

The Juvenile Justice System: Current Policies and the Need for a Reform

Initial Focus of the Juvenile Justice System

“Progressive era founders of the juvenile court envisioned an institution where the state would act as a kind and just parent”

Restorative School of Thought

- The Juvenile Justice System needs to focus on
- ♦ The preservation of the Juvenile Justice system.
 - ♦ The ineffectiveness of punitive policies.
 - ♦ The effects of incarceration on juveniles.

Research Question

Whether the Juvenile Justice System should be reformed to return to a rehabilitative focus?



VS



Current Focus of the Juvenile Justice System

“In order to prevent future criminal behavior, Juvenile offenders need to be punished and their crimes need to be taken seriously”

Retributive School of Thought

- The juvenile Justice system needs to
- ♦ Focus on the crime, not the age of the offender.
 - ♦ Recognize the importance of holding juveniles accountable for their actions.
 - ♦ Ensure that juveniles know that there are serious consequences for their unlawful behavior.

Hypothesis & Results

FIRST HYPOTHESIS

Juvenile incarceration has serious consequences and increases juvenile trauma.

RESULTS

Juveniles incarcerated face high risks of

- ♦ Suicide, Depression, Sexual and Physical Abuse

SECOND HYPOTHESIS

Juveniles are deserving and appropriate for rehabilitation because of their youthfulness.

RESULTS

- The brain does not reach full maturity until the early-to-mid-20s.
- The parts of the brain that deal with judgment, impulsive behavior, and foresight develop in the 20s rather than in the teen years.
- Juveniles do not have the same physiological means that adults have to control themselves.

THIRD HYPOTHESIS

Rehabilitation is effective at decreasing recidivism.

RESULTS

- Rehabilitation programs can reduce recidivism, by at least 10%, with much larger effects for well-designed programs.
- 95% of offenders that completed SHORTSTOP, a rehabilitative program for first-time juvenile offenders, did not re-offend.

Conclusion

Given that my research showed that

1. Juvenile incarceration has serious negative consequences.
2. Juveniles are appropriate for treatment because they are still developing.
3. Rehabilitation alternatives work.

I conclude that the juvenile justice system should be reformed back to its initial focus of rehabilitation

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