WORKING PROFESSIONALS’ AND COLLEGE STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD JUVENILE OFFENDERS

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After 1899: Juveniles legally recognized as being different from adult offenders (Ghetti, 2001).

Juvenile Offender: younger than 17 yrs old and charged with an offense that carries a maximum prison sentence of < 15 yrs (South Carolina State Legislature, 2011).
Attitudes toward juvenile sex offenders tend to be harsh, especially from Caucasian women and those high in disgust (Stevenson, et al., 2009).

Overall public attitudes toward juvenile sex offenders remain negative even if the offender had a history of victimization themselves (Sahlstrom & Jeglic, 2008).
Non-sexual juvenile offenders are considered better candidates for rehabilitation (Stevenson, et al., 2015).

Although correctional institution interventions are useful, they are mostly effective in short-term (Redonda et al., 2012).

Social reintegration requires community resources to help with employment, education, and emotional support (Menon & Cheung, 2018).
- What percentage of crimes in the U.S. are committed by juveniles?
- At what age do you think children should be considered responsible for their crimes?
Research Questions

1. Interaction with Juveniles
2. Race
3. Personality

Predict perceptions of juvenile offenders?
Participants: $n = 117$

- 30 Men, 87 Women, 3 Transgender
- Mean Age: 28.32 ($SD = 12.29$)
- 56% Caucasian, 33% African American
- Health Department Staff
- Teacher
- Probation Officer
- Correctional Specialist
- Police Officer
- Advocator for children/adolescents/families

- College Student
- Employed professional
Participants completed online survey assessing:

- **Sentencing Goals** (Greene & Evelo, 2013)
  “Offenders should be locked away so that they can’t reoffend.”

- **Open-Mindedness** (Svedholm-Hakkinen & Lindeman, 2017)
  “I believe letting students hear controversial speakers can only confuse and mislead them.”
Entitlement (Campbell et al. 2004)

“People like me deserve an extra break now and then.”

Forgiveness (Rye et al., 2001)

“I feel resentful toward the person who wronged me.”
We also asked participants their opinions regarding state versus community based programs after reading a short description of each.
Now let’s see how your perceptions compared to that of other adults....
What percentage of crimes in the U.S. are committed by juveniles?

25.53%  
\[ SD = 14.82 \]

Actual percentage? This is hard data to find!!!
At what age do you think children should be considered responsible for their crimes?

According to the National Juvenile Defender Center, the minimum age varies from state to state.

**Source:** NW Facts.com
Research Questions

1. Interaction with Juveniles
   - Predict perceptions of juvenile offenders?

2. Race

3. Personality
H1: Working professionals would be less punitive toward juvenile offenders than would college students.

Some Support.

College students preferred harsher punishments and less tax dollars for juvenile offenders.

- **JO should be punished like adults.**
  - $t(113) = 2.21, p = .025$

- **I want my tax dollars to go toward JO rather than adult offenders.**
  - $t(113) = -2.27, p = .001$
College students saw mentors and role models as important for preventing juvenile crimes, while working professionals valued family support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is most influential in preventing juvenile’s bad behavior?</th>
<th>College Students</th>
<th>Working Professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>$t(112) = -2.35, p = .021$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role models</td>
<td>$t(112) = 3.27, p = .001$</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>$t(112) = -2.08, p = .04$</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Research Questions

1. Interaction with Juveniles
2. Race
3. Personality

Predict perceptions of juvenile offenders?
Community-based programs are effective for reintegration into the community.

$t(101) = 2.02, p = .047$

Community-based programs are too punishing for JO.

$t(101) = 1.98, p = .05$

H2: African American will be less punitive toward juvenile offenders than Caucasians.

Some Support.

Compared to Caucasians, African Americans emphasized the role of the community for rehabilitation.
Overall Participant Results

Main influence on juveniles committing crimes:

- Parents: [1.69(1.02)]
- Peers: [2.25(1.02)]
- Community: [2.79(1.07)]
- The School System: [3.63(0.96)]
- Department of Juvenile Justice: [4.63(0.72)]

1 = most influence
5 = least influence
Greatest impact on rehabilitation:

- Parents: 1.69 (1.02)
- Community: 3.02 (1.15)
- Department of Juvenile Justice: 3.02 (1.15)
- The School System: 3.30 (1.20)
- Department Juvenile Justice: 4.63 (0.72)

1 = most impactful
5 = least impactful
Take Home Messages

- Working professionals, who deal directly with juveniles, are more sympathetic towards juvenile offenders.

- African-Americans emphasize the importance of the community in rehabilitation.

  ➔ Venable et al. (2015) found same community emphasis in this population, especially with the involvement of church.
Research Questions

1. Interaction with Juveniles
   Predict perceptions of juvenile offenders?

2. Race

3. Personality
**H3**: Adults with higher open-mindedness will have more positive views of rehabilitation.

Supportive of rehabilitation of JO

\[ r(40) = .44, p = .018 \]

\[ r(75) = .34, p = .032 \]

Supported. Adults who are more open-minded are supportive of rehabilitation for juvenile offenders.
Some support.

College students preferred state-based rehabilitation, while professional preferred community based.

College Students:
State-based programs are very effective for rehabilitating JO
\[
r(40) = -.36, p = .002
\]

Working Professionals:
Community-based programs would help rehabilitate JO
\[
r(40) = .34, p = .032
\]
H4: Adults with lower entitlement will have more positive views of rehabilitation.

Entitled college students did not see the value of community-based programs.

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College Students:
Agreed less that community-based programs would help to reintegrate JO back in the community

$r(75) = -.30, p = .009$

Supported.
Entitled college students wanted juveniles in prison but complained that it cost too much.

- College Students: Support for incarceration of JO
  - $r(75) = .28$, $p = .016$

- College Students: State-based programs cost too much
  - $r(75) = .26$, $p = .024$

Some support.
H5: Adults with higher tendency for forgiveness will have more positive views of rehabilitation.

Forgiving professionals felt that their jobs allowed them to help rehabilitate juveniles.

\[ r(24) = -0.41, p = 0.05 \]
Forgiving college students felt juveniles committed less crime and did not think state-based programs were helpful for reintegration.
Take Home Messages

- Open-minded adults were more supportive of rehabilitation, especially community-based.
- Entitled college students were punitive and stingy.
- Forgiving adults were kinder toward juvenile offenders.
Why Should We Care?

- Overall African Americans value community in reference to involvement in the rehabilitation process of juvenile offenders.

  ➔ those who support the community will be the ones most proactive about rehabilitating JO in community
Why Should We Care?

- Open-mindedness was more predictive than other personality variables.

  ➔ Educating people and helping them see different perspectives makes them more sympathetic.
Why Should We Care?
THANK YOU TO...

- Dr. Merry Sleigh
- Dr. Cheryl Fortner-Wood
- Winthrop McNair Staff Team
- Winthrop University
- Family & Friends
- Fellow Scholars

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References


H3: Women would be less punitive toward juvenile offenders than would men.

Men and women were very similar in their perceptions. Women supported community-based programs more.

Community-based programs are very effective for rehabilitating JO.

$t(111) = -1.53, p = .03$

Some support.