A notable finding from this study is the presence of racial disparities in graduation outcomes with Caucasian participants being more likely to graduate than minority participants. Despite minority participants having fewer risk factors presumed to impact graduation outcomes, such as fewer mental health problems, fewer substance abuse problems, fewer felony convictions, and fewer violent crime convictions, racial disparities in graduation outcomes existed. This finding is particularly troubling and should be the focus of future research. Additionally, minority participants also had more violations in the program than Caucasian participants. Therefore, contributing factors to teen court violations in minority groups should be studied further. It is recommended that qualitative research methods be used in the future, such as individual interviews and focus groups, with minority participants to collect data on participants' lived experiences in teen court, with a particular focus on the challenges minority participants may face in completing the program.

Programs similar to teen courts, where rehabilitative services are offered in lieu of punitive interventions, have successfully used qualitative research methods to explore possible contributing factors to racial disparities in graduation outcomes (Gallagher, 2013). Qualitative research is best used to answer the unanswered questions that arise from quantitative findings (Padgett, 2008), such as why racial disparities exist in graduation outcomes. Future research may offer an in-depth understanding on how teen courts can provide equal outcomes across race and ethnicity. Participants would also provide insight into the perceived effectiveness of interventions such as community service and jail tours. Individual interviews with participants, for example, could be facilitated following a jail tour to assess whether participants found it helpful or not. Additionally, during the process, participants

may also offer insight into other interventions that could help them be successful in the program.

CONCLUSION

Teen courts appear to be a valuable part of the juvenile justice system, as they offer an alternative to punitive approaches by offering first-time youth offenders with rehabilitative interventions that are designed to support them in completing the program and not recidivate. Previous research has suggested that youths who complete the program are less likely to recidivate than those who are terminated from the program (Harrison et al., 2001; Norris et al., 2011). This study focused solely on identifying the variables that predicted graduation outcomes and found through several analyses that youths were less likely to graduate if they were ordered to complete community service or jail tours, were minority participants, were not in special education, and had more violations throughout the program. From a practice standpoint, it is recommended that teen courts evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions, such as community service and jail tours, and make sure participants' individualized needs are being met. In addition, incorporating incentives into teen court programming may offer an alternative to interventions participants may view as punitive in nature, such as jail tours.

Future research using qualitative methods is recommended to explore the factors that may contribute to racial disparities in graduation outcomes and to assess the perceived effectiveness of traditional teen court interventions, including community service and jail tours. The recommended practice implications and suggestions for future research may help improve the effectiveness teen courts have demonstrated thus far.

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