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Adverse Childhood Experiences and Effects on Delinquency

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Adverse Childhood Experiences and Effects on Delinquency

by

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Thank you to my parents, Brent and Denise, for years of love and encouragement in reaching my goals. I will forever admire the strength and dedication you both have shown and guided me in times of hopelessness. Your motivation through this degree has shown me support and unconditional love. I could not have finished this degree without you.

Abstract

Youth involved in delinquent acts are seen interacting with the juvenile justice system at an alarming rate. Adverse childhood experiences influence the development of behavior and chances of taking risks. Children who grow up in a household with an unfit parent, substance abuse, or mental health disorders are seen turning to delinquent acts for gratification. This can have a higher chance of poor educational performance, unemployment, increased law enforcement interactions, and long-term mental and physical disabilities. Searching literature consisted of finding external factors and their control on brain development and future adult behaviors. Research was conducted on the school-to-prison pipeline, poverty and economic disadvantages, criminal court interactions, mental health evaluations, and developmental disorders. Challenges addressing gang involvement, incarceration, racial disproportionality, and psycho-legal abilities hinder the chances of succession. Parenting styles influence juvenile behaviors and are to be considered when reviewing adverse childhood experiences in connection with youth delinquency. Child maltreatment and neglect are connected to a future of violent crimes, specifically murder, rape, and sexual offending, stemming from attitudes learned during adolescence and young adulthood. The child welfare system determines the outcome of youths' lives and exposes them to a diverse spread of criminal actions, increasing the chance of involvement.

Keywords: Juvenile justice, adverse childhood experiences, brain development, school-to-prison pipeline, developmental disorders

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Adverse childhood experiences shape behavioral responses through young adulthood and can lead to a life of crime. Youths who experienced a range of maltreatment during their childhood have a higher chance of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system, affecting the outcomes of education, employment, health care, and more during their adult life. Traumatic events that occur in childhood can include experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, or having a family member attempt or die by suicide. The child's environment can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding (CDC, 2024). Growing up in a household with substance abuse and mental health problems or instability can impact the health and well-being of the child and lead to issues regarding not having enough food to eat or unstable housing. This project aims to address adverse childhood experiences in connection to juvenile crime and influence criminal behavior in the future. Factors hindering a child during their development can increase the chances of being involved in the school-to-prison pipeline or continuing a life in poverty.

Research has evolved to explore the development of behavior when affected by external factors and the outcome of these actions. Concentrated poverty is a topic arising in conjunction with juvenile justice, as youth growing up in these neighborhoods are exposed to harsher circumstances. When a child's needs go unmet, they manifest behaviors that disrupt their functioning at home and school. Incarcerating juveniles disrupts existing protective factors and isolates them from their families and support networks, as well as disrupting educational services. Community-based programs are most effective in improving long-term outcomes, including reduced reoffending, improved mental and physical health, strengthened family bonds, and greater skill-building.

Juvenile justice and adverse childhood experiences shape learned behaviors and change the overall outcome of the individual's life. This topic significantly contributes to the organization because the human services field heavily relies on previously developed habits while the brain matures during early adulthood. Human service professionals work with individuals with a past influenced by adverse childhood experiences. Professionals often dissect and evaluate individuals to find patterns in behavior relevant to crime and criminal justice interactions. Forensic behavioral health professionals evaluate actions shown in police interactions and determine reoccurring reactions that influence relationships and life events. Several studies cover the negative consequences juveniles face while involved in the juvenile justice system.

Background

Youth violence is a rising topic stemming from different issues seen in current adult behavior. Youths are guided to a life of crime through gang memberships, parental behavior in the home, and communal problems. The juvenile justice system assists in diverting offenders from criminal court punishments and is based on the idea that youth are more amenable to rehabilitation. The court's primary goals are to maintain public safety, develop skills and rehabilitation, address treatment needs, and successfully reintegrate into the community. Youth encountering the juvenile justice system have co-occurring life difficulties that lead them to cross paths with the law and suffer traumatic impacts on their mental and behavioral well-being.

Adolescents involved with legal proceedings need services ordinarily unavailable to them. Significant educational and mental health needs can block the child from succeeding in daily activities. Primary factors associated with unmet service needs are economic disadvantages such as living on public assistance, lack of health insurance, and transportation problems (White,

2017, p. 63). Race and ethnicity are strong predictors of unmet service needs, limiting minorities' opportunities to access mental health services (White, 2017, p. 64). Studies show significant differences in behavior based on the youths' living situation and offense severity. Youth who received psychological evaluations or lived with relatives or DCS are more likely to obtain treatment services. Research examines youth's mental and behavioral service needs to understand better the complications of providing treatment services (White, 2017, p. 75). These studies analyze youth's treatment use and examine the funding source for treatment services.

Currently, the juvenile justice system's foundation is that youth are responsive to rehabilitation and differ from adults regarding criminal responsibility (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 142). Developmental research recognizes the fundamental differences between adolescent and adult decision-making and the youth's potential for change. The brain is responsive to environmental stimuli (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 142). It highlights the social environment and significant events shaping the brain's responses to risk-taking situations. This behavior continues into adulthood, forcing the individual to stay in specific environmental conditions. Incarceration encompasses the social world and can be an atypical social context.

Youth adjudication and the juvenile justice system are essential to human services because they predict and determine the outcome of adult life. Evaluating the individual's childhood allows the professional an outside view of the elements that make up the person being evaluated. Delinquent behavior can be viewed as a pattern or a habit; at times, these are the only actions an individual performs due to repeated interactions with external factors. Reviewing an adult's background allows the professional to have an insight into a history of abuse or gang involvement. During adolescence, structural and functional changes to the brain underpin

psychosocial development (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 141). These interruptions have implications for adolescent behavior and system responses to crimes.

Statement of the Problem

Youth violence results in deaths, injuries, disability, and long-term health consequences, including mental health problems and increased health risks (World Health Organization, 2023). Violence also impacts cognitive development and opportunities for youth to contribute to their communities. Components increase healthcare, welfare, and criminal justice services costs while decreasing productivity. Minority groups increased, demonstrating a heightened need to provide culturally sensitive services. The effort attempts to prevent their involvement in the criminal justice system. Black youth are less likely to be diverted from the juvenile justice system or be housed in a residential treatment center. Underrepresented youth live in diminished economic and social communities, making them the center of the court's attention. Problems are made worse by abuse and neglect, difficulties in school, and developmental delays. These factors influence the development of long-term mental and physical health problems.

Adolescents cannot consider the consequences of their actions, control their impulses, regulate their emotions, and plan (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 142). The brain is easily emotionally provoked and seeks new sensations. Decisions are propelled by adapting to changes and can be swayed by risky behavior. Attention-seeking propels youth to develop an individualistic identity and explore new opportunities, leading them to take risks. Taking risks in front of peers activates reward centers in the adolescent brain (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 142). The reward sensation triggers the youth to attempt risks that are becoming delinquent. This becomes a part of their normal behavioral development and is carried through to adulthood. Brain regions mature at different

rates, which can affect the development of social skills and decision-making. When the adolescent brain matures into adulthood, growth continues to work on details such as the connection between communication and emotional centers of the brain (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 142). Following this is a decrease in impulsivity and the need to seek attention. The result is decreased risk-taking and a desist from delinquency and criminal behavior. For this reason, juvenile delinquency and adverse childhood experiences are considered adolescent risk-inducing anti-social behavior in adulthood.

Conclusion

Comprehensively, there is a significant importance adverse childhood experiences have on the interaction between characteristics and involvement in the juvenile justice system. These experiences are encountered during crucial parts of brain development and influence future decisions in crime. Youth are living through poverty, increasing the number of gang members and dangerous crimes in the community. Children are seen interacting with school resource officers in impoverished schools, where more referrals are sent to law enforcement.

Prior research has explained the push to rehabilitate juveniles, as their brains are malleable, and behaviors can be changed. Poverty severely hinders a juvenile from living a proactive right as several possibilities are blocking the chance for growth. Children face issues with proper parenting, discipline, lack of resources and preventative care, and economic disadvantages. When collaborating with juvenile defendants, human service professionals can utilize this information to be conscious of the factors influencing the pattern of actions. This targets specific behavior reasons and allows the professional to provide a beneficial intervention. When working with adults, it is essential to remember that previously learned attitudes guide criminal behavior, and there is a significant need for solutions to prevent a cycle.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Connections between juvenile justice and delinquency are exposed to elements made to restrict the youth from succeeding. Implicit factors impact youth in ways that mold and shape future behavior in adulthood. Brain development is rigorously progressing during adolescence, and it absorbs learned actions from the environment around it. These biases are a factor that affects perceptions of the juvenile justice system and are a collection of subconscious feelings, attitudes, and perceptions developed based on previous influences. Youth are influenced by gang involvement, from the school-to-prison pipeline to discipline disparities and long-term membership. Families growing up in impoverished communities experience generational trauma, poor parenting abilities, and participation in the child welfare system. Mental and developmental disorders modify behavioral actions and can lead to psychopathology and issues with treatment or rehabilitation. Legal matters work with delinquents to obtain competency and insanity evaluations to determine legal capabilities and the possibility of civil commitment.

Adverse childhood experiences are traumatic events involving exposure to household dysfunction that occurs before the age of eighteen. These experiences, often referred to as ACEs, can include physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, household substance abuse, and household mental illness. They are correlated with a higher risk of psychological and physical health problems and have been shown to include significant outcomes over a lifetime (Schickedanz et al., 2021, p. 01). Individuals will show greater risk-taking behavior, mental health issues, more significant chronic disease burden, and premature death (Schickedanz et al., 2021, p. 01). The involvement in adversity in childhood can result in a higher likelihood of continuous perpetuating cycles of trauma for one's children when in a parenting role.

Poverty

Intergenerational trauma can significantly influence delinquency among youth, creating a problematic relationship between firsthand experiences and inherited family dynamics. When children are exposed to familial trauma, such as abuse, neglect, or substance abuse, they internalize stressors that can develop into maladaptive coping mechanisms. Traumas can be demonstrated through delinquent behaviors, including aggression, future substance abuse, or criminal activity, to cope with their unresolved emotions and interrupted sense of safety. The cycle of trauma is preserved across generations, and unaddressed trauma increases the likelihood of similar challenges being passed down to the next generation. Addressing generational trauma requires interventions that provide support, therapy, and resources to break the cycle and promote healthier outcomes for at-risk youth.

Intergenerational trauma, the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next, is a significant issue that needs to be addressed. This phenomenon occurs when individuals or communities who have experienced profound suffering pass on the effects of their trauma to their children. The impact of intergenerational trauma can manifest in numerous ways, including through behavioral patterns, mental health issues, and cultural disconnection. It often shapes individuals' views, relationships, and overall well-being, preserving cycles of distress across generations. However, it is crucial to understand that trauma has its consequences once it is transmitted to a new generation, leading to individual vulnerability to further transmission of trauma to subsequent generations. By understanding and addressing generational trauma, we can break the cycle of distress and promote healthier outcomes for at-risk youth.

Human physiology is sensitive during childhood and can respond physically and psychologically to environmental changes (Burke et al., 2021, p. 01). Parents who have experienced childhood distress have a higher risk of having a broad range of parenting practices that range from a lack of sensitivity to abusive behaviors. Parents with psychiatric diagnoses are more critical of their children and less emotionally invested. Parental stress mediates the relationship between maternal childhood maltreatment and behavioral difficulties in children (Burke et al., 2021, p. 02). Parents who encountered adverse childhood experiences during adolescence show a harsher parenting style and have a reduced capacity to self-regulate when managing personal stress and the stress of the child (Burke et al., 2021, p. 02). Parental stress management is a crucial challenge when aiming to improve child outcomes, as this is influenced by the parent's ability to regulate negative emotional states. Relational trauma can also refer directly to patterns of attachment interaction from parent to infant, characterized by conflicting signals, intrusive behaviors, withdrawing or antagonistic behaviors, or a lack of soothing (Isobel et al., 2019, p. 01).

Poor Parenting. When parents are inconsistent with parental responsibilities, children can develop behavioral problems to seek attention, assert independence, or cope with feelings of abandonment. Poor parental role modeling causes problems with appropriate behavior and conflict resolution, contributing to delinquency, as children may mimic or internalize negative patterns they observe at home. Parental interventions target a change in parent-based responses to behavior rather than child-based behavior reduction (Isobel et al., 2019, p. 02). Additionally, a lack of parental supervision and involvement can expose children to risky environments and influences that further encourage delinquent behaviors. Youth with continuous exposure to violence during adolescence have higher levels of reoffending during early adulthood, and this

relationship was pronounced for those with callous, unemotional traits. An important topic in parenting interventions is the concept of acceptability, allowing for potential change in the parent-child relationship (Isobel et al., 2019, p. 02).

Poor parenting practices can significantly contribute to juvenile delinquency, shaping the behavior and development of children in profound ways. When there is a lack of parenting supervision during adolescence, there are signs of problematic behaviors during this stage (Moitra et al., 2017, p. 336). Neglectful or abusive parenting styles, characterized by lack of emotional support, inconsistent discipline, or outright neglect, can leave children feeling unguided and unsupported. Family economics affects children's development by influencing the psychological well-being of parents, resulting in their awareness of and adherence to certain practices (Moitra et al., 2017, p. 339). Poverty-induced family stressors weaken the functioning of the family, and economic deprivation is connected to poor academic achievement among youth. This lack of a nurturing environment can lead to feelings of alienation, low self-esteem, and a propensity towards risky or delinquent behavior as a form of seeking attention or rebellion. Moreover, parents who themselves engage in criminal activities or substance abuse may inadvertently expose their children to negative influences, further exacerbating the likelihood of juvenile delinquency.

Parents who participate in criminal behavior or substance abuse may expose their children to environments where criminal activities are normalized or even encouraged. Permissive parenting lacks strategies to punish children for misbehavior, such as deprivation of material resources, object alienation, and emotional reciprocation (Moitra et al., 2017, p. 343). When economic distress consumes most of the parent's time, there is less time and resources for engagement in better means to improve their children's psychological capacity (Moitra et al.,

2017, p. 343). Lack of supervision due to parental neglect or the absence of positive role models can lead children to engage in risky behaviors or criminal acts as a means of gaining attention or providing support for the family.

Impoverished Parents. Impoverished parents often find themselves struggling when trying to provide for their families. Financial strain can lead to increased stress and anxiety, which may inadvertently affect their children's upbringing. In some cases, the inability to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter can create an environment where children are more susceptible to delinquent behavior. Without adequate support and resources, parents may struggle to instill discipline or be positive examples, leaving their children vulnerable to engaging in delinquent activities as a means of survival. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive social support systems to help alleviate financial burdens and provide resources to strengthen family cohesion and stability.

Children residing in a home with a parent diagnosed with an anxiety disorder are seven times more likely to develop an anxious condition (Baer et al., 2012, p. 347). Parental anxiety determines an excessive or unrealistic worry about life events. Environmental risk factors are associated with future development of generalized anxiety disorder. The quality of the home environment determines the potential for future mental health issues. These social conditions play a role in the origin of psychological distress and are often overlooked. Mothers raising children with low socioeconomic status or internalizing symptoms have a more significant effect on the possibility of passing down an anxiety disorder. Harmful dysfunction causes an absence of situations that would produce them and is caused by an interruption in everyday functioning (Baer et al., 2012, p. 353). Poor parents develop anxiety disorders as a reaction to severe environmental deficits. The relationship between poverty, maternal parenting, stress, and child

behaviors shows a connection to maternal stress, impeding positive parenting in a way that the child may be adversely affected (Baer et al., 2012, p. 352).

Delinquent behavior affects the parent's ability to enforce disciplinary strategies, resulting in inconsistent punishments and less involvement in socialization. Children with early on-set delinquency have a higher chance of committing a violent offense, such as attacking someone with a weapon, murder, rape, or severe threats (Hoeve et al., 2009, p. 752). Problems such as low-income family functioning increase the chances of participation in violence. Non-aggressive behaviors are found in non-persistent adolescent-onset delinquents with ordinary backgrounds (Hoeve et al., 2009, p. 752). Impoverished parents can put responsibility on their children to assist with financial support, which can influence truancy, dropping out of school, and involvement in criminal behavior. These behaviors are increased when poverty is combined with factors such as unemployment, family dysfunction, and informal social control and reach an aggregate level. These actions create a cycle of setbacks, including becoming a high school dropout and long-term unemployment.

Child Welfare System. The child welfare system plays a critical role in addressing delinquency by intervening in situations where children are at risk of engaging in behaviors or in circumstances where the parent is unfit to raise the child. This system incorporates social services, law enforcement, courts, and community organizations that work together to safeguard the well-being of children and promote their healthy development. Often, children who experience neglect, abuse, or unstable family environments are more vulnerable to delinquency due to a lack of parental supervision, inadequate support systems, or exposure to trauma. The child welfare system aims to identify and address underlying issues contributing to delinquent

behavior. By providing support, the system strives to redirect children toward positive outcomes and break cycles of delinquency.

Girls involved in the foster system are at a higher risk than their male counterparts of juvenile justice involvement (Flores et al., 2018, p. 149). Within the welfare system, girls may struggle with unstable living situations or inadequate support networks, aggravating their vulnerability. While in foster care, girls encounter continued trauma, such as sexual, emotional, and physical abuse from caretakers, and limited access to basic needs and necessities such as food and clothing (Flores et al., 2018, p. 150). A stable home allows the juvenile to establish healthy attachments and bonds. Prominent levels of foster care displacement in both quantity and duration increase the likelihood of running away (Flores et al., 2018, p. 150). The lack of permanency and security creates minimal attachment to others and deflates beliefs in conventional values. In the criminal justice system, they often encounter situations that may overlook underlying factors such as trauma or mental health issues, leading to punitive rather than rehabilitative approaches. Addressing the needs of these girls requires a comprehensive understanding of their circumstances and the implementation of programs.

Interventions designed for youth involved in both the juvenile justice and welfare system are often unrecognized because of challenges in sharing information across systems. Youth of color and their families face disparities in the child welfare system and are disproportionately being referred to the system by institutions. These individuals face higher arrest rates and fewer opportunities for diversion and are more likely to be detained or incarcerated. Implicit biases, or subconscious feelings and attitudes, result from using cognitive shortcuts to filter information and fill in data. These biases impact every step, from arrest to sentencing, and determine the outcome of a case.

Gang Involvement

Gang involvement represents a potent factor in juvenile delinquency, drawing vulnerable youth into a culture that often glorifies crime and violence. Young people may join gangs seeking identity, protection, or a sense of belonging, especially when facing instability at home or in their communities. Youth are seen promoting gang affiliations in high schools to convince other students to join. The school-to-prison pipeline impacts impoverished school systems, increasing the number of referrals to the legal system. Gang members can become involved in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, theft, and assault, fueled by peer pressure and the allure of financial gain. Crime rates are increased when students are expelled from school, allowing them time to become involved with criminal activities. Gang affiliation increases the likelihood of involvement in illegal behavior and exposes youth to heightened risks of victimization, arrest, and incarceration. Gangs are difficult to escape, with members committed for their lifetime.

Gangs are diverse in ethnic composition, criminal activities, age of members, propensity towards violence, and stable organization (Feixa et al., 2020, p. 100). The organization has a family dynamic, with the main objectives of solidarity and protection. Gangs change due to direct and indirect factors such as demographic shifts, economic conditions, media influence, and reactions to community policies (Feixa et al., 2020, p. 100). The impact of gangs can derail educational pursuits and disrupt family dynamics, trapping youths in a cycle of crime and incarceration. Organized crime groups have specific cultural practices and outputs that highlight delinquency. Associating with delinquent peers contributes to delinquency, and gang membership composes a unique experience than strictly being involved with peers.

School-to-Prison Pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline is a troubling phenomenon that illustrates how punishing disciplinary measures in schools can funnel students into the criminal justice system. Harsh disciplinary policies, such as zero-tolerance policies and increased police presence in schools, often disproportionately affect students of color and those from low-income families. Instead of addressing underlying issues like poverty, trauma, or learning disabilities, these policies can lead to suspensions, expulsions, and even arrests for minor infractions. Joining a gang exposes the individual to drugs, alcohol, and inappropriate sexual behavior. Affected students may become disengaged from education, increasing their likelihood of dropping out and eventually entering the criminal justice system. Children engaging in gangs face risks around their community and can be influenced when growing up in an area with heavy gang activity. Children growing up in homes lacking support or proper parenting experience unstructured free time, particularly during after-school hours. There is a lack of positive role models and exposure to media that glorifies gang violence. Students removed from supportive school environments are more susceptible to negative communal influences.

Education is one of the strongest predictors of lifetime support, and lack of access to quality education is a frequent constraint in areas of persistent poverty. Inside schools, continuous bullying and aggressive behavior have long-lasting psychological effects on victims, causing school districts to partner with local law enforcement to have police stationed in schools (Owens, 2017, p. 12). Officers must maintain order and safety in a way that a security guard cannot, and they must positively interact with students daily to normalize officers in the eyes of students. This action is aimed at improving police and community relations to normalize officers in the eyes of students. Agents in the criminal justice system who are too contentious in the arrest, prosecution, and sentencing of criminals can reduce the private return to invest in

education (Owens, 2017, p. 12). Youth arrested are less likely to complete high school, and students with certain types of criminal records have limited potential to receive federal grants and loans that reduce the cost of college. School resource officers are more likely to respond to misbehavior by arresting and exposing the youth to legal procedures instead of using in-school discipline (Owens, 2017, p. 12). Incarceration produces long-term effects on youth and reinforces violent behaviors while also limiting employment and housing opportunities. When an arrest does not lead to a conviction, explicit effects impact the student's continuation in school, such as the school refusing to readmit the student (Nance, 2016, p. 321). If the student is readmitted to the school, the student often suffers from emotional trauma, stigma, and embarrassment, leading to increased monitoring by school resource officers and school officials (Nance, 2016, p. 321). Arresting students leads to lower test scores and a higher probability that the student will not graduate from high school.

When a school excludes or expels a student from school, the student loses valuable instructional time, impacting graduation rates and enrollment in higher education. Academic underachievement makes students more likely to be incarcerated at some point in their lives and leads to misbehavior, resulting in a suspension or expulsion from school (Nance, 2016, p. 324). Underachievement makes students more likely to be incarcerated at some point in their lives. Students engage in delinquent behavior because they are frustrated or embarrassed by their inability to complete assignments or learn concepts taught in class (Nance, 2016, p. 324). When students realize the educational process will not assist them, they have fewer reasons to behave and take school seriously or master classroom material (Nance, 2016, p. 325). Negative responses are aggravated in schools serving unsuccessful students, many living in poverty (Nance, 2016, p. 325).

Long-Term Gang Involvement. Long-term gang involvement among juveniles often intertwines with a trajectory of escalating delinquency. Young people who join gangs typically experience a sense of belonging and identity initially, but this affiliation can lead to sustained criminal activities and violence. Over time, gang membership becomes a central part of their social and personal identity, influencing their behaviors and choices. Juveniles engaged in gangs frequently face increased exposure to criminal networks, substance abuse, and risky behaviors, which further perpetuates their involvement in illegal activities. This prolonged association can severely hinder their social development, educational attainment, and overall prospects for a productive future, reinforcing a cycle of delinquency that is challenging to break without targeted intervention and support.

Gang affiliation at an early age can lead to long-term adverse developmental outcomes as gang membership holds across time, place, and demographic subgroups (Dong & Krohn, 2016, p. 01). Individuals with a history of gang involvement experience lower educational achievement, unemployment, economic hardship, and family problems during adulthood (Dong & Krohn, 2016, p. 01). Persistent social and emotional ties to a gang can lead to future perpetration and victimization after distancing themselves. Affiliation can lead to unstructured routine activities and expose individuals to a street-oriented lifestyle. Members will engage in unsupervised activities with friends to hang out where drugs and alcohol are available. Youth members develop a concept of group esteem in place of self-esteem and are placed in group solidarity, where there is reinforcement for self-sustaining cycles (Dong & Krohn, 2016, p. 03). Norms of gangs expect and support aggressive actions when there is belittlement of honor to the membership, and individuals identified with the gang are expected to resort to violent actions to control the situation.

Former members can pursue illegal economic activities on their own, move into another type of criminal association, be incarcerated for a considerable part of their life, die from violence or overdose, or maintain an ordinary lifestyle they avoided in the past (Dong & Krohn, 2016, p. 03). Leaving a gang is more of a process, as significant obstacles are faced when addressing the emotional or social ties to the gang and a maintained routine involving attendance at the same school or residing in the same neighborhood as other members. An essential role gangs play in their members' lives is providing social support, and members need to have continued support from more traditional sources such as parents or stable partners (Dong & Krohn, 2016, p. 14). This reduces the impact of the gang on life chances, and the members will be less likely to experience problematic outcomes. Youth's perception of psychic rewards associated with crime, violence, and irresponsible impulsivity can result in more violent and property offenses over time (Joseph, 2024, p. 1050).

Youths with a history of gang involvement will experience factors pushing towards resistance and eventually resulting in reduced violent offending. Criminal behavior can proliferate socially and in poor neighborhoods due to the lack of formal and informal social controls (Joseph, 2024, p. 1040). The unstructured routine activities of gangs, group dynamics, culture, regular events, and multiple other factors promote behaviors supporting criminal actions against gang members. Members who reach the contemplation and exploration stages are more resistant to their delinquent peers and choose to explore alternative lifestyles that do not involve engagement in aggressive behavior (Joseph, 2024, p. 1051). Pull factors such as association with prosocial peers, encouragement from parents, and involvement in prosocial programs make members more resistant to their delinquent peers (Joseph, 2024, p. 1050).

Criminal Justice Involvement. Juveniles participating in a criminal lifestyle often see their criminal activities intersect with the law, leading them into the authority of the juvenile justice system. Courts must navigate complex issues such as peer pressure, coercion, and the influence of older gang members when resolving cases involving these young offenders. The courts face the challenge of holding youth accountable for their actions while also considering rehabilitation strategies to address the underlying causes of their gang involvement. Gang involvement poses intricate challenges for juvenile courts due to its pervasive influence on young offenders' lives. Courts must review the coercive nature and the pressures juveniles face to conform to criminal norms within their peer groups. Effective collaboration between courts, social services, and community organizations is essential in providing comprehensive support to juveniles to prevent recidivism and promote their successful reintegration into society.

Juvenile courts were designed to act in the best interest of youthful offenders. Still, over time, the system's response to gangs has been centered around policies and practices aimed at suppressing gang activity (Walker & Cesar, 2020, p. 02). This suppression includes increased police patrols, gang intelligence units, multiagency task forces, gang files, and civil injunctions. Juvenile incarceration is a risk factor for future offending and adverse behavioral and mental health outcomes in adulthood. Gang membership can make imposed juvenile sentences more over the top, and the juvenile justice system can expose the youth to additional risks instead of providing protective factors. Juvenile court processes implicate racial and ethnic variations when determining placement outcomes for youth. Black and Latino youth are less likely to be placed in therapeutic settings and are seen being put in reform schools or strictly controlled residential programs (Walker & Cesar, 2020, p. 04). These youth face harsher treatment while involved in legal processes (Walker & Cesar, 2020, p. 02).

Judges perceive gang members as a threat to others, and the risk of reoffending can outweigh the burden on the Department of Corrections. Court decisions view gang members as more blameworthy for their offense, more likely to pose a risk in the community, and consequently deserving of harsher penalties (Walker & Cesar, 2020, p. 16). Judges hold tremendous discretion in a range of legal areas. Judicial discretion spans the entire trial process, beginning with bail decisions and culminating in sentencing since they are there for all legal proceedings (Levinson et al., 2017, p. 73). Bias is seen in perceptions of responsibility, risk of reoffending, and deserved punishment for adolescents when the decision-maker knows the race of the offender. The adultification of black youth contributes to the disproportionate representation of youth who are incarcerated. The consequences of these disparities result in youth in the adult criminal legal system being more susceptible to committing suicide, having psychiatric problems, and recidivating than youth in juvenile facilities (National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, 2022).

Sentencing disparities in juvenile delinquency cases highlight significant inequalities within the criminal justice system. Despite the aim of juvenile courts to rehabilitate rather than punish, disparities based on race, socioeconomic status, and geographical location persist. Effective programs may be geographically inaccessible to minority youth or are designed for white youth, limiting the court's options for rehabilitative services during sentencing. These discrepancies can lead to harsher penalties for marginalized youth compared to their peers, exacerbating cycles of disadvantage and reinforcing systemic inequalities. Minority youth are more likely to suffer harsher consequences at each stage in the decision-making process. Such disparities not only affect individual outcomes but also erode trust in the fairness of the justice system, potentially deterring rehabilitation and increasing recidivism rates.

Mental and Neurodevelopmental Disorders

Neurodevelopmental disorders significantly intersect with juvenile delinquency, influencing both the behaviors of young offenders and the responses of the justice system. Conditions such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and other intellectual disabilities can impact impulse control, social interactions, and decision-making abilities in adolescents. These challenges may lead to behaviors misinterpreted as deliberate misconduct or defiance, potentially resulting in involvement with the juvenile justice system. Antisocial behavior is formed through the complex array of experiences on the expression of neurodevelopmental difficulties. Moreover, the justice system's response to these individuals often lacks understanding of their underlying neurobiological differences, potentially exacerbating their challenges rather than addressing them with appropriate support and intervention.

Psychiatric morbidity, including schizophrenia, depression, personality disorders, and substance abuse, are higher in prison populations than in the general community. Neurodevelopmental disorders are manifestations of a delay in psychological features influenced by maturity and show a general tendency for the impairment to lessen with age (Billstedt et al., 2017, p. 234). Intellectual disabilities impact cognitive functioning and underlying central nervous system dysfunction. This affects the individual's intelligence quotient, and when these disabilities are combined with comorbid illnesses, the person is at risk of being involved in the legal system. Youth with disorders can be life-course-persistent offenders that behave antisocially early in childhood and continue into adulthood. These groups show more aggressive behavior at a youthful age and lower school achievements (Billstedt et al., 2017, p. 234). Intellectual disabilities impact the ability to judge appropriate social behavior, plan future tasks, or learn a new skill (Billstedt et al., 2017, p. 234).

Sex Crimes and Offending. Disorders may contribute to behaviors that lead to sexual misconduct, often misunderstood due to deficits in social cues and boundary recognition. Deficits in impulse control and difficulty understanding the consequences of their actions can further complicate their interactions and decision-making in social contexts. Juvenile sexual offending intertwined with neurodevelopmental disorders poses intricate challenges that necessitate comprehensive understanding and specialized intervention strategies. Child abuse is a risk factor for later offending behavior and is highly prevalent in juveniles who have been sexually offended. Sexual abuse victims can have an increased risk of sexual offending due to modeling their abuser's behavior and developing a positive attitude toward sexual misconduct between children and adults (Boonmann et al., 2016, p. 02). Abuse contributes to deviant psychosexual development, and the relationship between sexual abuse and offending can also be caused indirectly through another variable, such as mental health problems (Boonmann et al., 2016, p. 02).

Childhood abuse is related to numerous mental health disorders, such as substance abuse, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideations, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Juvenile sexual offenders internalize their problems through social isolation or thought disturbances instead of expressing feelings externally. Internalizing mental health problems can be the result of previously existing issues of sexuality or can manifest emotions as a reaction to the perpetration of sexual offenses (Boonmann et al., 2016, p. 06). The role of a pathological family atmosphere, early traumatic sexual experiences, sexual interest, and sexual frustration are emphasized factors that affect the individual's capacity to form secure attachments and develop healthy relationships (Satapathy et al., 2022, p. 467). Experiences of abuse and adversity during childhood create problems with intimacy deficits or insensitive interpersonal relations.

Juveniles who commit a sexual offense lack empathy or remorse for their victims and tend to black their victims for the action. A child who has internalized the victimization experience as usual or pleasurable is more likely to adopt a belief that is favorable to offending and will view sexually abusive acts as less harmful during adulthood (Satapathy et al., 2022, p. 471). Physical aggression in association with anger and substance abuse shows a high prevalence of criminal recidivism, personality disorders, and psychological comorbidity. Adverse childhood experiences and psychopathology in connection with the environment deprive children of encountering situations that promote adaptive functioning (Satapathy et al., 2022, p. 471). A poor parent-child relationship leads to cognitive and affective deficits, which are critical elements in understanding the cause of sexual offending behavior (Satapathy et al., 2022, p. 471). Carrying a history of experiences leaves the individual with an unfulfilled need for closeness or attachment.

The frequency of having at least one psychiatric diagnosis in forensic juvenile cases is between 70 and 80 percent (Friat & Erk, 2022, p. 59). Psychopathological findings show that clinical depression and rates of anxiety were higher in children who sexually abused younger children. At the same time, peer abusers were found to have a higher rate of substance use disorders (Friat & Erk, 2022, p. 59). Children who abuse younger children behave in a more submissive and conformist manner as a reaction to the problems they experience, and peer abusers show more antisocial and extrinsic reactions. Experiences of physical and emotional abuse pave the way for anxiety, depression, psychosomatic disorders, and personality disorders and contribute to the development of psychosis (Friat & Erk, 2022, p. 59). Sexual abuse history should be evaluated under the family sub-dimension, and assessing family income, parental effectiveness, criminal history, and witnessing domestic violence (Friat & Erk, 2022, p. 59). Structure and function within the home determine outcomes surrounding sexual misconduct.

Antisocial Behavior. Mental disorders can significantly influence juvenile sexual offending behaviors, complicating both the interaction and treatment of these offenses. Disorders such as conduct disorder, ADHD, and mood disorders can contribute to impulsivity, poor judgment, and difficulties in regulating emotions, all of which can increase the likelihood of engaging in inappropriate sexual behaviors. Additionally, conditions like autism spectrum disorder can lead to social challenges and misunderstandings of appropriate boundaries, further complicating interactions with others. Juvenile sexual offending linked with mental disorders underscores the intricate relationship between psychological health and behavioral outcomes. Treatment must be tailored to address both the mental health needs and the specific offending behaviors of juveniles, aiming to foster rehabilitation, mitigate risk, and promote positive social functioning.

Personality is formed during adolescence, and disorders can be created from the learned behaviors surrounding the individual. Antisocial behaviors, such as oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder, display anger or irritable moods and non-compliance with social norms (Friat & Erk, 2022, p. 59). Attention deficit- hyperactivity disorder is an extrinsic disorder due to problems in social aspects towards parents and the environment. When there is a conflict with authority, oppositional defiant behaviors and rebellious attitudes against authority figures will stand out (Friaat & Erk, 2022, p. 59). Youths become deceiving, lie frequently, and act aggressively and violently towards individuals in the home, school, or social environments (Friaat & Erk, 2022, p. 60). Reckless behaviors are shown through threatening dangers involving unprotected sexual intercourse and seeking excitement continuously (Friaat & Erk, 2022, p. 60). Individuals who go through this development typically start to conflict with authority and then later display stealthy or obvious antisocial behaviors (Friaat & Erk, 2022, p. 60).

When evaluating the development of these actions, external factors must be considered to review the components surrounding the child. Family dimension, crime history, alcohol or substance abuse, and mental disorders can be detected in factors around the child (Friat & Erk, 2022, p. 60). Youths are conspicuous with their actions and display acts of bullying due to their distinguishing dominative natures. Stealthy youth act on opportunities instead of their personal preference and commit criminal acts calculatingly (Friat & Erk, 2022, p. 60). The lack of romantic relationships can be an indicator of unusual behavior and can be a factor in the formation and recidivism of sexual offenses. Lack of self-control, inconsistency with routines, inability to take responsibility, and unrealistic long-term goals can be signs of possible high-risk sexual offending (Friat & Erk, 2022, p. 61). Children who sexually abuse peers with their friends have the chance to build a relationship with others who have a criminal history to commit offenses together. Juvenile sex offenders will continue to commit repeated sexual acts as adults due to the structure of the offense.

Parental self-control is associated with the quality of the family environment in which the youth grows up and the parenting practices to which the child is exposed (Meldrum et al., 2016, p. 1637). There is a significant relationship between parental self-control and family coherence and conflict, determining the environmental variables for the juvenile. Self-control is a factor in the repeated intergenerational continuity of antisocial behavior (Meldrum et al., 2016, p. 1637). Poor self-discipline is the central cause of antisocial behavior, as intergenerational continuation of delinquency and crime is self-control (Meldrum et al., 2016, p. 1638). Finding consistent antisocial behavior across generations shows the development of family interactions and emphasizes the role of family environments. They reinforce the utility of parental training and family intervention programs to enforce positive relationships.

Neuropsychiatric Disorders. Certain mental illnesses can be unpreventable or are formed during adolescence and result in future criminal behavior. These disorders include attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, tic disorders, and intellectual disabilities. Neurodevelopmental disorders are displaced through maturational-influenced psychological features, and impairments can tend to overlap among disorders (Billstedt et al., 2017, p. 234). These can significantly impact a young person's behavior and social functioning, potentially contributing to juvenile delinquency. Conditions often affect impulse control, social skills, and executive functioning, crucial for adhering to societal norms and managing interpersonal relationships. Psychosocial difficulties and poor adjustment to surroundings increase the risk of aggressive antisocial behaviors (Billstedt et al., 2017, p. 235).

Children with ADHD might struggle with attention and self-regulation, leading to impulsive actions that can result in conflicts with authority figures or engagement in risky behaviors. Individuals with ADHD have a higher risk of participating in and being convicted of an extensive range of criminal behaviors (Billstedt et al., 2017, p. 234). Autism spectrum disorders can affect communication and social interactions, potentially leading to misunderstandings or difficulties in navigating peer relationships. Children with autism spectrum disorders have traits related to conduct disorder, both showing deficits in socio-communicative and pragmatic language problems (Billstedt et al., 2017, p. 234). Children on the autism spectrum may struggle with social communication and understanding social cues. Deficiencies in social communication are connected to antisocial behavior, and individuals with this disorder will engage in violent criminal behavior (Billstedt et al., 2017, p. 235). Neurodevelopmental challenges can increase the risk of delinquent behavior, underscoring the importance of early diagnosis and tailored interventions to address the specific needs of these individuals.

Intellectual disabilities and juvenile delinquency intersect in complex ways, influencing both the likelihood of offending and the nature of criminal behavior. Youth with intellectual disabilities may face challenges that make them more vulnerable to engaging in delinquent activities, such as difficulties with impulse control, communication, and social skills. Their cognitive impairments can also result in misinterpreting social cues or struggling to understand the consequences of their actions, which can inadvertently lead to legal troubles. Intellectual disabilities often affect a youth's ability to navigate social and legal systems effectively, contributing to a heightened risk of juvenile delinquency. Social exclusion and stigmatization that individuals with intellectual disabilities frequently experience can exacerbate feelings of frustration and isolation, potentially driving them towards delinquent groups or activities as a means of seeking acceptance or coping with their challenges.

Offenders with intellectual disabilities have more prevalent substance misuse and psychiatric disorders, leading to school and family problems and showing signs of attitude or aggression (Asscher et al., 2012, p. 1909). These individuals are often affected by broader environmental factors such as familial instability, economic hardship, and inadequate access to appropriate support services. They address negative qualities such as low life aspirations, difficulties with impulse control or non-compliant behaviors, and critical thinking skills to change cognitive distortions and improve overall functioning (Asscher et al., 2012, p. 1912). Youth with disabilities tend to commit crimes against other people due to experiencing more problems with anger and can have difficulty with social information processing. Children are at a higher risk of being involved in the child welfare system because of an increased likelihood of abuse and maltreatment by parents (Development Services Group, 2017, p. 01).

Legality

The legality of juvenile justice systems is deeply intertwined with the recognition that children and adolescents are distinct from adults in terms of cognitive, emotional, and social development. Legality and juvenile delinquency intersect at a critical juncture in the criminal justice system, where the focus shifts from penal measures to rehabilitation. The legal system recognizes that children and adolescents have different maturity levels and judgments than adults. Penalties for juvenile delinquency emphasize rehabilitation over retribution, aiming to address the underlying causes of delinquent behavior and provide opportunities for positive development. The juvenile justice framework includes diversion programs, counseling, and educational support, aiming to reform and express the importance of addressing the root causes of delinquency. This rehabilitative focus seeks to balance accountability with the understanding that youth are still in the formative stages of development, striving to redirect their paths toward constructive futures and reduce the likelihood of future criminal behavior.

Unlike adults, juveniles are still in the process of development, and their actions are often influenced by a variety of factors, including socioeconomic background and psychological issues. Legal principles such as due process rights, individualized sentencing, and access to educational support assist with balancing accountability to allow the juvenile the potential for meaningful change and growth. Ensuring these legal protections are upheld is essential for a just system supporting public safety and young offenders' future well-being. At times, juvenile offenders need competency or insanity evaluations and could be subject to involuntary civil commitment. Evaluating a youth requires careful consideration of past and current brain development and factors surrounding the juvenile. Youths who receive an evaluation must be medically approved to have the abilities needed for court.

Competency. To understand a youth's need for an insanity or competency evaluation, the professional must understand adolescent brain development and the structural and functional changes to the brain. The teenage brain is sensitive to social rewards, easily emotionally aroused, and primed to seek new sensations (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 142). Sensation-seeking can drive youth to develop an independent identity and explore risky opportunities. Cognitive brain development occurs before socioemotional maturation and can create a competency gap (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 142). Consequently, adolescents can make decisions in unemotional contexts and struggle to mature in emotionally stimulated contexts. As youth matures, further brain development improves communication between the prefrontal cortex and the emotional regulation centers of the brain to develop behavioral control and reduce impulsivity (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 142). Delinquency represents a compelling interaction between developmental immaturity and the youth's surroundings.

Competency to stand trial in criminal court involves the defendant fully understanding court proceedings and being able to assist their attorney in preparing their defense (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020, p. 555). Since adolescents are still developing cognitively and emotionally, competency evaluations are crucial in ensuring that legal proceedings are fair and appropriate. The person must be able to make decisions involving a guilty plea and blameworthiness and responsibility for the criminal act (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020, p. 555). Mental health professionals conduct psychological assessments examining the juvenile's cognitive abilities, emotional state, and understanding of legal concepts. Ensuring juveniles are competent to stand trial upholds their constitutional rights and recognizes the developmental differences between adolescents and adults. Defendants can be declared incompetent due to severe mental illness or an intellectual disability (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020, p. 555).

Mental health evaluations are critical in addressing young offenders' complex needs and ensuring fair treatment within the legal system. These evaluations involve comprehensive assessments conducted by mental health professionals to understand a juvenile's psychological state, cognitive abilities, and behavioral patterns. The evaluation can serve many purposes, including determining competency to stand trial, assessing risks for reoffending, and identifying underlying issues contributing to delinquent behavior. Common mental health disorders found in youth offenders include affective disorders, anxiety disorders, psychotic disorders, anxiety disorders, disruptive behavior disorders, and substance abuse disorders (Underwood & Washington, 2017, p. 03). The findings from mental evaluations inform the court's decisions on appropriate interventions and sentencing. For example, a juvenile found to have significant mental health issues may be directed toward therapeutic programs rather than traditional punitive measures.

These evaluations can help adjust rehabilitative approaches to provide interventions suited to the youth's developmental needs. It is more economically practical if the focus is on preventing juveniles from becoming adult criminals (Underwood & Washington, 2017, p. 02). This approach helps provide fair and effective legal outcomes and contributes to the broader goal of rehabilitation and positive development for juveniles within the justice system. Incarceration and detainment are necessary for a small group of juveniles, as long-term confinement will do more harm than good (Underwood & Washington, 2017, p. 02). This can lead to a pattern of continued offending and recidivism. Community-based alternatives can assist with decreasing re-offending, even among youth who commit serious crimes (Underwood & Washington, 2017, p. 02). Cognitive behavioral therapy and co-occurring treatment models promote youth to increase skills such as problem-solving and nonaggressive responding strategies.

Civil Commitment and Involuntary Hospitalization. Civil commitment in the context of juvenile justice involves the involuntary hospitalization or institutionalization of young individuals who are deemed to pose a significant risk to themselves or others due to severe mental health conditions. This process focuses on providing treatment to ensure safety rather than performing punitive measures. Individuals committed due to delinquent behavior are shown to be problematic with histories of abuse and neglect and were often removed from their homes or placed in foster care during childhood (O'Donohue & Bromberg, 2019, p. 61). When a juvenile exhibits symptoms of a severe mental illness that impairs their ability to function in society or poses a danger, civil commitment may be pursued to secure appropriate psychiatric care. Individuals who are suicidally depressed, manically reckless, overwhelmed with psychotic delusions and auditory commands for violence, or fail to thrive due to developmental impairments require higher-level psychiatric care (Nakic, 2017, p. 66).

The goal of civil commitment within juvenile justice is to address severe mental health issues in a structured environment, offering therapeutic interventions and safeguarding both the individual and the community. Treatment should provide theoretical frameworks to focus on self-regulation, providing a structured environment, and strength-based approaches (O'Donohue & Bromberg, 2019, p. 66). Practical civil commitment should also involve creating individualized treatment plans focusing on therapeutic interventions aimed at stabilization and recovery rather than mere containment. The goal is to address immediate safety concerns while fostering long-term recovery and reintegration, ensuring that the juvenile's mental health needs are met in a manner that respects their dignity and potential for positive change. It must be used judiciously and with a focus on rehabilitative care, balancing the need for safety with respect for the juvenile's rights and potential for recovery.

As the juvenile justice system increasingly recognizes the importance of addressing mental health concerns, civil commitment laws play a pivotal role in ensuring that young individuals receive the appropriate care while maintaining due process and safeguarding their developmental needs. This delicate balance underscores the importance of a nuanced approach to juvenile justice, where legal, medical, and ethical considerations intersect to support the rehabilitation and well-being of vulnerable youth. Laws involving civil commitment and juvenile justice are designed to address the needs of juveniles with severe mental health issues while balancing their rights and safety. These laws vary by district but include legal standards for civil commitment, juvenile rights, treatment and rehabilitation, safety measures, and integration into the court system. The court is expected to uphold the youth's entitlement to procedural protections, including the right to counsel, cross-examine witnesses against them, and the privilege against self-incrimination (Larson & Grisso, 2016, p. 447).

Landmark Supreme Court decisions have changed how the juvenile court goes through legal proceedings. In *re Gault*, the court ruled that juvenile defendants are entitled to due process rights under the Fourteenth Amendment (Legal Information Institute, 2022). A formal court hearing is held where evidence is presented. The juvenile has the right to legal representation, challenge the evidence, and present their own. Based on the evidence presented, the court must decide if civil commitment is necessary for the youth. In most jurisdictions, the criteria for civil commitment are designed to ensure that only those juveniles who pose significant risks or have severe mental health conditions are subject to involuntary hospitalization. Forensic evaluators provide input on issues regarding the youth's age and risk to the community, placement options, and the likelihood of success (Larson & Grisso, 2016, p. 449).

Racial and Ethnic Disparities. Racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system are significant issues that reflect broader societal inequities. These disparities manifest in numerous ways, including differences in arrest rates, treatment by the justice system, and outcomes such as detention rates and sentencing. Overrepresentation often stems from systemic biases, socioeconomic factors, and differential treatment by law enforcement and judicial authorities. Studies have shown that minority youth are more likely to be arrested, charged, and detained compared to their White counterparts, even for similar offenses. Black youth are more likely to be sentenced to physical regiment programs such as boot camps, while white youth are committed to therapeutic programs like mental health facilities or drug treatment (Dragomir & Tadros, 2020, p. 62). Socioeconomic disparities limit access to resources such as quality education, supportive family services, and community conditions that can increase contact with the justice system. Black girls are the fastest-growing incarcerated group in the United States, and their crimes are typically non-violent and related to poverty, homelessness, and maltreatment (Dragomir & Tadros, 2020, p. 63).

Efforts to address these disparities involve a multifaceted approach, including policy reforms to reduce bias, improve community-based alternatives to detention, and enhance support services for at-risk youth. Implementing culturally competent practices, training for law enforcement and judicial personnel, and promoting greater transparency and accountability in the juvenile justice system are essential to achieving more equitable outcomes. Early contact with police can hinder the youth's long-term future life opportunities (Dragomir & Tadros, 2020, p. 64). Recognizing and addressing these racial and ethnic disparities is crucial not only for ensuring justice but also for fostering a more inclusive and fair juvenile justice system that supports the positive development and rehabilitation of all youth.

The racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice are deeply rooted in historical and systemic inequities that perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage. Black and Latino adolescents often receive longer sentences and are more frequently transferred to adult courts for similar offenses. Youth who are incarcerated or even subjected to prolonged judicial processes are more likely to experience negative impacts on their educational and employment prospects, contributing to a cycle of disadvantage. Schools in minority neighborhoods are usually underfunded and over-policed, leading to more frequent referrals to juvenile justice systems for disciplinary issues that might be managed differently in more affluent areas. Moreover, racial biases—both explicit and implicit—among law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges contribute to unequal treatment.

The consequences of these disparities are profound, affecting the immediate lives of the youth involved and their long-term outcomes. Youth involved in the juvenile justice system experience poorer health and social outcomes, which can lead to long-term consequences for the individual or their family (Dragomir & Tadros, 2020, p. 64). To address these issues, it is crucial to implement policy reforms that include bias training for those in the juvenile justice system, more significant investment in preventive and rehabilitative services, and a focus on restorative justice practices that emphasize rehabilitation over punishment. There is importance surrounding parenting styles, balanced agendas, autonomy, awareness, and cultural values (Dragomir & Tadros, 2020, p. 67). Addressing the root causes and implementing systemic changes, the juvenile justice system can work toward a more equitable and just approach for all youth. Investing in community-based programs that offer mentorship, educational support, and family services can provide alternative pathways and prevent youth from entering the justice system in the first place.

Overview

Juvenile justice refers to the legal and social systems designed to address and manage the behavior of minors accused of committing criminal acts. Unlike adult criminal justice, which focuses primarily on punishment, the juvenile justice system emphasizes rehabilitation and support, reflecting the understanding that youth are still developing cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Juveniles involved in the justice system have the right to legal representation, the right to remain silent, and the right to a fair hearing. The system is structured to ensure these rights are upheld throughout legal proceedings. It operates under separate laws and procedures distinct from those applied to adults. This framework includes juvenile courts that oversee minor cases, focusing on providing rehabilitative services rather than punitive measures. Juvenile justice systems use institutional settings as temporary measures while providing rehabilitative programs, including educational and therapeutic interventions, aimed at addressing the underlying causes of delinquent behavior and promoting positive development.

Many areas utilize diversion programs to redirect youth from formal judicial proceedings into community-based services. These programs often include counseling, community service, and educational support to prevent future offenses and reduce recidivism. Juveniles in the justice system may undergo competency evaluations to determine their ability to understand and participate in legal proceedings. Mental health evaluations help identify any underlying issues that must be addressed through appropriate treatment. The juvenile justice system is subject to racial and ethnic disparities, with minority youth often facing disproportionate rates of arrest, detention, and harsher sentencing. Addressing these disparities is a critical area of focus for achieving fairness and equity within the system.

For juveniles with severe mental health issues, civil commitment provides a legal mechanism to involuntarily place them in psychiatric facilities for treatment, ensuring that they receive necessary care while maintaining due process protections. Civil commitment provides a legal mechanism for the involuntary placement of juveniles with severe mental health conditions in psychiatric facilities. This process ensures these youth receive appropriate care while maintaining due process protections. The focus is on providing necessary treatment and stabilization, with regular reviews to assess the need for continued commitment. Severe mental health issues impact a juvenile's behavior, and coordinated efforts are essential to address both mental health needs and legal responsibilities effectively.

Overall, juvenile justice aims to offer a balanced approach that holds youth accountable for their actions while providing them with the support and resources needed to rehabilitate and successfully reintegrate into society. The system continually evolves to address challenges and improve outcomes for all young individuals involved. Reforms often focus on enhancing rehabilitation efforts, reducing reliance on detention, and ensuring that policies and practices are fair and effective. Innovations in juvenile justice include increased use of evidence-based practices, community-based alternatives to incarceration, and a greater emphasis on addressing the root causes of delinquent behavior. Competency evaluations determine whether a juvenile can understand the legal proceedings and assist in their defense. This is crucial for ensuring that juveniles who participate in the justice system can participate meaningfully in their cases. Through specialized legal procedures, rehabilitative services, diversion programs, and ongoing efforts to address disparities and improve outcomes, the juvenile justice system strives to support the positive development of youth while ensuring fair and effective responses to delinquent behavior.

Chapter 3: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The deep interconnection between juvenile justice and adverse childhood experiences underscores the importance of understanding the root causes of delinquent behavior. The challenges and traumas faced during early development, such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, can significantly influence a young person's behavior and interactions with the legal system. This influence often leads to emotional and psychological difficulties, heightening the risk of delinquent behavior. These young individuals usually develop coping mechanisms that can manifest as behavioral issues, which may be misinterpreted as delinquent actions rather than responses to their trauma. When these youth encounter the juvenile justice system, they are often met with a framework that may not fully address their underlying issues, potentially magnifying their struggles.

Practical Applications

Effective juvenile justice practices increasingly recognize the importance of trauma-informed approaches that address these early adversities, aiming to provide supportive interventions rather than punitive measures. By focusing on rehabilitation and the underlying causes of delinquency, the system can better support these young individuals in overcoming their past challenges and reducing recidivism. A trauma-informed perspective emphasizes understanding and addressing the effects of childhood trauma rather than simply focusing on behavior. This creates safe and supportive environments, provides access to mental health services, and expands positive relationships with caregivers. Addressing adverse childhood experiences within the legal system requires partnerships between community resources, such as schools, social services, and mental health professionals, to create a comprehensive support network. Relational trauma affects patterns of attachment interaction from parent to child and can be characterized by conflicting signals or intrusive behaviors (Isobel et al., 2019, p. 02).

Overall, adverse childhood experiences shape behavioral responses through young adulthood and can lead to a life of crime. Juvenile justice policy can maximize adolescent's potential and reduce the likelihood of further involvement in crime by recognizing developmental science (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 143). Raising the minimum age of juvenile justice jurisdiction allows for supervision while brain development continues and acknowledges the need for developmentally distinct rehabilitative services (Cavanagh, 2022, p. 144). Community supervision rehabilitates youth and provides excellent continuity after court supervision. Community interventions can create a safe space to provide services and reduce the challenges of transitioning from detention to the community (Flores et al., 2018, p. 154). Juvenile risk assessments determine the likelihood of reoffending and criminogenically link attitudes and behaviors with delinquency.

Poor parenting influences juvenile delinquency, and the child's problematic behavior affects the parent's disciplinary strategies, resulting in less involvement by the adult and inconsistent punishment (Hoeve et al., 2009, p. 750). Delinquent behaviors are influenced by poor parental monitoring, and the parents fail to take responsibility for tracking and monitoring the child's whereabouts. Youth who experience rejection by a parental figure risk developing distorted mental representations of themselves and their environment (Hoeve et al., 2009, p. 763). Childhood trauma impacts the child across their lifespan. It can lead to adult health problems, poor coping mechanisms, and the creation of behaviors developed by the youth to protect themselves from adversity (Isobel et al., 2019, p. 02). The link between detached parenting styles and delinquency provides implications for intervention policies, especially for parental management training programs. Programming needs to focus on training parents to

actively monitor children to enhance the parent's knowledge of the youth's whereabouts (Hoeve et al., 2009, p. 763).

Intergenerational trauma is the process by which parents with unresolved trauma transfer this to their children via interactional patterns, resulting in the effects of trauma being experienced without the original event (Isobel et al., 2019, p. 02). When families experience prolonged exposure to trauma, such as abuse, violence, or systemic discrimination, these experiences can shape parenting styles and familial dynamics in ways that perpetuate the cycle of trauma. Children raised in such environments may inherit maladaptive coping mechanisms, emotional dysregulation, and a skewed sense of normalcy regarding conflict and aggression. Treatment interventions should include a powerful healing effect for those who may not have had supportive relationships throughout their lives (Burke et al., 2021, p. 09).

Youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities struggle to understand legal proceedings or communicate their needs effectively. Judicial training enforces adolescent developmental science and the importance of learning about development in connection with delinquency. Seminars held for judges, attorneys, and other legal members typically held by mental health professionals enable the disbursement of pamphlets they can refer to often (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020, p. 583). Addressing this issue requires specialized training for justice system professionals, inclusive policies, and tailored interventions to ensure that youths with developmental disabilities receive fair treatment and appropriate support throughout their legal encounters. At times, parenting can help judges observe adolescent behavior and create an understanding of an offender's actions due to developmental immaturity (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020, p. 584). Often, intellectual or developmental disabilities are co-occurring with substance use disorders, personality disorders, anti-social behavior, and other aggressive behavior (Billstedt

et al., 2017, p. 238). Treatment must be provided to attack all angles of delinquent adolescent behaviors to have cumulative effects on recidivism and future legal involvement.

Recommendations for Further Research

There is a pressing need for more research on the long-term effects of adverse childhood experiences on girls and young female adults involved in the legal system. This area has been underrepresented in previous research, particularly in the context of foster care, violence, educational issues, and family relationships. These young women often experience mistreatment by foster home staff due to previous incarceration, and there is a need to expand on the connection to recidivism. Research should emphasize disproportionality and disparities within the child welfare system to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges these young women face.

First, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term outcomes of various interventions and sentencing practices on juveniles. This should include their impacts on recidivism and social reintegration. Second, research should focus on understanding the specific needs of varied populations within the juvenile justice system, including those with mental health disorders, developmental disabilities, and minority groups, to develop more targeted and equitable interventions. Exploring the efficacy of therapeutic justice approaches and community-based alternatives could provide valuable insights into reducing dependence on incarceration and promoting positive youth development. Finally, investigating the role of family dynamics and socio-economic factors in juvenile delinquency can help inform more holistic and preventive strategies. These research avenues can inspire and motivate us to create a more effective, fair, and rehabilitative juvenile justice system.

To better understand and address long-term gang involvement in the juvenile justice system, further research is needed in several critical areas. Studies should track individuals from early exposure to gangs through their interactions with the juvenile justice system and into adulthood, assessing how early experiences shape long-term outcomes. Investigating the effectiveness of various intervention programs, especially those that offer educational, communal, and psychological support, can provide insights into what strategies best mitigate the risks of sustained gang involvement. Exploration of the role of familial and community factors in maintaining and alleviating gang affiliations to focus on how these elements influence long-term goals. Examining the impact of systemic factors, such as socioeconomic conditions and law enforcement practices, on gang persistence and recidivism can offer a broader perspective on how to implement more comprehensive and effective prevention and rehabilitation efforts.

Conclusion

Juvenile justice and delinquency encompass the legal and social frameworks addressing young individuals who engage in illegal behavior. The juvenile justice system balances accountability with rehabilitation, recognizing that adolescents are developing cognitively and emotionally. Delinquency refers to a range of criminal activities committed by minors, which can originate from numerous factors such as family environment, peer influence, socio-economic conditions, and individual psychological issues. The system employs specialized approaches, including diversion programs, restorative justice, and educational interventions. These are designed to address the root causes of delinquent behavior while promoting reintegration and reducing recidivism. Barriers to treatment are based on race and socio-economic status and support. Ongoing research and policy development are crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of interventions and ensuring a fair and rehabilitative approach to juvenile justice.

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