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JUVENILE AWARENESS PROJECT

Evaluation Report No. 2

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	iv
BACKGROUND	1
METHODOLOGY	5
FINDINGS	7
CONCLUSIONS	14
BIBLIOGRAPHY	18

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LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Comparability of Experimental/Control Groups by Prior Delinquency Records	8
2. Comparison of Experimentals/Controls by Outcome	9
3. Comparison of Non-delinquent Experimentals/Controls by Outcome	10
4. Comparison of Delinquent Experimentals/Controls by Outcome	11
5. Comparison of Experimentals/Controls by Seriousness of Outcomes	12

BACKGROUND

In a previous report, it was pointed out that the Juvenile Awareness Project at Rahway State Prison in New Jersey provides an excellent opportunity for testing the efficacy of one form of deterring juvenile delinquency.* The Lifers' Group of inmates who created the Project in 1976 have emphasized that its objective is ". . . to enlighten the youth of our communities to the facts of what involvement in crime, prison or its ramifications will lead them into." The Lifers "convey information specifically aimed at increasing the perceived magnitude of the probability and losses of imprisonment for juveniles . . ." (Gilman and Martin, 1977). This evaluation is grounded in deterrence theory on the premise that deterrence provides the Project with its theoretical base. The guiding idea seems to be to deter certain juveniles from committing criminal offenses.

Deterrence has long been one of the fundamental goals of the criminal justice system, and more recently of the juvenile justice system as well. Unfortunately, little is known about the deterrent effects of exposure to these systems. For example, after an excellent review of the literature on the deterrent effect of criminal sanctions, Anderson concluded, ". . . there is not yet any clear or cohesive support for deterrence. At this point it remains an unverified criminological 'truth.'" (1978). She cited a number of deterrence studies involving

* Juvenile Awareness Project Help, Evaluation Report No. 1 (December, 1978).

juvenile subjects which have been carried out over the last ten years, e.g. Jensen (1969), Burkert and Jensen (1975), Teevan (1976), Chiricos, et.al. (1977), Erickson, et.al. (1977), Peck (1977), Teevan (1977), Thomas (1977), Tittle (1977), etc. All of these studies used questionnaires or interviews to survey juveniles who had not been subjected to criminal sanctions. Most of the studies relied on self-reported behavior as their outcome measure. All of them used perceptual measures of sanctions following the belief that perception of risk of swift, certain and severe reaction by police, court and corrections officials is what acts to deter or not deter, as the case may be, the contemplated criminal act. Little deterrent effect was found in these studies for either perceived severity or perceived swiftness of legal reactions. Some support was found for the deterrent effects of perceived certainty. This is consistent, in general, with recent research on deterrence which "suggests that increasing the certainty of punishment has considerably more impact on crime than does increasing its severity" (Silberman, 1978).

A number of substantial differences exist between the aforementioned research and this evaluation of the Juvenile Awareness Project. However, following a deterrence model based upon perceptions of swiftness, certainty and severity, it seems reasonable to assume that the Lifers' Group cannot influence perceptions of swiftness and certainty. One must come to the attention of the police, be apprehended, be referred to juvenile court, be adjudicated, and be sentenced to a correctional institution before one faces the pain of imprisonment. The delinquents, both those whose delinquencies have not come to the attention of legal authorities and those who are officially known, are already aware of the swiftness and certainty of being caught and punished from their own personal experiences. These

youths know that the chances of being caught are small. The official delinquents are also personally aware of the severity of sanctions, having been subjected to them. They know that these sanctions are not very severe, and that there is a good chance of getting off lightly even if they are caught.

The only part of the deterrence model left is perceptions of severity, and the only youths who are not personally familiar with sanctions are the non-delinquents and the hidden delinquents. The Lifers' Group must confront this reality and attempt to convince those juveniles who are amenable to convincing that confinement in a maximum security prison is a reasonably likely consequence of their future involvement in delinquent behavior. Not only is this a difficult and perhaps impossible task, but its potential success flies in the face of the previously cited research evidence which shows that perceived severity has no particular deterrent effect.

The Juvenile Awareness Project was designed to enlighten youth about the effects of their involvement in crime through a "shock-confrontation" approach. The style of the inmates is aggressive and dramatic, and is intended to represent to the youth the most negative aspects of prison life. Since the first evaluation report in December, 1978, a film about the Project entitled "Scared Straight" has been shown nationally. The response to this film has been widespread and generally positive. In a number of states and several foreign countries, consideration is being given to implementing similar programs. The question guiding this evaluation, namely does the Project work, thus assumes even greater and more far-reaching import. There is serious concern that expectations for this and similar projects are becoming unrealistically high.

A "Scared Straight" bandwagon is developing, and this might be detrimental to the interests of the inmates and the juveniles involved.

The goals of the research reported here were to evaluate the behavioral outcomes of juveniles exposed to the Lifers, and to compare this behavior with that of a comparable control group. The basic hypothesis underlying the evaluation is that the Juvenile Awareness Project has no significant effect on the juveniles participating in terms of deterring their future delinquent behavior. This report concerns only the second phase of the evaluation which attempts to test that hypothesis.

METHODOLOGY

One objective of the evaluation was to select a sample of approximately 100 juveniles designated for attendance at the Juvenile Awareness Project. These juveniles were to be randomly assigned to experimental and control groups - 50 youths to each. The experimental group would attend the Project; the control group would not.

A stratified random sample of 21 sponsoring agencies was selected to represent agency type. Each of these agencies was then contacted and asked to provide the names of juveniles selected to attend. The design called for random assignment to experimental and control groups within these designated lists. Ultimately, nine sponsoring agencies participated in the study.

For reasons beyond the control of the evaluators, the experimental design became a quasi-experimental design in which assignment to experimental and control groups was not purely random for all agencies. However, each juvenile in the sample was designated by the referring agency for participation in the Project in accordance with the selection criteria employed by that agency. Thus, the experimentals and controls are assumed to be equivalent in terms of those criteria. A total of 46 experimentals and 35 controls was studied.

Juvenile court records were surveyed a minimum of six months after the experimental group visited Rahway and after the control group was pre-tested. This was done to determine whether or not there was any

recorded delinquent behavior for either experimentals or controls. Where records of delinquency were found, they were reviewed for type of delinquency (before and after visit or pre-test) and number of delinquencies (before and after). Type of delinquency was weighted according to seriousness by classification as a juvenile in need of supervision (JINS) offense or a juvenile delinquency (criminal) offense. This permits a determination of not only whether one group commits or has committed more offenses than the other, but also whether these offenses are or were more or less serious. For comparative purposes, a mean seriousness of delinquency score for each juvenile was developed. Non-delinquency was weighted as zero, JINS offenses as one and JD offenses as two. The score results from multiplying each offense by its weight and then adding them for each youth. For those experimental juveniles having prior offenses, subsequent offenses can be considered a measure of recidivism.

FINDINGS

Because the research was unable to adhere strictly to an experimental design with random assignment, it was necessary to test for comparability of the experimental and control groups. Significance tests were conducted for four independent variables: sex, race, delinquency probability, and age. There were no significant differences between the groups, thus they can be considered comparable on these factors.

Examination of juvenile court records revealed that 19 of the 46 youths in the experimental group (41 percent) had no record of prior offenses. This is contrary to what appears to be a widely held view that all referrals to the Juvenile Awareness Project are delinquents. The number of offenses among those with prior records in this group ranged from one to eleven. The seriousness of delinquency scores ranged from 0 for those with no priors to 22. The mean seriousness score was 4.26; excluding the 19 non-delinquents, it was 7.26. Among the controls, 21 of the 35 juveniles (60 percent) had no prior record. The number of offenses range from none to nine; seriousness scores from 0 to 18. The mean seriousness score was 2.51; excluding non-delinquents it was 6.29.

This descriptive background information raised some concern about the comparability of the two groups in terms of their criminal histories, and it was decided that this should be tested. The results which are shown in Table 1 indicate that the two groups do not differ in a significant way with respect to having a prior record of delinquency.

TABLE 1

COMPARABILITY OF EXPERIMENTAL/CONTROL GROUPS
BY PRIOR DELINQUENCY RECORDS

	Priors	No Priors	Total
Experimentals	27(58.7%)	19(41.3%)	46(56.8%)
Controls	14(40.0%)	21(60.0%)	35(43.2%)
Total	41	40	81

$$\chi^2 = 2.785; 1 \text{ df}; \text{ n.s.}$$

It was decided to further test their comparability by using the mean seriousness of delinquency scores. A difference of means test showed no significant difference between the mean seriousness score for the experimental group and that for the control group ($t = 1.43$, $df = 79$; n.s.). This result further confirmed the conclusion that overall the two groups are similar. When the non-delinquents were excluded from the analysis, the difference between the mean seriousness scores for experimentals and controls was even further from being significant ($t = .37$; $df = 40$; n.s.). The juveniles in the group which attended the Juvenile Awareness Project were somewhat more delinquent than the comparison juveniles, but not significantly so.

Outcomes: Success or Failure

Each juvenile's court record was tracked for a minimum of six months after the visit or after pre-testing in the case of the controls. Using any further recorded offense regardless of disposition as the definition of failure, the results are shown in Table 2.

This table indicates that a significantly higher proportion of the juveniles who did not attend the Project did better in terms of

subsequent offenses than did the group which attended. The relationship between the variables of group and outcome is a moderately strong $C = .44$. This surprising and unexpected finding seemed to call for further examination and analysis of the data.

TABLE 2
COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTALS/CONTROLS
BY OUTCOME

	Success	Failure	Total
Experimentals	27 (58.7%)	19 (41.3%)	46 (56.8%)
Controls	31 (88.6%)	4 (11.4%)	35 (43.2%)
Total	58	23	81

$$\chi^2 = 8.73; 1 \text{ df}; p < .01; C = .44 \text{ (corrected)}$$

Among the experimental group, the success rate was 27 out of 46 (58.7%). This is certainly a far cry from the 80-90% success rates being claimed by the supporters of the Juvenile Awareness Project. Among the 27 youths with prior records, 14 (51.8%) were successes; conversely, the recidivism rate was 48.2%. This is not only not better than, but in some instances is worse than, recidivism rates from other programs designed to prevent or treat juvenile delinquency (Martinson, et.al., 1975). In fairness however, it should be emphasized that this is not a typical prevention or treatment program which engages its clients over some period of time. It is strictly a "one shot" effort for the most part, and as a result there are problems of comparability. One need only review the categories into which programs were classified for purposes of comparative evaluation by Robert Martinson to get a sense of the comparability problems (Martinson, 1974). These categories included education

and vocational training, individual counseling, group counseling, psychotherapy in community settings, probation, intensive community supervision, etc. Into which of these categories could the Juvenile Awareness Project be classified? Its uniqueness makes comparisons to other projects untenable. Therefore, the use of a control group for comparison purposes is of considerable importance.

An interesting outcome with the experimental group was that six of the 19 youths (31.6%) with no priors had subsequent records of delinquency. This result can be used to test the assumption that it is with this non-delinquent or hidden delinquent group that the Lifers can perhaps be most successful. A comparison of their outcomes with those for the non-delinquents in the control group leads to the results illustrated in Table 3.

TABLE 3
COMPARISON OF NON-DELINQUENT EXPERIMENTALS/CONTROLS
BY OUTCOME

	Success	Failure	Total
Non-delinquent Experimentals	13(68.4%)	6(31.6%)	19(47.5%)
Non-delinquent Controls	20(95.2%)	1(4.8%)	21(52.5%)
Total	33	7	40

$\chi^2 = 3.3$ (corrected for continuity); 1 df; n.s.

More of the non-delinquent controls were successful than their counterparts in the experimental group, but not significantly so. The Lifers were more successful with non-delinquents alone than with their overall group (68.4% vs. 58.7% successes). However, this success rate

is still considerably short of the claimed success rates. It is even less favorable when compared with the success rate of the non-delinquent controls (95.2%). The Lifers have a rough typology of the juveniles referred to their project in which the youths are classified as the "good," i.e. those with no involvement in crime; the "bad," i.e. those with minor infractions; and, the "ugly," i.e. those who have been away or are borderline cases. Does the Juvenile Awareness Project scare the so-called "good" kids straight? The answer appears to be no.

What about the "bad" and the "ugly" kids? A comparison of only those with prior records of delinquency is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
COMPARISON OF DELINQUENT EXPERIMENTALS/CONTROLS
BY OUTCOME

	Success	Failure	Total
Delinquent Experimentals	14 (51.8%)	13 (48.2%)	27 (65.8%)
Delinquent Controls	11 (78.6%)	3 (21.4%)	14 (34.2%)
Total	25	16	41

$$x^2 = 2.76; 1 \text{ df}; \text{n.s.}$$

Again, more of the controls were successful than experimentals (78.6% vs. 51.8%), but the difference is not significant. The conclusion seems to be that the Lifers are relatively more successful with the "good" kids than with the "bad" or "ugly" kids, but overall the project is not successful with any of these youth when outcomes are compared to those of the control group.

Outcomes: Seriousness

The next step in the comparative analysis of the outcomes of the experimental and control groups was a difference of means test for the mean seriousness scores of the two groups. These were the scores for subsequent offenses committed within the minimum six month follow-up period. The results shown in Table 5 compare mean seriousness of delinquency scores for all experimentals and controls, for the failures only (those with subsequent offenses), and, for the non-delinquents only (those with no priors). The latter comparison again tests the theoretically based assumption that these youths are perhaps the best targets for the Lifers' efforts.

TABLE 5
COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTALS/CONTROLS
BY SERIOUSNESS OF OUTCOMES

	Mean	t value	df	2-tail Probability
Experimentals (N = 46)	1.2	2.67	78.19	.009
Controls (N = 35)	0.3			
Non-delinquent Experimentals (N = 19)	0.8	1.84	19.42	.08
Non-delinquent Controls (N = 21)	0.09			
Experimental Failures (N = 19)	2.8	-0.19	21.0	.85
Control Failures (N = 4)	3.0			

The results illustrated in the above table reinforce the earlier finding that the experimental group did significantly worse than the control group in terms of outcomes. More experimentals than controls committed subsequent offenses and their mean seriousness of subsequent delinquency scores was significantly higher. As a subsample, the non-delinquent experimentals did significantly worse than their non-delinquent counterparts in the control group. Once again, the Project does not have better results in a comparative sense with those who are most likely to be deterred.

The only finding in the table where there was no significant difference was in the comparison of mean seriousness of subsequent delinquency scores for the failures in the two groups. The seriousness of the subsequent delinquency was substantially the same.

CONCLUSIONS

In a recent article in *Crime and Delinquency*, Richard J. Lundman and Frank Scarpitti reviewed forty past or continuing attempts to prevent juvenile delinquency (April, 1978). Indicating that the results of these projects have not been particularly encouraging, they conclude, ". . . our own research and the research of others lead to the nearly inescapable conclusion that few, if any, of these efforts successfully prevented delinquency." Lundman and Scarpitti outline a number of recommendations for future project design, implementation and evaluation. These recommendations provide a useful analytic structure for summarizing this evaluation of the Juvenile Awareness Project and for spelling out consequences, both in terms of the Project itself and in terms of the research on the Project.

Their first recommendation is that, "researchers should expect future projects to be unsuccessful." In hypothesizing that the Project would have no significant effects on the juveniles attending, the researchers have proceeded in a manner consistent with this recommendation. The expectation of absence of success which has been emphasized by the evaluators was and is realistic in view of the failure of past attempts at delinquency prevention, and in view of the complex nature of juvenile delinquency. Zealous Project supporters and "media hype" specialists have failed to take account of these realities, and consequently have raised unrealistic expectations and goals for the

Project. A rethinking of these goals and expectations would seem to be in order given the findings from this study.

Another recommendation is that, "future delinquency prevention programs must be sensitive to and protect the rights of the juvenile subjects involved." Project sponsors and the Lifers themselves must recognize that the potential for either social or emotional injury to participating juveniles exists. A "delinquency fulfilling prophecy" may be set in motion in which the Project actually increases the probability of delinquent behavior. This possibility cannot be dismissed in light of the finding that experimental group juveniles, including the non-delinquents, did considerably worse than control group juveniles in terms of their behavioral outcomes. Follow-up interviews with each juvenile should help determine whether the Project may actually be counterproductive in any sense.

A third recommendation by Lundman and Scarpitti is that, "the theoretical foundations of future delinquency prevention programs should be expanded to include sociological as well as psychological understandings of the causes of delinquency." The theoretical foundation of the Juvenile Awareness Project has been assumed to rest in deterrence theory, although there is an argument that it perhaps should be viewed in terms of conditioning (Eysenck, 1977). Either of these theoretical perspectives are consistent with the spirit of this recommendation which is to broaden the understanding of the causes of delinquency.

Also recommended is that, "all future delinquency prevention projects should be experimental in design." The Juvenile Awareness Project itself did not have a built-in evaluation design, but this is neither surprising nor unusual. The Project began in September, 1976;

the evaluation began in December, 1977. The original experimental design for the evaluation became a quasi-experimental design, but still a useful alternative under the circumstances. It is felt that the two groups were sufficiently well-matched as to be comparable. Therefore, the results can be viewed with confidence.

Other Lundman and Scarpitti recommendations are to assess changes in delinquent behavior in order to measure the achievement of delinquency prevention goals; to objectively measure delinquency; to use self-report measures of delinquency; to insure the presence of different types of subjects (females, middle class, rural, male, lower class, urban, etc.) in both projects and studies; and, to publish the results of all projects. This evaluation has focused on delinquent behavior measured objectively by means of offenses recorded in juvenile court records. The Project serves many different types of juveniles, and the sample studied was constructed in such a way as to be closely representative of these types. Finally, it is intended that the results be published and the fact that you are reading them may be proof of accomplishment of that intent. Self-report measures are being used in the third phase of the evaluation.

There are probably going to be supporters of the Juvenile Awareness Project, and of the concept embodied in it, who are going to be very disappointed with the results in this report. There may even be some who will feel compelled to try to discredit these findings. It is suggested that both the disappointed supporters and the potential discreditors harken to the comments of ex-lifer Frank Bindhammer reported in Human Behavior (April, 1979):

He admits that the program at Rahway in no way attacks poverty, a poor education, family difficulties, unemployment

or racial discrimination--the real causes of juvenile crime. What it does do, he says, is to get the kids' undivided attention so that counselors, probation officers and teachers at least have a chance of reaching them with alternatives to a life of deviance. The lifers, in fact, are trying to start a followup program to help the kids they see stay straight.

The findings here are not entirely inconsistent with these reported remarks which suggest a very different goal for the Project than that which has been the basis for this evaluation. The comment suggests that the Project could perhaps be a beginning rather than an end in itself, thus the need for rethinking goals and expectations.

Juvenile delinquency is an incredibly complex behavioral phenomenon. There are no panaceas; no cure-alls. There are no simplistic solutions. It is not possible to simply scare kids straight.

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