



OJJDP FACT SHEET

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

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Expert Panel Issues Report on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders

by Joseph Foote

Although serious and violent juvenile crime has become a major contributor to rising rates of murder and other serious and violent crimes across the country, information about this extraordinarily important segment of juvenile crime has been scattered and not systematically analyzed.

A ground-breaking report by a team of leading scholars now offers a comprehensive assessment of research-based knowledge about serious and violent juvenile offenders. It tells professionals across the entire criminal and juvenile justice system what is known, what programs have been tried, how well they have performed, and what lessons policymakers and practitioners can draw from them.

The report is a product of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile (SVJ) Offenders. The Study Group project was created to provide information support for jurisdictions implementing OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders. In order to disseminate key findings and recommendations to the justice community, OJJDP will issue a Research Summary of the report in the fall. The full report will be commercially published in November 1997.

The report provides an authoritative discussion of issues surrounding serious and violent juvenile offenders, a population that poses the greatest challenge to policymakers at the State and local levels. It integrates the concept of risk and protective factors with information about intervention and prevention programs. Having this knowledge available in one document will prove invaluable to policymakers and legislators, judges, lawyers, law enforcement personnel, academics, educators, social workers, and researchers.

Study Group

Supported by OJJDP, the Study Group consists of 29 of the premier juvenile justice and criminology researchers in the Nation. Group leaders are Rolf Loeber, Ph.D., Professor of Psychiatry, Psychology, and Epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh, and David P. Farrington, Ph.D., Professor of Psychological Criminology at the University of Cambridge.

The authors focus on both violent and serious personal and property offenders. Violent offenses include homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, arson of an unoccupied dwelling, and kidnaping. Serious offenses include other personal offenses, burglary, motor vehicle theft, theft over \$100, arson, drug trafficking, and extortion. The authors examine overlap between serious and violent juvenile offenders.

New Ground

Although several excellent reports on serious and violent delinquency have appeared in the past few years, none covers the same ground as this one, which systematically links risk and protective factors for violence and serious crime to a wide range of interventions. These interventions range from early childhood to adulthood, from prevention to aftercare for known violent young people, and from home- or school-based approaches to programs in the juvenile justice system.

The team spent 1½ years studying the literature and data and analyzing the current state of knowledge about SVJ offenders. The authors examined hundreds of studies, principally from the United States but including many from Canada, England, Scandinavia, and other countries. They looked at literature on programs at all levels of prevention, from early childhood and pre delinquency to violent behavior in late adolescence and early adulthood.

The information in the report is up to date through early 1997. It is augmented by charts, figures, graphs, tables, and an extensive bibliography.

Conclusions

The authors draw these main conclusions:

- ◆ SVJ offenders are a distinct group of offenders who tend to start early and continue late in their offending.
- ◆ From childhood to adolescence, SVJ offenders tend to develop behavior problems, including aggression, dishonesty, property offenses, and conflict with authority figures.

- ◆ Many potential SVJ offenders below the age of 12 are not routinely processed in juvenile court, and services in the community for such offenders appear unnecessarily fragmented, leading to a lack of public accountability for young potential SVJ offenders.
- ◆ Many known predictors of SVJ offending could be incorporated into screening devices for the early identification of SVJ offenders.
- ◆ It is never too early. Prevention interventions for young children at risk of becoming SVJ offenders are known to be effective and should be implemented at an early age.
- ◆ It is never too late. Interventions and sanctions for known SVJ offenders can reduce their risk of reoffending.
- ◆ Evaluations of interventions often are inadequate and usually do not provide information specifically about changes in the rate of offending by SVJ offenders.
- ◆ An integrated and coordinated program of research is needed on the development and the reduction of SVJ offending.

- ◆ Several key issues about SVJ offenders are unresolved and remain to be addressed through research.

Policy Implications

What lessons can policymakers draw from this landmark study? The authors recommend integration of juvenile justice, child welfare, mental health, and public health-based approaches as the most cost-effective way to reduce SVJ offending. They also advocate more accountability of the juvenile justice, child welfare, and mental health service systems, especially in their work with very young offenders.

For Further Information

Copies of the OJJDP Research Summary on SVJ offenders will be available from OJJDP's Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 800-638-8736. For other questions, please call the Research and Program Development Division, OJJDP, 202-307-5929.

Joseph Foote is a professional writer who has written extensively about criminal justice matters.

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