A description and assessment of a Youth Accountability Board

Tamara Dawn Sorensen

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project

Part of the Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/2036

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.
A DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT OF A YOUTH ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Criminal Justice

by
Tamara Dawn Sorensen
September 2001
A DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT OF A
YOUTH ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

by
Tamara Dawn Sorensen
September 2001

Approved by:
Dr. Dale Sechrest, Chair, Criminal Justice
Dr. Pamela Schram
Dr. Larry Gaines

8-23-01 Date
ABSTRACT

A collective focus by criminal justice practitioners and concerned community members on youth and minor delinquent behavior has resulted in the creation of Youth Accountability Boards (YAB). These Boards concentrate their efforts on non-serious, first-time, juvenile offenders with the expectation that early intervention will result in long-term deterrence from criminal activity. This paper will provide an examination of a Youth Accountability Board currently operating in San Bernardino County, California.

The general purpose and function of the Board will be explored. A preliminary assessment of recidivism and program completion rates of YAB participants will be conducted and compared to those of juveniles placed on informal probation. The results of the investigation show that the Youth Accountability Board and informal probation programs have relatively similar percentages of program completion and recidivism, but program assignment is not the only factor that influences program outcome. The findings show that certain juvenile characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, and seriousness of offense) influence
recidivism in juveniles who complete the program to which they are referred.

Limitations, theoretical and policy implications as well as suggestions for future research will be provided. This study gives practitioners an understanding of the role of the Youth Accountability Board program in the emerging restorative model of justice. Although the sample used in this study was small and the results have limited generalizability, the findings reported in this examination suggest potential avenues of inquiry for future research.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mr. Gil Martinez who first introduced me to the concept of the Youth Accountability Board program and who has supported me in this investigation.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the members of my committee: Dr. Dale Sechrest, Dr. Pamela Schram and Dr. Larry Gaines. I thank you for your time and patience and for being such admirable role models. You have each been an inspiration in my academic and personal endeavors.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, Vicki and Kleo, for their understanding and support throughout the past few years. Thank you for lending me to this academic cause.
DEDICATION

To Mom and Dad.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline of Research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Juvenile Justice System: Past and Present</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in Punitiveness</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing Public Sentiment</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Current State of the Juvenile Justice System</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Diversion of Juveniles in the Justice System</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Diversion Programs</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems With Diversion</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative Justice and Accountability-Based Sanctions for Juveniles</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Accountability Boards</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Study</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

Design .......................................................... 35
Sample .......................................................... 36
Data Collection ............................................... 36
Validity ......................................................... 37
Coding .......................................................... 38
Interpretation of Results ................................. 41

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics ................................. 43
Predictors of Success ................................. 47
Test of Hypotheses ................................. 51

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of Results .................................... 65
Theoretical Implications ............................ 70
Policy Implications ....................................... 72
Study Limitations and Suggestions
for Future Research .................................... 74

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Summary .................................................... 77
Future Directions ......................................... 79

APPENDIX: YOUTH ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD CONTRACT ........... 81

REFERENCES .................................................... 84
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Description of Juveniles Referred to Youth Accountability Board Program (Experimental Group) ....................... 43

Table 2. Description of Juveniles Placed on Informal Probation (Comparison Group) ......................... 44

Table 3. Comparison of Seriousness of Offense and Age Between Experimental and Control Groups ........ 45

Table 4. Comparison of Youth Accountability Board and Informal Probation: Program Completion and Recidivism ......................... 47

Table 5. Predictors of Program Completion or Failure for Total Sample ........................................ 48

Table 6. Variables That Had Non-Significant Effect on Program Completion: Total Sample Combined .... 49

Table 7. Predictors of Future Recidivism for Total Sample .......................................................... 50

Table 8. Variables That Had Non-Significant Effect on Recidivism: Total Sample Combined ............ 51

Table 9. The Effects of Gender on Recidivism ............... 55

Table 10. The Effects of Ethnicity on Recidivism .......... 57

Table 11. The Effects of Age on Recidivism .............. 59

Table 12. The Effects of Offense Seriousness on Recidivism ....................................................... 61

Table 13. The Effects of Program Completion on Recidivism Separated by Program Assignment ....... 62

Table 14. A Comparison of the Effects of Program Completion on Recidivism Between Groups ......... 63
Table 15. A Comparison of Program Completion Between Groups .......................... 63

Table 16. Time to Failure Between Programs ...................... 64
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Youth Accountability Board (YAB) programs have been established in cities throughout the U.S. as an alternative to the traditional justice system for first-time juvenile offenders. Labeled as a diversion program, Youth Accountability Boards follow recent trends that attempt to keep juveniles from entering the criminal justice system. The program was primarily founded on the restorative and accountability-based models of justice. These models of justice focus on repairing harm sustained by the victim and the community, as well as providing rehabilitation and reintegration to the offender with the intent of reducing or eliminating the possibility of future recidivism. Due to the relatively recent conception of the YAB program, the effectiveness and characteristics of this diversion effort have not yet been subject to investigation. There is no evidence in published literature that a previous evaluation of the YAB program has ever been conducted.

The objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of a Youth Accountability Board program. The
outcomes of the YAB program will be compared to the outcomes of a traditional informal probation program to determine if the YAB diversion effort has any notable effect in reducing youth recidivism. Additional variables including race, gender, age, and severity of offense will be used in the data analysis to determine if these characteristics influence program completion or recidivism rates. Also, a comparison of time to failure means between Youth Accountability Board and informal probation participants will be conducted to determine which program is most effective in delaying recidivism in juvenile offenders.

Outline of Research

Chapter two will begin with an examination of the history and purpose of the juvenile justice system. The discussion will begin with the child saving movement and conclude with a depiction of the juvenile justice system of today. Despite the punitive trends that dominate current movements in the system, research indicates the juvenile crime rate has remained relatively stable (Jenson & Howard, 1998) and the public favors rehabilitation over imprisonment for juvenile offenders (Moon & Sundt, 2000).
These factors may be responsible for the continuation of diversion efforts that began in the 1960's, starting with the establishment of Youth Service Bureaus. These efforts have strived to keep children out of jail and provide ties to the community, the same principles that govern the philosophy behind Youth Accountability Board programs.

Since there has not been a prior evaluation of a YAB program, this paper will briefly discuss the outcomes of other diversion projects including; Project Magic (Smith, Usinger-Lesquereux & Evans, 1999), conditional release (Cain, 1994), and teen courts (Minor & Wells, 1999; Zehner, 1997). While the characteristics of these programs may differ substantially from those of the Youth Accountability Board, each of these programs share the same goal of diverting juveniles away from the traditional justice system. It is possible that the diversion programs mentioned above also share some of the same positive or negative outcomes, problems with implementation, and struggles to obtain necessary resources. Differences between diversion and petition will be explored as well as some of the serious problems that face diversion programs today.
The role of the Youth Accountability Board program in the restorative and accountability-based justice movement will be addressed. The theoretical underpinnings for the YAB program can be taken directly from the foundations of these movements. The origin, theory, and goal of restorative justice will be presented along with contemporary arguments for and against the adoption of policies related to the movement. The accountability-based justice movement, which is responsible for diversion efforts such as teen courts, will also be discussed.

Chapter two will conclude with the hypotheses generated for the current study.

Chapter three will detail the methodology that will be used to collect and analyze the data. A single YAB program in San Bernardino County, California will be the focus of this investigation. The study will be conducted using a quasi-experimental model with a nonequivalent groups design. The total sample will include 115 juveniles (n = 66 experimental; n = 49 comparison). The experimental group will consist of all juveniles who were seen by the Youth Accountability Board in 1999. The comparison group will consist of all juveniles placed on informal probation during the same time period. All of the juveniles in the
sample, in both the experimental and control groups, will be those referred to the programs within the same suburban city.

Chapter four will contain the results of the current investigation. Significant differences in descriptive variables were found between the YAB and informal probation programs. Despite these differences it is argued that informal probation is still a practical comparison group since all of the juveniles in this sample are first time offenders and not eligible for placement or formal probation. Also, there are no guidelines for juvenile referral to either program.

Direct tests of the hypotheses produced only one significant finding. Program completion in both the experimental and control groups resulted in significantly fewer recidivating juveniles. Combinations of predictor variables (i.e., gender and program completion) were used to find significant differences in recidivism based on gender, ethnicity, age, and seriousness of offense. Several interesting findings will be reported in chapter four. It was determined that juveniles in the YAB program had a longer time to failure than juveniles in the informal
probation program, although this difference was not significant.

Chapter five will provide a summary of the results and discuss whether the findings found any support in the research literature. Findings concerning ethnicity and age did not mirror the results reported by others who previously investigated division efforts. An interpretation of the findings will be presented.

Theoretical implications will be provided in chapter five. The YAB program will be examined in the context of the restorative model of justice. According to the philosophy of restorative justice, the YAB program has many, if not all of the elements necessary to conduct a successful diversion effort.

Policy implications will also be discussed. Based on the findings of this study, the YAB program can provide relief to an overburdened system by working with community volunteers, without the threat of increased recidivism or lowered program completion percentages. Practitioners who want to begin or improve a current YAB program may find the results of this study to be beneficial.

Limitations of the current study and suggestions for the improvement of future research will be presented.
Several limitations were noted: experimental and comparison groups were not identical, the JNET system may not capture accurate recidivism numbers, there is limited generalizability, and small sample size. Data that could not be included, but should be considered in future analyses are family and school variables.

Chapter six will mark the end of this examination with a summary of the points of interest, implications of the current findings, and suggestions for future directions. It is noted that this examination of YAB outcomes is only a one-dimensional view of restorative justice. Future research should investigate the victim and community components of the YAB program. While the results of this study should be considered tentative pending additional research, the Youth Accountability Board program appears to be a practical diversion effort that deserves further investigation.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Juvenile Justice System: Past and Present

The establishment of the juvenile justice system as it is known today began as an attempt to separate delinquent juveniles from adult criminals in secure detention facilities. The philosophy behind this separation stemmed from the belief that children, unlike adults, could be rehabilitated and thus reintegrated back into the community. This separation was coined the 'child saving movement' by Anthony Platt. Platt (1969) considered the intentions of the ruling class child savers to be less than admirable. It was argued that their intentions were more guided by self-interest. Platt believed the child savers desire to protect children actually stemmed from a campaign waged to preserve their way of life from the threat of newly arriving immigrants and the poor.

On the surface, the child saving movement had two goals. The first goal was the protection of the child. The second goal was the protection of the community. Many individuals responsible for this progressive movement felt that the punishment of juveniles in the adult criminal
justice system was inappropriate and damaging. The progressives argued that delinquents were vulnerable and that the state should act as a parent to the juvenile. The progressives maintained that in order to act in the child’s best interest, the state should be given broad discretion to address the interests of the youths under their supervision (Rothman, 1980).

Increase in Punitivness

Several changes in the juvenile justice system have taken place since the beginning of the child saving movement. Discretion in processing juveniles through the legal system has been severely restricted. Supreme Court decisions during the 1960’s and 1970’s such as In re Gault, In re Winship, Breed v. Jones, and McKeiver v. Pennsylvania have limited the discretion of the courts and other criminal justice personnel. It has been argued that these court decisions have unintentionally transformed the juvenile justice system into a punishment-oriented rather than a help- or reform-oriented institution (Feld, 1997).

Jenson and Howard (1998) found that current juvenile justice policy stresses punishment and control of young offenders. They note that many community-based programs have been eliminated and replaced with institutions that do
not focus on specific juvenile needs or characteristics. The Office of Justice Programs (1994) reported that numerous states have introduced policies since 1985 that have lowered the age at which juveniles can be tried as adults. They also found that stricter punishments for drug- and gang-related offenses have been implemented along with exceedingly stringent treatment such as boot camps for juvenile offenders.

The trend of increased punitiveness in the juvenile justice system has not been coupled by a great increase in juvenile crime. Despite evidence that offending rates have remained relatively stable over the past two decades and reports that most crimes committed by juveniles involve property offenses, highly punitive measures have been implemented to cope with juvenile delinquency (Jenson & Howard, 1998). While research has failed to identify a strong relationship between the severity of punishment the juvenile justice system imposes and the amount of criminal activity a child will engage in later in life (Levitt, 1998), most present-day policy reforms are created based on the characteristics of violent juvenile offenders (Jenson & Howard, 1998).
Existing Public Sentiment

Many of the current 'get tough' policies aimed at juveniles may be the result of popular belief in the effectiveness of deterrence. Levitt (1998) found that juveniles are at least as responsive to criminal sanctions as adults. Levitt attributed a decrease in juvenile delinquency at age 16 to the fact that many children at this age are eligible for adult criminal sanctions. In other words, it was determined that declining crime rates in juveniles were related to the age at which the juvenile could receive the same punishment as an adult. If this conclusion is true and generalizable to the entire U.S. juvenile population, we could assume that stricter penalties for delinquent juveniles would produce lower juvenile crime rates. Furthermore, public support for the 'get tough' policies addressing juvenile delinquency would be warranted.

In a review of recent polls and research findings, Moon and Sundt (2000) discovered that a great portion of the U.S. population strongly supports the child saving movement. The public believed rehabilitation was the central goal of juvenile corrections. The public was also more supportive of treating juveniles than adults because
they believed that juveniles are more susceptible to change (or rehabilitation) than adults.

Moon and Sundt (2000) examined a survey conducted in 1998, which reported citizens' attitudes on various juvenile justice policy issues. They found that the public's desire to rehabilitate juvenile offenders was stronger than the public's desire to protect society and punish offenders combined. The citizens surveyed supported numerous community-based programs for juvenile offenders and embraced the concept of restorative justice. The participants greatly favored prevention over imprisonment. Most held the belief that sending youths to jail would not stop their offending.

The Current State of the Juvenile Justice System

Feld (1997) has recommended that we abolish the juvenile justice system all together and create one criminal justice system for adults and juveniles. It was argued that any institution that attempts to combine social welfare with penal social control would fail in its efforts. Feld maintained that the juvenile justice system does not have the resources necessary to provide the social services children so desperately need. Instead of hiding
behind the illusion that juvenile courts provide additional services not available to adults, Feld believed that the juvenile justice system should focus its resources solely on deterrent measures. Feld argued that the juvenile justice system could not play the role of the supportive/nurturing parent and the role of disciplinarian at the same time.

Feld's view of the juvenile justice system may be considered radical but this opinion raises some very interesting questions about current practice and policy. Should the juvenile justice system attempt to provide welfare services to children? Is the juvenile justice system responsible for eliminating all societal ills that affect children? Jackson (1994) theorized that the solutions to juvenile delinquency might lie outside of criminal justice networks. Jackson argues that family violence, homelessness, unemployment, and so on, cannot be addressed by criminal justice agencies. Most in the criminal justice field now realize that the justice system cannot tackle the crime problem alone. With this realization comes the desire to expand beyond the current confines of the traditional juvenile justice system.
Diversion programs have been created in an attempt to move beyond the limitations of the current system.

The Diversion of Juveniles in the Justice System

There are numerous studies that examine the various risk-factors believed to be associated with delinquent behavior. While social scientists can confidently list risk-factors associated with juvenile delinquency, no single factor has been shown to reliably predict criminal behavior (Zigler, Taussig & Black, 1992). Quinn and Sutphen (1994) provide a partial list of these factors including; age at first court referral, seriousness of offenses, parental supervision, school functioning, peer groups, alcohol and drug use, and criminality in the family. Based on their interpretation of the interaction between these delinquency variables, the authors claim family- and community-based interventions would be beneficial in reducing youth criminality. The U.S. Department of Justice (1999) released a bulletin describing community-based programs and the use of diversion in the juvenile justice system. The bulletin describes diversion, not as diversion from the juvenile justice system, but as "diversion to appropriate services where the formal
intervention of the juvenile justice system is not necessary or required" (p. 4).

The creation of diversion programs coincided with a movement that focused on keeping juvenile offenders out of the justice system altogether. A variety of interventions were created to avoid the stigmatization associated with justice system practices. After the establishment of Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) across the country in 1967, diversion programs grew in great numbers. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 also promoted diversion, calling for the establishment of community based programs and placement of offenders in the least restrictive treatment environments deemed to be appropriate. Follow-up evaluation studies revealed mixed results, but the reports were usually unfavorable (Zigler, Taussig & Black, 1992). Since the 1960's, there have been countless programs implemented to keep juveniles from entering the formal justice system. The following is a description of a few diversion programs currently used throughout the country along with a brief overview of the problems that plague these programs.
Current Diversion Programs

Some diversion programs, such as conditional release, focus on juvenile offenders who have already been sentenced by the juvenile courts. Conditional release is a community-based program used throughout the U.S. for placement of non-serious and non-threatening offenders. There are several benefits to this program. First, it helps to maintain family and community ties. Second, it has been proven that personal, educational, vocational and social skills development is greater in non-custodial environments. Finally, strict supervision and intensive counseling is often seen as being far more humane than keeping individuals locked up and off the streets (Cain, 1994). In a study of a conditional release program, Cain (1994) found that over 70 percent of juveniles successfully met the conditions of the program. The study did not indicate whether the rate of recidivism in this program was significantly less than the recidivism rates found in other diversion or detention programs.

Project MAGIC (Making A Group and Individual Commitment) is a rural, community-based program in Nevada that has proven to be effective for nonviolent, nonsexual juvenile offenders beginning to enter the criminal justice
system. Smith, Usinger-Lesquereux, and Evans (1999) interviewed a number of graduates from MAGIC one year after they had completed the program. They found that juveniles had adopted new and positive coping strategies that helped them to stay out of trouble. Not one of the participants interviewed had come into contact with the justice system since the completion of the MAGIC program.

Although the MAGIC program seemed to produce positive results, several limitations to the program were documented. The juveniles who had completed the program revealed struggles with family conflict, lack of long-term goal setting, and problems with drug and alcohol use. The juveniles also described the discomfort of being labeled as delinquents within their communities after participating in the program.

There has been considerable support for the use of teen courts as a method of diversion from the juvenile court system. This is a more formalized diversion alternative to traditional processes. In most teen courts, peers impose sentences after guilt has been established through the traditional juvenile court process. The function of the teen court is to hold juvenile offenders responsible before their peers and at the same time promote
education and make meaningful dispositions (Minor & Wells, 1999).

Zehner (1997) tracked juveniles who were referred to teen court rather than traditional court in Florida. Zehner found that more than 90 percent of the juveniles successfully completed their sentences and fewer than 10 percent reoffended within a one-year follow-up period. Teen courts were also supported by Hissong (1991) who found that a significantly higher proportion (36%) of juveniles sentenced through traditional means recidivated than juveniles who were sentenced by their peers (25%). Minor and Wells (1999), in a study of teen court outcomes, reported that the majority of juveniles (71.4%) complied with their peer-imposed sentences. Yet, this evaluation found a higher rate of recidivism than the studies conducted by Zehner and Hissong. Of the 226 persons followed, 72 (31.8%) committed a new offense at least once during the year after sentencing.

Longitudinal studies of early childhood intervention programs provide evidence that diversion programs are most effective if experienced at an early age. Zigler, Taussig and Black (1992) found a snowball effect that results from early intervention programs. These researchers maintain
that the earlier the intervention, the greater the impact on delinquency. The authors found that a child’s first and most important influence are his or her family members. Yet, these family members are not alone, they are actually interactive members of larger social institutions. Zigler, Taussig and Black argue that initiation of early community intervention, which may include community-based diversion programs, can produce a long-term impact on childhood and adolescent delinquency rates.

There is also evidence that diversion may be more effective than petition in reducing recidivism among juvenile offenders. To date, juveniles have not been granted the constitutional right to a speedy trial. Butts (1997) argues that in order to affect the behavior of adolescents and the rate of recidivism, the juvenile justice process must be as swift and as fair as possible. Butts notes that there is a lack of uniformity in juvenile courts, with a four to six month waiting period for some to receive a response to delinquent behavior. Informal cases, such as those that are assigned to diversion, move faster through the juvenile justice system than those cases that are formally charged. Butts reported that half of the delinquency cases referred to juvenile courts in the U.S.
were handled without formal petitions or judicial hearings. If the speed in which a juvenile’s case is handled significantly lowers future rates of delinquency, we should expect diverted cases to produce lower rates of recidivism than cases that are handled formally.

Minor and Hartmann (1997) conducted a two-year follow-up study examining recidivism in first time offenders. They determined that the probability of recidivism was about the same for those who were sent to diversion programs and those who faced petition. A combination of probation supervision and community treatment produced the lowest recidivism rate. Minor and Hartmann concluded that while unattractive to some juvenile justice practitioners, diversion for most cases is unlikely to result in high rates of recidivism.

Problems With Diversion

Rivers and Anwyl (2000) report delinquents and at-risk juveniles have inundated the justice system and they are quick to deplete the social welfare resources necessary to reform youth involved in criminal activity. They also found implementing early intervention programs is often a frustrating task for juvenile justice personnel. Authorities often struggle with inadequate fiscal,
physical, and personnel resources. These problems, accompanied by punitive trends in sentencing, often lead officials away from establishing diversion programs for delinquents.

In an assessment of intake processes, Mears and Kelly (1999) interviewed 20 juvenile justice practitioners in Texas during 1998 and 1999. The juvenile justice practitioners reported frustration with an overall lack of necessary resources required to address juvenile needs. They also reported poor communication and cooperation among juvenile court practitioners and child welfare agencies. Poor documentation provided by other criminal justice agencies was another obstacle faced by personnel. Securing funds to initiate, develop, and maintain diversion programs can also be a problem. The administrators of project MAGIC in Nevada expressed concern over whether the diversion program could continue after the available grant money expired (Smith, Usinger-Lesquereux & Evans, 1999).

Frustration over the limitation of resources and obstacles to the implementation of programs may not be the only problems associated with diversion. Another issue that needs to be considered is net widening. Net widening occurs when a program or programs intended to reduce a
population under state control actually increases that population either through faulty design, flawed implementation, or because of broader, unavoidable social forces (Frazier & Lee, 1992). The effects of net widening can be seen when judges would rather use some type of informal probation rather than dismiss a case, even when that case is lacking evidence. Net widening also occurs when overworked public defenders plea bargain juvenile cases rather than spend the extra time needed to find an appropriate informal settlement (Sanborn, 1994).

Frazier and Lee's (1992) study revealed that a Florida reform law aimed at reducing the state's juvenile population in detention was largely unsuccessful. The reform law did not help to decrease the desired population but actually increased delinquency admission by 3.2 percent. Even well planned diversion efforts may result in an unexpected increase in juveniles handled by the justice system.

Some researchers have questioned whether discriminatory practices based on race, like those found in the traditional system, are found in diversion programs. Leiber and Stairs (1999) examined the literature available on race and diversion. They discovered that of the few
existing studies, the evidence was inconclusive in determining whether blacks or whites participate more often in diversion. They discovered in their own research that blacks are more likely to be recommended for further court processing and whites are more likely to receive informal adjustments rather than release. An earlier study conducted by Bell and Lang (1985) found that since black juveniles are labeled as criminals, criminal justice personnel see these youths as less likely to benefit from diversion programs. White juveniles are not labeled criminals and are more likely to be sent to diversion programs since they are believed to be responsive to such treatment. Therefore, in less serious offender populations, more black juveniles are released and more white juveniles are sent to diversion programs. It seems while black juveniles are denied the benefit of diversion programs, white juveniles are subject to the consequences of net widening.

Restorative Justice and Accountability-Based Sanctions for Juveniles

During the 1980’s, the juvenile justice system began to turn to retribution programs. In these programs,
offenders pay fines to, or perform services for, their victims (Zigler, Taussig & Black, 1992). The Office of Justice Programs (1994) maintains that the balanced (or restorative) justice approach is more than an attempt to repackage the traditional juvenile justice agenda. Retributive justice is concerned with public vengeance, deterrence, and punishment through an adversarial process, while restorative justice is focused on repairing harm done to victims and the community by concentrating on negotiation, mediation, victim empowerment, and reparation. Accountability, community protection, and competency development are emphasized as programming priorities. These objectives are directed at three primary clients of juvenile justice: offenders, victims, and the community. This balance approach strongly relies on local support and cannot function without the assistance of the community.

According to the Office of Justice Programs (1994), restorative justice is based on the following values and assumptions:

- All parties should be included in the response to crime — offenders, victims, and the community.
- Government and local communities should play complementary roles in that response.
- Accountability is based on offenders understanding the harm caused by their offenses, accepting responsibility for that harm, and repairing it (pp. 5-6).

The philosophy behind restorative justice helps to give meaning to sanctions (e.g., restitution, community service) and links different practices and programs such as restitution and dispute resolution. Teen courts are one example of a diversion program that is compatible with the restorative justice movement (Minor & Wells, 1999).

Also compatible with the restorative justice model is the accountability-based juvenile justice system. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (1999), a system of juvenile accountability must be swift, sure, coherent, consistent and it must have a continuum of sanctions in order to be effective. The sanctions imposed upon the juvenile, as punishment for delinquent behavior, should also occur within the community in which the juvenile offender lives. The accountability-based system
incorporates community, system, and individual accountability while holding the system responsible for outcomes. The U.S. Department of Justice cites mentoring, teen courts, and probation supervision as accountability-based programs that emphasize offenders’ personal responsibility and obligation to victims.

Researchers in the field of criminal justice who question the intentions of those who employ the restorative justice model are beginning to emerge. Levrant and colleagues (1999) list four possible unintended consequences of restorative justice. First, some practitioners may use these programs as a means of getting tough on offenders, much like the child saving movement of the nineteenth century. Second, the restorative benefits promised to victims, offenders and communities might never materialize. Third, practitioners may employ restorative justice programs as only as symbolic rather than substantive reform. Finally, restorative justice may serve to reinforce existing race and class biases that plague the current justice system.
Youth Accountability Boards

Along with the emerging restorative and accountability-based models of justice, Youth Accountability Boards (YABs) have materialized as a link between juvenile delinquents, juvenile justice personnel, victims, and the community. Youth Accountability Boards are currently in operation throughout the U.S. and their popularity has grown considerably over the last decade.

The Board is made up of volunteer community members who have taken an active interest in juveniles living within their community. The characteristics and specific functions of each Board vary slightly from city to city, but their primary purpose remains the same. They provide an alternate means of dealing with delinquent juveniles by allocating treatment programs that are intended to help bring the offender, the victim and the community together.

A unique feature of the YAB is the wide range of treatment options available. The Board is not limited or bound by sentencing guidelines and is able to assign a juvenile to any number of programs. The juvenile is often referred to programs that extend well beyond the scope of their crime. For example, a juvenile that is caught shoplifting may be sentenced to after-school tutoring if
the Board notes substandard grades in the juvenile's record. The goal of the Board is to improve as many aspects of the juvenile's life as possible, hoping to eliminate the root cause of the delinquent activity.

Street officers, detectives, judges, or probation officers may refer delinquent juveniles to the Board. The determination to refer a juvenile to the Board is made on an individual basis and the process involves a great deal of discretion. Personnel are trained to recognize juveniles who may be eligible for the Youth Accountability Board program. These juveniles, and their parents, are given the option of completing a contact designed by the Board or attending a traditional court hearing. The juvenile has the option to reject an appearance before the Board and may be processed through the traditional system instead. If the juvenile fails to complete the contract assigned by the Board or decides they do not want to follow their assigned program, they are then referred to juvenile court for a traditional hearing.

Youth Accountability Board cases are heard much like traditional cases. Instead of a single judge, or a judge and a jury, the juvenile's case is presented before a number of community members. These community members have
been trained by the county to perform this function. Each community member receives a background report concerning the juvenile’s history (academic, social, criminal, etc.) before the hearing. After the case is presented and the juvenile and family are interviewed, the members determine the appropriate treatment options for the juvenile. If the juvenile agrees with the options, the Board members, the juvenile, and the juvenile’s parents sign a contract that contains the terms and conditions of the individually tailored program (see Appendix).

The YAB program’s theoretical framework is based on the restorative and accountability-based justice models. Youth Accountability Boards aim to restore the victim to his or her status held before the crime occurred through the use of programs such as victim restitution. It also helps the offender to accept responsibility for his or her actions. This combined goal creates the foundation of the Youth Accountability Board and encourages the use of unique and innovative treatment options.

Proposed Study

Restorative justice is focused on repairing harm criminal activity may cause victims and the community.
When this concept is used as the foundation for delinquency programs, it is believed to lower rates of delinquency (Office of Justice Programs, 1994). Following the restorative and accountability-based models of justice, the restitution and community service aspects of YAB programs are expected to help the juvenile who has committed an offense to accept responsibility for his or her actions. It is anticipated that this acceptance of responsibility will lead to lower recidivism rates for those who complete the YAB program than for those juveniles who do not complete the program or are placed on informal probation.

The following two hypotheses will be used to determine the overall effectiveness of the Youth Accountability Board program in deterring future juvenile delinquency. The concept of recidivism will be defined as the number of petitions filed against an individual juvenile that are found to be true in juvenile court following the completion of his or her referral to the YAB program or informal probation.

Hypothesis 1: Juveniles who are assigned to and successfully complete the YAB program will have a lower recidivism rate within a (12) month period than
juveniles who are assigned to the YAB program but do not successfully complete the program.

Hypothesis 2: Juveniles who participate in the YAB program will have a lower recidivism rate within a (12) month period than juveniles who are placed on informal probation.

The stricter supervision of juveniles on informal probation compared to juveniles referred to YAB programs should lead to the discovery of more technical violations. There tend to be more restrictions placed on juveniles who are on informal probation. Additionally, the term for those juveniles placed on informal probation is, on average, two months longer than the contract given to juveniles participating in the YAB program. These factors combined should lead to more program failures by juveniles who are placed on informal probation.

Hypothesis 3: Juveniles referred to the YAB program will have a higher program completion rate than juveniles who are placed on informal probation.
The data analysis will also include demographic variables that may be key indicators of success. The data is expected to show a significant difference in completion and recidivism rates based on gender, ethnicity, and age. The analyses that include these variables will help to determine whether YAB programs are more or less effective for juveniles of a specific age, gender or ethnic background.

Hypothesis 4: The gender of the juvenile will aid in the prediction of YAB program completion.

Hypothesis 5: The ethnicity of the juvenile will determine the probability of YAB program completion.

Hypothesis 6: The age of the juvenile will affect the probability of YAB program completion.

Hypothesis 7: The rate of recidivism within a (12) month period following completion of the YAB program will be influenced by gender.
Hypothesis 8: The rate of recidivism within a (12) month period following completion of the YAB program will be influenced by ethnicity.

Hypothesis 9: The rate of recidivism within a (12) month period following completion of the YAB program will be influenced by age.

Due to the significant amount of discretion involved in the processing and referring of YAB cases, there are a wide variety of offenses represented by the pool of program candidates. While almost all cases referred to the YAB are misdemeanor cases, felony cases are also included. Since the YAB program is meant to deter first time offenders charged with a petty crime and keep them out of the traditional system, it is not expected to benefit juveniles who commit more severe crimes. The severity of the offense committed is expected to affect both program completion and recidivism rates.

Hypothesis 10: Juveniles who commit less severe offenses will have a higher YAB program completion rate than juveniles who commit more severe offenses.
Hypothesis 11: The severity of the offense committed by the juvenile will affect the rate of recidivism within a (12) month period following the completion of the YAB program.

While it is predicted that Youth Accountability Board participants will be less likely to recidivate and will have a higher program completion rate than those placed on informal probation, it is also expected that YAB participants will take longer to recidivate than those on informal probation. Time to failure, or time to recidivism, will be calculated in days from the last day of the program to the day of the first offense.

Hypothesis 12: Juveniles who participate in the YAB program will have a longer time to failure (recidivism) than juveniles who are placed on informal probation.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODS

Design

This study will be conducted as a quasi-experiment using a nonequivalent-group design. It is impossible to randomly assign juveniles into experimental and control groups since the determination to assign a delinquent offender to YAB is made based on individual-specific circumstances and is left to the discretion of criminal justice personnel. The experimental group will consist of the juveniles who are referred to the YAB program and the comparison group will be those juveniles who are placed on informal probation during the same period of time.

The number of juveniles referred to the YAB program and placed on informal probation each year does not allow a list-wise or pair-wise matching procedure to be used. The total sample of juveniles in each group is too small to accommodate a matching procedure. Nevertheless, the comparison of the juveniles assigned to the Youth Accountability Board program and the juveniles placed on informal probation will determine which justice option is more effective in reducing future recidivism. This
comparison will also determine which of the two options produce the highest program completion rate.

Sample

The experimental group in the sample will consist of all juveniles referred to a Youth Accountability Board currently operating in San Bernardino County, California, for a period of one year (January 01, 1999 through December 31, 1999). The comparison group will consist of the juveniles placed on informal probation in the same city during the same time period (January 01, 1999 through December 31, 1999).

Sixty-six (66) juveniles participated in the YAB program during 1999 and the experimental group will consist of these individuals. During the same time period, forty-nine (49) juveniles were placed on informal probation and these individuals will be used as the comparison group. Overall, there will be one hundred and fifteen (115) juveniles in this sample.

Data Collection

Official records will be obtained to test the hypotheses. These records include Youth Accountability Board and informal probation records. The records are
contained within a countywide database. Each juvenile who is processed though any segment of the criminal justice system is assigned a JNET number. This number is given to ensure the confidentiality of a juvenile's criminal history. The JNET number is used to document a juvenile's encounter with the system, whether it is an arrest, court decision, placement in a detention facility or diversion assignment. It also includes basic demographic information, including the gender and ethnicity of each juvenile.

Access to the countywide database has been obtained for the purpose of this study. The JNET numbers of the juveniles referred to the YAB, and the JNET numbers of the juveniles who have been placed on informal probation will be obtained. The JNET numbers will allow for the investigation of recidivism and program completion rates. Following program completion or revocation, each JNET number will be examined to determine whether the juvenile has had any further contact with the criminal justice system within a twelve-month period.

Validity

There are some questions concerning the validity of the secondary data sources that will be obtained. The data
is collected and documented by various individuals. These individuals do not always have the same or consistent objectives. A clerk who is responsible for data entry may accidentally enter a date or court decision incorrectly. Also, the validity of the recidivism rate may be affected since the procedures for citing or arresting juveniles are not uniform and a substantial amount of discretion is involved in the process.

While these issues may influence the validity of the current study, it is impossible at this point to control for these factors. It is important to note this limitation for subsequent models of this study and future analysis of the data.

Coding

Program completion will be coded simply as "yes" or "no." If a juvenile successfully completes his or her contract requirements and the Board is satisfied by their fulfillments of the requirements, the juvenile will be coded as having successfully completed the YAB program. If a juvenile successfully completes his or her informal probation program without incurring any infractions that lead to the revocation of the sentence, that juvenile will be coded as having successfully completed their program.
Two additional variables will be constructed in the database to enable the examination of program completion. The category of 'YAB Treatment' will distinguish between those juveniles who completed the YAB program from those who did not complete the YAB program or were never referred to the program (i.e., failed YAB or referred to informal probation). The category of 'Informal Probation Treatment' will distinguish between those juveniles who completed informal probation from those who did not complete informal probation or were never referred to informal probation (i.e., failed informal probation or referred to the YAB program). These distinctions will be made in order to assess the outcomes of those who receive the full treatment of a particular program in relation to the outcomes of all other juveniles.

While a technical violation of a YAB or informal probation program may result in the non-completion of the assigned program, technical violations will not be considered an act of recidivism. As described earlier, the concept of recidivism will be defined as the number of petitions filed against an individual juvenile that are found to be true in juvenile court following the completion, or revocation, of his or her referral to the
YAB program or informal probation. Each count filed against the juvenile that is found to be true will be coded as 'one' (1). Due to the small size of the immediate sample, recidivism will also be coded as 'yes' and 'no' for analyses.

The seriousness of each offense will be determined using two different methods. First, if the specific offense is listed as a felony in the California penal code, the offense will be considered a 'serious' offense. After all felonies have been labeled, the remaining offenses will be examined. The remaining offenses will be divided into two categories. The first category will consist of crimes against persons. The second category will consist of all property and drug offenses. Those offenses in the first category of crimes against persons will be considered 'serious' offenses. Offenses listed under the second category of property and drug offenses will be considered 'non-serious' crimes. This distinction will be used to predict recidivism and program completion rates.

Due to a small sample population, ethnicity will be examined using a 'white' and 'non-white' categorization. There are a large number of white and Hispanic juveniles in the sample, but other numbers of other ethnicities are
exceptionally small. Unfortunately, the data analyses will require that minorities be grouped together to eliminate small cell counts.

Age will be examined as a two-category variable. The first category constructed will be 'youth' and it will contain all juveniles who are 8 to 14 years of age. The second category will be 'young adult' and it will consist of juveniles who are 15 to 18 years of age. This categorization is intended to promote variance in a small sample.

Time to failure, or time to recidivism, will be coded in days. The date of the act of recidivism, found to be true in court, will be subtracted from the day of program completion or revocation.

Interpretation of Results

The analyses of the data will heavily rely on crosstabulation statistics. Since most of the statistics will employ the use of a two by two table, the Continuity Correction statistic will be used in place of the Chi Square statistic to determine if a significant relationship exists between the variables. The Continuity Correction statistic is a more conservative approximation of the
relationship between variables and should be used in place of the Chi Square statistic if a table is any smaller than two by three cells.

Due to the small sample size, it is expected that some cells will contain an expected frequency less than five. In such a case, the Fisher's Exact Test statistic will be used in place of the Chi Square and Continuity Correction statistics to control for this factor. The Phi statistic will be used to determine the strength of any relationship found to be significant.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

There were 115 juveniles in the total sample. Table 1 provides a description of the juveniles in the experimental group who were referred to the Youth Accountability Board program (n = 66). Of those in the experimental group, 41 were male and 25 were female, the age range was 9 to 18 with a mean age of approximately 14 (mean = 14.39, SD = 2.22), 37.9 percent of the population were white and 62.1 percent non-white, and 17 juveniles committed offenses that were categorized as serious and 49 juveniles committed offenses categorized as non-serious.

Table 1. Description of Juveniles Referred to Youth Accountability Board Program (Experimental Group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Youth(8-14)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Adult(15-18)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-white</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offense</td>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-serious</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 is a description of the juveniles in the comparison group who were placed on informal probation (n = 49). Of those in the comparison group, there were 39 males and 10 females, the age range was 8 to 18 with a mean age of approximately 15 (mean = 15.14, SD = 1.98), 44.9 percent of the population were white and 55.1 percent non-white, and the offenses were categorized as 26 being serious and 23 being non-serious.

Table 2. Description of Juveniles Placed on Informal Probation (Comparison Group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Youth (8-14)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Adult (15-18)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-white</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offense</td>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-serious</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A comparison of the two groups shows that the YAB population had a slightly larger percentage of females, was slightly younger and had approximately the same ethnicity distribution as the informal probation population. One
important difference between the experimental and control group populations is the offense seriousness categorization. While only a fourth (25.8%) of the experimental population committed offenses deemed to be serious, over half (53.1%) of the comparison group committed a serious offense. Another noted difference between groups is the age group categorization. Tables 1 and 2 show the YAB program has 70.5 percent of the juveniles referred to this program listed under the youth category while only 29.5 percent of juveniles are listed as youth in the informal probation group. A crosstabulation of offense seriousness and age between groups found these differences to be significant (see Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of Seriousness of Offense and Age Between Experimental and Control Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seriousness b</td>
<td>4.667*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group b</td>
<td>4.146*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes p<.05
b denotes use of Continuity Correction statistic

Although the two groups have significant differences, they are still comparable. Almost all of the juveniles are
first time offenders deemed ineligible for placement or formal probation. There are no guidelines that require justice practitioners to refer a juvenile to a specific program (i.e., YAB or informal probation) based on age or seriousness of offense. This sample represents only one year of YAB and informal probation program referrals. Juvenile characteristics, such as age and severity of offense committed, may be represented within each program in different proportions from year to year. Although these groups are not identical, using informal probation as a comparison group did not appear to affect the findings in a significant way.

Basic descriptions of program completion and recidivism percentages in both the YAB and informal probation groups are provided in Table 4. Both programs have comparatively similar rates of program completion and recidivism. Table 4 reveals the YAB program had a slightly higher number of participants who successfully completed the program (78.8%) than the informal probation program (71.4%) and both programs produced almost identical recidivism rates. The YAB program had a 22.7 percent recidivism rate while the informal probation program had a 22.4 percent recidivism rate. Statistical analyses of the
differences between these variables will be conducted later in the tests of hypotheses section.

Table 4. Comparison of Youth Accountability Board and Informal Probation: Program Completion and Recidivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YAB</td>
<td>Program Completion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Probation</td>
<td>Program Completion</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YAB</td>
<td>Recidivism</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Probation</td>
<td>Recidivism</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>77.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Predictors Of Success

Prior to the testing of the hypotheses, a preliminary analysis of the data was conducted in order to determine what juvenile characteristics were related to program completion and recidivism. Without distinguishing juveniles in the YAB program from those on informal probation, the variables of gender, ethnicity, age group, seriousness of offense and length of time in program were compared to program completion and recidivism.
Table 5 shows the results of the analyses concerning program completion. Not one of the independent variables proved to be a significant predictor of program completion.

Table 5. Predictors of Program Completion or Failure for Total Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Significant Predictor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriousness of offense</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length in program</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interesting relationships within the total sample population not deemed significant include gender, age and seriousness of offense (see table 6). With regard to gender, 27.5 percent of males failed their assigned program while 17.1 percent of females failed their assigned program. Older juveniles (28.2%) failed their assigned program more often than younger juveniles (18.2%). Also, juveniles who committed a serious offense failed their assigned program (35.0%) more often than juveniles who committed a non-serious offense (18.7%).
Table 6. Variables That Had Non-Significant Effect on Program Completion: Total Sample Combined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Failed Program</th>
<th>% Failure Margin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Adult</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriousness</td>
<td>Non-serious</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same variables were compared to recidivism. The analysis also included program completion as a predictor, or independent variable. Table 7 provides a summary of the findings. Only program completion appeared to be a significant predictor of non-recidivism in the total sample population. Program completion is significant at the .001 level in predicting non-recidivism and this relationship is moderate to strong (Phi = -.711).
Table 7. Predictors of Future Recidivism for Total Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Significant Predictor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriousness of offense</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length in program</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program completion****</td>
<td>Yes***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** denotes p<.001

Table 8 describes variables that were non-significant in predicting recidivism but are interesting to note. While not significant, gender shows a difference with males (26.3%) more likely to recidivate than females (14.3%) overall. Younger and older juveniles in the total sample were equally likely to recidivate (22.7% and 22.5% respectively). An examination of seriousness of offense and future recidivism in the total population produced an unlikely finding. Based on the constructed offense seriousness categories, those who committed non-serious crimes were more likely to recidivate than those who committed serious crimes by a margin of 7.8%.
Table 8. Variables That Had Non-Significant Effect on Recidivism: Total Sample Combined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Recidivated</th>
<th>% Recidivism Margin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Adult</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriousness</td>
<td>Non-serious</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to these preliminary analyses of the total sample population, it was expected that the examination of hypotheses would find interesting associations between gender, age group, seriousness of offense, program completion, and recidivism. The division of juveniles by program may yield additional variables of interest. The following section contains the final results of the investigation into the hypothesized relationships between the variables.

Tests of Hypotheses

Initial statistical analyses of the differences between the two programs, as predicted in the hypotheses,
resulted in all non-significant findings except for the significant effect of program completion on non-recidivism. The division of juveniles by program produced the same non-significant findings as the predictors of success variables that examined the characteristics of all juveniles in the sample without controlling for specific program assignment.

Since there was no direct correlation between the majority of independent variables and recidivism, three new categories were created to test association. The juveniles were grouped into the three new categories of program completion, YAB treatment, and informal probation treatment. The category of program completion separated all juveniles who completed the program to which they were referred from those who did not complete their assigned program. The YAB treatment category separated juveniles who completed the YAB program from all others (i.e., those who did not complete their referral to YAB and those referred to informal probation). The informal probation treatment category separated juveniles who completed informal probation from all others (i.e., those who did not complete their referral to informal probation and those who were referred to the YAB program).
The program completion category was created to explore the association between receiving a treatment, whether it is through YAB or informal probation assignment, and recidivism. The YAB and informal probation treatment variables were created to examine the benefits associated with the completion of a specific program. Within the newly created program completion and treatment categories, the independent or control variables were tested for significance.

The first variable examined was gender. Gender alone had no significant effect on program outcome or recidivism. Also, assignment to a specific program, did not produce significant differences in recidivism based on gender for either YAB or informal probation program participants. Significantly lower rates of recidivism (p<.001) were found in both males and females who completed their assigned program (see Table 9). This relationship was stronger for females (Phi = -.898) than for males (Phi = -.651). Youth Accountability Board treatment significantly reduced recidivism for females (p<.01) but YAB treatment did not reduce recidivism for males. Again, Youth Accountability Board treatment refers to those juveniles who have successfully completed the YAB program compared to those
juveniles who did not complete or were not referred to the YAB program (for a full description of the construction of this variable, please see the coding section of this study).

Informal probation treatment did not reduce female recidivism, but significantly reduced recidivism in males (p<.01), producing a weak to moderate relationship (Phi = -.378). Again, informal probation treatment refers to those juveniles who have successfully completed informal probation compared to those juveniles who did not complete or were not referred to informal probation (for a full description of the construction of this variable, please see the coding section of this study). According to these statistics concerning gender, the YAB treatment was more beneficial in reducing recidivism in female juveniles while the informal probation treatment was more beneficial in reducing male juvenile recidivism.
Table 9. The Effects of Gender on Recidivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Recidivism</th>
<th>Program Completion</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Phi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.800***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.629***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>91.4%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** denotes p<.01  
* denotes p<.05  
^ denotes use of Continuity Correction statistic  
^ denotes use of Fisher's Exact Test statistic

** Due to the small number of juveniles in the sample, the juveniles were divided into the categories of white and non-white to study the ethnicity variable (see Table 10). Program completion and recidivism were unaffected by...**

55
ethnicity alone. Ethnicity, together with the specific program to which the juvenile was referred had no effect on recidivism. Both whites and non-whites who completed the program to which they were referred were significantly less likely to recidivate ($p < .001$) than those who failed their program, with the relationship being strongest for non-whites ($\Phi = -.765$) compared to whites ($\Phi = -.625$). Non-whites who received YAB treatment were significantly less likely ($p < .01$) to recidivate than non-whites who did not receive YAB treatment, with a weak to moderate relationship reported ($\Phi = -.357$). There was no significant effect on recidivism for white juveniles who received YAB treatment.

Non-white juveniles who received informal probation treatment were also significantly less likely to recidivate ($p < .01$) than non-white juveniles who did not receive informal probation treatment, again with a weak to moderate relationship ($\Phi = -.346$). Informal probation treatment did not have a significant effect on recidivism for white juveniles. These findings indicate that non-white juveniles were more responsive to both YAB and informal probation treatment than white juveniles.
Table 10. The Effects of Ethnicity on Recidivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Recidivism</th>
<th>Program Completion</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Phi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.800***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>94.1%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.629***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** denotes p<.001
** denotes p<.01
b denotes use of Continuity Correction statistic
c denotes use of Fisher’s Exact Test statistic

Table 11 presents findings concerning the effects of age on recidivism. In order to compensate for the small number of juveniles in the sample, the juveniles were divided into the two categories of youth (ages 8-14) and
young adult (ages 15-18) to promote variance. The age group variable alone had no significant impact on program completion or recidivism. The youth juveniles and young adult juveniles who completed the program to which they were referred were significantly less likely to recidivate (p<.001) than those who failed their program, with a slightly stronger relationship present for youth juveniles (Phi = -.729) compared to young adult juveniles (Phi = -.711).

All juveniles, regardless of age group, were significantly less likely to recidivate if they received the YAB treatment (p<.05). The relationship between receiving the YAB treatment and the reduction of recidivism was weak to moderate. Both younger and older juveniles who received the informal probation treatment were not significantly less likely to recidivate than those who did not receive the informal probation treatment. In summary, both youth and young adult juveniles who received the YAB treatment were significantly less likely to recidivate (p<.05) than those who did not receive the YAB treatment. Informal probation treatment did not affect recidivism for youth or young adult juveniles in the sample.
Table 11. The Effects of Age on Recidivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Recidivism</th>
<th>Program Completion</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Phi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19.068***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adult</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32.248***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seriousness of offense had no direct significant impact on recidivism or program completion. Being assigned to a specific program did not have a direct impact on recidivism based on seriousness. Seriousness of offense did have a significant impact (p < .001) on recidivism for both serious and non-serious offenders who completed their assigned program (see Table 12). The relationship between these variables was stronger for non-serious offenders (Phi = -.822) than for serious offenders (Phi = -.628).
Statistics show that non-serious offenders who received the YAB treatment were significantly less likely to recidivate (p<.01) than non-serious offenders who did not receive the YAB treatment. The YAB treatment had no significant effect on recidivism for serious offenders. The Phi statistic shows the relationship between non-serious offenders, YAB treatment and recidivism to be weak to moderate (-.393). Those juveniles received the informal probation treatment were significantly less likely to recidivate than juveniles who did not receive the informal probation treatment (p<.05), regardless of seriousness of offense.

To sum up the findings concerning offense seriousness, the statistics indicate that juveniles who committed non-serious crimes were significantly less likely to recidivate if they received the YAB treatment. While this is not true for serious offenders, both serious and non-serious offenders were less likely to recidivate if they completed their assigned program or if they received the informal probation treatment.
Table 12. The Effects of Offense Seriousness on Recidivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense Seriousness</th>
<th>Recidivism</th>
<th>Program Completion</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Phi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-serious c</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45.996***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious c</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.485***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the above analyses, program completion when coupled with other control variables such as gender or offense seriousness tends to effect juvenile recidivism. A
crosstabulation that measured the relationship between program completion, program assignment and recidivism is presented in Table 13. The statistic shows that this relationship was significant (p<.001) for both the YAB program and informal probation and both relationships are moderate to strong. Juveniles who completed their assigned program were significantly less likely to recidivate than juveniles who failed the program to which they were referred.

Table 13. The Effects of Program Completion on Recidivism Separated by Program Assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Recidivism</th>
<th>Program Completion</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Phi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Probation c</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.213***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YAB c</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.647***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** denotes p<.001  
* denotes use of Fisher's Exact Test statistic

Juveniles who participated in the YAB program were not significantly less likely to recidivate than juveniles who were placed on probation. Table 14 is a summary of this relationship. It is important to note that both programs
have almost the exact same percentage of participant recidivism.

Table 14. A Comparison of the Effects of Program Completion on Recidivism Between Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recidivism</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Continuity Correction</th>
<th>Phi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>YAB</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77.3%</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>YAB</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Juveniles who participated in the YAB program did not have a significantly higher program completion rate than juveniles who were placed on informal probation. Table 15 is a summary of this relationship. While juveniles in the YAB program were more likely to complete the program compared to those on informal probation, this difference was not significant.

Table 15. A Comparison of Program Completion Between Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Continuity Correction</th>
<th>Phi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>YAB</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal Probation</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>YAB</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal Probation</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

63
The final analysis was the comparison of the means of time to failure between the YAB program and informal probation groups. This was done to determine which program was more effective in delaying acts of recidivism. Time to failure was calculated, in days, for every juvenile who recidivated. Using an ANOVA statistic, it was determined that the difference between group means was not significantly different for those who recidivated (see Table 16). Although the YAB program had a time to failure mean of 182.00 and the informal probation program had a mean of 83.91, the standard deviation for the YAB program was very high, thus causing no significant difference. While this may not be considered a significant relationship, the YAB program was at least slightly more effective in delaying future acts of recidivism than informal probation.

Table 16. Time to Failure Between Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>ANOVA F</th>
<th>Eta Squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YAB</td>
<td>182.00</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>153.48</td>
<td>3.756</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Probation</td>
<td>83.91</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>77.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Summary of Results

On the surface, the YAB program and the informal probation program appear to be equal in terms of program completion and recidivism rates. The percentages for these variables are very similar, particularly with respect to acts of recidivism. While the initial test of hypotheses found only one significant difference, the effect of program completion on non-recidivism, the analyses were then focused on combinations of predictor variables to determine additional significant differences. By doing so, it was determined that specific juvenile characteristics play a significant role in influencing recidivism.

The data concerning gender produced interesting findings. The statistics revealed that gender did not influence program completion but did influence recidivism. The most important finding regarding gender was that females who received the YAB treatment had a significantly lower recidivism rate than females who did not receive YAB treatment. YAB treatment had no significant effect on recidivism for males. The opposite was found to be true
when examining informal probation. Males who received the informal probation treatment had a significantly lower rate of recidivism than males who did not receive the informal probation treatment. Informal probation treatment had no significant effect on recidivism for females. Females were less likely to recidivate if they completed the more lenient justice option of the YAB program and males were less likely to recidivate if they successfully met the more stringent conditions of informal probation. This finding may have a tremendous impact on program assignment by practitioners if the same finding can be replicated in subsequent studies.

Unlike the findings of Bell and Lang (1985), minority juveniles were not significantly more likely to participate in the YAB diversion program than white juveniles. Perhaps what is most interesting to note is that non-white juveniles who completed their assigned program, whether it was the YAB or the informal probation program, were significantly less likely to recidivate than non-white juveniles who did not complete their program. White juveniles who met their program requirements were not significantly less likely to recidivate than white juveniles who failed their assigned program. Based on
these findings, minority juveniles appear to be more responsive to the treatment of both programs.

The age of the juvenile was significant in predicting recidivism only if the juvenile completed their assigned program. Both younger and older juveniles had significantly lower recidivism rates if they successfully met the requirements of their assigned program. Younger and older juveniles who received the YAB treatment were significantly less likely to recidivate than those who did not receive the YAB treatment. This significance was not found in those who received the informal probation treatment, despite their age categorization. The treatment of the YAB program appears to be greater than that of the informal probation program in reducing recidivism, regardless of age. This finding does not support the assertion presented in the literature that diversion programs are most effective if experienced at an early age (Zigler, Taussig & Black, 1992).

Non-serious juvenile offenders who received the YAB treatment were significantly less likely to recidivate than non-serious offenders who did not receive the YAB treatment. The YAB treatment had no significant effect on recidivism for serious offenders. Since the target of the
YAB program is the non-serious offender and YAB treatment options are geared toward this juvenile population, this result was expected from the data. It is interesting to note that both serious and non-serious offenders were equally less likely to recidivate if they received the informal probation treatment.

The strongest single predictor of recidivism was program failure. Those juveniles who failed their assigned program were significantly more likely to recidivate than juveniles who successfully completed their program. It seems that the treatment obtained in both programs has a significant effect on lowering the rate of recidivism. At the very least, both YAB and informal probation program failure can help to determine which juveniles are at highest risk for recidivism.

It can be argued that those who fail their assigned program may be most at risk to experience the negative effects of net widening. As pointed out by Frazier and Lee (1992), programs developed to reduce the number of juveniles under state control may actually serve to increase delinquency admission. Technical violations of diversion programs may draw a juvenile further into the system that the original program referral meant to deter
them from. It is also argued in the literature that many
diversion efforts fail because practitioners do not
distinguish between interventions that strengthen youth
commitments from those that further stigmatize and exclude
the juvenile participants (Bazemore, 1998). Interventions
that may further stigmatize juveniles may be related to the
reactions to technical violations of diversion programs.

While not significant, it is worthwhile to note that
YAB program participation results in a longer delay of time
to failure on average. The sample size in this study is
small and the insignificant numbers may have masked the
significance of this variable. For the moment, it should
be noted that the YAB program does delay juvenile
recidivism longer than the informal probation program.

This finding concerning the delay of recidivism in
those that are referred to the YAB program may be related
to the avoidance of stigmatization that juveniles feel
after being introduced to traditional juvenile justice
practices. Diversion programs began largely in response to
the desire to keep juveniles from entering the system and
thus result in the prevention of continued participation in
the system (Zigler, Taussig & Black, 1992). In a
juvenile's mind, completing informal probation may be first
step in self-labeling themselves as a delinquent whereas completing the YAB program causes the juvenile to be more concerned about righting their wrong.

Theoretical Implications

The connection between the Youth Accountability Board program and the emerging restorative model of justice has been argued in this thesis. The components of the YAB program seem to fit well into the core philosophy of the movement, but just how well the program works to support the movement has yet to be determined. There are three clients considered in the theoretical foundation of restorative justice and those are the offender, the victim and the community (Bazemore, 1998). While this study examined the outcomes of the YAB program as it pertains to the offender, there was no attempt to measure change in the victims or the community. Still, the current focus on the offender allows us to examine at least one dimension of the model.

By examining the ways the YAB program affects the offender, we can easily find the model of restorative justice in the basis of the program. Bazemore (1998) cites the following as important factors in the application of
restorative justice and these factors can easily be applied to the YAB program. First, the YAB program moves beyond the treatment/punishment paradigm. The contract designed for the individual offender addresses aspects of his or her life that is considered to be associated with delinquency (i.e., academic failure and anger management). Second, the program is not clinical in its focus but seeks to provide a more informal and individual based treatment. Finally, the juveniles in YAB are given a stake in conformity by allowing them to see the consequences of their delinquent activities and take responsibility for their actions.

Even though the outcomes measured in this study reveal that the YAB program might be very similar to other non-restorative justice programs such as informal probation in terms of overall program completion and recidivism rates, we are unable to observe the benefits that may come from community and victim involvement. Since the program outcomes are similar and the YAB program is not causing a more negative effect than informal probation, it would be wise to reap the benefits of satisfaction that stem from victim and community involvement. Also, it makes sense to use the least restrictive measures if the same results are obtained. The less stringent YAB program may prove to be a
superior alternative to more the intensive programs that have traditionally been used.

Policy Implications

Feld (1997) may have argued the current juvenile justice system is so severely flawed and incompetent that we should consider abolishing it all together, but the findings of this study show that there are more practical alternatives to improving current conditions. It is true that the justice system and its practitioners cannot eliminate the crime problem alone, nor should they be expected to. Instead, the justice system needs to learn to rely on outside resources. The Youth Accountability Board program’s reliance on community members as a resource in the administration of justice is an ideal example of how criminal justice agencies can tap into resources beyond their own.

Practitioners who have been involved in other diversion programs have complained about the lack of personnel or funds that plaque their diversion efforts (Mears & Kelly, 1999). While there has not been a cost benefit analysis conducted concerning the YAB program, the probation department that oversees the operation of the
Board claims that there are far less personnel hours absorbed by the YAB program compared to informal probation. Volunteer probation officers ensure that the juvenile completes the contact requirements set forth by the community members in the particular city under investigation. Volunteer community members make up the panels that hear the juvenile cases. The justice system would do well by forging strong relationships with the community that could in turn provide valuable resources such as volunteer personnel to assist in creation and maintenance of diversion programs like the YAB program.

Practitioners looking to begin a YAB program or to improve a program currently in operation may find the results of this study to be useful. Despite claims that restorative justice risks failure and perhaps does more harm than good (Levrant, Cullen, Fulton & Wozniak, 1999), the outcomes of this study suggest that the YAB program is a viable alternative for juvenile offenders, specifically for minorities, females and non-serious offenders. Contrary to findings reported in previous research concerning age and diversion, the YAB diversion effort is effective in deterring recidivism in both younger and older
juveniles. These findings may be tentative, however, and the limitations of these results should be observed.

Study Limitations and Suggestions For Future Research

With respect to design and internal validity, the analyses revealed that the experimental and comparison groups were not entirely identical. Although the decision to refer a juvenile to either program is based on a discretionary process, the comparison group had a larger percentage of older juveniles and juveniles who committed a serious offense. These differences were determined to be statistically significant. It is possible that the YAB juvenile population more closely resembles the population of juveniles who are referred to traffic court for minor violations. Future research should compare YAB populations to other juvenile program populations.

The JNET system used to collect the data used in this investigation is not always an accurate measure of recidivism. For example, juveniles who move out of the county are not followed by the system. Also, the system cannot track those juveniles who recidivate in an outside county. There are also clerical errors and aliases used by
the juveniles that affect the data. These factors may restrict the reliability of the offense data.

The generalizability of the results of this study is severely limited. The sample for this evaluation was collected from a single city and selected from a single year. Future analyses of YAB programs should attempt the collection of a more generalizable sample. For example, several YAB programs in a particular region should be compared since each Board differs slightly in design. Also, data should be collected over a longer period of time in order to observe trends in offender populations and outcomes.

The statistical power of the analyses of the current study was restricted due to small sample size. Most of the variables needed to be collapsed (i.e., white and non-white) in order to create categories large enough to conduct statistical tests. Interval data with higher frequencies may prove to be more valuable in detecting significant differences than nominal and ordinal variables.

Although not examined in the current study, the specific conditions of each juvenile's YAB contract may be related to program completion and recidivism outcomes. Family variables such as income and single heads of
household, as well as student behavioral records are worthy of future investigation. Future research should incorporate these additional variables in the analyses to determine what additional factors are related to YAB program outcomes.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Summary

The basis of the Youth Accountability Board program can best be described within the framework of restorative justice. The model of restorative justice is focused on the treatment of offenders, but then extends beyond traditional goals to incorporate victim and community in the justice process. The current evaluation was an examination into the offender aspect of the model.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the outcomes of a Youth Accountability Board diversion program and compare the findings to the outcomes of traditional informal probation. It was determined that the YAB program was at least as effective as informal probation when comparing program completion and recidivism rates. However, differences were found between individual juvenile characteristics that were helpful in predicting program completion or failure and future recidivism. The conclusions reached, while tentative, provide an interesting insight into the workings of the YAB program.
and the characteristics of the juveniles who are treated in this program.

The implications of these findings suggest the acceptance of restorative justice practices by criminal justice practitioners may help to enhance the justice process. Community resources, such as volunteer community members, available to a justice system that is strained by a lack of necessary resources may prove to be invaluable. Still, it is the justice system's responsibility to identify those juveniles who will most benefit from restorative justice treatment. This study provides an interesting look at some of the key variables that may be considered in juvenile referral to the YAB program.

Caution should be used when attempting to draw generalized conclusions based on these findings. Several limitations of the study were noted. First, the comparison group was not identical to the experimental group. Second, the database containing the information concerning recidivism may not be reliable. Third, this examination did not extend beyond a single YAB program. Since Boards vary slightly in design from city to city, the results from this program may not be consistent with results from other programs. Finally, the small sample size in both the
experimental and control groups made the statistical power of the analyses weak.

Future Directions

Many of the conclusions reached in this study cannot be compared to past research findings due to the lack of a prior evaluation of a Youth Accountability Board program. One of the benefits of this evaluation is that key variables found to be related to the overall success or failure of this diversion effort have been identified and can be analyzed in future research projects. Personal characteristics of the juveniles as well as the severity of offenses committed have proven to be significant indicators of future recidivism in juveniles who participate in the Youth Accountability Board program.

Future research should include other descriptive variables in the analyses of juvenile program completion and recidivism. One point of interest may be the terms contained in the YAB program contracts. An analysis of what treatment options are most likely to produce higher rates of program completion and lower rates of recidivism would be of great relevance. Additional research may also look deeper into the demographic variables contained in
juvenile pre-sentence reports. It would be interesting to find differences in juvenile outcomes based on family income, school behavioral records, and academic achievement.

Another avenue of investigation to be considered is future evaluation of the two restorative justice dimensions neglected in the current study: the victim and the community. Surveys of victim satisfaction and the community members' opinions about their participation in the YAB program will reveal how well the program accomplishes the goals of restorative justice. Juveniles should also be interviewed to determine if they do in fact accept more responsibility for their delinquent actions than juveniles in traditional programs.

This investigation of the YAB program is as much a description as it is an assessment. The findings of this evaluation should be used as a stepping-stone for those who are interested in conducting additional research concerning the YAB program. This study suggests the YAB program is a practical diversion effort and one that deserves further investigation.
APPENDIX:

YOUTH ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD CONTRACT
Youth Accountability Board
Youth Application and Contract

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE

Accepted ______
Rejected ______

By completing and signing this Application and Contract I hereby request I be granted the opportunity to fulfill an agreement with the Youth Accountability Board.

Further, I understand the Youth Accountability Board Contract is granted in lieu of court actions as an opportunity for me to prove to the court, the community, my family and myself, my total commitment to the acceptable behavior in society.

With this in mind, I promise to follow the advice and instruction of the Youth Accountability Board, and comply with the following stipulations (initial at left of each item):

1. ______ I will pay restitution to ____________________________ in the amount of $__________.

2. ______ I will complete _______ hours of community service at a work site assigned to me by the Youth Accountability Board.

3. ______ I will attend an educational program as directed by the Youth Accountability Board.

4. ______ I will observe a curfew of _______ unless in the company of my parent, guardian or an adult, over the age of 21, who has been approved by my parents before leaving home.

5. ______ I will attend school on a regular basis, work to the best of my abilities and report my grades to the Youth Accountability Board.

6. ______ I will obey all laws.

7. ______ I will not drive a motor vehicle at any time during the period of this contract expect to school or work.

8. ______ I will not associate with any person who have in the past or are now involved in unlawful behavior. I will not associate with:

9. ______ I will obey my parents.

10.______ I will report to the Board any change of address.
11. _____ I will attend and complete the social responsibility and/or drug/alcohol abuse programs as indicated below:

12. _____ I will view a traffic safety film at the direction of the Board. WARNING TO PARENT: This film is graphic and it is recommended that a parent attend the viewing with their child.

13. _____ I will attend ______ meetings of:

________________________________________________________________________

CHAIRPERSON __________________________ DATE ____________

VICE CHAIRPERSON __________________________ DATE ____________

YOUTH __________________________ DATE ____________

Parent’s Statement

I feel my child/ward, ___________________________ can complete this contract and I support its conditions.

I understand that it is my obligation to provide suitable care, control and financial support for my child. I agree to commit the whole family to the Youth Accountability Board program designed for my child.

I understand that failure of this contract may obligate me and my child to appear in Juvenile Court on the present petition.

PARENT(S)/GUARDIAN(S) __________________________ DATE ____________

83
REFERENCES


In re Gault, 387 U.S. 1 (1937).


