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ABSTRACT
        With the recent trend towards diversionary projects
for juvenile law offenders, various therapeutic residential and
outreach models have been introduced. It was hypothesized that there
are family characteristics which are related to high incidences of
continued delinquent behavior, and that males from single parent,
low-income families will be the most likely to re-enter the juvenile
justice system. It was further hypothesized that there are other
salient variables in diversionary strategies which can serve to
mediate the relationship between family characteristics and
recidivism. Subjects were 53 families referred to a diversionary
project utilizing a short-term behavioral family intervention
approach. Data on families were collected, along with recidivism data
from court records. Post-evaluation data were collected after
termination of therapy. Both family and process variables proved
important in understanding juvenile recidivism. More attention needs
to be directed toward single parent families; smaller families tend
to have higher recidivism rates than larger families; and family
counseling tends to be the most effective method of lowering
recidivism. (Author/BMW)

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ACQUISITIONS

Predictors of Recidivism in Juvenile Delinquents Participating

in a Family Counseling Program[1]

Karen Jenkins, Anne Kazak and Michael Rosmann[2]

Juvenile delinquency has long been identified as a major
social problem and has received a substantial amount of research
attention in recent decades. Antecedents of delinquent behavior
have been the focus of most of the psychological and sociological
literature to date. For example, Glueck and Glueck (1950)
comprehensively studies a large number of family background
characteristics and Clowden and Placht (1967) similarly pointed
to the important role of family characteristics in describing
juvenile delinquency. Ganzer and Sarason (1975) suggested that
most juvenile delinquents are from broken, low-income homes,
concurring with Martin, Clominger and Guze (1978) who pointed
to the important role of familial tendencies towards criminality
in understanding delinquency. While these and other studies
(c.f. Willie, 1967) have revealed family background and
socioeconomic variables relevant to an understanding of youths'
criminal behaviors, there is a need for a more comprehensive
approach to delinquency, focusing on how we can best rehabilitate
juveniles who have entered the criminal justice system.

With the recent trend towards diversionary projects for
juvenile law offenders, various therapeutic residential and
outreach models have been introduced in the treatment of
juvenile delinquents. Evaluations of these programs have not
kept pace with the swift growth of alternative projects. There
is a pressing need for program evaluation and research which
aims to combine our knowledge of etiology of delinquency with
successful therapeutic interventions and post-intervention
adjustment level of program participants.

While the outcomes of interventions at the family level
are often considered to be inconclusive (DeWitt,1978;Well,
Dilkes & Burckhardt, 1976), it has been shown that therapy with
families of juvenile law offenders has proven to be a successful
deterrent to continued criminal behavior. Shostak and Rosmann
(1977) found that a short-term behavioral family therapy approach

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was more effective as a treatment for juvenile delinquents
than was an individual intervention. Similarly, Alexander
and Parsons (1973) compared the effects of short-term
behavioral family treatment with other types of family therapy
and with a no-treatment control group. They found the family
behavioral intervention to be most effective, resulting in
significant changes in both family interaction patterns and
in reduced rates of recidivism. Klein, Alexander and Parsons
(1977) found that short-term behaviorally oriented family
therapy was effective in both primary and secondary prevention
of juvenile delinquency. They found a significant decrease
in the recidivism rates of the identified delinquents (secondary
prevention) as well as fewer initial court contacts in the
siblings of the identified delinquents (primary prevention).
This suggests that the efficacy of family therapy is built
upon long-term behavioral changes which are maintained and
transmitted through the entire family system.

While family therapy, particularly short-term behaviorally
oriented family therapy, has proven to be an effective interven-
tion with juvenile delinquents, there is a need for research
which utilizes clear and meaningful dependent variables. Since
our ultimate goal is to keep juveniles out of the juvenile
justice system, recidivism should be expanded as a dependent
measure. Intervention may change family interaction patterns
or may alter the families' orientation toward the problem,
but if high rates of post-intervention recidivism continue
to exist, the interventions have questionable merit in helping
to decrease the incidences of delinquent behavior.

Previous research which relied on recidivism as an outcome
measure has been inconclusive in its ability to predict who
will or will not re-enter the juvenile justice system. Ganzer
and Sarason (1975) found that youths who were younger, had
lower verbal IQ's and sociopathic tendencies were most likely
to recidivise. Martin, Clominger and Guze (1978) related
recidivism to a series of factors such as drug use, homosexuality
and familial criminality while Cowden and Placht (1967) found
that both short and long-term post release adjustment was
related to family background characteristics. There has been
little research done on the recidivism of non-institutionalized
juvenile offenders and no attempts have been made to systematically
relate recidivism to aspects of the actual intervention process.

Recidivism itself is a measure which has been defined
inconsistently in past research. Reppucci and Clingempeel (1978)
outlined several salient criticisms of the existing measures
of recidivism and made cogent recommendations for future
research. They suggested that recidivism be operationally
defined, be supplemented with other measures of adjustment and
be conceptualized and measured as a continuous rather than a
dichotomous variable.

The present study suggests a model for viewing predictors of recidivism in juvenile delinquents unlike any in the existing literature. It is hypothesized that there are family and background characteristics which are related to high incidences of continued delinquent behavior. In accordance with past research, it is hypothesized that males from single parent, low income families will be the most likely to re-enter the juvenile justice system. External social support systems are also hypothesized to affect rates of recidivism. It has been shown in previous research on social networks that structural and functional aspects of social networks are related to adjustment in hospitalized mental patients (Tolsdorf, 1976) and in juvenile delinquents participating in a diversionary project (Kazak, 1978; Garland, 1978). Along with demographic and structural family background characteristics, it is hypothesized that family interaction variables will be important predictors of recidivism. Juveniles of families evidencing low cohesiveness and high conflict should be more likely to recidivise.

In addition to variables related to the family and family background, it is hypothesized that there are other salient variables in diversionary strategies which can serve to mediate the relationship between family characteristics and recidivism. These variables are related to the process and status of family counseling. Therefore, it is suggested that the type of offense precipitating the referral, the nature of the terapy termination, the percentage of sessions that the family keeps and the therapist's rating of family adjustment will be predictors of recidivism. These process variables should provide data on the efficacy of counseling and additionally should suggest changes which can be proposed in therapeutic interventions with juvenile offenders and their families. While some of the family factors can be altered (e.g., family interaction patterns), many of the family background variables are more difficult to change but must be considered in the planning and implementation of diversionary projects for delinquents.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects. Subjects were 53 families referred to the Family Counseling Program (FCP), a diversionary project utilizing a short-term behavioral family intervention approach, located at the University of Virginia. The families were referred to the program by local juvenile courts for juvenile offenses such as incorrigibility and truancy as well as for criminal offenses. The mean age of the referred adolescents was 14.1 years. (Description of the client populations can be found in Table 1).

Procedure. All families participated in an initial intake session during which data on all family members were collected. Recidivism data were obtained from court records. Post-evaluation data were collected from the families after termination

of therapy or refusal of services, controlling for the amount of time since the family's original referral. Recidivism data were collected from 2 to 17 months after termination, with a mean of 6 months.

Measures.

I. Family background data. At the intake session the following data were obtained.

A. Demographic data: 1) age of the referred adolescent; 2) sex of the adolescent; 3) family type (one or two parent families); 4) race; 5) income; 6) residence (urban-within the city of Charlottesville and rural-residing in Albemarle or outlying counties); 7) size of the family.

B. Social network utilization. Information on kin and friends of father, mother and adolescent. For each kin and friend listed, the family member indicated whether or not they sought help from that person. Network utilization scores were obtained by determining the ratio of persons from whom help was sought to the total number of persons listed. A maximum of six network utilization scores were obtained for each family. These were summed to provide a total network utilization score.

C. Interaction data. The Moos Family Environment Scale (1975) was administered to all family members, providing data on five subscales (cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, organization and control) which reflect family interaction patterns.

II. Process Variables.

A. Adjustment. Adjustment of the families was measured in two ways: 1) a rating by the therapist of the families overall adjustment which was obtained by defining adjustment and asking the therapist to describe the family on a 7 point Likert type scale; 2) change scores were obtained for a sample of 25 families which asked the families to report on pre and post measures of changes in frequency, disruption and emotional reaction to target behaviors. These families also provided a self-report of their adjustment. A correlation of .78 was obtained between the rating of adjustment by the therapist and the families perceptions of their adjustment. Similarly, a correlation of .85 was obtained between the therapist rating of adjustment and the family's self-report of changes in problem behavior. Since these correlations were strong, the counselor ratings of adjustment were accepted as measures of adjustment in the results to be described.

B. Other process variables. The type of offense (criminal vs. status) was introduced into the analyses as was the type of referral (voluntary, probation, court-ordered). A ratio of sessions kept to total number of sessions scheduled was calculated in order to assess the family's level of participation in the counseling process. Counseling status was an additional variable, indicating whether the family terminated with or without therapist approval.

III. Dependent Measure. A seven point recidivism index
was constructed, using up-to-date data from the juveniles'
records at the Juvenile Court. An attempt was made to
incorporate some of the suggestions offered by Reppucci
and Clingempeel (1978) in order to develop a more useful
measure of recidivism.   The seven categories were:
1) no recidivism; 2) any offense committed during therapy
only; 3) one status offense or one during counseling and
one after; 4) two status offenses or one criminal offense;
5) two criminal offenses or 3 offenses of any kind; 6) four
or more offenses; and 7) detainment.

RESULTS

Family background variables

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed
in order to determine the interrelationships among the
family background variables and also to ascertain the
relationships of each with recidivism (Table 2). Sex ($r = -.28$,
$p < .023$) and size ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$) were the only family
background variables to correlate significantly with
recidivism, suggesting that adolescents from smaller families,
particularly males, recidivise more often. Although network
utilization did not correlate significantly with recidivism,
it correlated highly with other family background variables.
Greater network utilization was found in rural families
($r = .336$, $p < .007$), white families ($r = .65$, $p < .001$), families
with two parents ($r = .44$, $p < .001$), and families with higher
incomes ($r = .532$, $p < .001$). Sex ($r = .23$, $p < .047$) and age
($r = .26$, $p < .03$) also correlated highly with network
utilization, suggesting that families of older adolescent
girls utilize their networks most fully.

Family Type was found to be related to residence ($r = .421$,
$p < .001$), income ($r = .419$, $p < .001$), race ($r = .40$, $p < .002$),
family size ($r = .32$, p .01) and ratio of sessions kept to
appointments made ($r = .27$, $p < .027$). Single parent families
tended to be black, lived in urban areas and had lower
incomes. Additionally, these families tended to keep fewer
therapy appointments.

The subscales of Moos Family Environment Scale (1975)
were found to be related to recidivism. Adolescents with
high conflict scores tended to recidivise more often ($r = .28$,
$p < .023$) and lower scores on the mother's expressiveness
scale were found to correlate significantly with recidivism
($r = -.25$, $p < .04$). Higher conflict scores in mothers were
found to be significantly related to lower levels of family
adjustment ($r = .25$, $p < .05$).

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Type of offense correlated significantly with race
(r=.29, p < .017), sex (r= -.41, p < .001) and referral
type (r=.39, p < .002). Criminal offenders tended to
be white males who were court-ordered into therapy.

Predicting recidivism

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed
with the recidivism index as the dependent variable.
This analysis was designed to determine the combination
of family background and process variables which best
account for the variance in recidivism. Table 3 presents
the results of this analysis. The strongest predictor
of recidivism was adjustment (measured by therapist
ratings), accounting for 27% of the variance. An additional
21% of the variance was accounted for by offense type.
The next most significant predictor variable was family
conflict as assessed by the adolescent. Other significant
predictors were size of the family, counseling status,
sex and family type. This complete model accounted for
63% of the variance in recidivism. Clients who were most
likely to recidivise had lower rates of adjustment, were
more likely to be criminal rather than status offenders,
had high scores on the conflict subscale of Moos Family
Environment Scale (1975), were from smaller families,
had refused counseling or dropped out prematurely and
tended to be male adolescents from single parent families.

DISCUSSION

The present investigation proposed and offered support
for a novel model of recidivism in juvenile delinquents.
The measure of recidivism used represented a methodological
improvement over measures used previously and is one which
should be utilized in future studies of recidivism. It
was found that both family and process variables were
important in understanding juvenile recidivism. Predictors
of recidivism included family background variables
such as sex, family type, size and family conflict as
assessed by the adolescent's Family Environment Score. These
variables alone, however, when entered in a multiple
regression analysis, accounted for only 32% of the variance.
When the process variables (therapist rating, counseling
status and offender type) were added to the regression,
recidivism was predicted with a much greater amount of the
variance accounted for. This suggests that further studies
of recidivism in juvenile delinquents should not be limited
to purely demographic data nor should therapists ratings and
other characteristics of counseling be utilized exclusively.
A combination approach is most comprehensive and most powerful
in understanding recidivism.

The family background variables which were significant
in predicting recidivism support the notion that single
parent families tend to have greater incidences of juvenile
delinquency, with families of male adolescents and with
low incomes being the ones most likely to reappear in
juvenile court. This indicates that more attention needs
to be directed towards single parent families. These
families tend to be poorer than two parent families
(r=.42, p<.001) introducing an element of complexity into
our understanding of the relationship between family type
and recidivism. It may be that the most effective
interventions would be those which could be aimed at
increasing the economic power of the single parent, a goal
which can best be achieved at the policy level.

Network utilization did not predict recidivism in the
multiple regression analysis. However, there is a trend
in our correlational results which suggests that greater
network utilization is associated with rural, white, two
parent, higher income families, families who are less likely
to experience recidivism. Families whose adolescents are
most likely to recidivise in our sample did not utilize
their networks highly, suggesting that they were not using
all available resources. Past research (Stack, 1974) has
suggested that the concept of social networks is a potent
one and that networks should be critical elements in
describing the overall life situation of families. Future
research should be directed towards understanding and
investigating salient dimensions of networks. Tolsdorf(1976)
has suggested that function and not structure of networks
is the most important dimension to consider in predicting
adjustment. Further research should expand network variables
and look at dimensions such as perceived helpfulness,
degree of network overlap and specific uses made of network
resources. In addition, therapists can help develop the
families' use of network members, thereby guiding the family
in a direction more likely to lead to improved adjustment and
less recidivism.

An unexpected finding in our study was that smaller
families tended to have higher recidivism rates than larger
families. It may be that the presence of siblings provides
more role models and supports for adolescents, particularly
males, when one parent is absent. The fact that larger
families were more successful (recidivised less) also
relates to the research of Klein et al (1977) who suggested
that family level intervention has powerful effects on other
siblings in the system. There may be characteristics of
the family therapy approach which are most suited to
larger systems, although this idea has not been explored.

While background variables are important, the most
powerful predictor of recidivism was found to be the
therapists' rating of adjustment. Therapist rating was
validated in the present investigation by correlating it
with self-report measures of adjustment. The correlation

was substantial, indicating that therapist ratings are predicting a level of adjustment which is clearly congruent with the family's perceptions of adjustment. The fact that this rating of adjustment strongly predicted recidivism is an interesting finding to add to our knowledge of outcome research but needs further specification. Future research efforts need to be directed towards specifying the dimensions of behavior which are being assessed in ratings of adjustment. When this next step is taken, the course of therapy can be understood more clearly. Therapists would have specific goals to be working towards if, for example, family communication clarity or cohesion were found to be the most cogent dimensions related to therapist rating of adjustment.

The present study concluded that those youths who committed criminal offenses were most likely to recidivise. Since many juvenile offenders who are presently committing recurrent criminal offenses initally committed status offenses, programs like the FCP should direct their efforts toward status offenders, as these types of youths are the ones we are most likely to serve successfully.

The fact that we found that counseling tends to be most effective in lowering recidivism when families terminate with the approval of their counselors, suggests that our program has been successful with families who remain in counseling. We need to further explore ways of engaging families of status offenders in family therapy (King, 1978) and combine this outreach approach with our knowledge of background and family variables related to recidivism.

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Table 1

Client Population

Variable	% of sample
Sex	
Males	56.6
Females	43.4
Offender type	
status	75.5
criminal	24.5
Race	
White	79
Black	21
Residence	
Urban	42
Rural	58
Income	
9000	53
9-12000	23
12000	24
Referral type	
voluntary	70
probation	13
court order	17
Parent type	
1 parent	43.4
2 parents	56.6
Sessi s kept (%)	
.75-1.00	50.9
.50 -.75	26.4
.25 -.50	7.5
.00 -.25	15.2
Counseling status	
terminated with approval	43.3
dropped out 3 sessions	26.4
dropped out 3 sessions	15.1
refused	15.2

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Table 2

Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Residence												
2. Income	.513 ***											
3. Race		.379 ***										
4. Sex												
5. famtyp	.423 ***	.419 ***	.397 **									
6. motive												
7. offtyp			.792 *	-.41 ***		** .392						
8. const				-.335 **								
9. age												
10. size		.257 *			.256 *							
11. sesrat						.309 **		.5116 ***				
12. therat		.328 **			-.297 *			-.597 ***			*** .507	
13. recid				.275 *			.424 ***	-.266 *			** -.253	
14. network	.336 **	.523 ***	.652 ***	.233 *	.444 ***				.261 *			

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

Table 3

Multiple Regression Summary

Step	Variable	F_e	P	R^2change	R^2	F	P
1	Therapist rating	15.83	.000	.269	.269	15.83	.000
2	Offender type	16.60	.000	.207	.476	19.09	.000
3	Juvenile Conflict Score	3.74	.060	.044	.520	14.80	.000
4	Size of Family	4.99	.031	.053	.573	13.43	.000
5	Family Type	2.40	.130	.025	.598	11.59	.000
6	Sex of Juvenile	1.41	.243	.014	.612	10.00	.000
7	Counseling Status	1.89	.177	.018	.631	9.04	.000

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