Impact of Rehabilitation Programs on Recidivism Rates Among Juvenile Offenders

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**Introduction**

Recidivism rate can be defined as the number of persons, such as juveniles, who get a conviction of a given crime, go to prison, and after serving their time, later get convicted and imprisoned for committing another offense. Dealing with juvenile recidivism has remained a major challenge for any criminal justice system in the world. The goal of taking juveniles to prison or having them engage in community service as part of their punishment for delinquency is to ensure they do not repeat their mistake. Rehabilitation programs targeting juveniles always focus on the reason for their criminal activities and offer juveniles services that can make individuals leave the habit of committing crime permanently. Research has demonstrated that various rehabilitative programs can decrease recidivism among juveniles by changing their behaviors on the basis of their personal risks and needs.

**Literature Review**

The existing literature demonstrates that there are different rehabilitative programs that are implemented for juvenile offenders. According to James et al. (2013), aftercare programs are one of the widely implemented programs by the criminal justice system aimed at reducing juvenile recidivism. Aftercare programs focus on youths who are released from prison, with the objective of ensuring they get required support, such as basic needs, to reduce their rate of committing crime again. A study conducted by Haerle (2014) indicated that therapeutic treatment programs are widely used in the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders who engage in violent criminal activities. In this treatment, some drugs are given to participants together with some counseling sessions with the aim of reducing their violent behaviors. Another widely used rehabilitation program in the juvenile justice system is youth diversions programs. Wilson and Hoge (2012) indicate that post and pre-charge diversions programs have been widely utilized as official intervention techniques for juvenile offenders in the last five decades. The focus of the diversion programs is offering offenders options in life, thereby giving them second chances to live normal lives free of crime (Wilson and Hoge 2012). The diversion programs involve those who engage in juvenile delinquency issuing an apology for their crime or joining vocational training as part of gaining skills while in prison for them to find legal ways of earning a living instead of taking part in criminal activities.

Furthermore, probation and placement are other methods widely used in juvenile rehabilitation programs (Ryan, Abrams, and Huang 2014). The placement method involves an offender engaging in certain behaviors, such as substance abuse, being placed in a behavioral rehabilitation facility, such as a recovery center, instead of being taken to prison. The objective is to offer the juvenile a chance to change addictive behavior and embrace non-criminal behaviors. Probation involves a juvenile offender being required to serve a term outside prison, but by observing certain strict conditions under the probation officer supervision (Ryan, Abrams and Huang 2014). Some of the examples of probations conditions include taking part in counseling sessions three times a week for drug abusers or community service of 300 hours a month for those found engaging in less risky criminal behaviors. Family transition programs are another widely used program to support offenders reduce the risk of being rearrested for committing future crimes. Trupin et al. (2011) indicate that the family transition approach has been widely used by juvenile criminal justice as a way of helping juvenile offenders have a smooth transition from prison to the outside world. The focus of the program is ensuring juveniles have family support, which is critical in reducing the risk of repeat offenses in the future. The juveniles are given time to spend with family members as they near completion of their prison terms as a way of reintegrating them back to their families.

The literature demonstrates that different rehabilitation programs have diverse impacts on recidivism rates among juvenile offenders. In the study carried out by James et al. (2013), aftercare programs were given to young adult and juvenile offenders immediately after they were released from prison, where the rate of recidivism was determined using re-arrests as well as reconvictions rates from government official records. The study revealed that aftercare programs could be an effective tool for reducing juvenile recidivism, particularly for high-risk and older youths, if the programs are implemented in the right ways and where treatment is focused on the individual needs of the juveniles (James et al., 2013). Further, Haerle's (2014) study looked at the relationship between that dosage received by juvenile violent offenders while in prison, attending therapeutic treatment programs, and recidivism rate. The study found out that offenders who received a high dosage of treatment reduced the risk of committing similar crimes again within three years after being released from prison compared to those juveniles who failed to get the treatment (Haerle 2014). The findings of the study demonstrate that strong dosages during therapeutic treatment plans are an effective way of reducing juvenile recidivism for violent and capital juvenile offenders.

Additionally, a study carried out by Wilson and Hoge (2012) tried to determine the effectiveness of post and pre-charge diversions programs in reducing juvenile recidivism. The focus of the study meta-analysis aimed at determining whether using diversion programs decreases juvenile recidivism at a higher rate compared to when traditional criminal justice processing is used. The findings of the study revealed that diversion tends to have higher effectiveness compared to conventional interventions from the criminal justice system (Wilson and Hoge 2012). The variables that influence program effectiveness include program-and-study levels. The diversion programs should focus on targeting high-risk individuals as a way of reducing their recidivism rates in the future. An alternative study was carried out by Ryan, Abrams, and Huang (2014) to measure the effectiveness of probation and placement as methods of rehabilitation on the juvenile recidivism rates. The research focused on determining how group-home placement, in-home probation, and probation camps programs affect juvenile recidivism (Ryan, Abrams, and Huang 2014). One of the findings of the study was that juveniles taken to probation camps had 2.12 times high likelihood of repeating offenses compared to those who were placed under in-home probation (Ryan, Abrams, and Huang 2014). Also, the study found out that individuals placed in group homes had 1.28 times the likelihood of recidivism compared to those under in-home probation (Ryan, Abrams, and Huang 2014). Thus, for first-time offenders, in-home probation is the most effective rehabilitation program that reduces recidivism rates among juveniles.

Interestingly to note, a study by Trupin et al. (2011) aimed at determining how family transition integration programs impact the rate of recidivism among juvenile offenders. The participants of the study were individuals with mental health programs and addictive substance abuse behaviors. The focus of the program was reintegrating the offenders back into their family's intransitive way. Trupin et al. (2011) revealed that FIT is connected with a reduction in 30% of felony recidivism, though not connected to a reduction in violent felony or other forms of misdemeanor behaviors. The study shows that family integration transition can be used in a cautious way by correctional facilities to help juvenile offenders who have served their time in prison reintegrate with ease into the community. Based on the reviewed literature, it is evident that rehabilitation programs are associated with a reduction in recidivism rates among juveniles. However, the nature of the rehabilitation program determines the recidivism rates. It is essential for juvenile rehabilitation programs to be aligned with individual needs and be implemented in the right way to produce positive results in reducing repeat offenses among juveniles.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the reviewed literature shows that there is a wide range of programs that are implemented in juvenile criminal justice with the objective of reducing juvenile recidivism. Some of the widely used programs include probation, place, post and pre-charge diversion programs, family integration transition plans, vocational training, and therapeutical treatment plans. The study indicates that the programs are effective in a great way in reducing juvenile recidivism. However, there is a need to conduct future research by analyzing the best rehabilitation programs that meet the needs of different groups of offenders in reducing their probability of engaging in repeated offenses after serving their term in prison. The focus of this research will be on investigating different juvenile programs and how they suit different juvenile offenders, particularly in helping them reduce the risk of going back to prison for repeated offenses at a future date.

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