

EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION WITH INCARCERATED YOUTH: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF THE SB 1095 PROGRAM.

Laura Ochoa

Mentor: Wendell Callahan, Ph.D.

The purpose of the San Diego County SB1095 program is to serve high-risk youth in education, job training, and community service as they transition from the San Diego County Juvenile Hall, Juvenile Ranch Facility, or the Juvenile Correction Center. The present article focuses on the attendance and recidivism indicators, which are both components of the ongoing multimeasure SB1095 program evaluation. The SB1095 evaluation components are conducted at various points during the student's entry, participation, and exit of the program. Evaluation components include measures of each youth's family, school, and community functioning. Program effectiveness will be evaluated based on the improvement the students demonstrate on these indicators.

It would be easy to say that children who grow up in low socioeconomic areas, areas of high crime rates, or have a multigenerational delinquent background become delinquents later in life. It is just as easy to say that not every child who comes from a poor family grows up to commit crimes. Further, children who live in areas of high crime rates or have a family background of delinquency may not always be angry and want to retaliate, but rather be motivated by what might hold them back. While the conditions listed above elevate the potential risk of delinquent behavior, there are certainly delinquent youth of high socio-economic status with no family history of delinquency. To be sure, neglect and lack of supervision (both salient factors in the progenesis of delinquent behavior) occur to children irrespective of socio-economic status. It can also be argued with certainty that nearly all cases of delinquency could have been prevented, if the correct steps were taken early in their development to deter the youth from making the wrong choices.

The juvenile justice system in the 1960's through the 1970's developed alternative forms of correction such as counseling, restitution programs, and social work, but unfortunately these alternatives became secondary to help prevent youth violent behavior. The services are typically ordered after the crime had been committed and usually after the child is referred to social services, which at this point it is too late since the youth might have developed a violent behavior pattern that is hard to change (Zigler, 1994). The approach in finding the individual youth that have the potential to just snap and act out is like finding a needle in a haystack, where the haystack is a group of at-risk youth and the needle signifies the youth who will actually commit the violent act (Sprague, 2000). Although the cases of juvenile delinquency are of a small percentage of the entire teenage population, their frequency of occurrence still warrants early intervention programs. Delinquency intervention can be defined as stepping in to making changes to better a situation or prevent what is currently happening or might happen. Early intervention is needed to recognize that there are many different ways to fixing a problem, and finding the way that will be a positive response to whatever those methods of change might be. While not all problems are fixable, and it has been claimed that community intervention research does suffer from specific methodological flaws, the most effective intervention programs are those that are frequent and lengthy (Davis & Baker, 1990). Community intervention planning should include development of personal, interpersonal, cognitive, and affective skills to help individuals to become more competent and effective in life (Davis & Baker, 1990).

Accurate assessment is critical to identify and track participants in an intervention program. Callahan and Kodzic (2003) discussed the importance of ongoing analysis of educational assessment data in educational programs serving delinquent and at-risk youth for identification of student intervention needs as well as for overall program improvement and evaluation. Of course most will consider the generally accepted notion that past or present delinquent behavior is the best predictor of their future behavior. Sprague (2000) discusses three different models of delinquency assessment. First, assessing the frequency, variety, and intensity of those past or present violent behaviors may be a good method for identifying those at-risk. The second model entails examining psychopathology of clinically diagnosed conditions, which may also help identify those who have the potential for violent behavior. Sprague discusses examples of DSM-IV diagnoses such as antisocial personality disorder, conduct disorder, and oppositional defiant disorder (with associated violent behavior). The last model proposed is perhaps consistent with contemporary social psychological theory and focuses primarily on ecological factors. This model views socio-cultural factors such as poverty, abuse, neglect, lack of parental supervision, as well as the availability of drugs, alcohol, and access to weapons as robust correlates of delinquent and violent behavior.

While intervention programs certainly should address the risk factors discuss above, such programs should also be designed to enhance known protective factors vis-à-vis delinquency. Developmental strengths and risks of prospective participants should be carefully examined and addressed by involving youth and their families in well-designed empirically-based character-development and social competence activities such as mentoring, community service and conflict resolution training. Perhaps this approach was best summarized by Zigler (1994), who wrote:

“...Provide various services including health care, parent support, and education, and help in linking parents with community resources. ... Many studies suggest that these programs, by helping parents to understand and fulfill their children’s physical, social, and cognitive needs, produce lasting improvements in the children’s social competence.”

It should be noted that while there is no standardized approach to creating intervention strategies, most interventions could be classified as either universal or individualized. The universal strategy is applied to everyone in the same manner and degree, to keep problems from emerging. Some examples include school wide discipline plans, conflict resolution and violence prevention skills, and using the most effective, researched-based methods for teaching. The second strategy involved individualized interventions, which are applied one case at a time or to small groups. This intervention approach rapidly becomes labor intensive, intrusive, and costly; especially when used to target youth with more severe delinquency (Sprague, 2000). It is important to differentiate between these two approaches in program development so that the needs of specific populations of at-risk and frankly delinquent youth are appropriately assessed and addressed.

Other programs have been established with the same intent of the San Diego County SB1095 program, to create prevention and early intervention strategies. Each program typically has its own intervention methodology. Programs such as the Seattle Social Development Program provide services that address the ecological risk factors for delinquency, while the Yale Child Welfare Research Program provides childcare, pediatric services, and parent education regarding child development (Zigler, 1994). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to go into more detail of these important intervention programs, it can be noted that even though there is success amongst these projects, it is doubtful to say that these programs or any program will deter all youth from delinquency. Life has many stages and in order for youth to succeed at every stage they must be supported and guided by competent, reliable and effective social support systems.

The San Diego County SB1095 program is targeted at incarcerated youth who have poor role models, peer pressure, and/or mental disabilities that may go undiagnosed due to lack of resources. For those reasons, it is important to recognize and assist those at high-risk and ensure the youths are involved in appropriate after school programs that help decrease adolescent crime. The SB1095 program is not the only one of its kind, as far as helping youth help themselves, but it is unique in that it has strong community ties with theme based school academies, such as the Sports Science and Fine Arts Academies. In these school programs, the curricula are aligned to specific themes (i.e., Sports science or the arts) in order to increase student motivation for academic learning. Increasing academic time on task is a short-term objective linked to the long-term objective of increased school attendance and ultimately high school completion. With the annual current cost of juvenile detention approximately \$33,000, the benefit of increasing school attendance and high school completion rates of recent juvenile offenders is obvious. For example, the cost to house 150 juvenile offenders is approximately \$6 million dollars annually. Completion of a high school diploma can reduce juvenile recidivism in San Diego County by as much as 90 percent (Callahan, 2004; personal communication).

The San Diego County SB1095 program was therefore designed as a comprehensive school-based intervention program to improve the educational outcomes of recently incarcerated youth, thereby reducing their overall juvenile recidivism rates. In this preliminary investigation, it is hypothesized that participants in the SB1095 program will improve school attendance rates and decrease recidivism rates. Long-term evaluation of the SB1095 program will report additional data regarding changes in social and family functioning as well as changes in high school completion rates and pre-post academic gains.

Method

Participants

Participants were 250 high-risk youth of the Juvenile Court and Community Schools in the San Diego County of Education, within the metro area of San Diego, California. Of the total 250 participants, 18 were females and 232 males.

Instruments

SB1095 Evaluation Component: Each individual JCCS student that participates in the SB1095 program has an Evaluation in his or her folder. The SB1095 Evaluation Component is made up of several different parts, which include, student information, student entrance information, family information, probation information (past/present), and exiting information. For the concern of this particular research, I only used the probation information section to determine how many times, if any, each JCCS student re-offended in the 2003-2004 school year.

Attendance Rate Calculations: The attendance rate was calculated through an excel spreadsheet, listing each students total days enrolled and attended. It is calculated by using the total number of days present at school as the numerator, and dividing that by the total number of days enrolled, which is the denominator. The dividend is than multiplied by 100% to the attendance rate, or percentage.

Procedures

It is important to note that this research is of a preliminary investigation of the attendance and recidivism rates of the SB1095 program. The first step in enrolling into the program is to be recruited by probation officer from juvenile hall and/or various camps. Second, each student is then interviewed and assessed within five days of start date, which include academics, criminal history, and family history. Every six months a report is created to show the progress of JCCS students, and then a post-interview is administered prior to release of JCCS students. Finally, a two-year follow up will be done on the success of each JCCS student.

Results

The primary purpose of this research was to examine the overall success of the SB1095 program, but since the results depend on a five-year outcome study, I could only focus on specific components. These specific components were the attendance and recidivism rates for the JCCS students during a one-year period. The bar graph in Figure 1 shows the attendance rate for SB1095 students and Non-SB1095 students in the 2003-2004 school year. The results show 2561 total numbers of days present in school and 2977 total numbers of days enrolled in school, which yields an attendance rate of 86.03% for SB1095 students. Whereas, the results for the Non-SB1095 students show an attendance rate of 77%, showing a decrease in attendance for students whom do not participate in the SB1095 program. The bar graph in Figure 2 shows the recidivism rates for those whom re-offended at least one time, including students in the SB1095 program and Non-SB1095 students for the 2003-2004 school year. The results show a recidivism rate of 23.00% for students in the SB1095 program (percentage based on 6 total number of students that re-offended at least one time, and 26 total students enrolled). Results show a recidivism rate of 33.00% for Non-SB1095 participants (percentage based on 115 total number of students who are Non-SB1095 participants and 38 total number of students whom re-offended).

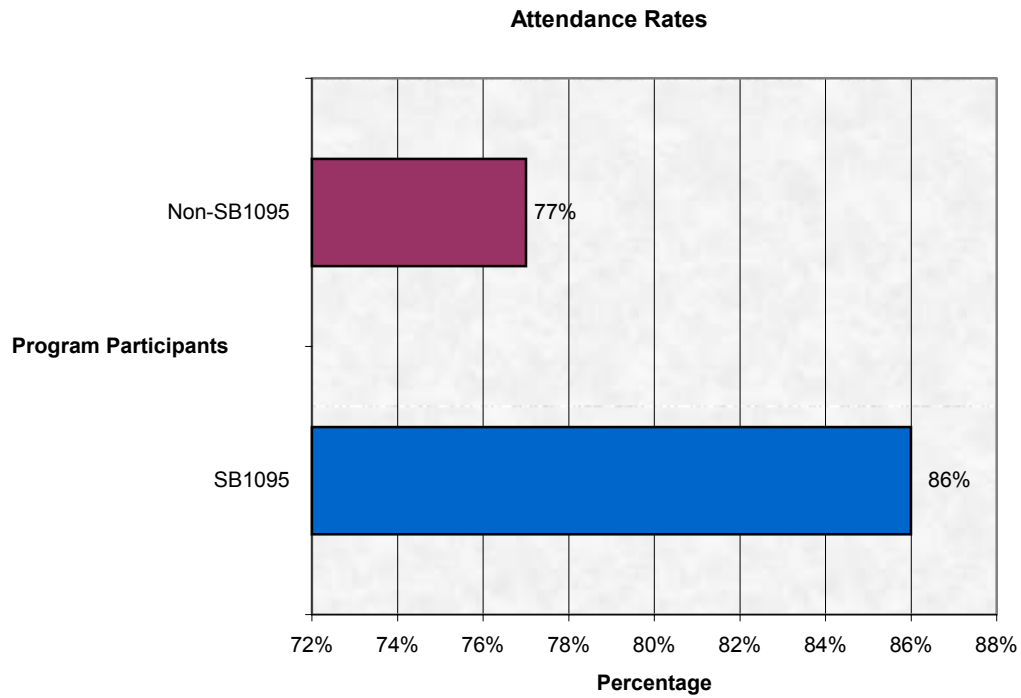


Figure 1: The attendance rates for the SB1095 and Non-SB1095 students in 2003-2004.

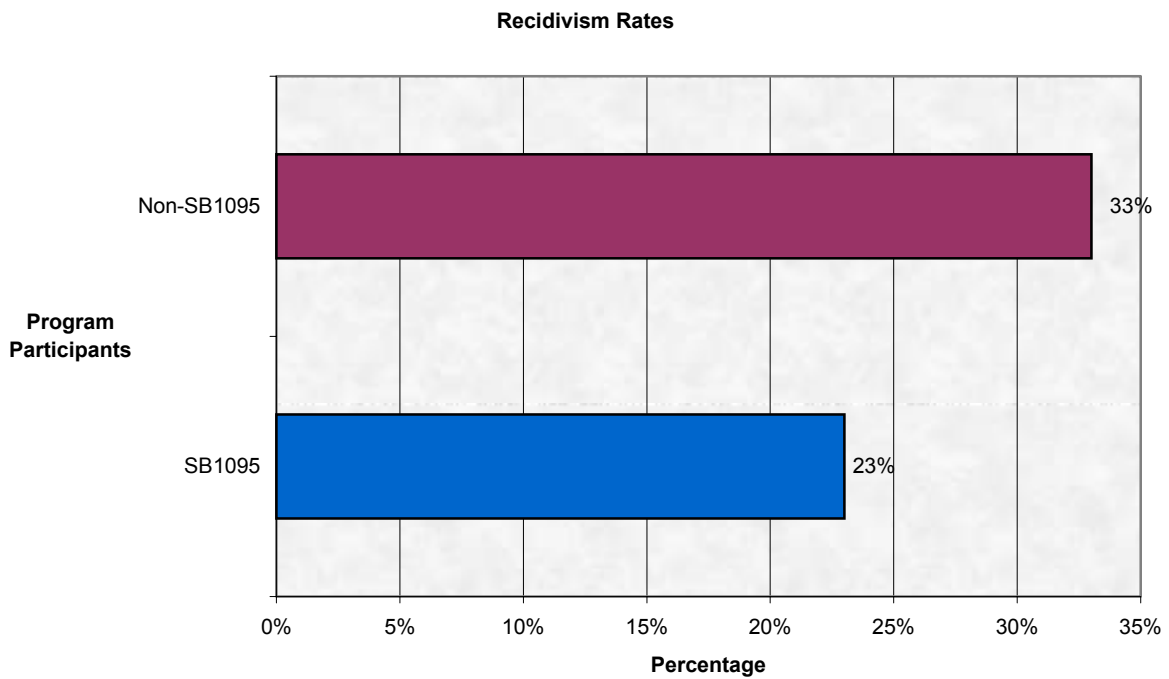


Figure 2: The percent of SB1095 & Non-SB1095 student who re-offended at least one time in 2003-2004.

Discussion

The results supported the hypothesis that there would be an increase in attendance rates, showing the SB1095 program having a 10% improved school attendance rate than Non-SB1095 participants. The results of this study indicate that the SB1095 program improves attendance outcomes due to each uniquely themed academy since it is more specific to what each participant may be better at and enjoy doing. Student's self-motivation and drive could be accountable in showing their performance in attendance, because of themed academies focus on specific interest of the students. The idea that most participants in the program do not like authority figures, taking that away in the classroom allows for teachers to seem more like role models or mentors, which allows each student to enjoy their classes more. Making the students feel accountable for their choices they make in attending classes may also support improved attendance rates. To sum up these findings, a majority of the students that have stayed throughout the program consistently show progress in their attendance rates.

The second hypothesis was also supported; that high-risk youth enrolled in the SB1095 program will re-offend less than those who are not enrolled in the program. The results of this study indicate that those who are Non-SB1095 participants re-offend more often than those who participate in the SB1095 program. This finding related to the fact that SB1095 students attend an 8-hour school day oppose to a 6-hour day, which include 6-hours of instruction and 2-hours of various enrichment courses, providing supervised activities during the most common hours of adolescent crimes, which is approximately 3:00 to 5:00 pm.

The results of this investigation have left some possible solutions and issues that need to be mentioned in order to make some ending points to the research. Zigler (1994) warned that at some point it might become too late to intervene with the youth, because a violent pattern of behavior might have already taken course. The results show that SB1095 students re-offend less than Non-SB1095 students, suggests that early intervention strategies do help juvenile delinquents. While students typically adapt well to interventions such as San Diego County's SB1095 program, Callahan and Kodzic (2003) stress the importance of ongoing data analyses to facilitate tracking of student data for accurate program evaluation and improvement.

Limitations of this particular study are that it is in its first year of preliminary investigation of a five-year grant. Continuation of the present study is underway, as more participants and data are being collected throughout the year. Once completed in five years, the study should provide better knowledge and understanding of the SB1095 program and its participants. With the hope to decrease the recidivism rates and increase attendance rates amongst the SB1095 participants. Ultimately, the research in adolescent delinquency in the field of psychology may provide a better understanding of the benefits of early interventions and identifying those who need help. In addition, the significance of this research is not strictly for the purpose of knowing how often these students attend classes or how many times they might re-offend. Rather, this research demonstrates the students possessive resiliency, could flourish in these kids who have made mistakes in their life. This point, the student's are detained in order to rectify what they can and move on, hopefully, with a better outcome. Therefore, working with this population of students can be difficult, but knowing how they will adapt to society is not only of their concern, but also our concern to assist them in becoming responsible adults.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the TRIO programs I participated throughout my teenage and early adulthood years, which include the Upward Bound Program and the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program. I could not have dedicated myself to my work without the support, guidance, invaluable lessons and resources I have been given. A special thanks to Veronica Bejar for believing in me and always making time to talk, about anything. Also, thanks to Sara Boquin for always returning my many e-mails in a timely manner, and showing nothing but smiles even when she is busy. I would also like to thank my mentor Dr. Wendell Callahan for giving me the chance to be involved in his research and allowing me to gain experience in a similar field such as his. Thank you for giving me advice about certain graduate programs I should look into, and thanks for taking the time to show interest in my goals in life and future career. Special thanks to Patty Jimenez, who also works for Dr. Wendell Callahan, without her I do not think I

could have completed a successful project. Thank you for your sarcasm when you felt it was necessary and the honesty it held, you are a hard worker and you do sit on top of the world.

Including a special thanks to my roommates for being aware of my research goals and summer work, and to my family for continual support in my education and career goals. My family and friends are an inspiration to my life and the motivation that keeps me looking up and ahead. I wish the best of luck to all the scholars in all their choices in graduate school and life.

References

Authors NAME (2004, February). High-Risk Youth Education and Public Safety Program. Paper presented at the cluster meeting of the Imperial County Office of Education, Imperial, Ca.

Baker, J.E. & Davis, James. (1990). Treating Delinquents. *Federal Probation*, 3, 2-89. Retrieved August 20, 2004, from EBSCO database.

Callahan, W. & Kodzic, A. (2003). Disaggregating Standardized Achievement Test Data for a Juvenile Court and Community Schools Program. *Journal of Juvenile Court, Community, and Alternative School Administrators of California*, 16,19-24.

Publication Manual for the American Psychological Association. (5th ed.) (2001). Washington, D.C: APA.

Sprague, Jeffrey & Walker, Hill. (2000). Early Identification and Intervention for Youth with Antisocial and Violent Behavior. *Exceptional Children*, 66, 367-379. Retrieved August 20, 2004, from EBSCO database.

Zigler, Edward. (1994). Early Intervention to Prevent Juvenile Delinquency. *Harvard Mental Health Letter*, 11, 3-5. Retrieved August 20, 2004, from EBSCO database.