

**NATIONAL IMPLICATIONS IN JUVENILE
JUSTICE: The Influence of Juvenile Mentoring
Programs on at Risk Youth**

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ABSTRACT

In 1972 the federal government created the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act that procured funding for various governmental programs to combat the sudden increase in juvenile crime. A provision of this Act set out the creation of mentoring programs to help decrease the juvenile crime rate and dropout rates in secondary schools. This article introduces mentoring programs and explains goals and problems encountered by juvenile justice practitioners. If administered effectively, juvenile mentoring programs can offer a positive influence on a child's life for many years after completion of the program.

Introduction

In the late 1980's and 1990's there was a convergence of two major events in juvenile justice. This was the reduction of government funds to address serious social problems such as crime and health education and the increase of juvenile crime in the United States. There are those that believe the limited governmental resources should be spent on more predictive crime control measures, such as boot camps, and on waiving juveniles to adult court (Jones-Brown, 1997). This explains the explosion of boot camp programs in the 1990's. Others believed that delinquency and juvenile crime could be reduced by self-help programs (i.e. mentoring and volunteerism from the community). In 1972 Congress passed the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) to address the steady increase of violent juvenile crime in the United States. This act addressed the issues of the treatment of juveniles in custody and intervened in developing programs that could prevent juveniles from getting arrested and being funneled into the juvenile justice system. In 1992, twenty years after Congress passed this act, the law was up for reauthorization. Congress and the President reauthorized this act with one major intervention. The act would include a provision for Juvenile Mentoring Programs (JUMP) to be created and funded by the Federal government (JJDP, Part G; amended 1992). JUMP was created to reduce the delinquency and gang involvement rate, improve academic achievement, and reduce the dropout rate (JJDP, Part G). After Congress passed the act, mentoring programs now can be developed that can intervene in the lives of at-risk juveniles. This intervention by role models can offer a positive influence on children with the goals of keeping them in school and decreasing gang involvement.

The purpose of this article is to provide a background on how the mentoring programs were created and a comprehensive overview of what juvenile mentoring is, including its goals and a review of the relevant literature.

Juvenile Mentoring and the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (1972) Amendment of 1992

In 1990 the Federal Government reauthorized the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (1972). This re-authorization was to include separate funding for juvenile mentoring programs. The Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (1972) defines mentoring as a one-on-one relationship that provides guidance to at-risk youth (JJDP, Part G). In this relationship, the adult mentor supports, teaches and counsels the juvenile offender on a regular basis over an extended period of time. In response to the increase in juvenile crime, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) established a wide range of programs to address the increase in juvenile crime.

In Part G of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP), as amended in 1992, established a new delinquency prevention program that includes mentoring to combat the rise in juvenile crime from the early 1990's. This rise indicated that in the early 1990's, approximately 2.7 million juveniles were arrested each year (OJJDP,1998). Of those juveniles that are arrested, more than a third of those were under the age of fifteen years old (OJJDP,1998). The Act produced a response to states that intervention programs for juveniles could ultimately lower the crime rate among that population in the United States. Out of this need for services, the Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP) was established in 1992 through an amendment to the Juvenile Justice

and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 1974 (Public Law 93 415), as amended. The intended goals of the Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP) are to reduce juvenile delinquency and gang participation, to improve academic performance, and to reduce school dropout rates (Jones-Brown, 1997). To achieve these goals, the JUMP program brings together caring and responsible adults that can address the needs of a delinquent juvenile. With a person acting as a role model for the juvenile, the juvenile mentoring program provides this one-on-one mentoring to at-risk juveniles. Included in this legislation was also the requirement that a report be prepared for Congress that describes the current status and progress of the Juvenile Mentoring Program (JJDP Sec. 288 H). By the year 2002, JUMP was involved in attempting to keep more than 9,200 at-risk juveniles in twenty-five states in school and off the streets though this one-on-one mentoring and counseling (Champion, 2002).

What Exactly Is Juvenile Mentoring And What Are Its Goals?

Juvenile mentoring is defined by the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act as “linking at-risk children, particularly children living in high crime areas and children experiencing educational failure, with responsible adults such as law enforcement officers, persons working with local businesses, and adults working for community-based organizations and agencies (JJDP, Part G)”. In this relationship, the adult mentor supports, teaches and counsels the juvenile offender on a regular basis over an extended period of time. Juvenile mentoring programs consist of matching a young offender with an adult resident of the community, who becomes an advisor/mentor of the youth and his or her family. This adult mentor is required to interact socially with the juvenile and assist the juvenile and family with locating other community resources. The mentor will often drive the juvenile to probation office meetings and provide positive interaction such as going to a baseball game or watching a movie. Most juvenile mentoring programs require that the adult undergo training and a background check. This training usually consists of educating the adult mentor on the decision making process the delinquent has engaged in and on referring the juvenile to programs that can help him or her deal with psychological issues.

According to Jones-Brown, this one-on-one interaction of law-abiding members of a community with delinquents or juveniles that are susceptible of becoming delinquent, dropping out of school, or becoming involved in gang activity, is a primary goal of preventing future law-violating behavior (1997). As a juvenile justice strategy, mentoring is an opportunity to provide support to the juvenile where it is missing, particularly in instances of high rates of family disruption. Mentoring makes alternate adult support networks available to “at-risk” juveniles and provides alternate opportunity for intimate relations (Cullen, 1994). These intimate relations developed by the mentor and the juvenile foster a strong bond that will last a long time. Styles and Morrow identified mentoring traits identified by mentors that produce a satisfying relationship between the juvenile and the mentor (1992). These traits identified by Styles and Morrow are that the mentors recognize that the youths are reluctant to trust any adult; the mentors understand that the relationship with a youth would initially be one-directional; and the mentor identifies the youth’s interests and takes them seriously (Styles & Morrow, 1992). Utilizing these traits, as identified by Styles and Morrow, allows the mentor to strengthen

the relationship between the adult and juvenile further achieving the goals set out by the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act of 1972.

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, mentoring is not a new concept. Examples of mentoring can be found as far back as the late 19th century in the United States when the Friendly Visiting Campaign, supported by social charities, enlisted hundreds of middle to upper class women to work with poor communities (Freedman, 1993). These programs were originally created to mimic those of Jane Addams in Chicago at the turn of the century. Congress recognized that mentoring could be beneficial to the rehabilitation of juveniles the effect of this concern allowed for the passage of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 1974, and amended 1992.

The Juvenile Mentoring Program's goal is to reduce juvenile delinquency and gang participation, improve academic performance, and reduce school dropout rates (Jones-Brown, 1997). Programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters is a federation of mentoring agencies that has been providing mentoring to children, especially those in single-parent families, for more than 90 years (Jones-Brown, 1997).

Goals of Juvenile Mentoring

In order to potentially lower the juvenile delinquency rate the mentoring agency must be able to complete numerous goals for a program to be considered successful. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention's 1998 report to Congress, mentors are expected to achieve one or more of several goals with the children.

These include:

1. Providing general guidance;
2. Promoting growth in personal and social responsibilities;
3. Enhancing participation in and abilities to profit from school;
4. Discouraging illegal use of drugs and alcohol, violent behavior, use of dangerous weapons, promiscuous behavior, and other criminal, harmful, or potentially harmful behavior;
5. Discouraging involvement in gang activities; and
6. Encouraging youth to set goals and make plans for the future.

According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report, the juvenile crime rate is on the rise after the juvenile is released from school (2003). Thornberry found the influence of peers and lack of supervision by parents to be strong risk factors in the causes of delinquency (1995). It is not surprising, therefore, that most acts of juvenile delinquency take place at the close of the school day, when opportunities for constructive activities are too often unavailable (Thornberry, 1995). This is why juvenile mentoring can be successful because the positive influence from the adult mentor takes place after school hours allowing for intervention to be addressed at this critical time (Jackson, 2002).

Problems in Mentoring

The Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention offers numerous problems associated with juvenile mentoring programs (OJJDP, 1998). These problems are outlined in their 1998 report to Congress on the successes and problems of these programs. According to the OJJDP, these problems are broken down into the following major categories:

1. Unrealistic project goals,
2. Inadequate staff and volunteer resources,
3. Insufficient community support, and
4. Lack of adequate parental involvement.

The problems of unrealistic project goals and inadequate staff and volunteer resources are identified by the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention as major problems (OJJDP, 1998). The OJJDP found that these mentoring program directors reported that it is extremely difficult to find qualified mentors. Many mentoring programs set recidivism goals that are too difficult to achieve (Jones-Brown, 2002). To combat these problems the OJJDP states that program directors were advised to develop realistic goals in dealing with juveniles and these numerous risk factors. These realistic goals could include measuring behavioral changes rather than recidivism (Jones-Brown, 2002).

The next major problem outlined by the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention is inadequate staff and volunteers. The directors report to OJJDP that they are overworked with office policies and do not have the time to focus on mentoring these juveniles. Another problem outlined is insufficient community support for the program. It is not uncommon for a community to turn its back on programs that involve juvenile offenders. The OJJDP reports that mentoring directors have stated “Everyone in our community wanted the mentoring program, but when it came to providing tangible support, it was a different story” (OJJDP Report to Congress ,1998).

The final problem that is the most important is the lack of parental support for the mentoring program. The research shows that parental involvement is ambiguous at best in determining how much involvement a parent should be. It is not uncommon for a parent that is a current drug user to see that the mentor is taking a surrogate parental role (Phillip, 1996). The parents can often become angry and can sabotage the juvenile’s relationship with the mentor. These problems often mirror those of any other criminal justice related program that is funded by the government. To better understand how to combat these programs we now look at the relevant research in juvenile mentoring.

A Review of the Relevant Literature

A review of the relevant literature seems to focus mainly on finding a magic method to reduce juvenile arrests and adjudications by positive interactions (Jones-Brown, 2002). It also tends to focus on the expansion of the mentoring duties not only to the juvenile but also extending to the immediate family. The research also focuses on to what degree that the family is involved in the mentoring process. In some programs such as JUMP the focus is primarily on the juvenile and the positive interaction between the juvenile and the mentor. The research concludes that the more positive interaction that a

juvenile or the family has with a responsible adult and role model, the more chance the juvenile has of learning how to stay out of the juvenile justice system (Keating et al., 2006).

Utilizing enforcement as a tool for positive change, Kashani et al. details a study of how youth show a lower level of social support and were often withdrawn and showed signs of depression (1989). Most of these delinquents come from families of a low socioeconomic level and receive very little positive support at home, leading them to seek negative reinforcement from peers on the streets (Kashani et al., 1989). The family is another variable that must be addressed for the juvenile to be successful at not engaging in criminal activity. When you combine juvenile and family mentoring as a policy, the results can support reducing delinquency. This offers strong support for mentoring as a juvenile delinquency reducing strategy.

Slicker and Palmer (1993) found a relationship between the effectiveness of young people having adult mentors and decreased participation in certain criminal behaviors of juveniles and school dropout rates. These behaviors can include gang involvement, alcohol and drug use, and dropping out or being truant at school (Slicker and Palmer, 1993). Slicker and Palmer (1993) also cite this transition between mentoring and these risk variables that must be addressed. Slicker and Palmer (1993) found a strong difference in the self-concept of juveniles that were involved in mentoring programs than juveniles that were not involved in these programs. The focus of many of these programs is funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention.

The research also discusses how to execute mentoring programs as a practical matter. As we know, juveniles are more likely to trust or develop a relationship with the mentor if the program is not formally structured and offers flexibility in trust development. However, these juveniles are often subject to legal and extra-legal problems. This can be a factor to the juvenile when they are never subjected to any kind of structured setting. If the parent is a drug and alcohol abuser it is unlikely they were around to wake the child up for school, offer a strong support system, and provide consistency in the child's life. This can also apply to parents that had children at a very young age and the mother constantly must work to make ends meet. Philip, K., & Hendry, L. B. (1996) examines a young person's perception of the mentoring relationship and provides a strong conclusion to this perception. They found that benefits in these relationships are in different realms and that mentoring can work in both formally designed and less formal situations.

Mentoring programs generally focus on the juvenile; however, many programs also focus on the family with the same degree of counsel. The primary idea is that if the juvenile lives in a disorganized household then the whole family would benefit from a positive interaction from the mentor just as much as the juvenile would. Rhodes, J. E., Grossman, J. B., & Resch, N. L. (2000) found that youth who participate in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program generally have improved relationships with parents or guardians and also improved attendance in school when compared to youth who applied to the program but were unable to participate due to lack of mentoring volunteers.

Frecknall and Luks (1992) examined the impressions that parents had on the behavioral impact of their child that was involved in the program. Frecknall et al. assessed numerous variables such as school attendance, grades, getting along with family members, staying out of trouble, and self esteem (1992). Frecknall et al. found that more than half of the juveniles that were surveyed had greatly improved in those variables examined (1992). Frecknall's research stated that there was a positive correlation with

length of time in the mentoring program and success (1992). However Keating et al. pointed out in Frecknall's study that no control group was used that could cause a problem with the study's validity (2002).

Delores Jones-Brown describes that mentoring is not a magic wand solution, however she reports that mentoring programs can be effective in a delinquent juvenile's life (1997). Delores-Jones Brown also states that the success of these programs is due to how the program is originally developed and funded (1997). These mentors must develop on going positive relationships with the at-risk juvenile. According to Delores Jones-Brown these relationships can be cultivated by matching across race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic levels if trust and understanding is well cultivated in the mentor's training.

Dubois et al. reviewed 55 evaluations of the effects of mentoring programs on youth and found that programs with the strongest bond with the juvenile offers the most effectiveness in producing positive outcomes. These researchers were particularly concerned with determining the overall effects of mentoring programs on youths, and with identifying possible reasons for variation in effectiveness, including program structure and implementation, youth characteristics, mentor-mentee relationships, and outcome measures that were utilized (Dubois, 2002). Outcomes were compared and results indicated which factors were significant predictors of program effectiveness. The evaluation method used was a pretest-posttest vs. pretest-posttest design with a comparison group and random assignment (Dubois, 2002). Dubois found that this was not a significant predictor of program effectiveness (Dubois, 2002).

Foster (2001) reviews research done on mentoring programs for youth and makes strong recommendations for strengthening programs in California agencies. He states that the more stringent the program evaluation and better the funding are the two strongest findings in this type of research. Jackson (2002) discusses a study of thirteen delinquent adolescents who took part in time-intensive mentoring relationships with college student volunteers. Parents of the young people reported significant improvement in behavior as a result of these relationships. Teachers gave mixed reviews when it came to the youths' behavior (Jackson, 2002).

The literature seems to reflect that the more interaction that a positive influence has on a juvenile's life, the better the chance of a decline in delinquent behavior. Research also shows that mentoring programs do make a difference in a juvenile's life. It even states that it can assist with lowering delinquency during the time the juvenile is in the program.

Discussion and Conclusions

As we have discussed, there are many factors that need to be taken into account when designing a mentoring program for juveniles. The research concludes that these programs offer a strong bonding relationship with a juvenile and the mentor, but they include a lot of ambiguity of how much involvement the family or parent needs to have in the mentoring program. If the involvement is solely focused on the juvenile there is a strong possibility that the family will be alienated from the process. However, if the family is too strong a factor in the mentoring process, this could cause the juvenile to feel alienated from the mentor. The juvenile might think the mentor is no more than an extension of the parents. This extension could effect how honest the juvenile will be with the mentor.

The limitation to the above research is that these programs have not fully concluded how important the family is when dealing with the juvenile. Some of the aforementioned programs tend to focus on the juvenile and developing a stronger relationship between the juvenile and the mentor. Some of these programs have stated that the family and the juvenile are in need of mentoring at an equal amount. Critics might say that that mentoring the family is a smaller goal; however the juvenile needs to be the major focus. As the literature has stated the family must be included in the mentoring process: the only question is, to what degree? The next limitation to the research conducted on juvenile mentoring is that further research needs to be conducted on a mentoring program that extends beyond the probationary time to measure the recidivism rate. If the juvenile completes the court ordered probationary period and the program and funding are cut, what is it that we are teaching the juvenile about trust?

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