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Juvenile Perceptions of Probation Officers in Relation to the Use of Strength-Based Programs

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Problem Statement

The absence of social work professionals within the juvenile system creates a challenge to hold a strength-based relationship perspective in working with juvenile delinquents. This is significant because, without a strength-based perspective, it leads to a failure to recognize juvenile's potential for growth and change (Prinsloo, 2014). A focus on strengths allows for building relationships with juveniles to motivate them to improve behaviors (Rogowski, 2014). The research appears to suggest the rates of recidivism in the juvenile system correlate with the lack of strength-based probation practices. Today, the research on the influence of the lack of a strength-based perspective has on recidivism is minimal.



Qualitative Research Question

What perceptions do juvenile delinquents have on interactions with probation officers?



Methodology

Teach strength-based methods to probation officers in Ohio and assess recidivism rates among facilities that receive training and those who do not receive training.

A Cross-sectional, descriptive study



Population and Sample: Qualitative

Population Criteria

- Probation officers working with juvenile offenders with non-felony charges
- Juvenile offenders between the age of 12-16
- Juvenile offenders assigned to probation officers

Sample Selection

- Quota Sampling based on levels of recidivism rates in state of Ohio
- Our Quota Sampling will have two quotas:
 - ◆ Area where recidivism rates are lower than state average.
 - ◆ Area where recidivism rates are higher than state average.



Literature Review - Definition & Terms

Strength-Based:

- “Professionals seeking out client’s abilities, resources, and gifts and applying them to current life challenges” (Nissen, 2006)
- “Strength-based practice recently has been developed by combining the assumptions and mindset of the strengths perspective with the techniques of the solution-focused therapy model” (Clark, 1998).

Recidivism:

- Recidivism is measured by whether a juvenile offender was re-arrested or not re-arrested (Kurtz & Linnemann, 2006).
- “Recidivism is the repetition of criminal behavior and is usually measured as the occurrence or frequency of a rearrest or reincarceration in a specific period” (Aalasma, White, Lau, Perkins, Monahan, & Grisso, 2015).



Literature Review

Strength-Based Approach in Juvenile Justice System

- Strength-based models offer an individualized plan (Nissen, 2006)
- Strength-based probation interventions have the potential to influence goal-oriented attitudes in offenders (Kurtz & Linnemann, 2006).
- Wraparound services approach is an example a strength-based model that “accounts for varying needs within this multidetermined problem population through its individualization” (Carney & Buttell, 2003).
- There is an increase in movement towards a strength-based approach with youth in the juvenile justice system (Clark, 1997).
- Strength-based models can create a positive environment within a detention facility (Nissen, 2006).
- Can still hold youth accountable for their behaviors (Mackin, Weller, Tarte, & Nissen, 2009).



Literature Review cont.

Motivation and Strength-based Approach

- Focusing on a strengths-based approach improves motivation of juvenile offenders (Clark, 2009).
- Self-determination plays a role in increasing motivation of offenders in strength-based interventions (McDaniel, 2015).
- Juvenile offenders who received wraparound services were less likely to engage in at-risk criminal behavior (Carney & Buttell, 2003).



Literature Review cont.

Juvenile Offender Needs

- Youth in incarceration may experience worthlessness (Slaughter, 2018).
- Having mental health issues be addressed and provide early intervention (Slaughter, 2018).
- Juvenile offenders often have unmet needs as they transition back into the community that could be met through interventions (Tracy & Hanham, 2015).
- Understanding juvenile offenders environments and their perspectives of risk factors informs interventions (Barnert et. al., 2015).
- Allowing juvenile offenders to be the experts on their own lives and problems leads to a better understanding of their strengths (Clark, 1998).
- Racial Equality and LGBTQ rights within juvenile centers (Slaughter, 2018).
- Developing positive identity and restoring connections with family, peers, and community (Mackin, Weller, Tarte, & Nissen, 2009).
- Addressing and stopping “Cradle-to-Prison Pipeline” (Slaughter, 2018).



Literature Review cont.

Strength-Based Effect on Perceptions of Offenders and Workers

- After implementation of strength-based model interaction between youth and staff have improved (Barton & Mackin, 2012).
- Staff members views of youth are changed from negative perspective to positive (Corcoran, 1997).
- Strengths-based model can help with developing relationships with youth (Mackin, Weller, Tarte, & Nissen, 2009).



Literature Review cont.

Why Our Research is Important

- Further study needs to happen to fully identify the effectiveness of model (Corcoran, 1997).
- There are barriers to making a strength-based approach a reality in the juvenile centers (Nissen, 2006).
- Limitations of current research include fully knowing if positive outcomes are due to strengths based model or climate changes and lack of understanding of the link between center's climate and recidivism (Barton & Mackin, 2012).



Qualitative Data Collection

→ We will be gaining approval from IRB before any data is collected.

Interviews

- General One-on-One Interview with Juvenile Offenders
 - Questions geared towards positive and negative perceptions and experiences of juvenile offenders in working with probation officers from the sample.
 - Questions focused on juvenile offenders experiences with strength-based programs.
 - Questions exploring juveniles perceptions on improving programs within probation at detention centers.



Qualitative Data Collection cont.

Example of Interview Questions:

1. What do you feel your probation officer focuses on in your supervision?
2. What are some needs that your probation is and is not meeting?
3. What are your perceptions of working with a probation officer?
4. How do you feel your strengths are being recognized by your probation officer?
5. How would you describe your current probation program?
6. What changes would you recommend to improve the probation program?



Qualitative Data Collection cont.

Reviewing Documents

- Reviewing Documentation Utilized and Written by Probation Officers
 - Document Analysis of probation officers case notes.
 - Reviewing policies where probation officers work to identify values and beliefs used in practice.
 - Reviewing the agency process and programs within probation and their efforts in meeting juvenile offender needs.



Qualitative Data Analysis

Transcription

- Researchers will transcribe interviews verbatim with use of audio-recording
- Establishing General Rules for Analysis
 - Reading through transcripts and data over an extended period of time in order to avoid missing patterns and themes in data.
 - Transcripts will be reviewed by several outside researchers and assistants.
 - Maintain a journal to record feelings and perceptions during interviews to identify possible bias.



Qualitative Data Analysis cont.

Coding

- First-Level Coding: Concrete Ideas
 - Assigning meaning to the data to create information categories appearing in the data relevant to the research question.
 - Limited Categories of Information with Coding Assignments
 1. Negative Perceptions (NP)
 2. Positive Perceptions (PP)
 3. Improvement of Probation Program (IPP)
- Second-Level Coding: Interpretation
 - Comparing categories to identify relationships and find patterns and themes within the data.
 - ❖ Example: Positive and negative perceptions impacting possible improvements to probation programs
 - Interpreting and assessing the trustworthiness of data



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