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SERIOUS JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND SECURE CARE--AN EVALUATION OF
THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES
DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

BY

Richard E. Isralowitz, Ph.D.
Director, Human Services Design Laboratory
and Assistant Professor

Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio

54783

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ABSTRACT

SERIOUS JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND SECURE CARE--AN EVALUATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

This study examines the effects of social and legal variables on the secure care decision-making process for serious juvenile offenders in an urban New England state. This decision process was examined at two levels: (1) caseworkers' decision to refer youths to a centralized youth authority secure care review team (SCRT) for placement consideration; and (2) the SCRT's decision to accept or refuse youths to secure care.

While the findings of this study indicate that secure care decision outcomes at the caseworker level are primarily influenced by youths' legal background, the social variable "family composition" exercises significant impact on decisions, suggesting that caseworkers view single-parent families as less capable than two-parent families of managing youths' serious delinquency problems. Caseworkers are more likely to refer a youth from a single-parent family for secure care placement consideration. The fact that legal variables are the strongest predictors of secure care decision outcomes indicates that appropriate criteria were being used to determine which youths were to be considered for secure care placement.

At the SCRT decision level, there did not appear to be a pattern of decision making based on either social or legal variables. As such, decisions made at this level may be viewed as being idiosyncratic in nature.

Among the study's findings, the issue of chronicity stood out as the primary factor affecting the secure care decision process as well as being a predictor of the scope and violence of offenses. In other words, the more offenses a youth commits the more likely he will eventually commit a violent offense. This finding implies that the issue of serious juvenile delinquency should be examined and dealt with from a broad juvenile justice perspective as opposed to a limited focus on only the secure care process.

SERIOUS JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND SECURE CARE

In the realm of social welfare, the issue of juvenile delinquency is perceived by many elected officials, juvenile justice authorities, members of the general public, and others as being in a state of crisis. Particularly, a facet of juvenile delinquency attracting public attention is that regarding youths who commit acts of violence and/or who are repeat offenders of serious offenses. Numerous states have set up special task forces and study groups to understand this problem, make recommendations, and establish guidelines for appropriately dealing with serious juvenile offenders. Generally, the pervasive attitudes reflected in public statements and reports is that the juvenile delinquency system must be "tightened up" in order to manage this small but difficult group of juvenile delinquents.

In Massachusetts, a state that is often referred to as a model for closing down the network of training schools and substituting community-based care for juvenile offenders, much concern is expressed over whether those youths needing secure care are being properly identified, placed and provided necessary services. Thus, the basic purpose of this study¹ was to examine the issue of identification, i.e., which youths are considered for and placed by the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS) in secure care facilities.

The Study Plan

The focus of this study is on social and legal variables that influence the decision process affecting youths after they have been referred for treatment by the Massachusetts juvenile courts to that state's Department of Youth Services. The specific decision process examined takes place on two levels: (1) first, the DYS regional caseworkers' recommendations that certain youths should be considered for secure placement by the Department's Secure Care Review Team (SCRT); and (2) second, the SCRT's decision to place, or not to place, a youth in a secure care facility.²

The major hypothesis of this study was that when all legal variables (i.e., number of prior DYS recorded offenses, prior offense history--in terms of seriousness of last offense, chronicity or recidivism, and number of violent offenses--detention and secure detention history, history of commitment by juvenile courts to DYS for services, and DYS placement "treatment" history) are controlled, social factors as a group--age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family composition and family stability³--have an effect on DYS regional caseworkers' decision to refer youths to the DYS-SCRT, and on that team's decision to place youths in secure care facilities. Before testing this major hypothesis, however, two replication hypotheses were tested: (1) first, that each social variable has an effect on the decision outcomes made by DYS caseworkers and the SCRT; and (2) second, that each legal variable has an effect on the decision outcomes made by DYS caseworkers and the SCRT.

The data for this study were gathered from Massachusetts DYS case records of youths who had received services any time during the 15-month period, January 1976 to March 1977. One study group consisted of a random sample of cases (N = 80) drawn from the population of youths committed (or referred) to DYS for services by juvenile courts but who had never been considered by the SCRT for secure care. This group represented the DYS "general" population. The other group consisted of all DYS cases (N = 100) referred by caseworkers for secure placement review by the DYS-SCRT and subsequently accepted or refused secure care services. A total of 81 accepted cases, and 19 refused cases were examined. Again, the purpose for these groupings was to compare: (1) the DYS "general" population sample with all youths referred by caseworkers to the SCRT; and (2) those youths accepted for secure care services with those refused this level of services.

Findings

Caseworker Level

At the bivariate level of analysis, the social variables found to be influencing caseworkers' decision to refer youths to the SCRT were: (1) age; (2) ethnicity; and, (3) family composition. The legal variables influencing caseworkers' decision outcomes were: (1) number of DYS recorded offenses; (2) number of violent offenses; (3) number of most serious offenses;⁴ (4) level of seriousness of last offense; (5) number of detentions; (6) number of secure detentions;

(7) number of commitments; and (8) number of placements. While some of the proposed hypotheses for social variables were acceptable (i.e., older youths, black youths, and youths from single-parent families were most likely to be referred by caseworkers to the SCRT), the evidence at this level of analysis pointed to the legal variables as most affecting the referral decision outcomes of caseworkers (see Table 1 for bivariate results).

In order to prove this study's major hypothesis (i.e., when all legal variables are statistically controlled, social variables as a group will still predict DYS caseworkers' decision outcomes), multiple regression statistical analysis was used.⁵ The result of this analysis indicated that social variables do significantly influence caseworkers' decision to refer youths to the SCRT for secure care consideration ($F = 2.6327$; $p < .05$). Thus, at the caseworker level this study's major hypothesis was supported.

The next question, then, was which social variable(s) is the best predictor of decision outcomes when legal variables are statistically controlled. To answer this question, multiple regression was again used. This time, legal variables were allowed to predict as much as they could and then the F test was used to see if the addition of each social variable added significantly to the prediction. Applying this statistical technique, it was found that only family composition was a significant predictor of decision outcome ($F = 5.372$; $p < .05$). (See Table 2.)

It is important to note that age was not a significant predictor here because of its relationship to legal variables.⁶

When social variables were controlled and each legal variable examined, all legal variables were found to be significantly related to caseworkers' decision outcomes. Those legal variables, however, most affecting decision outcome (based on beta scores) were: number of DYS recorded offenses, number of most serious offenses, and the level of seriousness of last offense (see Table 3).

SCRT Level

Applying the same statistical techniques used for the first decision level (i.e., the caseworkers' decision to refer youths to the SCRT), at the bivariate level of analysis, it was found that there were no social variables affecting the SCRT's decision to accept or refuse youths to secure care. On the other hand, only two legal variables--number of detentions and number of secure detentions--significantly affected final disposition outcome at the SCRT level (see Table 4).

Regarding the study's major hypothesis, at the SCRT decision level, when legal variables were controlled social variables did not predict the SCRT's decision to either accept or refuse youths to secure care ($F = 1.0462$; $p > .05$).

When legal variables were controlled and each social variable examined, there was no social variable significantly related to decision

outcome (see Table 5). Conversely, when social variables were controlled and each legal variable examined, no legal variable was related to decision outcome (see Table 6).

Social Policy Implications

The social policy implications derived from this study's data analysis were focused on two key facets of the secure care system: (1) the decisions made by DYS regional caseworkers to refer youths to the DYS-SCRT for secure care consideration, and the SCRT's decision to accept or refuse youths to secure care; and (2) the serious juvenile delinquent.⁷

Decisions Regarding Secure Care

The analytical results (i.e., the multivariate data analysis) of this study point to the DYS regional caseworkers as the principal decision makers in the secure care process. Once the DYS regional office staff has decided that a youth should be referred to the DYS-SCRT, it is highly probable that the youth will be accepted to secure care.

The regional caseworkers' decisions regarding the secure care needs of youths appear to be primarily based upon youths' legal characteristics, i.e., number of DYS recorded offenses, number of most serious offenses, level of seriousness of last offense, number of violent offenses, number of DYS commitments, number of secure

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detentions, number of placements, and number of detentions. This result is as it should be for the secure care decision-making process. Thus, in Massachusetts at the time of this study, the decisions made regarding youths' placement into secure care facilities appear to have been made on the appropriate criteria. If, however, legal variables were secondary in importance to social variables, then this would be a critical index of whether the secure care decision-making process was inappropriately managed. While it is not surprising that seriousness of last offense is among the strongest predictors of decision outcome, it is somewhat surprising that chronicity variables (i.e., number of DYS recorded offenses and number of most serious offenses) are the strongest predictors. This view is taken because chronicity is a problem that occurs over time and thus the juvenile justice system should be able to intervene appropriately to stem the tide of youths' delinquent behavior. In contrast, seriousness of last offense, reflects the culmination of a growing problem in a discrete event which the juvenile justice system can only react to on a crisis basis rather than through procedural services intervention.

Also, this study's data indicate that social factors influence the decisions being made by regional caseworkers. Specifically, family composition, which is the most significantly related social variable, implies that at least at the regional level the view is held by caseworkers that youths' serious juvenile delinquency cannot be managed in single-parent environments and thus the state must impose its parens patriae doctrine.

The major implication of the DYS regional office being the hub of the secure care decision-making process is its greater susceptibility to pressure by the community and juvenile court for having youths sent to secure care facilities. This pressure has been observed in a number of cases presented by regional caseworkers to the SCRT.⁸ At these presentations, regional personnel have on occasion indicated that their decision to refer a youth to the SCRT was influenced by a juvenile court judge's threat to "bind over" the youth to the adult court system unless he is accepted to secure care.

The absence of significant relationships between social and legal variables and the decision to accept or refuse youths to secure care leads one to believe that the SCRT's decision outcomes were idiosyncratic in nature. This finding seems to be consistent with another observation of the SCRT:

There does not seem to be any one factor, or any combination of factors, that can predict which children will be voted in to secure programs by the (SCRT). Presentations varied in completeness and in points of emphasis. Some characteristics which one might see as predictive of a youth's violent propensities (e.g., complete criminal history, description of offenses, and history of violent behavior) were included in the most general and inexplicit fashion. Other characteristics which seemed to have little predictive value for behavior,

compared with their clinical value for treatment (e.g., family history, psychological evaluation) were emphasized in many presentations. If the (SCRT's) voting procedure does screen out those youths who do not need to be incarcerated, it is not clear what characteristics of a youth signal a need for secure care (Linda Smith, "Secure Care Referral Process: A Field Study," Yale Law School, May 1976:30).

While the SCRT's role in deciding whether youths are to receive secure care appears to be secondary when compared with that of the regional caseworker's, the prime purpose of the SCRT is critical to the secure care process and must not be understated. Essentially, the purpose of the SCRT (as well as the DYS central office secure care unit) has been observed as being a bulwark against permitting the secure care system from becoming a dumping ground for youths who are troublesome to communities, courts and DYS regional offices but who are not serious juvenile offenders. The SCRT process is seemingly an effective mechanism for providing regional office staff and caseworkers with specific definition and direction as to which youths will be permitted to secure care. Among the centralized DYS-SCRT's responsibilities which particularly lend structure to the secure care system are: (1) intake control of all youths entering secure care programs, and its ability to protect against hasty and improper decisions; (2) development of standardized rules and regulations around the use and management

of secure care; and (3) development and implementation of standardized policies regarding youths' progress into and through the secure care system.

In sum, the DYS regional office staff appear to be most important in determining whether youths are to receive secure care services. While the SCRT provides a check on the regional selection process, it appears that if measures are necessary for ameliorating the identification, referral and acceptance of youths to secure care, then the focus should be on the regional level where the decisions are actually being made.

Serious Juvenile Delinquency

Regarding serious juvenile delinquency in Massachusetts, the issues of chronicity, violence and the labeling process raise important policy implications.

Among the various legal attributes of the juvenile offenders examined in this study, it appears that chronicity (i.e., the number of DYS recorded offenses and the number of most serious offenses) is a pervasive problem throughout the DYS system. Not only is chronicity highly characteristic of the DYS-SCRT referred population--84 percent of the youths in this group are found to be chronic offenders--but it is also indigenous to a large proportion of the DYS general population--37 percent of those youths committed to DYS but never referred to the SCRT for secure care consideration were found to be chronic offenders. While the extent of this problem questions

the effectiveness of Massachusetts' community-based service effort for juveniles, it has been pointed out by the Harvard Center for Criminal Justice that youths participating in community programs do no worse than those in institutional settings (Coates, 1976).

The relationship between chronicity and secure care may be viewed as the result of the juvenile justice system's inability to curb youths' delinquency at the time of their first penetration of the system. Furthermore, the relationship appears to be reflective of a system geared to crisis intervention. That is to say, the juvenile justice system including the police, probation officers, judges, and youth caseworkers are often only responsive to youths' problems and delinquent behaviors when they reach crisis proportions. This "state of the art" leads one to believe that effort should be directed to a broader assessment of the effectiveness of the juvenile justice process including those DYS service programs whose goals are to deter youths from ending up in secure care.

For many persons, the issue of serious juvenile delinquency is synonymous with juvenile violence. Examining the problem from this perspective (i.e., violent juvenile delinquency) the findings of this study indicate that juvenile violence is highly correlated with chronicity. In other words, youths who commit the most offenses are likely to commit a violent offense. While the statistical results of this study point out that as much as 20 percent of the DYS general population and 63 percent of the DYS-SCRT referred population have

committed at least one violent offense, it is believed that the actual extent of violent juvenile delinquency is disproportionate to the amount of attention given to it and secondary to the problem of chronicity.

In the context of this study and related to the issue of violent delinquency, it is important to briefly note a problem that seems to be endemic throughout the juvenile justice system, namely inappropriate offense labeling and case record entries. In a number of case records examined for this study, it appeared that youths' offense charges were the result of subjective labeling on the part of police and subsequently filtered through the system as permanent case record entries. In more than one instance, for example, youths' offense records reflected charges of assault and battery with a deadly weapon--a violent offense--when in fact the deadly weapon was a shoe, stick, foot, etc. Oftentimes, case records are not thoroughly examined before a youth's disposition is decided. It should be recognized, therefore, that youths may be subjected to juvenile justice processing inconsistent with the exact nature of their offense violation. Furthermore, the "labeling problem" affects research since findings may be misrepresentative of the actual condition of the issues under examination such as violent juvenile delinquency.⁹ In juvenile justice policy terms, consideration should be given to the standardization of offense interpretation, recording and review.

In sum, the findings of this study regarding serious juvenile delinquency point to the issue of chronicity as the principal problem for policy and decision makers to focus on because it is reflective of the efficacy of the juvenile justice system as a whole and its various interrelated parts. While the problem of juvenile violence must not be neglected, the actual extent of this facet of serious juvenile delinquency appears to be overstated, often shadowing basic corrective measures of the juvenile justice system which should be taken up as opposed to the myopic efforts usually adopted for the secure care process.

Summary and Conclusions

The objective of this study was to examine the effect of selected social and legal variables on the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services secure care decision-making process for serious juvenile offenders. The decision process was examined at two levels: (1) first, DYS regional caseworkers' decision to refer youths to the DYS-Secure Care Review Team (SCRT) for secure care consideration; and (2) second, the SCRT's decision to accept or refuse youths to secure care.

While the findings of this study indicate that secure care decision outcomes at the caseworker level are primarily influenced by youths' legal background, the social variable "family composition" suggests that caseworkers view single-parent family environment as

incapable of managing youths' serious delinquency problems thereby necessitating the state's intervention by placing youths in secure care facilities. The fact that legal variables are the strongest predictors of secure care decision outcomes indicates that, at the time of this study, appropriate criteria were being used by the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services Secure Care Review Team to determine which youths were to be placed in secure care facilities.

At the SCRT level, there does not appear to be a pattern of decision making based on either social or legal variables. As such, decisions made at this level may be viewed as idiosyncratic.

Among the study's findings, the issue of chronicity (i.e., number of DYS recorded offenses and youths' violation of 5 or more of the most serious offenses) stands out as the primary factor affecting the DYS secure care decision process, as well as influencing the scope of serious juvenile delinquency including violent offenses. In other words, the more offenses a youth commits, the better are the chances that the additional offenses will be more serious and possibly violent in nature. Basically, it is believed that this finding implies that the issue of serious juvenile delinquency should be examined from a broad juvenile justice perspective as opposed to a limited "crisis" focus on only the secure care process.

TABLE 1^a

SOCIAL AND LEGAL VARIABLES AFFECTING DYS CASEWORKERS' DECISION
TO REFER YOUTHS FOR SECURE CARE PLACEMENT
CONSIDERATION

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>Chi-Sq.</u>	<u>Lambda</u>	<u>Gamma</u>	<u>Tau c</u>
<u>Social:</u> Age as of 3/31/77	8.54**	0.13	0.29	0.19
Age as of First Offense	5.74	--	--	--
Ethnicity	10.42***	0.06	0.17	0.08 ^b
Socioeconomic Status	1.12	--	--	--
Family Composition	7.32**	0.07	0.37	0.20
Family Stability	1.75	--	--	--
<u>Legal:</u> # of DYS Recorded Offenses	53.59***	0.42	0.67	0.59
# of Violent Offenses	38.88***	0.33	0.72	0.47
# of Most Serious Offenses	38.71***	0.40	0.76	0.45
Level of Seriousness of Last Offense	37.96***	0.24	0.71	0.48
# of Detentions	14.68*	0.17	0.33	0.29
# of Secure Detentions	30.86***	0.27	0.49	0.42
# of Commitments	33.01***	0.27	0.47	0.35
# of Placements	22.57***	0.21	0.23	0.20

^aMeasures of association are not reported for independent variables indicating no relationship to caseworkers' decision to refer youths to the SCRT.

^bTau b is reported.

P < .01

** P < .05

* P < .10

Table 2
Multiple Regression Analysis

Social Variable Relationships to the Decision to Refer Youths
to the DYS-SCRT When Legal Variables are Statistically Controlled

	<u>F^a</u>	<u>Significance Level^b</u>	<u>Beta^c</u>	<u>R² Change^d</u>
Family Composition	5.372	p < .05	-0.138	0.026
Age of First Offense	3.472	p > .05	0.123	0.006
Socioeconomic Status	1.409	p > .05	0.070	0.001
Age as of 3/31/77	1.216	p > .05	0.067	0.038
Ethnicity	0.602	p > .05	-0.048	0.017
Family Stability	0.525	p > .05	0.043	0.014

^aThe F score is a test of statistical significance

^bThe multiple regression significance level is set at the .05 level.

^cBeta weights are standardized regression coefficients computed to assess the direct effect of each independent variable in the analysis.

^dR² Change indicates the amount of variation in the dependent variable that can be statistically accounted for by a specific predictor variable.

TABLE 3

Multiple Regression Analysis

Legal Variable Relationships to the Decision to Refer Youths
to the DYS-SCRT When Social Variables are Statistically Controlled

	<u>F^a</u>	<u>Significance Level^b</u>	<u>Beta^c</u>	<u>R²Change^d</u>
Number of DYS Recorded Offenses	45.380	p < .01	0.546	0.20
Number of Most Serious Offenses	45.675	p < .01	0.524	0.20
Seriousness of Last Offense	45.221	p < .01	0.458	0.20
Number of Violent Offenses	23.091	p < .01	0.364	0.12
Number of Commitments	23.474	p < .01	0.351	0.12
Number of Secure Detentions	14.766	p < .01	0.292	0.08
Number of Placements	12.300	p < .01	0.284	0.07
Number of Detentions	9.642	p < .01	0.246	0.05

^aThe F score is a test of statistical significance

^bThe multiple regression significance level is set at the .05 level.

^cBeta weights are standardized regression coefficients computed to assess the direct effect of each independent variable in the analysis.

^d²R Change indicates the amount of variation in the dependent variable that can be statistically accounted for by a specific predictor variable.

TABLE 4^a

SOCIAL AND LEGAL VARIABLES AFFECTING THE DYS-SCRT'S
DECISION TO ACCEPT OR REFUSE YOUTHS TO SECURE CARE

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>Chi-Sq.</u>	<u>Lambda</u>	<u>Gamma</u>	<u>Tau c</u>
Age as of 3/31/77	1.47	--	--	--
Age as of First Offense	3.02	--	--	--
Ethnicity	0.02	--	--	--
Socioeconomic Status	1.17	--	--	--
Family Composition	0.28	--	--	--
Family Stability	0.00	--	--	--
# of DYS Recorded Offenses	0.98	--	--	--
# of Violent Offenses	2.56	--	--	--
# Most Serious Offenses	4.56	--	--	--
Level of Seriousness of Last Offense [•]	3.40	--	--	--
# of Detentions	8.26**	0.0	-0.06	-0.02
# of Secure Detentions	9.69*	0.0	-0.18	-0.09
# of Commitments	4.26	--	--	--
# of Placements	4.73	--	--	--

^a Measures of association are not reported for independent variables indicating no relationship to DYS-SCRT's decision to accept or refuse youths to secure care.

P < .01

**
P < .05

*
P < .10

Multiple Regression Analysis

Social Variable Relationships to the Decision to Accept or Refuse Youths to Secure Care When Legal Variables are Statistically Controlled

	<u>F^a</u>	<u>Significance Level^b</u>	<u>Beta^c</u>	<u>R²Change^d</u>
Socioeconomic Status	2.741	p > .05	0.181	0.020
Family Stability	1.313	p > .05	-0.129	0.002
Age as of 3/31/77	0.853	p > .05	0.105	0.022
Ethnicity	0.547	p > .05	-0.089	0.007
Family Composition	0.390	p > .05	0.068	0.000
Age - First Offense	0.002	p > .05	0.006	0.000

^aThe F score is a test of statistical significance.

^bThe multiple regression significance level is set at the .05 level.

^cBeta weights are standardized regression coefficients computed to assess the direct effect of each independent variable in the analysis.

^d²R Change indicates the amount of variation in the dependent variable that can be statistically accounted for by a specific predictor variable.

TABLE 6

Multiple Regression Analysis

Legal Variable Relationships to the Decision to Accept or Refuse Youths to Secure Care When Social Variables are Statistically Controlled

	<u>F^a</u>	<u>Significance Level^b</u>	<u>Beta^c</u>	<u>R² Change^d</u>
Number of Secure Detentions	2.134	p > .05	0.169	0.023
Seriousness of Last Offense	1.091	p > .05	0.111	0.011
Number of Placements	0.647	p > .05	-0.100	0.007
Number of Detentions	0.581	p > .05	0.095	0.006
Number of Violent Offenses	0.388	p > .05	0.068	0.004
Number of Most Serious Offenses	0.223	p > .05	0.062	0.002
Number of DYS Recorded Offenses	0.010	p > .05	0.014	0.000
Number of Commitments	0.000	p > .05	-0.002	0.000

^aThe F score is a test of statistical significance.

^bThe multiple regression significance level is set at the .05 level.

^cBeta weights are standardized regression coefficients computed to assess the direct effect of each independent variable in the analysis.

^d R² Change indicates the amount of variation in the dependent variable that can be statistically accounted for by a specific predictor variable.

FOOTNOTES

¹This study was supported by the Office of Criminal Justice Education and Training, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

²Despite the lack of research done on these specific levels within the juvenile justice system, certain generalizations and parallels can be drawn from knowledge available on other levels of decision making in the system. Specifically, literature regarding the decision processes involving juvenile detention (e.g., Coates, 1975; Sumner, 1971; Cohen, 1975a; Cohen, 1975b), probation officers' recommendations (e.g., Gross, 1970; Cohn, 1970; Ariessohn, 1972; Cicourel, 1968), and juvenile court judges' dispositions (e.g., Cohen, 1975c; Cohen, 1975d; Scarpetti and Stephenson, 1970; Scarpetti and Stephenson, 1971; Thornberry, 1973; Thomas and Sieverdes, 1975; Terry, 1967; Emerson, 1969; and Short and Nye, 1970) was reviewed in order to develop a conceptual framework and hypotheses relevant to this study's investigation of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services secure care decision-making process for serious juvenile offenders.

³The variable sex (male, female) is not used in this study because there were no females being provided services in DYS secure care facilities at the time this research study was conducted.

⁴This variable was used to determine the repeated violation of the most serious offenses. A total of 89 offenses were arranged in random order and instructions were provided the SCRT to rate each offense on a scale ranging from one to nine, with one being the least serious and nine being the most serious offense. Using the ratings from each SCRT member, a mean score was calculated for each of the 89 offenses. All offenses were then ordered from high to low in terms of the average scores. The most serious offense, non-negligent murder, received an average score of 9 and the least serious offense, obstructing a sidewalk, received an average score of 1.66.

The next step was to group the 89 offenses into five levels of seriousness. The grouping was done by subtracting the lowest mean score (the least serious offense) from the highest mean score (the most serious offense) and dividing the difference by five. In actual numbers this process reflects: $(9 - 1.66) \div 5 = 1.46$. Each level, then, had an interval width of approximately 1.46.

Level 1, the least serious offenses included scores 1.66 (obstructing a sidewalk) to 3.08 (rude and disorderly behavior); Level 2, 3.16 (driving without a license) to 4.58 (escaping from DYS jurisdiction); Level 3, 4.66 (failure of a motorist to stop at a stop sign) to 6.00 (breaking and entering to commit a crime); Level 4, 6.05 (falsely reporting a bomb) to 7.25 (unlawful possession of heroin); and Level 5, 7.66 (possessing a fire bomb) to 9.00 (murder, non-negligent). An offense's mean score determined which level of seriousness it fell into.

⁵To test this study's hypotheses, in terms of multiple regression analysis, the following F ratio equation (written in general form) was used:

$$F = \frac{(R^2_{y.12\dots k_1} - R^2_{y.12\dots k_2}) / (k_1 - k_2)}{(1 - R^2_{y.12\dots k_1}) / (N - k_1 - 1)}$$

where $R^2_{y.12\dots k_1}$ = the squared multiple correlation coefficient for the regression of Y on k_1 variables (the larger coefficient); and $R^2_{y.12\dots k_2}$ = the squared multiple correlation coefficient for the regression of Y on the k_2 variables, where k_2 = the number of independent variables of the smaller R^2 . Calculating R^2 's in this manner and using the F test to evaluate the statistical significance of increments to prediction, as it were, is a powerful method of analysis (Kerlinger and Pedhauzer, 1973:71).

⁶The oldest youths in the DYS system are most likely to have been involved with the greatest amount of delinquency and contact with the juvenile justice system. As the analysis of legal variables shows, they are very strong predictors of decision outcomes. Thus, any social variable closely associated with legal variables is likely to be the strongest predictor, among social variables, of decision outcomes. In other words, when the impact of legal variables on decision outcomes is not statistically controlled for, age seems to reflect the strong influence of those legal variables and consequently overshadows the impact of other social variables.

⁷For purposes of this study, serious juvenile delinquency is defined as: (1) the commitment of those offenses which can be categorized as being of a violent nature, i.e., the various types of homicide, forcible rape and child molesting, armed robbery, aggravated assault which involves an intent to kill or do bodily harm, kidnapping, and arson when it endangers the lives of people; and/or (2) the repeated violation (5 or more times) of offenses which have the potential for causing injury to another person(s). Offenses of this nature are categorized as level 3, 4 and 5 offense types.

⁸The DYS-SCRT meetings were observed from January, 1977 through March, 1977, by the researcher.

⁹While the labeling problem is briefly discussed for purposes of drawing attention to this often neglected issue, the impact of this problem on the major findings of this study is negligible.

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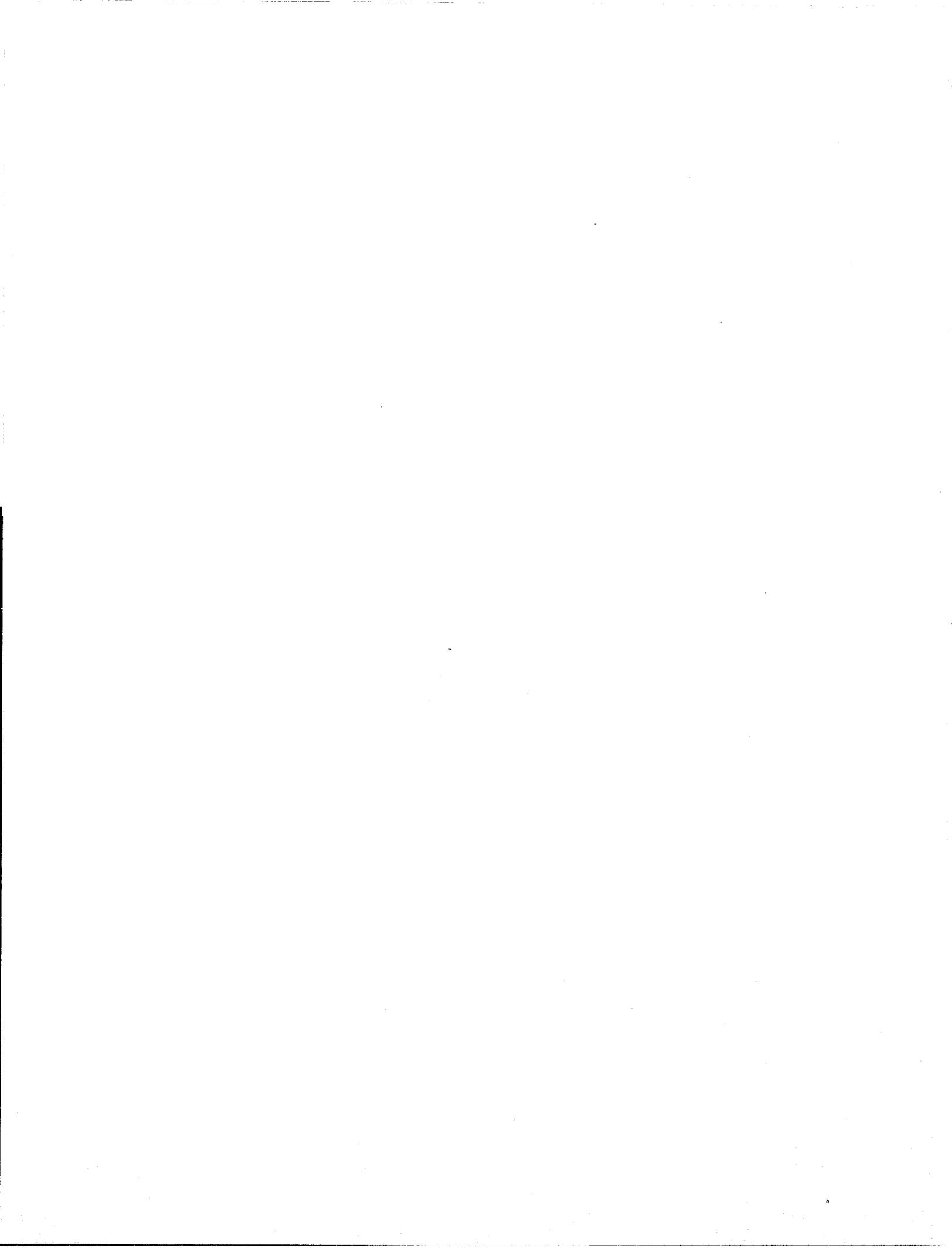
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