Honors Layperson Summary and Proposal:

Juvenile Corrections

And

Developing Programs to Reduce Recidivism

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In the United States one of the prominent resources are the children, the future of the society depends on the younger generation to become the future, teachers, community organizers, business leaders, care givers, employers, problems solvers, government officials and law enforcement providers, as well as becoming the next generation of productive parents. The expectations and demands placed on juveniles in the United States require the governing generation to nurture and guide the juveniles through the societies values, morals and social issues. Each generation is forced to manage diverse social issues as juveniles, family units, and neighborhoods, as well as a greater society. As each individual, generation and environment overlap it creates layers of strain caused by “relationships in which others are not treating the individual as he or she would like to be treated” or are persons who are “experiencing an event or condition that is usually disliked by members of his or her group,” as well as strain could be the “events or conditions that are disliked by the people who are experiencing them” (Agnew, 2001, p. 319-320). The layers of strain can build a foundation of juvenile delinquency, which is the “single or multiple acts that violate the law by persons who are minors, generally under the age of eighteen,” and are thought to involve a “spectrum of disruptive behaviors, most often aggressive, that have in common transgressions against social norms” (Smith 2008, p. 5). Acts of juvenile delinquency creates a new set of distinctive terms for the juvenile offender, which differentiates them from adults, for example; “juveniles are not arrested they are detained, juveniles are not sentenced they are adjudicated and they do not plead guilty, but plead true or false to accusations” (Ramsay, 2010, p. 37). There are more considerations for juveniles such as, the offenses of a juvenile can range from status offenses, such as drinking alcohol under the age of twenty-one to violent adult crimes such as murder. Consequently, a juvenile can face a range
of social issues from peer pressure while in school to cyber-bullying on the internet or parental restrictions with in the home to being detained in a juvenile detention facility. The variations occur due to the strain and decision making skills of the juvenile and the physical and social environment in which the juvenile is living and spending their time. The variations in juvenile behavior provides the framework in which to view the structural issues of family units and neighborhoods, for example family units can be made up to single or dual parents households and multigenerational households, while neighborhoods can vary in proximity to urban business centers, be encumbered by economic fluctuations and inequalities and have degrees of racial diversity. The framework of the family units and neighborhoods require the greater society to contend with three issues of juvenile delinquency; the results of the decisions made by juveniles, the state of the family unit and neighborhoods in which the juveniles lived and carried out their delinquent acts, as well as deciding how to punish juveniles for their delinquent behavior and acts. This complex structure of individuals, relationships and environment reflect the delicate balance and vital importance of creating a support system for individual juvenile delinquents, their burdened families and the strained community in which they are living. By addressing the issues of the entire complex structure and not just the individual juvenile delinquent, the greater society will benefit from a more productive individual that can interact with their family and community in a constructive manner.

The complex structure of individuals, relationships and environments which generate juvenile delinquency are defined by three factors; strain, sources of strain and the characteristics of the environment. In order to effectively treat a juvenile delinquent and reduce recidivism there needs to be network of programs, which address the individual’s delinquent behavior, the family structure and events in which the juvenile came from, as well as the community that the
juvenile will be returning too. An effective juvenile corrections program needs to be built on a strong foundation of sociological and criminological theory, which addresses the three factors of juvenile delinquency, as well as provides ongoing psychological counseling and support for the juvenile after their release. For example, Krisberg (1993) suggests the key components of a successful juvenile offenders program requires, “continuous case management, careful emphasis on re-integration and reentry services, opportunities for youth achievement and program decision making, clear and consistent consequences for misconduct and a diversity of forms of family and individual counseling matched to and individual adolescent needs” (p. 143). However, in order to create a successful juvenile corrections program one needs to identify key risk factors within the juvenile, the family and the environment, then the risks need to be assessed and classified. The purpose of these steps are to “guide and structure decision making” pertaining to sentencing, “reduce bias by eliminating extralegal factors, such as race and gender,” clearly identify “higher-risk offenders” and “manage the offender in a more efficient manner” as far as assigning caseloads in organizations with scarce resources (Latessa, 2014, p. 30). A comprehensive juvenile corrections program can be constructed when defining, analyzing and utilizing the sociological theories of Robert Agnew’s General Strain Theory, Ronald Akers Sources of Strain and ultimately relating strain to environment by analyzing Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay’s Juvenile Delinquency in Urban Areas: Social Disorganization Theory, which was later redefined and expanded on by Robert Sampson and Byron Groves, which was referred to as Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social Disorganization Theory. The preceding theories of juvenile delinquency lead to the necessary next step of assessing and classifying risk factors according to those theories, the final step is to provide comprehensive and ongoing counseling to the juvenile and their family. In order to create a successful juvenile corrections program there needs to be
comparison analysis completed on presently successful and unsuccessful juvenile corrections programs and how they address the sociological and criminological theories and risk factors. Ultimately, the goal would be to identify the key factors and best practices utilized in maintaining a successful juvenile corrections program.

There are two specific theories, which address the root conditions of “at-Risk” youth, first is strain theory which is defined by Robert Agnew’s (1992) general strain theory and Ronald Akers (2000) subsequent “sources of strain” theory (Inderbitzin, 2013, p. 153). Second, is the social disorganization theory developed by Shaw and McKay as early as 1940, then modified by Sampson and Groves in 1993. The elements of these two theories explain, how juveniles become “at-risk” youth and remain in the same cycle, if the appropriate actions in the corrections process are not utilized. There are direct connections between criminological theories, causes of juvenile delinquency and deriving a successful juvenile corrections program from exploring those connections. Successful juvenile corrections programs demand a commitment toward creating a series of processes which intentionally establish psychological and social connections, create personal discipline, develop decision making skills, build life skills and provide daily mental health support with incarcerated juveniles, where there was none before. There are two types of juvenile corrections approaches traditional militaristic approach and the treatment therapeutic approach, both with positive and negative results, however there are two successful juvenile corrections programs which combine these approaches called the STAR (Sheriff Training And Respect) program based in Florida and the Missouri juvenile detention approach based in Missouri. By examining strain and social disorganization theory the connections to a successful juvenile corrections program will be revealed.
The root conditions of juvenile delinquency which are stated in the STAR program are: poverty, family factors, environment, media influence and declining social morality. These root conditions contribute to the criminal activity in a juvenile’s environment, which are called “neighborhood factors,” and they are; gang activity, illicit drug networks, high levels of transience and lack of informal support (STAR program, 2007). The root conditions of juvenile delinquency and neighborhood factors can be explained through strain theory and social disorganization theory. First, Robert Agnew’s general strain theory explains crime and delinquency by focusing on an individual’s close social environment, through three events; “the failure to achieve positively valued goals, the removal of positive stimuli and the presentation of negative stimuli” (Inderbitzin, 2013, p. 153). These three events define the first two root causes of juvenile delinquency stated by the STAR program; poverty and family factors. For example, if a juvenile lives in a home where there is a constant struggle to meet basic needs, such as food and shelter then they will feel they have failed financially to achieve positively valued goals of our society, which will increase their frustration (Folk, 1996, p. 277). In comparison, if the same juvenile is removed from a positively valued stimuli, through the process of divorce, then they are likely to experience disappointment, frustration and anger (Coltrane, 2003, p. 363). Then if the third event occurs of the presentation of negative stimuli, through a bad teacher experience, new step parent or drug use, then the feelings of frustration are likely to escalate to levels of delinquency.

Robert Agnew’s general strain theory was expanded by Ronald Akers who focused on the sources of strain; like the gap in expectations of achieving a goal and the reality of the results, due to unavoidable circumstances or blocked opportunities. Akers claims that these failed goals or gaps in expectations lead to “disappointment, dissolution, resentment and anger”
(Siegal, 2014, p. 105). A few examples of the Akers sources of strain would be if a juvenile plans to graduate high school and ends up becoming a parent or if a juvenile was planning on becoming the first in their family to attend college (because of good grades and motivation), but they are forced to forfeit the opportunity because they cannot afford to pay for the college education. Both of these examples of sources of strain lead to a gap in expectations, which Akers claims begins a cycle of dissolution, resentment and anger that increases until the juvenile finds relief in committing delinquent acts. Additionally, family factors such as divorce followed by single parenting are directly correlated to an increase in juvenile delinquency (Folk, 1996, p. 278).

However, the final three root conditions of juvenile delinquency stated by the STAR program are, “environment, media influence and declining social morality” (STAR program, 2007). These root causes are reflected in Shaw and McKay’s social disorganization theory and Sampson and Groves expanded social disorganization theory. In Shaw and McKay’s social disorganization theory they utilized crime mapping of urban areas of convicted juveniles and discovered that juvenile delinquency was consistent across five distinctive zones. These zones were derived from concentric circles surrounding urban areas, where the center was the central business district followed by zones of industry and transition which were the highest concentrations of juvenile delinquency, all the way out to zone five and rural areas with the least amount of juvenile delinquency. Shaw and McKay explained zone two which was the zone with the most convicted juvenile delinquents by containing three specific characteristics; “poverty, high rates of turnover and racial and ethnic heterogeneity” (Inderbitzin, 2013, p. 205). These three environmental characteristics describe and explain the atmosphere in which the juvenile delinquent was living under. The environment and the declining social morality of the juvenile
were two the root conditions of juvenile delinquents. Examples of how environment can effect a juvenile would be living in an area with wide spread poverty would change a juvenile perspective on who and what they could become in life, while if they lived amongst illicit drug networks and other broken families they would be victims of declining social morality. Sampson and groves expanded on the social disorganization theory by adding characteristics of; “low socioeconomic status, ethnic heterogeneity, residential mobility, family disruption and urbanization” (Inderbitzin, 2013, p. 208). Ultimately, Sampson and Groves stated that if “juveniles live in such conditions they will also suffer from, lack of supervision, lack of positive networks and lack of participation in organized instruction,” creating the perfect storm for juvenile delinquency (Inderbitzi, 2013, p. 208).

The criminological theories help define juvenile delinquency and build the framework for quality juvenile corrections programs, such as the STAR (Sheriff Training And Respect) program in Polk county Florida, which began in 2006 and was altered from a traditional boot camp program. According to Sheriff Grady Judd, the main goal of the STAR program is to “turn young criminals in to successful productive adults” (STAR program, 2007). The juveniles who are sent to the program are those individuals who have been sentenced to a juvenile lock-up facility and have been referred by the court to participate in the STAR program. Sheriff Judd states, the “components of the STAR program, which make it successful are: (1) incarceration, (2) discipline training through military style, (3) build on faith based composites, (4) weekly juvenile and family counseling, (5) integrate juveniles back into society with a set of values, beliefs and skills, which teaches and allows the juvenile to be productive” (STAR program, 2007). The program begins with 7-9 days of “forming,” which involves the military style of discipline for accomplishing everyday tasks, such as learning to speak to adults with respect,
making a bed, eating with utensils and physical training. Then on to the second stage of 60 days, which is called the “red hat” stage and this incorporates education and psychological counseling. Then stage three is known as the “green hat stage, which last approximately 45 days and the juveniles add vocational training to their regime, along with family counseling. The final phase is graduation to the “gold hat,” once graduated the juvenile will attend an aftercare program for 60 days, which is called “wise guys” and it provides counseling to build parental relationships, teach male responsibility, food preparation and general life skills (Star program, 2007). This program is successful because it addresses the issues of Agnew’s General strain theory by counter acting the strains of lack of achievement and success by rewarding and encouraging the juveniles in their discipline and behavior choices. Agnew’s composite of positive stimuli are added by giving the juveniles positive feedback, attending school and counseling. The juveniles are removed from any negative stimuli in their lives, such as drugs or violence by having to participate in the program for a minimum of 115 days with 60 days of after care. The program addresses Ronald Akers sources of strain by filling in the gaps of expectation and replacing the gaps with personal, emotional, physical and educational successes, through discipline, training and reward. Akers also places emphasis on family factors and the STAR program integrates family counseling and parenting skills to help the family learn and cope with their environment. The STAR program addresses Sampson and Groves social disorganization theory by removing the juvenile from the complex socially disorganized life and placing them in an environment, in which they are taught how to organize, their behavior responses, emotions, and life goals. The STAR program is truly a successful model for which other states should look to reduce juvenile delinquency and recidivism.
The Missouri juvenile detention program takes a slightly different approach to juvenile corrections than the STAR program, by removing the militaristic component and adding a more “homelike” atmosphere by placing the detained juveniles into a college campus dormitory. One of the Missouri approach detention centers is located in the “Rosa Parks center on the William Woods University” which is an especially secure juvenile detention center. However, not so secure that the detained juveniles would be able to escape quite easily, but they do not. This programs philosophy is to confront Agnew’s general strain theory and Aker’s sources of strain by creating a “new family environment” for the detained juveniles to connect with in such a way they learn to change behavior patterns. There are separate dorms for boys and girls and they are on a strict and structured daily schedule of school, chores, education and psychological counseling and behavioral treatment. The dorms are further divided into smaller teams to help support group emotional therapy, as well as team build and leadership build. If a juvenile is feeling stresses or angry the whole group is detained for a “check-in” session immediately to openly work through emotions and behaviors as a group, the goal of “check-ins” are to create a new family for the juvenile, so they can see how a socially organized and emotionally responsible family is organized and successful (Ferrari, 2009). The Missouri approach strives to repair the juvenile emotionally and psychologically, while giving them the tools to use for success outside the program.

The Missouri approach is different from the STAR program, but they both address the criminological theories and issues of Agnew, Akers, Sampson and Groves. Each of the programs goals focus on returning a successful and productive juvenile back into society, but choose very different paths to attain the same goal. The programs are successful because they confront the individual and their previous living environment, while building their education,
emotional health and life skills. These programs are excellent examples how states can reduce juvenile delinquency and create mentally and emotionally strong juveniles who are ready to tackle their futures with success.
Works Cited


