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A Quantitative Content Analysis on Juvenile Crime Rates in Comparison to Student
Outcome Data in a Saint Louis Metropolitan High School Setting

by
Arron Nakia Whitt, Sr.

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Education
School of Education

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Arron Nakia Whitt, Sr.

Signature:  Date: 7/18/2024

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Abstract

Mental health is one of the most polarizing topics of the 21st Century. Mental health affects those from all economic statuses, races, age ranges, and genders. Since mental health can affect the youth population, the researcher investigated two Saint Louis metropolitan school districts that were listed in provisional accreditation status with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MoDESE).

The purpose of this research was to identify relationships between the graduation rates, dropout rates, and enrollment rates of high school students and compare these data to the crime statistics obtained from the Saint Louis metropolitan juvenile courts. The researcher gathered secondary data from Normandy Schools Collaborative and Riverview Gardens school districts during the school years of 2020 through 2023 to use for this analysis. Additionally, data were collected from the City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community during the years of 2020 through 2021.

The researcher conducted a Chi-Square test for independence to seek relationships across years 2020 to 2023 to determine if relationships existed between graduation, enrollment, and dropout rates in comparison to juvenile crimes (felony, misdemeanor, and status) committed during those same years. The results of this study revealed that there was a significant hike in enrollment for Normandy Schools Collaborative and Riverview Gardens between the school years 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022. A significant hike existed in felony crimes between years 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022, a significant hike in misdemeanors was also noted between years 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022; then again between 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. Notably, there was a significant drop in status referrals between 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

According to Crook (2015), in discussions regarding students within the juvenile justice system, the involvement of school counseling is often overlooked. Operating from a perspective of social justice advocacy, school counselors can effectively utilize the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model to address the specific needs of juvenile justice-involved students (Crook, 2015).

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 2016) a high percentage of youth in need of mental health services do not receive services in their communities, because existing mental health services are inadequate. Similarly, Weisbrot and Ryst (2020) noted that before the COVID-19 crisis, the K-12 schools were ill equipped to meet the needs of the students' mental health. Hill, Ohmstede, and Mims (2012) reported that the mental well-being of a child has an impact on their academic, behavioral, and interpersonal development. Further, according to the Missouri Division of Youth Services FY 2019 Annual Report, juveniles who committed crimes were between 15 and 16 years of age (p. 4). Therefore, the researcher who is an ex-offender and currently a mental health professional and licensed professional counselor noted from personal experience similarities with a lack of mental health services during his middle and high school years, and during his adult years, similarities of a lack of knowledge in receiving a college education post-incarceration. The researcher experienced the challenges of meeting the requirements to attend college for the post-incarcerated population, because the researcher was incarcerated and incorporates personal experience in examining secondary data from local educational agencies to seek a potential

correlation between the availability of mental health services within the schools and the rate of crimes committed by juveniles who are also considered ex-offenders. According to Brown (2015), post-incarceration education has positive but reduced benefits, and higher education appears to have the largest benefits to ex-offenders. The likelihood of someone going to federal prison, serving their time, and then obtaining a doctorate degree after being released, varies depending on various factors, such as the individual's determination, access to education programs in prison, support network upon release, and personal circumstances. While it may be challenging, it's not impossible, and there are instances of individuals who have successfully pursued higher education after serving time in prison.

America's first juvenile court included safeguards to treat juveniles differently from their adult counterparts. During the implementation of these safeguards, the Supreme Court employed new scientific understandings of juveniles, as well as common sense, to conclude that juveniles are different from adults and should be treated differently by the law (Troutman, 2018). For over a century, America's legal system has made substantial reforms to change its treatment of adolescents (Troutman, 2018). There are various examples to demonstrate that the legal system treats adolescents differently from their adult counterparts. A few examples include the age limit for driving privileges, voting rights, and the ability to purchase alcohol for consumption. The laws recognize that adults and adolescents are different and therefore require a different set of standards. America extended this treatment to the realm of juvenile justice in 1899, when Cook County, Illinois, created the country's first juvenile court (Troutman, 2018). The purpose of the development of the first juvenile court was the rehabilitation of juveniles.

One of the primary reasons the juvenile justice system was put into place is for accountability (Troutman, 2018). When we speak on accountability, it is imperative to take into account the many different laws, the basis of those laws, and how they affect those who violate them. Many factors come into play when it comes to laws, such as: state, federal, age, race, gender, severity, municipalities, and intent. Unfortunately, some systems are disproportionate based on the aforementioned factors, which contrasts rehabilitative efforts. According to Leon (2022), after the Civil War, felony disenfranchisement in the United States was significantly influenced and expanded. The emancipation of four million formerly enslaved individuals served as a catalyst for the establishment of new control mechanisms aimed at regulating the freedom of black citizens and perpetuating a system of white supremacist labor exploitation. In the postwar South, the implementation of black codes and vagrancy laws sought to criminalize black citizens, channel them into the criminal justice system, and exploit their labor through convict leasing or chain gangs when fines imposed by convictions could not be paid. Reconstruction witnessed a surge in criminal convictions among black citizens and the formalization of felony disenfranchisement laws across southern states.

By 1869, 27 out of 37 states in the Union had enacted felony disenfranchisement laws (Leon, 2022, p. 747). By 1880, with Southern Democrats regaining power, 33 out of 38 states had codified such laws. By 1910, seven more Southern states followed suit. Despite efforts to provide paths to re-enfranchisement, the Supreme Court's 1974 decision in *Richardson v. Ramirez* affirmed felony disenfranchisement as a state issue, interpreting the Fourteenth Amendment to allow states to permanently disenfranchise those convicted of felonies. While most states have made efforts to restore voting rights,

approaches vary, with some automatically re-enfranchising individuals upon release from prison, completion of parole or probation, or after additional waiting periods or actions (Leon, 2022).

Access to mental health counseling in low socioeconomic income high schools can vary significantly. In some cases, these schools may face challenges in providing adequate mental health resources due to limited funding and resources. Students in such schools may encounter barriers to access of professional mental health support, leading to unmet mental health needs. Efforts were made to address this issue, which included initiatives to increase funding for mental health services in schools and provide training for educators to identify and support students in need (Leon, 2022). However, the availability and quality of mental health counseling services can still be insufficient in some low-income schools. It is essential to advocate for increased support for mental health services in all schools, particularly those in poor areas, to ensure that students have access to the necessary resources for their well-being and academic success.

Youth who become involved in the juvenile justice system are often denied procedural protections in the courts; in one state, up to 80% of court-involved children do not have lawyers. Students who commit minor offenses run the risk of secured detention if they violate boilerplate probation conditions prohibiting them from activities like missing school or disobeying teachers (ACLU, 2008). According to Copenhaver et al (2007), most forms of media overlook the rehabilitative efforts made by inmates. Copenhaver et al. (2007) assessed education as a form of rehabilitation and identified the struggles faced by inmates while trying to finish their degrees on a traditional college campus. This study demonstrated the stigma, both real and perceived, that former inmates

battle and how they find ways to alleviate the harmful effects of stigma caused by prior incarceration. The understanding of these rare situations is crucial for educators to connect with this demographic of students.

According to Scott (2017), the funneling of poor, urban, minority school students into jails and penitentiaries, combined with the reduced opportunities for education while behind bars, produced uneducated ex-offenders who are ill-prepared to improve their personal conditions and contribute substantially to society. Such circumstances expose a void in the nation's educational and social services system that is inadequately addressed or remedied when considering the proven societal benefits to educating offenders, such as reduced recidivism, decreased welfare dependency, increased employability, advanced earning potential. The failure to develop concrete strategies to solve this issue is unacceptable and borders on the criminal. Alleviating the issues could possibly lead to a phenomenon known as the prison-to-school pipeline (Scott, 2017).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research was to examine secondary data from the state educational agency and two local educational agencies that were listed in provisional accreditation status to seek a potential correlation between high school graduation rates and dropout rates, while also comparing the number of crimes committed by juveniles. Further, this study analyzed the juvenile justice system and the resources available pre- and post-incarceration.

To understand the importance of juvenile crime rates, it is imperative to research and to identify the difference between the school to prison pipeline and the prison to school pipeline. Students pushed along the school-to-prison pipeline find themselves in

juvenile detention facilities, many of which provide few, if any, educational services. Students of color and students with disabilities are far more likely than their white peers to be suspended, expelled, or arrested for similar infractions and are particularly likely to travel down this pipeline (ACLU, 2008). On the other hand, the term prison-to-school pipeline is not widely recognized. The concept of a school-to-prison pipeline refers to policies and practices that push students, particularly those at risk, out of schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. It underscores the connection between harsh school disciplinary policies and increased likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system.

According to Scott (2017), one potential solution is the intentional creation of a prison-to-school pipeline, wherein ex-offenders are deliberately presented with options for formal education once released from jail or prison. Although studies on the perpetuation and effects of the school-to-prison pipeline are plentiful the researcher did not find many empirical or theoretical research articles conducted on post-prison formal education. Halkovic's (2014) study on ex-offenders who enroll in college upon release from prison offered some valuable context; however, his research yielded unanswered questions. A large percentage of people who are incarcerated do not have a high school diploma or GED (Anders & Noblit, 2011; Hall, 2015). As a result, the establishment of a prison-to-school pipeline requires providing educational possibilities not only for ex-offenders who are eligible for college, but for those who need to complete K-12 schooling.

According to Blomberg et al. (2012), successful educational achievement, viewed as a positive label to prospective employers and partners, can be an important life event

that can redirect criminal trajectories. In this regard, educational success can enable access to conventional opportunities over the course of one's life. This serves as a reminder that the motivation behind being educated at any level can lie within an individual's ability to attain gainful employment and be labeled as successful, while lowering the recidivism rates of ex-offenders who adequately attain both employment and mental health services.

Cregor and Hewitt (2011) noted that the analysis of the prison industrial complex has gained traction, researchers have started linking the criminal justice system with the education system in the U.S. Based on the research, various policies implemented in low socioeconomic school settings have impact on the number of future prisoners (Blomberg et al. (2012).

Rationale of the Study

The rationale of the study is to seek potential correlations between high school graduation rates and dropout rates and compare them to juvenile offenses committed in a Saint Louis metropolitan area. The researcher outlined an in-depth understanding of the juvenile justice system and crime rates, in addition to graduation and dropout rates in the Saint Louis metropolitan area. The researcher also evaluated the recidivism rates of those who received mental health services pre- and post-incarceration. The data were compared for the purpose of understanding the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline, as well as paving the way for additional research on the prison-to-school pipeline.

According to Blomberg et al. (2012), successful education achievement, viewed as a positive label to prospective employers and partners, can be an important life event that can redirect criminal trajectories. In this regard, educational success can enable

access to conventional opportunities over the course of one's life. Intrinsically, this serves as a reminder that the motivation behind being educated on any level is significant and demonstrates an individual's ability to attain gainful employment and be labeled as successful, while lowering the recidivism rates of ex-offenders who adequately attain both employment and mental health services.

The debate over providing education to inmates often involves complex factors, such as public opinion, political ideologies, and budget considerations. Some argue that prioritizing education for inmates may face resistance, due to concerns about allocation of resources, perceived leniency, or political pressure to appear tough on crime. Striking a balance between punishment and rehabilitation remains a challenge in the criminal justice system. Hall (2015) postulated that a general consensus among scholars suggested that correctional education plays a major role in the rehabilitation of inmates, while Petersilia (2003) believed that societal forces, such as lawmakers and politicians, often combat the goals of correctional education by arguing that inmates should not be given access to education when society is obligated to pay for their education, which contradicts the idea that the goal of the prison system is to rehabilitate offenders. Previous research assessed that correctional education reduces recidivism, claiming gainful employment as the direct link to recidivism reduction (Hall, 2015; Petersilia, 2003).

It is essential to facilitate a seamless transition and reintegration process for high school students within the juvenile justice system, as it significantly impacts their academic success and reduces the likelihood of further delinquency and recidivism (Crook, 2015). Access to quality education is perceived as the most viable pathway to a productive future for this population (Crook, 2015). However, many high school

students within the juvenile justice system struggle academically, due to various academic and cognitive challenges (Crook, 2015). Alarming, only 12% of previously incarcerated juvenile offenders manage to graduate from high school or obtain a GED (Biddle, 2010; Crook, 2015). This low level of academic achievement underscores a social justice concern that necessitates attention from school counselors operating within a comprehensive developmental school counseling program. Nonetheless, school counselors possess a unique opportunity to contribute significantly to the successful reintegration of these students into the educational environment (Crook, 2015).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between graduation rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 through 2023.

Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between dropout rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 through 2023.

Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between enrollment rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 through 2023.

Study Limitations

As with most academic research, limitations may exist. In this research there were some limitations that existed, which included the limited access to comprehensive and reliable data about juvenile crime rates, mental health resources within the school districts, and educational outcomes, may constrain the analysis. Moreover, a quantitative

content analysis may not capture the full complexity of contextual factors that may influence juvenile crime and mental health outcomes in the St. Louis metropolitan area. The establishment of causal relationships between variables, such as the impact of access to mental health professionals on juvenile crime rates or the influence of the school-to-prison pipeline, was a challenge in this quantitative analysis.

Definition of Terms

Felony Offenses: Felony offenses are serious crimes that are punishable by imprisonment for more than one year or by death. Felony offenses usually include crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, burglary, and certain drug offenses. The classification of offenses as felonies varies by jurisdiction (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Juvenile Justice: Juvenile justice refers to the system of laws, policies, and procedures designed to address the legal rights and needs of individuals who are minors and have engaged in some sort of delinquent behavior. This system aims to rehabilitate rather than punish juvenile offenders, with an emphasis on their development, well-being, and potential for reintegration into society (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Misdemeanor Offenses: Misdemeanor offenses are typically defined as less serious crimes that are punishable by imprisonment for up to one year, probation, fines, community service, or other alternative sanctions. These offenses often include less severe violations of the law, such as petty theft, disorderly conduct, simple assault, and minor drug possession. The classification of offenses as misdemeanors may vary by jurisdiction (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Prison-to-School Pipeline: Though many students are propelled down the pipeline from school to jail, it is difficult for them to make the journey in reverse.

Students who enter the juvenile justice system face many barriers to their re-entry into traditional schools. Many of these students never graduate from high school (ACLU, 2008).

School-to-Prison Pipeline: According to the ACLU (2008), the school-to-prison pipeline is a concept describing a systemic pattern where students, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, are pushed out of the education system and into the criminal justice system. This pipeline is characterized by policies and practices within schools that contribute to the increased likelihood of students facing legal consequences rather than receiving appropriate educational support. Factors that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline include zero-tolerance disciplinary policies, harsh disciplinary measures, such as suspensions and expulsions, the presence of police officers in schools, and a disproportionate impact on certain demographic groups, particularly students of color and those with disabilities (ACLU, 2008). The idea is that punitive approaches in schools can create a pathway for students to become entangled in the criminal justice system, limiting their educational opportunities and potentially perpetuating a cycle of incarceration. Efforts to address the school-to-prison pipeline focus on reforming disciplinary practices, promoting alternatives to exclusionary measures, and addressing underlying systemic issues.

Recidivism: Recidivism refers to the tendency of individuals who have been previously convicted of a criminal offense to commit subsequent offenses or return to criminal behavior after being released from incarceration or completing a sentence (National Institute of Justice, 2021).

Status Offenses: Status offenses refer to behaviors that are considered offenses only because of the individual's status as a minor, such as truancy, running away from home, curfew violations, and underage drinking. These acts are not considered criminal if committed by adults but may result in legal intervention or juvenile court involvement for minors. Status offenses are often viewed as indicators of underlying issues, such as family problems, mental health issues, or substance abuse, and the goal of the juvenile justice system in addressing these offenses is typically rehabilitation and support rather than punishment (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Summary

Counseling for post-incarcerated juvenile offenders is crucial for their successful reintegration into society. It helps address the underlying issues that may contribute to criminal behavior, such as trauma, substance abuse, or family issues.

Counseling provides a supportive environment to develop coping mechanisms, emotional regulation skills, and positive decision-making. By addressing these factors, counseling contributes to breaking the cycle of criminal behavior and enhances the chances of rehabilitation, reducing the likelihood of recidivism among juvenile offenders. This is important because according to Calhoun (2014), since the inception of the juvenile justice system, the focus was on the juvenile offender, rather than the offense, and was based on the principle that youth are developmentally different from adults and more amenable to intervention. Under this philosophy, juvenile offenders were designated as delinquent rather than criminal, and the courts sought to rehabilitate juvenile delinquents into productive citizens by focusing on treatment rather than punishment (Calhoun, 2014).

Juveniles require access to capable legal guidance when appearing in court. When a juvenile's freedom is at stake, they must have meaningful access to legal advice and legal counsel, which becomes imperative (Calhoun, 2014). Moreover, mental health counseling for juvenile offenders in a high school setting post incarceration is vital because it addresses behavioral issues early on, helps prevent further involvement in the justice system, and promotes positive personal development. It can assist in understanding and addressing underlying problems, contributing to a more supportive and rehabilitative environment within the school community (Calhoun, 2014). This approach aims to guide K-12 students toward better decision-making and fosters a positive path forward, reducing the likelihood of continued involvement in delinquent behavior, and sheds light on the prison-to-school pipeline, which in turn serves as a positive factor in recidivism rates.

Beckford (2016) recognized that the United States Office of Justice considered the school-to-prison pipeline a national priority. This phenomenon involved a sequence of events that included severe disciplinary measures, student suspension or expulsion, school-based arrests, dropout, and subsequent court involvement, ultimately leading to prolonged or cyclical incarceration. This resulted in the denial of access to education and future employment opportunities (Beckford, 2016; Children's Defense Fund, 2013; Kim et al. 2010). Certain groups, particularly those in impoverished neighborhoods and individuals who are Black, Latino, homeless, immigrant, LGBTQ+, or have disabilities, are disproportionately affected by this pipeline (Beckford, 2016; Kim et al., 2010). Some advocates asserted that harsh disciplinary practices and early exposure to poverty can set young individuals on a trajectory toward prison from a very early age, coining the term

"cradle to prison pipeline" (Beckford,2016; Children’s Defense Fund, 2013; Wilkes, 2011).

The availability of mental health counseling to high school students is important for various reasons. It helps students navigate academic challenges, make informed decisions about their future, and cope with personal or emotional issues. Counseling can address mental health concerns, improve social skills, and contribute to a positive learning environment. Overall, counseling is a mechanism that can serve as holistic development of students, ensuring they have the tools to succeed academically and emotionally as they transition into adulthood. Crook (2015) and Lewis, et al., (2002) illustrated the need for counselors, the American Counseling Association (ACA), and Advocacy Competencies to serve as a foundation for social justice.

Fairness, equity, and access are consistent themes throughout the entire counseling profession. In seeking to define social justice within the field of counseling, Crook (2015) and Steele (2008) focused on the use of counseling services that include the identification and addressing of social policies and practices that negatively impact individuals from marginalized backgrounds. Within school counseling, Crook (2015) emphasized addressing the causes and effects of systemic oppression on the lives of students. In a more comprehensive fashion, Bemak and Chung (2008) and Crook (2015) highlighted social justice advocacy among school counselors as working to improve educational outcomes by ensuring fair treatment, access to opportunities and resources, and working to right injustices among students where variables, such as race and socioeconomic status, are linked to disparities in achievement.

Access to mental health counseling in high school settings is instrumental to prevent students from referrals to juvenile detention. Counseling addresses emotional and behavioral challenges early on, offering support and intervention. By addressing mental health concerns, students are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior, promoting a positive school environment and reducing the risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system. Thus, decreasing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rates of juveniles. Early intervention through counseling contributes to fostering emotional well-being and positive decision-making among students.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

In Chapter One, the researcher provided an in-depth review of the existing literature on high school students who were referred to the juvenile justice system, outlining general approaches for school counselors to intervene at the individual student level, utilizing the American Counseling Association (ACA) Advocacy Competencies as a framework. The chapter examined research on the juvenile justice system, as well as the roles and duties of school counselors, while also discussing implications for counselor educators and suggestions to help lower crime and recidivism rates amongst juveniles. Moreover, during the high school years, the researcher acknowledges that there may be an overestimation of preparedness for a controlled, institutional environment. While recognizing the ability to handle independence, the researcher reflects on the challenges of navigating a chaotic upbringing, which predominantly shaped perceptions and survival strategies. Additionally, the pressure of being a first-generation student played a significant role in initiating a college career directly after high school, driven by a desire not to disappoint others. However, the researcher identifies a lack of readiness for the academic journey at that time.

Chapter Two analyzes the implications of Erikson's (1950) eight stages of development, *The Scope of Mental Health Professionals in a High School Setting*, *Mental Health Needs of Racial and Ethnic Minorities*, *Correlation between Crime and Mental Health, Education and Discrimination*, *Recidivism rates amongst Juvenile Offenders*, and *The Scope of the Juvenile Justice System*. To initiate each topic, the research begins with a brief historical overview. Following history, this chapter discusses the research supporting the effects these topics have on juveniles, then transitions to the responsibility

of schools to meet the mental health needs of students suffering from the effects of being juvenile offenders. This knowledge uses research to understand the correlation between mental health professionals and juvenile offenders, and the impact that this relationship has on crime rates to lower juvenile crime rates.

Erikson's Eight Stages of Development

Erikson's well-known model of psychosocial development, often synonymous with his name and described as his "all-encompassing psychological theory" (Erikson, 1950/1963, p. 424) stands out for its comprehensive portrayal of the entire human life cycle and the interplay between psychological and social dimensions. Departing from the traditional psychoanalytic emphasis on internal dynamics, Erikson's theory represented a shift towards a relational and interpersonal perspective. With the emergence of the "relational turn" in psychoanalytic theory and the growing recognition of the therapeutic relationship as an interaction between two subjectivities, Erikson can be considered one of the pioneers of psychoanalytic relational theory (Aron, 1996; Benjamin, 2004; King, 2017; Mitchell & Aron, 1999; Ogden, 1994, 2007).

Throughout his life, psychoanalyst Erik Erikson emerged as one of the most esteemed and prolific scholars of the 20th century, producing 14 books and numerous articles, while maintaining a full-time and enduring clinical practice (King, 2017; Kivnick & Wells, 2013). He initially formulated his revolutionary life cycle theory, comprising eight stages of psychosocial development in 1950, with the publication of his book, *Childhood and Society*, followed by a second edition in 1963. Erikson further elaborated on his psychosocial developmental theory in seminal works, such as *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968/1994), *Insight and Responsibility* (1964), *Toys and Reasons*

(1976), and *The Life Cycle Completed* (1982). Additionally, he delved into the exploration of old age in collaboration with his wife and a colleague, as detailed in the book *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (1994).

Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development encompass a series of dichotomous conflicts and virtues (Syntonic Tendency-Dystonic Tendency) that individuals encounter as they progress through different life stages (Erikson, 1950). These stages include Infancy (Basic Trust vs Mistrust, Hope), Early childhood (Autonomy vs Shame and doubt, Will), Play age (Initiative vs Guilt, Purpose), School age (Industriousness vs Inferiority, Competence), Adolescence (Identity cohesion vs Role confusion, Fidelity), Young adulthood (Intimacy vs Isolation, Love), Adulthood (Generativity vs Stagnation/self-absorption, Care), and Old age (Integrity vs Despair, Wisdom). Each stage presented a virtuous quality to be attained and a maladaptive tendency to be avoided (Erikson, 1950).

Erikson's Eight Stages of Development as it Relates to Juveniles and Mental Health

The researcher incorporated Erikson's stages of development into the research on juvenile crime rates and access to mental health professionals in the St. Louis metropolitan high school setting by using it as a theoretical framework to understand the psychosocial factors influencing adolescent behavior (Smith, 2020).

- **Identity vs. Role Confusion (Adolescence):** Erikson's stage of identity development was particularly relevant to understanding juvenile behavior and engagement with mental health services. Adolescents who struggled with identity formation were more susceptible to delinquent behavior as they navigated peer

pressure, societal expectations, and personal identity exploration (Jones & Brown, 2018).

- **Intimacy vs. Isolation (Young Adulthood):** While focusing on high school settings, the researcher explored how the availability of mental health professionals and support systems within schools impacted adolescents' ability to form healthy relationships and develop interpersonal skills. Access to mental health resources was found to mitigate feelings of isolation and promote positive social interactions, reducing the risk of delinquency (Garcia et al., 2019).
- **Generativity vs. Stagnation (Adulthood):** Although Erikson's later stages primarily focused on adulthood, elements of generativity, such as contributing to the well-being of future generations, informed discussions on preventive interventions for juvenile crime. The researcher examined how investment in mental health services for adolescents in high school contributed to long-term societal benefits by reducing crime rates and promoting positive youth development (Lee & Smith, 2021).

By integrating Erikson's stages of development into the research framework, the researcher provided a holistic understanding of the interplay between psychosocial factors, adolescent development, and access to mental health services in addressing juvenile crime rates in the Saint Louis metropolitan high school setting. This approach allowed for a nuanced analysis that considered both individual developmental trajectories and environmental influences on adolescent behavior (Johnson, 2017).

Scope of Mental Health Professionals in High School Settings

The researcher explored the scope of mental health professionals in high school settings, aiming to understand their roles and contributions to students' psychological well-being. According to a study by Jones and Smith (2019), mental health professionals commonly found in high school settings included school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists. These professionals engage in a spectrum of activities aimed at supporting students' mental health:

- **Individual Counseling and Therapy Sessions:** Mental health professionals offer one-on-one counseling and therapy sessions to help students cope with mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, or trauma (Brown & Johnson, 2020).
- **Assessments and Evaluations:** They conduct comprehensive assessments and evaluations to identify students' mental health needs and devise personalized intervention plans tailored to each student's requirements (Garcia et al., 2019).
- **Group Counseling and Support Groups:** Mental health professionals organize group counseling sessions and support groups to address common issues among students, including peer relationships, academic stress, and social adjustment (Miller & Lee, 2017).
- **Collaboration with School Staff and Parents:** They collaborate closely with school staff, administrators, and parents to create a supportive and inclusive environment within the school community. This collaboration fosters mental health awareness and resilience among students (Taylor & Martinez, 2019).

- **Educational Initiatives:** Mental health professionals educate students about mental health through various educational initiatives such as classroom presentations, workshops, or awareness campaigns. These initiatives aim to destigmatize mental health issues and promote help-seeking behaviors (Hernandez & Rodriguez, 2020).
- **Referrals and External Resources:** Additionally, they facilitate referrals to external mental health resources or community services for specialized treatment or ongoing support beyond the school setting (Clark & White, 2016). By engaging in these multifaceted roles and activities, mental health professionals contribute significantly to the overall well-being and academic success of students within high school settings.

Mental Health Professionals in Disadvantaged High School Settings

Eppler-Wolff et al. (2019) introduced the School-Based Mental Health Collaboration (SBMHC), a partnership between Teachers College, Columbia University, and selected New York City public grade schools. This initiative addressed the mental health needs of students while providing a unique training opportunity for graduate students in psychology. The SBMHC aimed to model a relationship characterized by both security and exploration, benefiting students, parents, and faculty members alike, particularly in schools serving high-poverty populations. Children in poverty often face trauma, chronic stress, and unstable relationships, factors associated with poorer socio-emotional adjustment and academic performance (Eppler-Wolff et al., 2019).

It is important to understand the significance of relationships between students, parents, and faculty is crucial for high school students' behavioral outcomes and future

trajectories. Attachment theory posits that secure child-parent attachment relationships serve as a foundation for exploration and curiosity, leading to better academic and social-emotional outcomes (Eppler-Wolff et al., 2019). Conversely, insecurely attached infants, particularly those classified as disorganized, are at higher risk of disruptive behavior (Eppler-Wolff et al., 2019).

The SBMHC's efforts to increase access to mental health services and accommodate diverse demographics are essential, particularly for research focused on low socioeconomic populations. This research could shed light on the impact of a lack of mental health professionals on college enrollment among marginalized high school students. Mental health professionals play a crucial role in supporting students' learning, potentially preventing barriers that may lead to criminal behavior. Considering mental health alongside academic performance, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the absence of mental health professionals in high schools may hinder a student's ability to learn, potentially contributing to future challenges. Karami and Mahmoodi (2018) emphasized the role of self-efficacy in mental health, suggesting that individuals with high self-efficacy demonstrate better coping strategies and mental health outcomes (Karami & Mahmoodi, 2018; Kim, 2003). Furthermore, Haddadi Moghaddam, Abolghasemi Sh, and Tizdast 's (2021) research underscored the relationship between emotional intelligence, psychological health, and academic achievement. Individuals with stable mental health tend to perform well academically and lead successful and fulfilling lives (Karami & Mahmoodi, 2018). This highlighted the intricate interplay between mental health and academic success.

Mental Health Needs of Racial and Ethnic Minorities

African American, Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic/Latinx American individuals not only face higher rates of mental health challenges, but also encounter persistent and concerning inequalities across all aspects of mental healthcare, including access to services, diagnostic methods, and treatment participation and effectiveness (Eaton et al., 2008; Holden et al., 2014; Valdez et al., 2019; President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003). The objective of this investigation was to scrutinize racial disparities concerning mental health and overall well-being. Data were collected via surveys administered in various settings, including homes, prisons, and mental hospitals, revealing a significant discrepancy in mental health-seeking behavior between blacks and whites in community settings.

Goodwin et al. (2021) identified the significant role of race and ethnicity in shaping the experiences of students in the United States. While many studies focused on mental health from either universal or group difference perspectives, discrimination, and intense pressure to succeed emerge as key risk factors that exacerbate mental health challenges among adolescents (Goodwin et al., 2021; Luthar et al., 2019). This research specifically examined the impact of high-pressure environments on black adolescents, by investigating their encounters with discrimination in high-achieving school settings, school well-being indicators, and internalizing risk. Additionally, the study explored the link between experiences of discrimination and intentions to seek mental health support within the school environment. As efforts for educational equity and justice gain momentum, it becomes crucial for schools to proactively support the diverse needs of successful learners, particularly black students, to ensure their continued flourishing and

increased access to advanced educational opportunities. Thus, a thorough examination of potential risk factors for mental health concerns and intentions to seek help is essential, providing schools and mental health professionals with valuable insights to effectively serve black students in academically rigorous settings (Goodwin et al., 2021).

Early research on this subject, as noted by Snowden (1999), yielded conflicting outcomes, with some studies suggesting higher mental health-seeking rates among blacks compared to whites, while others showed the opposite trend. Recent studies, however, have adopted more rigorous methodologies and national data sources to minimize biases. Notably, these studies have revealed an overrepresentation of African Americans in inpatient mental health programs.

According to Browman (1987), The National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) and the Americans View Their Mental Health restudy (AVTMH), indicated that blacks were more inclined than whites to seek mental help from non-mental health professionals, such as teachers and emergency room staff. This discrepancy underscores the importance of examining the representation of blacks seeking mental health assistance from mental health professionals. Snowden (1999) revealed that The Epidemiologic Catchment Area Study (ECA) compared racial disparities using both community and institutional samples. This study used both controlled and uncontrolled analysis and the community sample. The community samples were combined with two institutional samples: inmates from jail or prison and mental hospitals.

Snowden (1999) indicated that the area study for ECA consisted of the eastern third of the city of Baltimore (38% black or 1,082), St. Louis ECA (20% black or 1,058), and five counties in the northern and central parts of North Carolina ECA (38% black or

1,392), and New Haven and Los Angeles contributed a minute portion of African Americans to the sample (420 in New Haven and 148 in Los Angeles). The sample included a total of 12,152 whites. Data was weighted to reflect the age, sex, and racial makeup of the United States. For each community survey given, an institutional survey was also conducted to supplement the community survey. The institutions in this study were jails, prisons, and mental hospitals. The only persons eligible to complete the institutional survey had to be residents of a jail, prison, or psychiatric facility within one of the five areas that made up the study. The institutional residents had to have lived in the facility for more than a year or live within the catchment prior to being admitted to said facility. Surveys were administered at the facility of confinement. Random sampling was the main method of data collection.

In Baltimore, surveys were administered in a mixture of four mental hospitals, a state mental hospital, two private psychiatric hospitals, and a state penitentiary. In Saint Louis, participants included persons in four jails, 10 state prisons, five mental hospitals, five residential treatment centers for alcohol and drugs, the State Hospital for the Mentally Retarded, and one half-way house. The North Carolina catchment consisted of five psychiatric facilities, two half-way houses, and 10 correctional facilities. In order to collect valuable data in Los Angeles, a preliminary survey was administered in order to narrow down eligible institutions. From those results, a list was developed of residents that live within the catchment, then institutional clusters were taken from the list.

Some independent variables were also taken from the survey. The independent variable of interest here, race, was displayed as black (black not Hispanic) versus white (white not Hispanic). Gender, age, employment status, SES, marital status, and health

diagnoses were some other independent variables considered in this survey. Another topic noted in this survey was whether participants had a regular physician or were more likely to go to the emergency room during a time of need. Researchers found that blacks were more likely than whites to report they did not have any usual source of healthcare. This meant that more blacks than whites lack health insurance, a regular physician during a health crisis, and most importantly lack of preventative or routine care. Is there a connection between this data and a lack of mental health professionals in schools?

The findings of this study mirror the findings in previous studies, blacks are underrepresented in mental health treatment facilities. All the findings, when taking racial differences into account, suggested that blacks are less likely than whites to seek help from any of the sources studied. In both controlled and uncontrolled analysis, African Americans were by far least likely to seek mental help from a private sector than whites.

While conducting research, Jenks (1994) found that 350,000 people were homeless at a designated moment in 1987. Jenks (1994) also pointed out that Blacks make up about 12% of the United States population but count for almost half of the homeless population. Of the 44% homeless blacks, 24% had a history of mental health treatment.

Crime and Mental Health in Black Low Socioeconomic Status Areas

Socioeconomic Status (SES) serves as an indicator of social position for both individuals and groups. At the individual level, SES is typically assessed by considering factors such as parental education, income, and occupation, which are linked to various forms of social, cultural, and human capital (Engberg & Wolniak, 2014). On a broader scale, SES also encompasses contextual measures at the school or organizational level,

reflecting the aggregate socioeconomic status of the individuals within that setting. Historically, scholars have shown interest in understanding the implications of SES for educational outcomes, with seminal work, such as Coleman et al.'s (1966) examination of educational inequality within and between schools. Building on this foundation, Borman and Dowling (2010) revisited the Coleman Report (1966) and utilized modern multilevel modeling techniques to analyze public-school data from the 1960s. Their study focused on predicting students' verbal abilities and included measures, such as school mean family resources and school mean parental education. The findings of their multilevel analyses underscored the significant impact of school-level socioeconomic factors on students' verbal achievement and emphasized the importance of considering contextual influences alongside individual characteristics (Engberg & Wolniak, 2014).

Engberg and Wolniak (2014) conducted qualitative analyses that focused on the high school socioeconomic context alongside school-level guidance and admissions norms. Their findings, as highlighted by McDonough (1997), suggested that the college application and admissions processes of students in low-SES schools are constrained by the K-12 schools' resources, particularly those related to guidance counseling. Regardless of academic merit, the socioeconomic context of high school appears to limit student choice and influence their ability to navigate the college selection process, exacerbating existing disadvantages among students from lower social classes.

In another study, Vinkers et al. (2011) found that developmental disorders were strongly associated with homicide, while personality disorders were linked to sexual crimes and homicide. Additionally, individuals with an IQ below 85 points were more likely to commit sexual crimes. Defendants of rape and sexual crimes were often

considered accountable and less likely to suffer from mental disorders, except for paraphilia, developmental disorders, and impaired intellectual functioning (Vinkers et al., 2011).

In the United States, one in five youth has a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder and one in 10 has impairment of functioning at home, school or in the community (National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, 2009). In the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, prevalence rates of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders are higher, with some studies indicating that rates may exceed 50% (Burns et al., 2004; dosReis et al., 2002).

The researcher found significance in the context of the articles in lieu of the literature review, as it explored the interplay between crime and mental disorders. Specifically, it investigated how the presence of mental health professionals in low-SES black communities may impact an individual's opportunity for college enrollment or attendance due to limited resources. If one understands the scarcity of resources in this demographic, it could shed light on the psychological factors that influence educational attainment and the potential consequences, such as a sense of hopelessness leading to involvement in criminal activities.

Education and Discrimination

Hughes, et al., (2010) stressed that the various social systems that work with young people may be affected by racial prejudice and bias. Discrimination and disenfranchisement manifest in various harmful ways, often with economic repercussions. Economists typically analyze the impact on wages and productivity; the Beckerian framework highlighted both direct costs to oppressed individuals and indirect

costs through resource misallocation (Becker, 2010). However, another significant, yet understudied, consequence of discrimination is its effect on a citizens' willingness to contribute to public goods (Qian & Tabellini, 2020).

The question arises regarding the integration of certain ethnic backgrounds into society, particularly concerning education. Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo (2016) noted a rise in demographic diversity in higher education enrollments, particularly among Latinas/os, leading to an increase in Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) catering to historically underrepresented populations. Despite the growing enrollment of Blacks and Latinas/os, institutional stratification trends towards less selective institutions (Núñez, Crisp, & Elizondo et al., 2016). Consequently, MSIs play a vital role in graduating historically underserved students (Núñez et al., 2016). Additionally, efforts to redesign history survey courses reflect a growing recognition among historians and educators of the need for innovation and cultural relevance (Cherland, 2019). This highlighted the ongoing struggle to address social injustices and educational inequalities for minorities, raising questions about equitable access to jobs and fair compensation compared to white counterparts.

Institutions, particularly public colleges and universities, grapple with conflicting objectives, seeking to serve the public while prioritizing research production, academic capitalism, and economic profitability (Ozias & Pasque, 2019; Pasque, 2010). These conflicting aims create tensions within institutions and hinder collaboration with surrounding communities to address entrenched social and economic issues (Ozias & Pasque, 2019). To tackle systemic inequities, stakeholders across community-university

boundaries must engage in collaborative efforts focused on equity and justice (Ozias & Pasque, 2019).

Cherland (2019) emphasized the importance of active learning and incorporating diverse perspectives into teaching practices. While efforts to enhance cultural relevance include non-Eurocentric and non-male voices in curriculum materials, there remains a need to critically examine the contributions of the nation's founding fathers amidst the diversity of perspectives.

The Disenfranchised

It is important to understand that students from different races, socioeconomic classes and geographical locations may be treated negatively, and that growing up with a negative mindset can potentially contribute to different violent crimes within different metropolitan areas. According to Puzzanchera, Adams, and Hockenberry (2013), in 2011, there were 1.5 million arrests of individuals aged 18 and younger. Among these arrests, a disproportionate number were African American and Latino youth. Specifically, in 2011, African American youth accounted for 51% of violent crimes and 35% of property crimes, while their white counterparts represented 47% and 62% respectively (Puzzanchera et al., 2013).

The high rates of suspensions and expulsions students of color experience reflect the approach to discipline many districts implement. Instead of creating chances for them to learn from unwanted behavior, the dominant approach is based on a punitive model that excludes students who engage in conduct considered offensive (Milner et al. 2019). Schools have historically used a deterrence model of behavior management designed to encourage compliant

behavior by removing noncompliant students from their classes. Zero tolerance policies were originally implemented in response to dangerous student behaviors. For example, the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act required removing a student for a minimum of one year for possessing a firearm in school. However, these policies started to be implemented for minor infractions as well (Jones et al. 2018). Today, zero tolerance policies are sometimes used for swearing and dress-code violations (Milner et al. 2019).

Native American Population

The historical narrative surrounding Native Americans in higher education, as documented by *Native Americans and Higher Education* (1990), is one marked by exclusion and forced assimilation since the earliest encounters with white settlers. Institutions of higher learning have often failed to actively seek out Native American students, rendering college environments confusing and inhospitable for those who have attempted to navigate them. Today, Native Americans remain significantly underrepresented in higher education, facing formidable barriers to obtaining a degree, exacerbated by the isolation and chronic neglect prevalent in reservation communities, characterized by issues such as alcoholism and unemployment.

Hispanic Population

Martinez, Vega, and Marquez (2019) shed light on the educational landscape for Latinx individuals, who constitute the largest minority group in the United States. Despite their demographic size, Latinx educational attainment rates trail behind other racial and ethnic groups. Dropout rates in high school contribute to low college enrollment rates among Latinx students, with disparities evident across racial lines. While promising

increases in college enrollment among Latinx students were noted in 2012, recent data show disparities persisting in immediate college enrollment rates following high school graduation. Latinx college enrollment rates have not declined since 2012, yet significant increases have also not been observed.

Asian Population

Gutierrez (2018) discussed ongoing investigations into allegations of Ivy League universities limiting admissions of Asian applicants, despite their strong academic records. While elite universities deny the existence of quotas, statistical evidence suggests otherwise, with disproportionately low admission rates for Asian applicants compared to their high academic achievements. This discrepancy raises questions about the fairness of admissions processes and the potential implications for racial diversity within universities.

African American Population

Clayton and Peters (2019) outlined the historical struggles faced by African Americans in accessing higher education, with the first African American student admitted to a public white institution in the South being Silas Hunt at the University of Arkansas in 1948. The enduring racial tensions between Black Americans and White Americans have shaped laws and legislation aimed at achieving equality for minorities of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Despite progress over the past centuries, Black Americans continue to fight for equal rights within various institutions, often sparking movements for self-sufficiency in the face of persistent inequalities.

According to Lesh (2020), it is essential to engage with students based on their lived experiences. Despite a 31% decrease in juvenile arrests since 2002, particularly in

categories such as violent crimes and property crimes, the presence of students within the juvenile justice system remains a concern that school counselors must acknowledge and confront. Many of these students are confined to detention centers, while others are placed on probation and reintegrated into their homes, schools, and communities (Crook, 2015).

Structural racism and disenfranchisement among minority adolescents have been well documented throughout history. Scarce resources and social disadvantages have also played an important role in high recidivism rates, juvenile crime rates, and the lack of mental health resources for minority populations. Research plays an integral role in how we develop systems and are able to move forward with ensuring equality for those who have historically been at a disadvantage with both mental health resources and educational resources that could possibly lead to higher juvenile crime rates. According to Morgan (2021) the implementation of exclusionary school discipline (ESD) is believed to increase the likelihood of students of color being arrested for several reasons. First, some zero-tolerance policies require schools to refer students to law enforcement for violating school rules. Second, the rise in school suspensions due to ESD leads to more unsupervised time for students, increasing their chances of getting involved in criminal activities. Cuellar and Markowitz (2015) explored this connection and found that out-of-school suspensions for youth with a history of offending behaviors significantly raised the number of referrals to the juvenile justice system. The study indicated that suspensions could more than double the chances of the youth being arrested.

Black students are particularly affected by the cradle-to-prison pipeline, as they are transferred to alternative schools at higher rates than other students (Hirschfield

2018). This transfer increases the likelihood of youths encountering the juvenile justice system because many of the alternative schools have partnerships with the juvenile justice system or police departments. The alternative schools' collaborations with the juvenile system and the police departments make it probable that incriminating information will be shared, further entangling these students in the legal system (Hirschfield 2018).

Scope of Juvenile Justice System

The juvenile justice system encompasses a multifaceted framework designed to address the legal and rehabilitative needs of young offenders. It involves a range of legal proceedings, from arrest to adjudication, aimed at ensuring accountability and fostering rehabilitation. Rehabilitation efforts within the system often focus on education, mental health services, and community-based interventions to address the underlying factors contributing to delinquent behavior (Feld, 2016). Additionally, diversion programs aim to redirect youth away from formal processing and toward community-based interventions (Bartollas & Miller, 2017). However, disparities within the system persist, particularly concerning race and socioeconomic status.

Research demonstrated that African American and Latino youth are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system, facing harsher sentences and less access to diversionary programs compared to their white counterparts (Feld, 2016; Zahn et al., 2010). Moreover, concerns persisted regarding the effectiveness of punitive measures versus rehabilitative approaches. Some argue for a shift toward restorative justice practices, emphasizing accountability, victim-offender mediation, and community involvement (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2011). Overall, the juvenile justice

system operates within a complex landscape, balancing the goals of accountability and rehabilitation while striving to address disparities and promote positive outcomes for youth involved in the system.

Link Between Recidivism Rates and Academic Success Amongst Juveniles

It is imperative to facilitate a seamless transition and reintegration process for students within the juvenile justice system, as it significantly impacts their academic success and reduces the likelihood of further delinquency and recidivism (Crook, 2015).

Access to quality education is perceived as the most viable pathway to a productive future for this population (Crook, 2015). However, many students within the juvenile justice system struggle academically due to various academic and cognitive challenges (Crook, 2015; Oudekerk et al., 2012).

Alarmingly, only 12% of previously incarcerated juvenile offenders manage to graduate from high school or obtain a GED (Crook, 2015). This low level of academic achievement underscores a social justice concern that necessitates attention from school counselors operating within a comprehensive developmental school counseling program.

Juvenile Justice System in the City of St. Louis: A Report Card to Our Stakeholders

The Juvenile Justice System in the City of St. Louis: A Report Card to Our Stakeholders (2020) provided a snapshot of the Saint Louis juvenile justice system's performance, and it highlighted benchmarks related to child protection, safety, accountability, and community involvement. Despite the impact of COVID-19, the court was committed to improvement and accountability. Citizens expressed a desire for community safety, justice for crime victims, youth accountability, responsible behavior, and safe, permanent homes for all children. The Family Court, guided by balanced and

restorative justice principles, sought to reduce recidivism, and positively impact youth, victims, and the community. Community involvement is crucial, and citizens were encouraged to participate in volunteer opportunities within the Community Justice Project and Detention Center. Opportunities included working directly with children or serving as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for abused or neglected children.

In 2020, the Family Court received 458 delinquency referrals, with 96% involving African American youth and 83% being male (City of St. Louis Family Court, 2020, p. 4). The Innovative Concept Academy is a collaboration that involved the St. Louis Family Court, St. Louis Public Schools, and MERS/Goodwill, providing alternative education for at-risk youth aged 10 to 19. The Family Court offered diversion programs, managed by Deputy Juvenile Officers, to prevent deeper involvement in the juvenile justice system and address harm caused to victims. The Detention Center served as a secure facility for juveniles pending delinquency hearings, with detention reserved for those considered a risk to the community or at risk of not appearing in court. Research supported the detainment of youth only, when necessary, with alternatives like Electronic Monitoring or Home Detention available for those not securely detained.

The Family Sub-Contracted Services program, partially funded by the St. Louis Mental Health Board, offers various services, such as counseling, anger management, and psychological evaluations to youth and families involved with the Family Court (Juvenile Justice System in the City of St. Louis, 2020). The Truancy Diversion Program served 76 students in the 2019-2020 school year, aiming to improve school attendance (Juvenile System in the City of St. Louis, 2020, p. 3). Volunteers in the Detention Center provided educational, artistic, recreational, and cultural services to detained youths. Neighborhood

Accountability Boards, which were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, involved volunteers working with offenders to develop plans for repairing harm caused, with Deputy Juvenile Officers maintaining communication and updates during this period.

In 2020, the Family Court handled 231 felony offenses, with five youths tried in adult court. Stealing was the most common delinquency offense (Juvenile System in the City of St. Louis, 2020, p. 4). Of the 25 youth under official court supervision, 15 had no new legal violations during the supervision period (Juvenile System in the City of St. Louis, 2020, p. 4). Curfew compliance, monitored through the Night Watch Program, faced disruptions due to the pandemic, resulting in 185 visits, where youth were home 82.2% of the time (Juvenile Justice System in the City of St. Louis, 2020, p. 4). Positive reinforcement was given to compliant youth, while violators faced swift sanctions.

The Family Court's Child Protection and Permanency Units handled child abuse and neglect cases, providing services until children achieved permanency. Custody is granted to the Missouri Children's Division, which investigates and offers foster care, and adoption services. The number of children in their custody decreased over the past five years, before this writing. The Missouri Supreme Court mandated timelines for child protection hearings, and 84% of family court hearings were held within these timelines, despite some postponements in 2020 due to the initial impact of COVID-19 (Juvenile Justice System in the City of St. Louis, 2020, p.5). Permanency outcomes included reunification, aging out of the system, adoption, guardianship, or transfer to another circuit in a small number of cases (Juvenile Justice System in the City of St. Louis, 2020, p. 5).

In 2020, crime victims emphasized the expectation for offenders to pay restitution for the harm caused, with orders totaling \$22,759; however, the actual amount paid was \$19,806 (Juvenile Offenders also contributed 160 hours of community service valued at a minimum wage of \$1,512 (Juvenile Justice System in the City of St. Louis, 2020, p. 6). Additionally, the system provided a Weekend Community Service program for youth in violation. The St. Louis Family Court Victim Advocate's services received positive feedback, as many respondents found their experience to be excellent, although the survey response rate was relatively low (Juvenile Justice System in the City of St. Louis, 2020, p. 6).

City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community: 2022

The Family Court legislation, established after the 1993 Legislative Session, grants jurisdiction over various court actions, including divorce, child custody, adoption, juvenile proceedings, establishment of parent-child relationships, child support duties, and adult abuse/child protection actions. Judges in the Family Court are required to undergo specific training, and a Family Court Services and Justice Fund is financed through a \$30 filing fee in many cases, supporting the court's operations (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, p. 3)

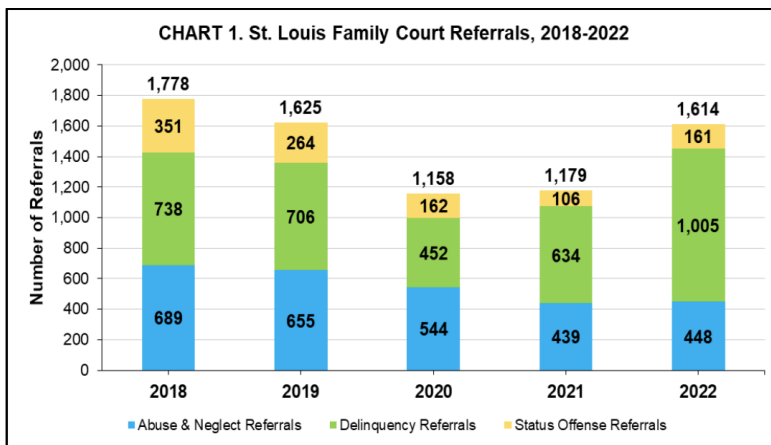
The Family Court Juvenile Division (Division 30) was composed of 222 employees and various departments providing support services. It included the Child Protection, Special Services, Legal, Detention, Administrative, and Judicial Departments. The Juvenile Office manages referrals, formal and informal cases, and has the Child Protection Department with units addressing abuse and neglect cases. The Comprehensive Study Unit conducted social investigations for delinquency referrals.

Supervision Units provide community-based services, and the Truancy Unit addresses educational neglect. The Grants and Special Programs Unit oversees the Nightwatch Program, Victim Offender Dialogue, and the Neighborhood Accountability Board Program. The Family Sub-Contracted Services program offers counseling, anger management, and more. (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, 4-6).

Figure 1 illustrates the number of offenses referred to the Juvenile Office categorized by charge level between the years of 2018 to 2022: 1a. Felony Offenses: - In 2022: 878 offenses; In 2021: 535 offenses; In 2020: 353 offenses; In 2019: 444 offenses; In 2018: 448 offenses; 1b. Misdemeanor Offenses; In 2022: 714 offenses; In 2021: 459 offenses; In 2020: 329 offenses; In 2019: 559 offenses; In 2018: 592 offenses. 1c. Status Offenses: - In 2022: 158 offenses; In 2021: 104 offenses; In 2020: 163 offenses; In 2019: 265 offenses; In 2018: 350 offenses (p. 4).

Figure 1

St. Louis County Court Referrals: 2018-2022



Note: St. Louis Family Court Referrals. Reprinted with permission from the Chief Communications Officer for the St. Louis Circuit Court and the 22nd Judicial Court of St. Louis, Missouri. See Appendix A.

Figure 2 outlines Child Protection and Permanency Referrals for the year 2022, presenting the data as follows: Male: 219 referrals; Female: 227 referrals; Gender not Reported: 2 referrals; African-American: 365 referrals; White: 68 referrals; Other: 15 referrals; Total Referrals: 448; Children Entering Foster Care: 285 (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, p 5).

Figure 2

Child Protection and Permanency Referrals, 2022

| Table 2. Child Protection and Permanency Referrals, 2022 | |
|---|-----|
| Male | 219 |
| Female | 227 |
| Gender not Reported | 2 |
| African-American | 365 |
| White | 68 |
| Other | 15 |
| Total Referrals | 448 |
| Children Entering Foster Care | 285 |

Note: St. Louis Family Court Child Protection and Permanency Referrals. Reprinted with permission from the Chief Communications Officer for the St. Louis Circuit Court and the 22nd Judicial Court of St. Louis, Missouri. See Appendix A.

The Community Service and Restitution Program offered youth an opportunity to be held accountable for their behavior by completing community service hours, acquiring basic employment skills, and repairing harm to victims and the community. In 2022, youth under the St. Louis Family Court jurisdiction paid \$42,740 in restitution to victims

and performed 450 hours of community service (City of St. Louis Family Report to the Community, 2022, p. 7). The Neighborhood Accountability Board addressed minor delinquency matters, allowing youth to repair harm caused by offenses. Thirteen boards operate in various neighborhoods. The Psychological Services Unit provided crisis intervention and therapeutic services to youth in the Detention Center, addressing mental health concerns. The Legal Department, established in 1970, screens and prosecutes civil cases related to abuse/neglect, status offenses, delinquency, and certification, representing the Juvenile Officer in formal proceedings (City of St. Louis Family Report to the Community, 2022, p. 7).

The Intake Unit assessed new delinquency and child protection referrals, determining if youth should be placed in detention or an alternative and if children should be placed in protective custody. Referrals come from Law Enforcement, the Missouri Children's Division, and other professionals. Deputy Juvenile Officers reviewed and consulted with attorneys to establish probable cause for delinquency or abuse/neglect (City of St. Louis Family Report to the Community, 2022, p. 7). They advised youth of due process rights, ensured protection during police interactions, and scheduled initial hearings. The Warrant Unit, after intake screening, reviewed referrals for prosecutive merit. When evidence was sufficient, a staff attorney filed legal pleadings for formal court processes, meeting the 24-hour filing requirement. The Intake and Warrant Units may also refer minor delinquency cases to other units for informal diversion services (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, pp. 7-8).

The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), expanded to St. Louis in 2006, aimed to establish more effective and efficient juvenile detention systems. The

goals included the reduction of unnecessary detentions, minimizing failures to appear in court or re-offenses, improving confinement conditions, and enhancing community safety. The initiative employed eight core strategies, emphasizing collaboration, data-driven decision-making, objective criteria, community-based alternatives, expedited case processing, innovations for special cases, bias elimination, and routine facility inspections. Successful implementation was expected to reduce admissions, shorten lengths of stay, expedite case processing, and increase the use of community-based programs. Secure juvenile detention is considered appropriate to ensure court appearances and minimize the risk of serious re-offending during adjudication (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, p. 8).

The Trial Unit, part of the Juvenile Office, handled litigation matters and was staffed by attorneys representing the Juvenile Officer in various cases, including abuse/neglect, termination of parental rights, status offenses, delinquency, certification hearings, and appellate cases. During hearings, the staff attorney bears the burden of proving delinquency charges beyond a reasonable doubt and abuse/neglect cases by clear and convincing evidence. Youth who faced delinquency charges were typically represented by private attorneys or public defenders. The Court ensured the appointment of a guardian ad litem (GAL) for every child involved in abuse/neglect, termination of parental rights (TPR), and adoption cases (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, p.9). Parents in abuse/neglect and termination of parental rights cases have the right to legal representation, with the Court providing an attorney if a parent cannot afford one. The tables detail the number of Termination of Parental Rights and

Adoption cases granted from 2018 to 2022 (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, p. 9).

Table 2 presents the Child Protection and Permanency Referral data from 2022 (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, p. 9). In 2022: 42 terminations granted - In 2021: 72 terminations granted - In 2020: 53 terminations granted - In 2019: 56 terminations granted - In 2018: 77 terminations granted Table 6 displays the Adoption data for the same period: - In 2022: 60 adoptions granted - In 2021: 103 adoptions granted - In 2020: 96 adoptions granted - In 2019: 88 adoptions granted - In 2018: 109 adoptions granted.

Figure 3

Termination of Parental Rights, 2018-2022

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Granted</u> |
|-------------|----------------|
| 2022 | 42 |
| 2021 | 72 |
| 2020 | 53 |
| 2019 | 56 |
| 2018 | 77 |

Note: St. Louis Family Court Termination of Parental Rights. Reprinted with permission from the Chief Communications Officer for the St. Louis Circuit Court and the 22nd Judicial Court of St. Louis, Missouri. See Appendix A.

Figure 4

Adoptions, 2018-2022

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Granted</u> |
|-------------|----------------|
| 2022 | 60 |
| 2021 | 103 |
| 2020 | 96 |
| 2019 | 88 |
| 2018 | 109 |

Note: St. Louis Family Court Adoptions. Reprinted with permission from the Chief Communications Officer for the St. Louis Circuit Court and the 22nd Judicial Court of St. Louis, Missouri. See Appendix A.

The Deep End Initiative, initiated in 2013 in collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, focuses on reforming the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) to assess and improve the use of out-of-home placements for court-involved youth (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022). The initiative is guided by goals, such as creating more effective systems, promoting safe and healthy adolescent development, ensuring safer communities, and eliminating unnecessary out-of-home placements. Core values include collaboration, data-driven decision-making, racial and ethnic equity, and meaningful family engagement. Through interviews, assessments, and the establishment of advisory groups and sub-committees, the initiative’s goal was to redirect resources, improve community-based interventions, and enhance juvenile system accountability for long-term youth outcomes. Team Support Approach (TSA) meetings have been implemented to involve families in the supervision

process before considering out-of-home placement (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, p. 10).

The Investigation Unit collaborated with staff attorneys to prepare for hearings, serving subpoenas, ensuring witness presence, and obtaining necessary evidence. They conducted interviews with various parties, including children involved in abuse/neglect cases, victims, witnesses, law enforcement, and medical professionals, ensuring sufficient evidence for hearings. The Adoption Unit, led by a Deputy Juvenile Officer, screens cases referred for adoption. Private attorneys representing prospective adoptive parents file adoption petitions. The unit coordinated efforts with the Circuit Clerk's office, private attorneys, child placement agencies, guardian ad litem, and the Court. It also facilitates adoption searches for birth parents and siblings on behalf of adult adoptees. A Victim Advocate, supervised by the Legal Department, provides support and assistance to victims of juvenile offenses, guiding them through court procedures and offering referrals to community services. The Detention Center operated 24/7, and detained youth pending delinquency hearings. Residents, aged 11 through 18, were housed for an average of 36 days. The most common causes for detention in 2022 included property felonies, felonies against persons, technical/probation violations, pre-adjudication program/placement failure, and others (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, pp. 10-11). The center prioritized safe and healthy adolescent development.

As part of the Deep End Initiative, launched in collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the court aimed for more effective systems, safer communities, and fewer out-of-home placements for court-involved youth. The initiative emphasized collaboration, data-driven decision-making, racial and ethnic equity, and meaningful

family engagement. TSA meetings with families help develop supervision cases before considering out-of-home placements. The Medical Unit conducted timely medical examinations for detained youth, providing ongoing basic care and utilizing community medical resources. Psychological services were offered seven days a week, addressing the mental health needs of detained youth through the Court's Psychological Services Unit. Psychiatrists from St. Louis University provide psychiatric services (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022).

City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021

The Family Court legislation, implemented after the 1993 Legislative Session, grants jurisdiction over various Court actions, including divorce, legal separation, child custody, and modifications (Chapter 452, RSMo), annulment of marriage, adoption, juvenile proceedings (delinquency, status offenses, child abuse, and neglect cases, and termination of parental rights - Chapter 211, RSMo), establishment of parent-child relationships (excluding certain actions in Chapter 210, RSMo), determination of child support duties, enforcement of support (including actions under the Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act - Chapter 454, RSMo), adult abuse, child protection, and change of name actions. The legislation mandates specific training for Family Court judges and establishes a Family Court Services and Justice Fund funded by a \$30 filing fee in many Family Court cases (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, p. 3).

The Family Court Juvenile Division, Division 30, employed 184 staff members across various departments. The Juvenile Division, composed of the Child Protection, Special Services, Legal, Detention, Administrative, and Judicial Departments, offers

comprehensive services to Family Court clients. Juvenile Office: Involves multiple departments and support services. Deputy Juvenile Officers in the Child Protection and Special Services Department provide case management to children and families, processing cases formally or informally based on the Juvenile Code. The Child Protection Department Comprises five units that address abuse and neglect cases. Deputy Juvenile Officers handle formal cases, ensuring adherence to court orders, maintaining dialogue with the Children’s Division Case Manager, and submitting status reports (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, pp. 4-6).

The department received the 2020 Supreme Court Permanency Award. Mediation Unit: Deputy Juvenile Officers provide mediation services for various divisions, addressing dissolution of marriage, motions to modify, and paternity actions. The Mediation Unit supervised visits and exchanges, adapting to COVID safety protocols. Family Subcontracted Services: Offers voluntary counseling, anger management, and other services to Family Court clients. In 2021, 15 vendors served 134 youth at an average cost of \$533.68 per child, partially funded by the St. Louis Mental Health Board. Special Services Department: Includes units like Comprehensive Study, Supervision, Grants and Special Programs, Community Justice Project, Informal services, and Psychological Services (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, pp. 4-6).

Comprehensive Study Unit: Conducts social investigations for delinquency referrals, providing recommended treatment plans for court dispositions. Supervision Units: Two units offer community-based supervision and treatment services to juveniles

and families. Informal services address minor delinquency offenses and truancy (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, pp. 4-6).

Truancy Diversion Program: Addresses educational neglect cases, with Deputy Juvenile Officers working on truancy issues, including school visits, needs assessments, advocacy, and connection to services (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, pp. 4-6).

Grants and Special Programs Unit: Encompasses the Nightwatch Program, grant management, and JDAI Site Coordinator role. Community Justice Project Unit: Includes Victim Offender Dialogue Program, Community Service and Restitution, and the Neighborhood Accountability Board Program. Victim Offender Dialogue: Facilitates face-to-face meetings between crime victims and offenders, providing a platform for open communication and the creation of mutually agreeable plans for restitution (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, pp. 4-6).

Figure 5 illustrates the number of offenses referred to the court categorized by charge level from 2017 to 2021: 1a. Felony Offenses: In 2021: 575 offenses; In 2020: 416 offenses; In 2019: 522 offenses; In 2018: 555 offenses; In 2017: 408 offenses. 1b. Misdemeanor Offenses: In 2021: 494 offenses; In 2020: 341 offenses; In 2019: 586 offenses; In 2018: 529 offenses; In 2017: 557 offenses. 1c. Status Offenses: In 2021: 104 offenses; In 2020: 164 offenses; In 2019: 266 offenses; In 2018: 330 offenses; In 2017: 321 offenses (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, p. 4).

Figure 6 provides information on Child Protection and Permanency Referrals for the year 2021: - Male referrals: 209; Female referrals: 228; Gender not reported: 2 - African American referrals: 343; White referrals: 86' Other (ethnicity not specified)

referrals: 10; Total Referrals: 439; Children entering foster care: 288 (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, p.5).

Figure 5

Offenses Referred by Charge Level, 2017-2021

| Table 1. Offenses Referred by Charge Level, 2017-2021* | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1a. Felony Offenses | |
| <u>Year</u> | <u>Offenses</u> |
| 2021 | 575 |
| 2020 | 416 |
| 2019 | 522 |
| 2018 | 555 |
| 2017 | 408 |
| 1b. Misdemeanor Offenses | |
| <u>Year</u> | <u>Offenses</u> |
| 2021 | 494 |
| 2020 | 341 |
| 2019 | 586 |
| 2018 | 529 |
| 2017 | 557 |
| 1c. Status Offenses | |
| <u>Year</u> | <u>Offenses</u> |
| 2021 | 104 |
| 2020 | 164 |
| 2019 | 266 |
| 2018 | 330 |
| 2017 | 321 |

Note: St. Louis Family Court Offenses Referred by Charge Level. Reprinted with permission from the Chief Communications Officer for the St. Louis Circuit Court and the 22nd Judicial Court of St. Louis, Missouri. See Appendix A.

Figure 6

Child Protection and Permanency Referrals, 2021

| Table 2. Child Protection and Permanency Referrals, 2021 | |
|---|-----|
| Male | 209 |
| Female | 228 |
| Gender not Reported | 2 |
| African-American | 343 |
| White | 86 |
| Other | 10 |
| Total Referrals | 439 |
| Children Entering Foster Care | 288 |

Note: St. Louis Family Court Child Protection and Permanency Referrals. Reprinted with permission from the Chief Communications Officer for the St. Louis Circuit Court and the 22nd Judicial Court of St. Louis, Missouri. See Appendix A.

The Community Service and Restitution Program allows youth to be accountable for their actions by completing community service hours, gaining skills, and contributing to nonprofit organizations. Restitution is paid to victims, and in 2021, St. Louis Family Court youth paid \$24,976.77 and performed 160 hours of community service (p. 7). Neighborhood Accountability Boards address minor delinquency matters, involving community members in formulating action plans with youth, guardians, and victims. The Psychological Services Unit offers crisis intervention and therapeutic services to detained youth, addressing mental health needs. The Legal Department, established in 1970, screens and prosecutes civil cases related to abuse, neglect, status offenses, and

delinquency, ensuring due process for youth in accordance with the Missouri Juvenile Code (p. 7).

The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), launched in 1992 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, aims to establish more effective and efficient systems for juvenile detention. In Missouri, including St. Louis, since 2006, JDAI focuses on reducing unnecessary detentions, improving outcomes for youth, and enhancing community safety through eight core strategies. These include interagency collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and reducing biases. Successful implementation aims to decrease admissions, shorten detention stays, and increase community-based program utilization, aligning with the purposes of secure juvenile detention: ensuring court appearance and minimizing re-offending (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, p. 8).

As noted in the City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community (2020):
 The Detention Center operates seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The Center is a secure facility where youth are detained by order of the Juvenile Court pending a hearing on delinquency matters. Missouri Supreme Court Rule includes standards for the operation of detention facilities in Missouri. The purpose of holding a youth in detention is to protect the community or ensure a youth's appearance at their court hearing, pending adjudication of the petition filed in the youth's interest. Residents range in age from 11-17 years, and they can be expected to remain for an average stay of 44.6 days. The most frequent causes for detention in 2020 are felonies against person (49), property felonies (19), and technical/

probation violations (28). Males constitute approximately 89 percent of the Center’s population. (p. 12)

The Intake Unit screens delinquency and child protection referrals, determining placement in detention or alternative programs. Deputy Juvenile Officers review referrals, consult with staff attorneys, and advise youth of their rights. The Warrant Unit reviews referrals for prosecutorial merit, filing legal pleadings within 24 hours of detention (p. 8-9). The Trial Unit represents the Juvenile Officer in various cases, with attorneys presenting evidence to prove charges. Private attorneys or public defenders represent youth, while guardian ad litem is appointed for children in abuse and neglect, termination of parental rights, and adoption cases. Parents are entitled to counsel, with the Court appointing one if needed.

Figure 7 outlines the number of Termination of Parental Rights granted for the years 2017 to 2021: 2021: 74 cases; 2020: 53 cases; 2019: 56 cases; 2018: 77 cases; 2017: 55 cases (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2022, p. 9).

Figure 7

Termination of Parental Rights, 2017-2021

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Granted</u> |
|-------------|----------------|
| 2021 | 74 |
| 2020 | 53 |
| 2019 | 56 |
| 2018 | 77 |
| 2017 | 55 |

Note: St. Louis Family Court Termination of Parental Rights. Reprinted with permission from the Chief Communications Officer for the St. Louis Circuit Court and the 22nd Judicial Court of St. Louis, Missouri. See Appendix A.

Figure 8 displays the number of adoptions granted for the years 2017 to 2021: -
 2021: 69 adoptions; 2020: 72 adoptions; 2019: 57 adoptions; 2018: 75 adoptions; 2017:
 84 adoptions (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, p. 9).

Figure 8

Adoptions, 2017-2021

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Granted</u> |
|-------------|----------------|
| 2021 | 69 |
| 2020 | 72 |
| 2019 | 57 |
| 2018 | 75 |
| 2017 | 84 |

Note: St. Louis Family Court Adoptions. Reprinted with permission from the Chief Communications Officer for the St. Louis Circuit Court and the 22nd Judicial Court of St. Louis, Missouri. See Appendix A.

Deep End Initiative

The Deep End Initiative, launched in 2013 in collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, extends the JDAI efforts to examine the use of out-of-home placements for youth. Driven by goals, objectives, and values, it aims to establish more effective systems, ensure safe adolescent development, and create safer communities. Key objectives include reducing unnecessary out-of-home placements, enhancing

community-based interventions, and improving public safety outcomes through data-driven decision-making and racial equity (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, p. 10). The initiative emphasizes collaboration, data-driven decision-making, racial equity, and meaningful family engagement. Initial steps included interviews and assessments, followed by the establishment of advisory groups and subcommittees. Team Support Approach meetings with families were initiated in June 2015 to develop supervision plans before recommending out-of-home placement for youth.

The Investigation Unit assists staff attorneys in preparing for hearings by serving subpoenas, ensuring witness appearances, and obtaining evidence. The Adoption Unit, led by a Deputy Juvenile Officer, screens adoption cases and coordinates adoption efforts. The Victim Advocate offers support and guidance to victims of juvenile offenses. The Detention Center operates 24/7, detaining youth pending delinquency hearings (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, pp. 10-11). The Medical Unit conducts exams and provides basic care, while the Psychological Services Unit offers mental health support to detained youth. These units ensure the well-being and proper handling of youth within the juvenile justice system.

In 2021, a total of 123 juveniles were detained, consisting of 14 females and 109 males (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, pp. 11). Among them, seven were white, 112 were African American, and four belonged to other ethnicities (City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community, 2021, p. 11). There were 80 new admissions and 76 repeat admissions. The total childcare days amounted to 7,349, with an average age of 16.6 years.

Figure 9

Detention Statistics, 2021

| Table 7. Detention Statistics 2021 | |
|---|-------|
| Total Juveniles Detained | 123 |
| Females | 14 |
| Males | 109 |
| White | 7 |
| African American | 112 |
| Other | 4 |
| New Admissions | 80 |
| Repeat Admissions | 76 |
| Total Childcare Days | 7,349 |
| Average Age | 16.6 |

Note: St. Louis Family Court Detention Statistics. Reprinted with permission from the Chief Communications Officer for the St. Louis Circuit Court and the 22nd Judicial Court of St. Louis, Missouri. See Appendix A.

Reflection: The Journey

Social learning theory, encompassing behaviorist learning theories, such as classical conditioning and operant conditioning, introduces two pivotal concepts:

- mediating processes between stimuli and responses
- observational learning as a mechanism for behavior acquisition (Whitt, 2020; Bandura, 1997).

This implies that individuals tend to mirror behaviors observed during upbringing or learn from negative models, influenced by the environment and available resources during development. Moreover, social learning theory sheds light on the influence of

ethical leaders on their followers, underscoring the role of role models in shaping individual behavior (Bandura, 1986).

The transition from high school to higher education has been described as ‘a highly interrelated, web-like series of family, interpersonal, academic, and organizational pulls and pushes’ (Liversage, Naudé & Botha et al., 2018; Terenzini et al. 1994, 61). First-generation students, those who are the first in their family to attend higher education, encounter unique transitional and developmental changes (Liversage, Naudé & Botha et al., 2018).

Being a first-generation college student when the researcher graduated high school did not hold much significance at the time. Being the fourth oldest among 29 grandchildren, it was not a focal point. Dropping out of college after the first semester and relocating to Los Angeles, California, marked a significant turning point. This decision led to encountering new opportunities and influences, ultimately resulting in a five-year prison sentence in 2008 (Whitt, 2020). Returning to school at the age of 33, the researcher is still identified as a first-generation college student, a journey to be explored later.

First-generation students face a higher risk of leaving higher education during their first year compared to subsequent years (Liversage et al., 2018). This trend is evident in various contexts, including South Africa, where research indicates alarmingly high dropout rates among first-year, first-generation, and black students. Chickering’s (2018) theory on identity development is often employed in understanding the psychosocial development of higher education students due to its comprehensive nature. The theory’s inclusivity regarding emotional, interpersonal, ethical, and intellectual development

provides a holistic framework applicable to diverse student populations. In the South African context, Chickering's (2018) theory serves as a valuable tool for examining the experiences of black first-generation students and contributes to understanding the application of this theory in a diverse higher education environment (Liversage et al., 2018).

Chickering's Identity Theory: 18-33 From College to the Grind

According to Chickering (1969), there are Seven Vectors of Development that encompass various aspects of one's life. These seven vectors include:

- Developing Competence
- Managing Emotions
- Developing Autonomy
- Establishing Identity
- Freeing Interpersonal Relationships
- Developing Purpose
- Establishing Integrity

Developing Competence

Although intellectual competence is of primary importance in college, this vector includes physical and interpersonal competence as well. Students who attend college seeking only credentials for entry into the work world may find that their intellectual interests and valued friendships change due to personal development throughout the college years (Chickering, 1969). While attending college away from home at 18 years of age, the researcher was more focused on social interactions than academics. Hormonal

changes and peer influences led to popularity among upperclassmen, impacting the ability to think soundly and navigate this vector effectively.

Managing Emotions

Moving from adolescence to adulthood involves learning how to manage emotions like anger and sexual desire (Chickering, 1969). The researcher began to mismanage emotions, experiencing frequent anger, possibly influenced by the environment and alcohol consumption. The social environment, coupled with limited guidance, increased opportunities for expressing sexual desires, ultimately diverting focus from education.

Developing Autonomy

Taking care of oneself emotionally and practically is crucial for interdependence in conjunction with one's family of origin (Chickering, 1969). The researcher's decision to leave college and move to California stemmed from aspirations to pursue a music career and to become independent. Influenced by friendships, connections in California, as well as coming from a poor family, the researcher failed to make the connection of healthy interdependence and instead focused on independence. Despite seeking to make the family proud, leaving a secure future for dependency on situational factors posed a disadvantage.

Establishing Identity

The question of identity is especially poignant during the college years, particularly for women and ethnic minorities. According to Chickering (1969), establishing identity comes when one has developed a sense of self-acceptance and self-esteem while navigating stability and the ability to integrate with others. The researcher found advantages in resiliency developed through past experiences, navigating from East Saint

Louis, Illinois, to college and eventually to Los Angeles, California. However, transitions were challenging, leading to self-doubt and seeking affirmation from negative influences.

Freeing Interpersonal Relationships

Transitioning from valuing relationships based on dependence to valuing individual differences and negotiating them marks growth. The researcher recognized the importance of healthy relationships and distanced from detrimental ones, seeking positive lifestyle changes and mutually beneficial relationships. This phase prompted a shift towards healthier lifestyles and associations. Chickering (1969) describes tolerance of individual differences as a key factor in freeing interpersonal relationships. This is accomplished by incorporating tolerance, in conjunction with not being upset by the actions of and feedback from others.

Developing Purpose

The researcher identifies career and life goals and makes appropriate choices to achieve them. The advantage of this stage is recognizing life beyond mere wealth accumulation. As a young individual raised in poverty, the researcher initially aspired to be rich. However, realizing a deviation from their true passion, which was communication, led to prioritizing money over purpose. This realization prompted a conviction to align actions with meaningful reasons, especially upon becoming a parent and seeking personal fulfillment. The disadvantage of lacking purpose resulted in scattered interests, superficiality, and difficulty recognizing meaningful commitments (Evans et al., 1998).

Establishing Integrity

Achieving this level of maturity is challenging but essential for navigating uncertainties in the adult world. Once attained, individuals adapt societal rules to align with personal values. This stage prompts the researcher to acknowledge incongruences between actions and thoughts, prompting a commitment to self-improvement and bettering relationships. However, rigid belief systems and self-serving interests posed disadvantages, ultimately leading to incarceration and a resolve for change (Evans et al., 1998).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory: 33-37 Prison Years

According to Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998), Schlossberg defined a transition as any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. It is important to note that perception plays a key role in transitions as an event, or non-event, meets the definition of a transition only if it is so defined by the individual experiencing it. In order to understand the meaning that a transition has for a particular individual, the type, context, and impact of the transition must be considered.

Types of Transitions

Adults undergo transformative experiences. Evans et al., (1998) describe Schlossberg's transitions as:

- Anticipated transitions: ones that occur predictably, such as graduation from college
- Unanticipated transitions: not predictable or scheduled, such as divorce or sudden death of a loved one

- Non-events: transitions that are expected but do not occur, such as failure to be admitted to medical school
1. Personal non-event: related to individual aspirations
 2. Ripple non-event: felt due to a nonevent of someone else
 3. Resultant non-event: caused by an event
 4. Delayed non-event: anticipating an event that might still happen

- Context refers to one's relationship with the transition and to the setting in which the transition takes place.

- Impact is determined by the degree to which a transition alters one's daily life

Transitions vary in type, context, and impact, encompassing anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events. During this period, the researcher encountered all three types of transitions, unanticipated, anticipated transition which was influenced by familial experiences, and delayed non-event (Evans et al., 1998; Whitt, 2020).

The example provided by Schlossberg (1981) parallels the experience of graduating from college. During the researcher's tenure in the underworld, individuals engaged in activities that posed the risk of imprisonment. The researcher and their associates consistently felt that their actions could lead to incarceration or death, representing a delayed non-event (Schlossberg, 1981). While this outcome was a reality for many acquaintances, the researcher now acknowledges that their anticipated transition is accompanied by additional considerations. One such consideration is the delayed non-event, which involves anticipating an event that may still occur. However, the researcher has come to understand that this eventuality will not materialize due to their involvement in illegal activities. Additionally, the researcher encountered an unanticipated transition

when their mother passed away from a heart attack one week before they were due to report to the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The researcher attended her funeral on a Saturday, cleared out her house on a Sunday, and found themselves incarcerated by Monday. According to Evans et al. (1998), Schlossberg identified four key factors that influence an individual's ability to cope with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies, commonly referred to as the 4 S's.

Situation

In dealing with this transition, the researcher understood that their actions precipitated the event, and that it was just a matter of time before they got caught. At this stage of their life, they realized they had total control over their actions, and it was up to them to change their role. This decision had to be made whether seen as too late or not, allowing the opportunity to have some peace about the future life. The researcher knew that their jail time would only be temporary, drawing from previous experiences of seeing friends and family members come home from prison, coping effectively by living vicariously through their stories on how they were able to get through. Despite other sources of stress, being set up by a confidential informant for the United States Government, the researcher knew they were responsible for their own actions and anticipated that God had a bigger plan for them.

Self: Personal and Demographic Characteristics & Psychological Resources

Growing up in a low socioeconomic status environment allowed the researcher and their family to appreciate the things they had rather than what they lacked. At this stage of life, the researcher was confident and had experienced many ups and downs. Going to prison allowed them to focus on their health, resulting in healthy weight loss and

improved physical fitness. Psychologically, this gave them an advantage over many friends who were still engaged in drugs and alcohol. Additionally, committing to studying and spiritual worship provided the researcher with a sense of purpose and commitment to a greater cause. This phase of the transition highlighted the importance of discipline, contributing to a positive attitude and outlook on life after incarceration.

Social Support

The researcher's social support network, including intimate relationships with family and children, instilled a sense of obligation to prove themselves due to the misfortune and collateral damage caused. With a large family and network of friends, the researcher found strength in childhood friends who remained supportive and a community that rallied behind them in a positive manner, a support system that has remained steadfast.

Strategies

When trying to strategize and cope with responses post-incarceration, the researcher's father played a crucial role in modifying the situation by encouraging them to reach for the stars and enroll in school if that was something they truly desired. At this point, the researcher understood the necessity of pursuing something greater than their previous situation to avoid feeling like a lost cause. Despite encountering numerous challenges along the way, the researcher found support from their wife and children, who helped manage the stress.

It is unlikely that most individuals will experience transitions identical to the researcher's. Believing in the theory's applicability to a prison scenario like theirs may be overly optimistic. The disadvantage of this theory lies in its failure to account for the

multifaceted nature of transitions, encompassing various religious, environmental, socioeconomic, personal, and institutional perspectives. Incorporating different theories may be necessary for a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Holland's Theory of Career Development: 37-45 College & Career

According to Ohler and Levinson (2012), Holland asserts that one's occupation selection reflects their personality. He suggests that greater agreement or congruence between one's personality and chosen occupation leads to higher job satisfaction and stability, with professional achievement closely linked to congruence degree. Holland categorizes people into six personality types: Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C). Extensive testing generally supports the validity of Holland's theory, which has had a significant impact on vocational psychology and counseling fields worldwide (as cited in Ohler & Levinson, 2012). Despite acclaim, the theory's limitations include its failure to consider socioeconomic status, religious background, or mental capabilities during assessment (Furnham, 2001).

Post-incarceration, part of the researcher's plan involved pursuing higher education. Contemplating throughout their time in prison, they believed choosing a career over a job and surrounding themselves with like-minded individuals would facilitate their transition to becoming a productive citizen. Despite initial skepticism from their parole officer about recidivism rates, the researcher was determined to defy the statistics. Their commitment to education was underscored by a pact with their parole officer to achieve an associate degree within two years, a challenge they embraced wholeheartedly.

Holland (1997) explains Social (S) as: Someone who likes to do things to help people, such as teaching, nursing, giving first aid, or providing information; generally

avoids using machines, tools, or animals to achieve a goal; is good at teaching, counseling, nursing, or giving information; values helping people and solving social problems; and sees self as helpful, friendly, and trustworthy. Reflecting on their prison experience, the researcher recalls being a ‘go-to figure’ for debates and disagreements, reminiscent of their role in their environment from gang members to drug dealers. Their interest in psychology during high school laid the foundation for future endeavors, fostering a love for teaching and helping others. Recognizing themselves as a Social (S) type according to Holland's (1997) classification, they understood their inclination toward helping and teaching people. Transitioning from one institution to another (prison to university) symbolized laying the groundwork for their future aspirations.

Despite the theories explored—Chickering (1969), Schlossberg (1981), and Holland (1997)—the question of "Who am I?" can be summarized as evidence of the researcher's development into the person they always were: a successful leader, therapist, educator, father, grandfather, husband, and lifelong student. Since their release from prison, they have remained steadfast in their pursuit of personal growth, drawing from their upbringing and worldview. Their journey exemplifies the application of social learning theory, learning both what to do and what not to do (Whitt, 2020), as well as giving life and definition in the “School to Prison Pipeline.

The researcher, who has experienced the school-to-prison pipeline firsthand, can define it from both personal and academic viewpoints. Drawing on their own experiences, they can offer insights into the systemic factors and individual struggles contributing to the pipeline. Additionally, they can incorporate scholarly literature and data to provide context within the broader societal and institutional context. In their

definition, the researcher may highlight the punitive disciplinary measures, lack of resources and support, racial biases, and socioeconomic disparities within the education system that disproportionately affect marginalized students, particularly those from minority backgrounds. They can discuss their own encounters with disciplinary actions, such as zero-tolerance policies or severe punishments, which propelled them toward involvement with the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the researcher can employ their personal narrative to humanize and depict the impact of the school-to-prison pipeline on both individuals and communities. By intertwining personal anecdotes with empirical evidence, they can offer a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics involved and advocate for policy reforms and interventions aimed at dismantling the pipeline (Whitt, 2020).

School Culture

Schools can encompass a variety of distinct cultures. These cultures can be observed in the ways students interact with one another, their teachers, and the administrative staff. Additionally, school culture may be reflected in the interactions between parents and teachers, teachers and administrative staff, as well as the interactions between parents, students, and the administrative staff. When discussing black culture and low socio-economic schools, a dichotomy in learning becomes evident. On one side, learning is influenced by the socio-economic environment, while on the other, it is compared to that of white middle-class students. Many studies that delve into the complexities of Black children's academic and social outcomes focus on the interaction of home and neighborhood factors, particularly among adolescents. Iruka, Curenton, and Gardener (2015) report that numerous studies and education policy documents indicate

that black children demonstrate lower school readiness skills, both in terms of academic achievement and social competence, compared to their White peers.

School culture includes organizational culture, which reflects how certain school districts function based on the administrators' values and mission. Aasebo, Midtsundstad, and Willbergh (2017) believed that subject matter is explored through teachers' questions and students' willingness to engage. Students respond by drawing on their imaginations of family life and daily and yearly activities. As a result, they interpret the subject matter through their personal experiences and creativity, making the content more meaningful.

Safety

As a parent, school safety ranks very high among the critical factors that can influence a child's success. Weiler and Armenta (2014) suggested one approach to promoting school safety is to arm school personnel, including principals and teachers. While there are pros and cons to this measure, it is essential to consider school safety in the context of past mass school shootings and the challenges faced by schools in low socio-economic status environments. Conversely, it is crucial to understand the potential impact of arming school personnel and students' ability to learn. According to Price et al., (2014), students often experience significant stress related to academics, interpersonal relationships, isolation, and the lack of long-term support networks from friends and family.

Duplechain and Morris (2014) highlighted that relationships and past experiences of trauma can significantly contribute to school shootings. For instance, the absence of attachment to parents or caregivers early in life has been a factor in the actions of some school shooters. Seung-Hui Cho, the perpetrator of the Virginia Tech Massacre on April

16, 2007, exemplified this risk factor. Cho had minimal communication with his parents and those around him. Many shooters either had very poor relationships with their parents or none at all. School personnel have a duty to ensure that proper health and safety measures are in place to protect students in all school-related activities, including extracurricular ones, as these are considered extensions of normal school activities (Essex, 2014).

Relationship Building

The environment in which young people grow up can directly influence their actions and outlook on life. This can be evidenced by the types of careers individuals may pursue, the nature of their relationships, and their social interactions. Additionally, biological factors may play a crucial role in shaping how individuals learn and perceive the world, influenced by the relationships they form.

According to Barnes (2016), building positive and effective relationships with youth in schools provides the foundation for the School Resource Officers (SRO's) counseling role. This is merely an extension of the many different leaders that may be involved directly in influencing the learning capacity of a student simply because SROs and school principals ordinarily form cooperative agreements to help secure schools and promote safety (Barnes, 2016).

According to the social exchange theory cited by Kharouf, Sekhon, & Roy (2015), trust leads the parties involved in a relationship to have positive motivations to initiate and maintain the relationship. Therefore, trust has been positioned as a central phenomenon in relationship formation and maintenance in a variety of relational exchanges.

Summary

In the Saint Louis Metropolitan area, crime rates and poverty rates were higher than the national average. This quantitative study examined the high school graduation rates and dropout rates to seek potential correlations with the number of reported juvenile crimes in the area. The likelihood of a black male aged 17 or younger entering the juvenile justice system can vary depending on various factors, such as socioeconomic status, community environment, and involvement in criminal activities. However, research suggested that black youth are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system compared to their white counterparts.

According to a study by Hockenberry and Puzanchera (2015), black youth are more likely to be arrested and detained compared to white youth. Additionally, research by Mears and Aron (2003) found that disparities exist in the processing of juvenile cases, with black youth more likely to be formally charged and placed in secure facilities rather than diverted to community-based programs. These disparities highlight systemic issues within the juvenile justice system that disproportionately impact black youth. Factors such as racial bias, socioeconomic inequality, and limited access to resources contribute to the over-representation of black youth in juvenile detention facilities (Hockenberry & Puzanchera, 2015; Mears & Aron, 2003).

The percentage of juvenile offenders who receive mental health counseling varies widely and is influenced by factors, such as access to resources, individual needs, and the policies of juvenile justice systems. Research indicates that a significant proportion of juvenile offenders have mental health needs, but not all receive counseling or treatment. According to a study by Wasserman et al. (2002), approximately 70% to 80% of juvenile

offenders have mental health disorders, yet only a fraction of them receives appropriate treatment. Similarly, Skowyra and Coccozza (2006) found that although a high percentage of juvenile detainees have mental health needs, only a small proportion receive mental health services while in detention. These findings underscore the importance of improving access to mental health counseling for juvenile offenders to address their underlying needs and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

It is vital for school districts, specifically the poorly funded schools, to collaborate with the juvenile justice systems and mental health professionals to decrease the number of juvenile crimes while retaining students. There seems to be a societal disconnect with these necessary collaborations to ensure the academic success of high school students. To illustrate this point, research conducted by Skowyra and Coccozza (2006), detailed the following:

First, it is recognized that there is a great deal of underlying tension between the juvenile justice and mental health systems when it comes to determining responsibility for this population of youth. Despite the fact that existing prevalence data suggest that the vast majority of youth involved with the juvenile justice system have mental health problems, the reality is that the existing juvenile justice system is not designed, nor does it have the capacity or specific mandate, to respond to all youth with mental health problems. This issue gets at the heart of the conflict between the juvenile justice and mental health systems. There is general agreement that the juvenile justice system should not become the designated mental health provider to the large numbers of youth who enter the system with mental health needs. Yet, the juvenile justice system is very often

where many of these youth end up, and their needs cannot be ignored. This “responsibility by default” has led to a high degree of tension (and sometimes resentment) between the juvenile justice and mental health systems. (p. 7)

Another issue plaguing this collaboration is that although there is a high number of youths who need mental health services but there are not enough mental health services available to support their needs. This creates a cycle of high school dropouts who eventually become juvenile offenders. If district leaders equipped the students with quality mental health accessibility and developed comprehensive collaborations with the juvenile justice and mental health systems, there may be an increase in high school retention and graduation rates.

Chapter Three: Research Method and Design

Introduction

According to Scott (2017), the funneling of poor, urban, minority school students into jails and penitentiaries, combined with the reduced opportunities for education while behind bars, produced an uneducated ex-offender who is ill-prepared to improve their personal conditions and contribute substantially to society. The researcher, who was an ex-offender, and a current mental health professional wanted to determine if there are early preventions that can take place to prevent an increase in crime rates among juveniles, based on his personal perceptions during their high school years. Therefore, the researcher collected secondary data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MoDESE) and from the St. Louis Family Report to the Community for years 2020 through 2021 to identify relationships between dropout rates and graduation rates of high school students and compare to juvenile crime rates in the Saint Louis metropolitan areas. The researcher selected two high schools that were classified as provisional accreditation status because research suggested that underprivileged schools were more likely to have limited resources. After analyzing secondary data from MoDESE (2023), it was determined that Normandy Schools Collaborative and Riverview Gardens School District met the requirements of being listed as provisionally accredited at the time of the study. MoDESE (2023) defined provisional accreditation status of a school district by the data trends based on annual performance, school improvement plans, and department findings, etc. (MoDESE, 2023).

According to the MoDESE (2023) report card, Normandy Schools Collaborative was labeled with a span of PK through 12th grade; a district with six elementary schools,

zero middle schools, zero junior high schools, and one high school. As of the 2022-2023 school year, the district was listed in provisional accreditation status and held this status since the 2018-2019 school year. The data collected from MoDESE (2023) included the total enrolled students for Normandy Schools Collaborative,

- 2022 - 2023 school year: K-12 enrollment 2792,
- 2021 - 2022 school year: K-12 enrollment 2764,
- 2020 - 2021 school year: K-12 enrollment 2660, as noted in Table 1.

The data collected from MoDESE (2023) included the total graduation rates for Normandy Schools Collaborative high school students,

- 2022 - 2023 school year: 53.3% Total number of graduates: 80,
- 2021 - 2022 school year: 77.9% Total number of graduates: 134,
- 2020 - 2021 school year: 66% Total number of graduates: 111, as noted in Table 1.

Additionally, the data collected from MoDESE (2023) included the total dropout rates for Normandy Schools Collaborative high school students,

- 2022 - 2023 school year: 13.4%,
- 2021 - 2022 school year: 12.6%,
- 2020 - 2021 school year: 7.6%, as noted in Table 1.

According to the MoDESE (2023) report card, Riverview Gardens School District was labeled as a grade span of PK-12 school district with 11 elementary schools, one middle school, zero junior high schools, and one high school. As of the 2022-2023 school year, the district was listed in provisional accreditation status and has held this

status since the 2018-2019 school years. The data collected from MoDESE (2023) included the total enrolled for Riverview Gardens high school students,

- 2022 - 2023 school year: K-12 enrollment 5146,
- 2021 - 2022 school year: K-12 enrollment 5157,
- 2020 - 2021 school year: K-12 enrollment 4978, as noted in Table 2.

The data collected from MoDESE (2023) included the graduation rates for Riverview Gardens high school students,

- 2022 - 2023 school year: 66.6% Total number of graduates: 193,
- 2021 - 2022 school year: 70.5% Total number of graduates: 179,
- 2020 - 2021 school year: 57.7% Total number of graduates: 173, as noted in Table 2.

The data collected from MoDESE (2023) included dropout rates for Riverview Gardens high school students,

- 2022 - 2023 school year: not reported by district,
- 2021 - 2022 school year: 2.3%,
- 2020 - 2021 school year: not reported by district, as noted in Table 2.

Table 1

Normandy Schools Collaborative Student Outcome Data

| School Year | Enrolled | Graduated | Dropout |
|-------------|----------|-----------|---------|
| 2022-2023 | 2792 | 53.3% | 13.4% |
| 2021-2022 | 2764 | 77.9% | 12.6% |
| 2020-2021 | 2660 | 66% | 7.6% |

Note: Student outcome data cited from MoDESE Building Report Card (2023)

Table 2

Riverview Gardens Student Outcome Data

| SCHOOL YEAR | ENROLLED | GRADUATED | DROPOUT RATE |
|-------------|----------|-----------|--------------|
| 2022-2023 | 5146 | 66.6% | NR |
| 2021-2022 | 5157 | 70.5% | 2.3% |
| 2020-2021 | 4978 | 57.7% | NR |

Note: Student outcome data cited from MoDESE Building Report Card (2023)

Table 3

Offenses, Referred by Charge Level Student Outcome Data

| CALENDAR YEAR | FELONY | MISDEMEANOR | STATUS |
|---------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| 2022 | 878 | 714 | 158 |
| 2021 | 575 | 494 | 104 |
| 2020 | 231 | 269 | 161 |

Note: The charge levels are cited from City of St. Louis Family Court (2020, 2021, 2022)

Alarminglly, only 12% of previously incarcerated juvenile offenders manage to graduate from high school or obtain a GED (Biddle, 2010; Crook, 2015). Therefore, the researcher collected crime rate data to prepare for quantitative comparison to seek a relationship between graduation and dropout rates in comparison to the number of juvenile crimes committed as reported from the City of St. Louis Family Report to the Community from the years 2020 through 2021, as noted in Table 3. According to the City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community (2020), in the year 2020, there were a total of 231 felony offenses committed by juveniles, a total of 269 misdemeanor offenses, and a total of 161 status offenses (p. 4). The City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community (2021), in the year 2021 there were a total of 575 felony offenses committed by juveniles, a total of 494 misdemeanors offenses, and a total of 104 status offenses (p. 4). The City of St. Louis Family Court Report to the Community

(2022), in the year 2022 there were a total of 878 felony offenses committed by juveniles, a total of 714 misdemeanor offenses, and a total of 158 status offenses (p. 4) as displayed in Table 3.

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were analyzed:

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between graduation rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 through 2023.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no relationship between dropout rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 through 2023.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no relationship between enrollment rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 through 2023.

Data Samples

The data samples included secondary student outcome data for two high schools that were listed in provisional accreditation status as reported by MoDESE (2023) and listed in Tables 1 and 2. Furthermore, secondary data was collected from the City of St. Louis Family Report to the Community (2020, 2021, 2023) juvenile crime rates as listed in Table 3. To determine if relationships existed, the data points included were graduation rates (N/R), dropout rates (N/R), enrollment rates (N/R) of high school students and juvenile crimes (J) committed across the school years 2020 to 2023. For the purpose of this research, N represents Normandy Schools Collaborative, R represents

Riverview Gardens, and J represents juvenile data. Further, included with the juvenile data were incidents of felonies, misdemeanors, and status offenses committed during the aforementioned years. A Chi-square test for independence was conducted in this study because its purpose is to examine relationships across categories.

Limitations

The researcher recognized that during the review of the secondary data, Riverview Gardens did not report dropout rates for school years 2020-2021 and 2022-2023 as shown in Table 2. Moreover, the collection of secondary data relied on the accuracy of the high school districts' submission to MoDESE (2023). Since this research concentrated on two urban high schools, which were in provisional accreditation status and operated with limited financial resources during the reported years. This could mean a lack of staffing and resources to accurately report data.

Summary

The researcher conducted a quantitative content analysis to investigate potential relationships between graduation rates, dropout rates, enrollment rates and juvenile crimes during the years 2020 to 2023. The researcher, who is an ex-offender and has an educational background in counseling, personally recognized the importance of mental health treatment during their high school years. This research demonstrated that a multitude of issues exists that involve poorly funded schools, increased juvenile offenses, and lack of mental health resources. Therefore, this research examined two schools that were listed in provisional accreditation status in the St. Louis metropolitan area to draw conclusions of the importance of mental health professionals in high school settings. To test the hypotheses, a Chi-Square test for independence was applied to determine if

significant changes existed between the variables. In Chapter Four, results from this quantitative content analysis are explained.

Chapter Four: Analysis

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis and the findings of the study using the Chi-Square test for independence. The purpose was to determine whether there is significant change between the variables of graduation rates, dropout rates, enrollment rates, and juvenile offenses. The analysis covered secondary data from the school years 2020-2021 to 2022-2023. Student outcome data from two high schools, Normandy Collaborative and Riverview Gardens, in the St. Louis metropolitan area and data from juvenile offenses that occurred within the same geographic location were analyzed.

The observed values for calculating the Chi-Square test for independence involved school years 2020 to 2023 and included enrollment numbers, graduation numbers and dropout numbers for Normandy Schools Collaborative (N) and Riverview Gardens (R). For the years 2020 to 2023, the number of juvenile (J) offenses included the sum of felonies, misdemeanors, and status offenses (see Tables 4, 5, and 6).

Table 4

Summary Data for Normandy Schools Collaborative

| School Year | Enrolled | Graduated | Dropout |
|-------------|----------|-----------|---------|
| 2022-2023 | 7.367 | 0.042 | 0.002 |
| 2021-2022 | 0.009 | 0.021 | 0.002 |
| 2020-2021 | 8.031 | 0.005 | 0.007 |

Critical value= 1.645

Table 5

Summary Data for Riverview Gardens

| School Year | Enrolled | Graduated | Dropout |
|-------------|----------|-----------|---------|
| 2022-2023 | 18.795 | 0.001 | NR |
| 2021-2022 | 0.126 | 0.004 | 0.03 |
| 2020-2021 | 18.599 | 0.001 | NR |

Critical value= 1.645

Table 6

Summary Data for Juvenile Offenses

| School Year | Felony | Misdemeanor | Status |
|-------------|---------|-------------|--------|
| 2022-2023 | 126.06 | 65.214 | 0.295 |
| 2021-2022 | 0.159 | 0.008 | 10.192 |
| 2020-2021 | 157.464 | 74.497 | 7.592 |

Critical value= 1.645

The critical value for the test was 1.645 with a .05 level of significance. The Chi-Square values for the data for years 2022 to 2023 were 1.8431 and for years 2021 to 2022 was 0.3735. These values were compared to the critical value to determine the results of the test.

The analysis revealed significant changes were apparent in enrollment numbers and juvenile offenses during the years 2020 to 2023. The researcher noted significant changes in the following five items: (1) Normandy Schools Collaborative experienced a significant hike in enrollment between school years 2020 to 2021 and 2021-2022; (2) Riverview Gardens experienced a significant hike in enrollment between 2020 to 2021 and 2021-2022 school years; (3) there was a significant hike in juvenile felony offenses

between years 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022; (4) a significant hike in juvenile misdemeanor offenses occurred between years 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022, and then again between 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023; and (5) notably, a significant drop in juvenile status offenses occurred between 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022.

The increase in juvenile felony offenses could be attributed to the school's provisional accreditation status due to lack of financial and mental health resources. The analysis revealed two periods of significant hikes in juvenile misdemeanors, first between 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022, and then again between 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. The repeated increase could be attributed to societal disruptions because of the pandemic. Although there was an increase in juvenile felonies and misdemeanors, there was a significant drop in juvenile status offenses between 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022. This decrease could be attributed to the various initiatives implemented by the City of St. Louis Family Courts. For example, the Psychological Services Unit provided interventions and therapeutic services to youth in the detention center to address mental health concerns (City of St. Louis Family Report to the Community, 2022).

The significant hikes in enrollment suggested positive efforts made by the high schools to attract and retain the students. However, the increase in juvenile offenses during the same time as the hike in enrollment demonstrates the need for collaboration with the high school and the juvenile system to ensure the safety of the St. Louis metropolitan communities. Alternatively, the drop in juvenile status offenses is a positive sign that could indicate the success of the initiatives set forth by the juvenile system.

The researcher surmised that the mental health initiatives implemented by the juvenile system could be further developed in collaboration with the high schools to continue to see the decline in juvenile offenses.

Hypothesis 1 Results

Hypothesis 1 sought to determine if a relationship existed between graduation rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 to 2023.

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no relationship between graduation rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 to 2023.

As shown in Tables 4, 5, and 6, the results of this examination did not yield any significant changes in graduation rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed during the years 2020 to 2023 for Normandy Schools Collaborative and Riverview Gardens high schools. The observed values for calculating the Chi-Square test for independence for graduation rates were not greater than the critical value of 1.645, therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Table 6 shows the observed values for calculating the juvenile crimes (J) committed during the years 2020 to 2023 which included felony, 126.06, misdemeanors, 65.214, and status offenses 0.295 respectively. For the years 2021 to 2022, the observed values included felony, 0.159, misdemeanors, 0.008, and status referrals 10.192. Lastly, for the years 2020 to 2021, the observed values included felony, 157.464, misdemeanors, 74.497, and status referrals 7.592.

Hypothesis 2 Results

Hypothesis 2 sought to determine if a relationship existed between dropout rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 through 2023.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no relationship between dropout rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 to 2023.

As shown in Tables 4, 5, and 6, the results of this examination did not yield any significant changes in dropout rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed during the years 2020 to 2023 for Normandy Schools Collaborative and Riverview Gardens high schools. The observed values for calculating the Chi-Square test for independence for dropout rates were not greater than the critical value of 1.645, therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Hypothesis 3 Results

Hypothesis 3 sought to determine if a relationship existed between enrollment rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 through 2023.

Null Hypothesis 3

There is no relationship between enrollment rates of high school students and the number of juvenile crimes committed within the Saint Louis metropolitan area during the years 2020 to 2023.

As shown in Tables 4, 5, and 6, the results of this examination noted a significant hike in enrollments for both Normandy Schools Collaborative and Riverview Gardens high school between the years 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022. Moreover, a significant hike was noted in juvenile crimes as follows: felony crimes between 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022; misdemeanors between 2020 to 2021, 2021 to 2022, then again between 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023; status referrals experienced a significant drop between 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022. Based on this information, the null hypothesis was rejected since significant changes were apparent between enrollment and juvenile crimes.

Conclusions

A Chi-Square test for independence was conducted to seek relationships between dropout rates, graduation rates, enrollment rates, and juvenile crimes committed in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. At the start of the data collection, the researcher postulated that if there was an increase in graduation rates and enrollment rates, then there would be a decrease in juvenile crimes committed and vice versa. However, no relationship existed between the graduation rates, dropout rates, and juvenile crimes committed during the years 2020 to 2023. Alarming, there were significant hikes in enrollment rates for both high schools and a significant increase in juvenile felony and misdemeanor crimes committed. Moreover, there was a significant drop in juvenile status offenses that could be attributed to various initiatives implemented by the juvenile system. Chapter Five includes a summary of the research, implications, and recommendations to policy makers.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

The researcher, who is an ex-offender, conducted a study on juvenile crime rates, high school enrollment rates, and high school dropout rates. The study focused on the Saint Louis metropolitan area, examining correlations between educational outcomes (graduation and dropout rates) and juvenile offenses. The study offered a detailed understanding of crime rates, the juvenile justice system, and the impact of mental health services in lieu of recidivism rates. The goal was to understand the school-to-prison pipeline and to inform future research on transitioning from prison back to school.

The researcher chose this topic because he can relate to the lack of mental health resources in a low socioeconomic environment that fosters room for crime as a juvenile. The researcher resided in an era whereas mental health in high school settings was unheard of. The researcher experienced firsthand accounts of having the need to consult with religious figures, male mentors, and high school staff and administration in lieu of receiving counseling that was perceived to be ineffective but aimed at ensuring a positive outcome in terms of academics, professional outlook and personal growth.

According to Amone-P'Olak and colleagues (2009), more mental health problems exist among youth from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds which is why the researcher selected two high schools that were in provisional accreditation status. The researcher was raised in a low socioeconomic environment and understands the disadvantages that minorities face in terms of the lack of mental health resources in high school settings, the lack of resources for juvenile offenders' post incarceration, and the lack of resources available for high school students within that environment. The

aforementioned is crucial for the Black population to successfully transition from a high school setting, as well as a juvenile detention setting, with the goal of positively contributing to society. The researcher discovered that most social support networks within the Black community, although interwoven to create support, are more than likely not that of a mental health professional. Clarke and Mosleh (2015) reported research from articles that suggests that when it comes to mental health help in Black low socioeconomic communities, the focus was specifically on faith and spirituality as a key element in helping children deal with life and avoid mental health problems, and that there was virtually no discussion of the medical aspect of the behavior of Black children or of the potential for individual cure through medical diagnosis and treatment. This creates a weak foundation when it comes to creating a supportive environment that fosters the well-being and development of students. The goal of mental health professionals in high school settings is to ensure that students have both the resources and resilience needed to thrive academically, personally, and professionally. Although, the researcher did not measure the impact of the number of professionals in a high school setting, based on the extensive literature reviews there is a connection with mental health support and academic success of a student (Silcox, 2022).

Incorporating both the school-to-prison pipeline and the prison-to-school pipeline in Chapter Two adds complexity to the analysis. Understanding the interconnectedness of these phenomena, and their effects on juvenile outcomes requires complex thinking while navigating gray areas, as well as consideration of multiple variables.

This research not only will reinforce the need for mental health services in local educational agencies; it will also provide educational leaders and juvenile leaders with

specific data to embed early preventative measures to retain the juveniles as students and prevent high numbers of juvenile crimes, as well as recidivism rates.

Implications

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, there were significant disruptions in education and different social structures, causing behavioral issues during a period of readjusting to the reopening of schools. Silcox (2022), reported findings from several self-reported cross-sectional mental health studies, that the prevailing consensus is that; post-secondary participants' levels of worry, grief, depression, anxiety, and PTSD had increased during COVID-19. The pandemic exacerbated mental health issues among young people, and without adequate mental health support, these issues can manifest as behavioral problems and delinquency. Kuhfeld et al., (2020), reports that Community support systems, such as after-school programs, sports, and other extracurricular activities, were often disrupted during the pandemic. Based on Kuhfeld et al., (2020) and Silcox (2022) findings, this could explain the hike in juvenile felony and misdemeanor offenses during the years 2020 to 2021 and then again in 2021 to 2022.

While the research provided valuable insight, the researcher identified several opportunities for improvement. For example, the researcher could have looked closely at the zip codes to determine if other high schools should have been included. The research focused on two high schools in provisional accreditation status, however, this could have been the reason for not seeing a hike in dropout rates and juvenile crime rates. Also, the researcher could have incorporated more studies on the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The data collected was during the time of COVID-19. There were fewer social interactions, which led to difficulty in learning, more negative peer influences, due to

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societal stress and the lack of after-school programs, which is crucial for keeping the youth engaged and out of trouble. The researcher also could have looked at data and studied the impact of the lack of resources available during the time of COVID-19, which may have contributed to high school enrollment rates, high school dropout rates, and juvenile crime rates.

The social learning theory was developed by Bandura (1977) and he posited that people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling. His research emphasized the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. The theory integrates a continuous interaction between behaviors, cognitive processes, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977). To say it another way, social learning theory encompasses the idea that how a person behaves is connected to the environment and its restraints. Therefore, a person's external locus of control can link the cognitive component in an individual to believe that his or her environment is the cause of the circumstances that may have led to incarceration.

While researching Social Learning Theory, marriage proved to be important for social integration. Marriage reduced recidivism rates when the spouse had no criminal record amongst spouses compared to non-married individuals. Similarly, marriage to a non-convicted spouse reduced recidivism significantly more than marriage to a convicted spouse (Andersen, 2015). It is very likely that incarcerated married male inmates play an important role in communication and social skills in lieu of building healthy relationships with the family. In doing so, going back to prison is less likely to happen, and being able to display model behaviors could be just as important in how the children's behaviors are displayed.

The researcher, who was incarcerated in the past, examined the behaviors of children with incarcerated parents, in order to understand the effect that it could have on adolescents. Today, the terms “inmate” or “prisoner” are often associated with individuals who have committed crimes. Hagen and Foster (2012) argued that formal equality and judicial neutrality can inadvertently lead to substantive inequality for women and children, with social ramifications extending beyond individuals and families to the broader community. This circumstance may influence how children perceive their roles within a household, potentially affecting their behavior. Wilson (1996) discussed social isolation stemming from the absence of maternal and paternal roles, which can limit cognitive development and perceived opportunities for educational and other achievements. Elder (1994) underscored the significance of parental relationships and role models in establishing and maintaining educational and other life trajectories. Disruptions in parent-child relationships can impact individuals within families and among students at school, who are affected not only by their own family disruptions but also by those of their peers. When a young person is raised in a low socioeconomic environment, this may further influence the behaviors of individuals within such settings.

The researcher examined and compared the behaviors of children with incarcerated fathers, both married and unmarried, to understand how the marital status of a prisoner affects their children's behavior. While much research has explored behavioral disorders in children in relation to drug and alcohol abuse and social factors, there has been limited focus on children with incarcerated fathers and the differences between having married or unmarried parents. Available research suggested that married incarcerated fathers may still have a positive impact on the household, potentially

reducing negative behaviors in their children. In contrast, children of unmarried incarcerated fathers may experience greater negative impacts, increasing negative behaviors. According to Murray and Farrington (2008), small-scale studies indicate that children may respond to parental imprisonment with internalizing issues such as sleep disturbances, bedwetting, concentration problems, clinging behavior, sadness, low mood, and withdrawal.

Philbrick (1996) noted that 30% of prisoners' children experience mental health issues during childhood and adolescence, compared to about 10% of the general population. Parental imprisonment in a boy's first ten years of life predicted internalizing problems in adolescence and adulthood, even after accounting for other childhood risk factors (Murray & Farrington, 2008). Bocknec, Sanderson, and Britner (2008) identified characteristics of prisoners' children, including estimated population size, racial and age demographics, and family and household compositions, based on reports from imprisoned parents. Although the Bureau of Justice has begun collecting information on incarcerated parents, systematic tracking of prisoners' children by child welfare or correctional officials remains limited.

Children of prisoners face unique challenges due to the trauma and disruption experienced before, during, and after their parents' incarceration, often enduring years of instability and lack of necessary support. The prison industry has grown into a significant and profitable sector globally. In recent years, children of American prisoners have garnered considerable interest from policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. However, reliable data on this population remains scarce, and few empirical studies directly involve these children. Researchers face challenges in studying these children

due to their frequent placement changes, ethical issues, and difficulties in identifying them comprehensively (Rankin et al., 2002).

Recommendations

It is crucial that juvenile systems work closely together with high schools to develop initiatives to increase graduation rates, decrease dropout rates and to reduce juvenile crimes committed in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. According to Lochner and Moretti (2004), research in the United States showed that completing high school reduces the probability of incarceration by about 0.76% for white people and 3.4% for black people. Research has reliably demonstrated strong correlations between higher education attainment and lower rates of criminal behavior. Schools and the juvenile system can share resources, such as counselors, social workers, and educational programs, to better support at-risk students. Collaborative efforts between different institutions that cater to ensuring positive youth development can also provide young people with the skills needed to be successful.

Further research should include a deep dive into the reasons for the significant decrease in status referrals during the years 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022. Some effective initiatives could include:

- Surveys to the district leaders and the community,
- Examining the impact of remote learning on student’s behaviors,
- Researching the availability of mental health access during this period,
- Studying shifts in community and family dynamics, and
- Looking at school disciplinary policies and procedures before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

According to Morgan (2021), restorative discipline aims to help students grasp the impact of their actions on others, promoting accountability and learning. This method also supports teachers by encouraging them to reflect on their role in conflicts.

Restorative discipline is built on the use of affective language, which emphasizes expressing emotions related to others' behaviors. By using effective language, educators can redirect negative behaviors and reinforce positive ones through specific statements and thoughtful questions.

A key element of restorative discipline is the circle process, where students gather in a circle with a facilitator in the center. This setup promotes a sense of inclusion and fairness, as everyone in the circle gets a chance to speak in turn. The circle process allows each participant to voice their thoughts and feelings, fostering a supportive and understanding environment. Additionally, conferences play a significant role in restorative discipline because they provide a structured setting for discussing conflicts and issues, ensuring that all involved parties have the opportunity to express themselves and work towards resolution. By integrating these methods, restorative discipline aims to create a more empathetic and just school culture (Morgan, 2021).

Given that students of color have faced years of discriminatory practices in urban schools, leading researchers argue that implementing restorative discipline can promote justice (Milner et al. 2019). Data from schools that have adopted restorative discipline programs show a significant reduction in suspension rates.

The Policy Maker

High school leaders and the juvenile system must understand that many obstacles are present when it comes to mental health, crime rates, high school enrollment, and drop-out and graduation rates of our youth. It is important for the policy makers to understand that when it comes to our youth, politics should have minimal influence in determining what's best for the future leaders of this nation. Having access to a good education, viable mental health professionals, and juvenile representation is a crucial part of policy development. Policy makers have great influence when it comes to the outcomes of the mental health, educational, and juvenile systems. According to Milner et al. 2019,

The lack of teacher support for implementing strategies known to benefit students of color is linked to the increase in the use of zero tolerance policies. While students were receiving more suspensions and expulsions in recent years, teachers were not receiving the support needed to alleviate the high rate of punishment these young people endured. Even when teachers learned about the importance of the cultural and socioeconomic factors that influence learning, this knowledge was often ignored when they had to face demands like test preparation. This trend has led many school employees to rely on traditional White middle-class values when interacting with students of color without considering how schools marginalize these learners (p. 3).

It is important to propose solutions, evidence research-based data, and to collaborate with policy makers to develop strategies and solutions that address the issues within the scope of this research. Developing policy standards that display no bias,

challenge disparities, and provide resources to the disenfranchised, would be a great way to display a forward leap when working with local communities.

Discussion

This research will not only reinforce the need for mental health services in local educational agencies; it will also provide educational leaders and juvenile leaders with specific data to embed early preventative measures to retain the juveniles as students and prevent high numbers of juvenile crimes, as well as recidivism rates. Collaboration between the juvenile system and high schools in the Saint Louis metropolitan area is essential for addressing the intricate and interrelated issues of education and juvenile crime. This partnership can create a more supportive and effective environment for low socioeconomic at-risk youth, leading to better outcomes for individuals and the community as a whole.

Although the state of Missouri has many initiatives in place, there seems to continue to be a high number of juvenile offenders.

Morgan (2021) revealed that the overrepresentation of people of color in prisons is a serious issue that highlights the deep racial inequalities in American society. The United States, unfortunately, has the highest incarceration rate in the world (Collier 2014). The disproportionate discipline of students of color seems to be linked to this high incarceration rate, but this can be addressed by implementing the research-based strategies mentioned earlier. Exclusionary school discipline (ESD) negatively impacts all Americans. It drives up taxpayer costs due to the expense of incarceration, and when it disproportionately affects students of color, it creates educational inequalities that can

lead to civil unrest (Morgan, 2021). To address the disparities, according to the Report of the Community (2020) the following was implemented:

In response to the disproportionate representation of minority youth in the Court system, the Court's Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Reduction project came to fruition. Despite the youth population of St. Louis youth being approximately 68 percent Black, 93 percent of youth detained are Black, according to 2020 figures. The Court continues to implement strategies to reduce this disparity as part of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Solutions to reducing disparity include educating stakeholders and the community about RED and solutions, consulting with other jurisdictions to implement best practices models, and removing subjectivity from the various decision points. (p. 13)

Awareness of the inequalities grew significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic ravished the United States. During this period, people around the world saw more videos of police mistreating black individuals and heard numerous reports about how people of color were suffering more than others due to socioeconomic inequalities (Morgan, 2021). These disparities included having less access to healthcare compared to whites, making them more vulnerable to severe illness and death from COVID-19 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2020). By adopting research-based practices designed to prevent ESD, educational leaders can help reduce the inequalities that many students of color face in schools. Taking such actions can address the growing concerns about racial inequalities in the United States and contribute to a fairer society.

According to Morgan (2021), the disproportionate discipline of students of color represents a significant issue within the American school system. This disparity in

disciplinary actions is believed to be a contributing factor to the high incarceration rates among people of color. The extensive incarceration rates in America have far-reaching consequences, including the substantial financial burden on taxpayers, who collectively spend billions of dollars addressing this issue. While many Americans recognize that the U.S. education system has its shortcomings, they may not fully understand the detrimental impact that excessive disciplinary measures have on students of color. This excessive discipline not only affects these young individuals adversely but also poses broader societal implications (Morgan, 2021).

Conclusion

The researcher meticulously examined the intricate relationships between juvenile crime, race, and student outcomes within the context of a St. Louis metropolitan high school setting. By employing quantitative content analysis, the study has shed light on the stark disparities that persist in our educational and juvenile justice systems, disproportionately affecting students of color. The findings unequivocally highlight that students of color, particularly black students, are subjected to harsher disciplinary measures and are more frequently funneled into the juvenile justice system. This overrepresentation is not merely a reflection of individual behaviors, but a manifestation of systemic biases deeply entrenched in our society (Skiba et al., 2011).

The data analyzed underscores the urgent need for reform in disciplinary practices and the broader institutional frameworks that govern our schools and communities. One of the most compelling revelations of this study is the clear correlation between exclusionary school discipline practices and the subsequent negative outcomes for students of color. Additionally, the tensions between the juvenile justice and mental

health systems further demonstrates the dire need for policy adjustments to support these important societal areas. These practices not only exacerbate the educational achievement gap but also perpetuate the cradle-to-prison pipeline (Wald & Losen, 2003). It is evident that the punitive measures currently in place fail to address the root causes of behavioral issues and instead contribute to a cycle of marginalization and disenfranchisement. Moreover, this research draws attention to the broader social and economic implications of these disparities. The high costs associated with incarcerating young people, coupled with the long-term societal impact of limiting educational and economic opportunities for an entire demographic, demand a reevaluation of current policies (Hjalmarsson, 2008). The data strongly suggests that investing in restorative and supportive disciplinary practices could yield significant benefits, not only for the affected students but for society.

To researcher who is a black man reflecting on these findings, it is imperative to advocate for systemic change that goes beyond surface-level interventions. The call to action is clear: we must dismantle the structures that perpetuate racial inequities and build a more just and equitable educational system. This involves not only policy reform but also a shift in cultural attitudes towards discipline, justice, and race (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In moving forward, educators, policymakers, and community leaders must collaborate to implement evidence-based strategies that promote inclusivity and equity. Restorative justice practices, implicit bias training, and community engagement are crucial steps in this journey. It is through such comprehensive efforts that we can hope to disrupt the cycles of inequality and provide all students with the opportunities they deserve. This dissertation serves as both a critical analysis and a clarion call for justice. It

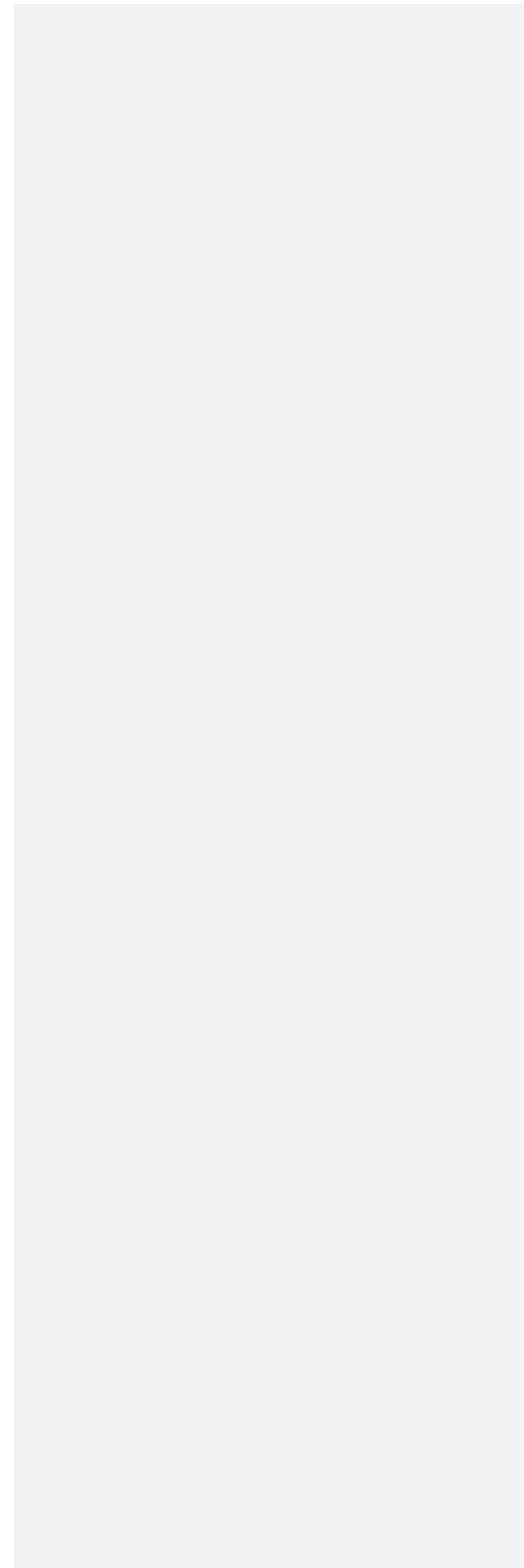
is a testament to the resilience and potential of our youth, and a reminder of our collective responsibility to create a society where every child, regardless of race, can thrive and succeed. The researcher is not only invested in the research academically, but personally and professionally, as well. The researcher has lived the research, and on several occasions, contributed both negatively and positively to society. Upon post incarceration, the researcher decided to lead the way in reducing recidivism rates by contributing to the unpopular prison-to-school-pipeline. Being part of the mental health profession, the researcher, who is a licensed therapist, has hopes of leading the way in helping to improve high school enrollment rates, decreasing high school dropout rates, and decreasing juvenile crime rates.

The researcher also experienced a troubled youth and as someone who has faced incarceration, I find this dissertation particularly significant. My journey was profoundly shaped by the systemic disenfranchisement tied to my socioeconomic status, which mirrors the findings of this research. This quantitative content analysis of juvenile crime rates in comparison to student outcome data in a St. Louis metropolitan high school setting reveals critical insights into the pervasive disparities affecting students of color. The data unequivocally demonstrates that students of color, particularly black students, are disproportionately subjected to harsher disciplinary actions. This disparity is not simply a reflection of individual behaviors but is indicative of deeper, systemic biases embedded within our educational and juvenile justice systems (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). These findings resonate deeply with my personal narrative, highlighting how punitive disciplinary measures often exacerbate existing inequalities rather than addressing the root causes of behavioral issues. One of the most compelling aspects of

this study is the clear correlation between exclusionary school discipline practices and negative student outcomes. The evidence shows that these practices contribute significantly to the school-to-prison pipeline, perpetuating cycles of marginalization and disenfranchisement (Smith & Harper, 2015).

For instance, out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, which are disproportionately applied to black students, lead to increased contact with the juvenile justice system and higher dropout rates (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011). Moreover, this research underscores the broader social and economic implications of these disparities. The high costs associated with incarcerating young people, combined with the long-term societal impact of limiting educational and economic opportunities for an entire demographic, demand urgent reevaluation of current policies (Western & Pettit, 2010). Investing in restorative justice practices and supportive disciplinary measures can mitigate these issues, offering a more equitable approach that fosters positive student outcomes and reduces recidivism. Reflecting on my personal journey, the implications of these findings are profound. My experiences of disenfranchisement and the systemic barriers I faced are echoed in the stories of many students of color in the St. Louis metropolitan area. The need for systemic change is evident. By addressing these disparities through evidence-based strategies, such as restorative justice, implicit bias training, and community engagement, we can begin to dismantle the structures that perpetuate racial inequalities in our educational system (Morris, 2016). In conclusion, this dissertation not only contributes to the academic understanding of juvenile crime rates and student outcomes but also serves as a catalyst for justice. It highlights the

resilience and potential of our youth and the critical importance of creating an equitable society where every student, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, can succeed.



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Appendix A

Permission to Use Tables and Figures from the St. Louis Circuit Court

Joel.Currier@courts.mo.gov <Joel.Currier@courts.mo.gov>
To: "WHITT, ARRON N (Student)" <ANW617@lindenwood.edu>
Cc: "drtmoore200@gmail.com" <drtmoore200@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 12, 2024 at 2:24 PM

Hi Aaron,

I checked with our acting court administrator on this.

As this annual report is published for the public, we have no problem with you including those figures/charts in your research as long as proper credit is given to the St. Louis Circuit Court or the 22nd Judicial Circuit Court of St. Louis, Missouri. Thanks!

Joel

Joel Currier
Chief Communications Officer
22nd Judicial Circuit
1114 Market Street
St. Louis, Missouri 63101
desk: 314-622-5685

From: "WHITT, ARRON N (Student)" <ANW617@lindenwood.edu>
To: "joel.currier@courts.mo.gov" <joel.currier@courts.mo.gov>
Cc: "drtmoore200@gmail.com" <drtmoore200@gmail.com>
Date: 03/11/2024 03:42 PM
Subject: URGENT - Need Approval to Use Graphics

Good Afternoon. I am a doctoral candidate conducting research on the correlation between high school dropout rates and graduation rates for two public high schools in the STL metropolitan area. I would like to use the figures included in your 2020, 2021, and 2022 Report to the Community.

If you approve this request, please respond to this email and it will be included in my research.

Thank you,
Arron N. Whitt
Lindenwood University

Vitae

ARRON WHITT

Cell: 424-946-5999

biglou5354@gmail.com

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Therapy Expertise: Skilled in group, family, and individual therapy; geriatric and adult mental health.
- Intervention: Proficient in Motivational Interviewing, TCI, and CPI.
- Social Work: Extensive experience in social work and case management; Medicaid billing.
- Leadership: Proven leadership and residential supervisory skills.
- Mentoring: Strong mentoring and life coaching abilities.
- Analytical Skills: Proficient in SPSS; knowledgeable in APA guidelines.
- Public Speaking: Experienced public speaker and mental health educator.
- Business Management: Successful independent owner and operator.

EMPLOYMENT

Care Coordinator
Centene Corporation/Meridian
1/2022-Current

Licensed Therapist/Owner
Tough Love Therapy Group LLC O'Fallon, IL 11/01/2021- Current

Behavioral Health Therapist (Adult and Geriatric)
SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital/Centralia: 7/2019 to 10/2021

Behavioral Health/Intake Specialist
Touchette Regional Hospital/Centreville, IL 1/14/2019 to 10/14/2019

Counseling Intern
Caritas Family Solutions/Counseling Department Belleville, IL 06/15/2018 to 11/01/2018

Residential Supervisor
Caritas Family Solutions/SJBCC Belleville, IL 12/04/2017 to 11/16/2018

Administrative Assistant

Lindenwood University-Belleville 12/20/2015 to 1/13/2019

Residential Treatment Specialist

Caritas Family Solutions/SJBCC Belleville, IL 12/14/2014 to 12/04/2017

Residential Recovery Specialist

Chestnut Health Systems Granite City, IL 7/2015 to 12/2015

Personal Trainer/Owner

Arron Whitt Fitness, Fairview Heights, IL 05/2014 to 05/2016

EDUCATION

Doctor of Education with emphasis in Instructional Leadership Higher Education

Lindenwood University – St. Charles, MO

Master of Arts in Professional Counseling

Lindenwood University – Belleville, IL

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

Lindenwood University – Belleville, IL

LICENSURE

Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)

Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor