RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN JUVENILE COURT DELINQUENCY OUTCOMES IN A LARGE URBAN COUNTY IN A MIDWESTERN STATE

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RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN JUVENILE COURT DELINQUENCY OUTCOMES
IN A LARGE URBAN COUNTY IN A MIDWESTERN STATE

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ABSTRACT

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This study used three years of data (2009-2011) from the Lagrange County (pseud.) Juvenile Court to identify whether minority juveniles received harsher punishments or outcomes, to assess whether any difference in outcomes is possibly due to legal or extra-legal factors, and to offer recommendations on possible interventions. Additionally, this study looked at possible racial disparities in juvenile court outcomes for Safe School Ordinance (SSO) violations that were handled in the Lagrange County Juvenile Court. The current findings show that for both school and non-school incidents, minority youth, especially Black youth, were more likely to have their cases handled formally, rather than referred to a diversion program, and have their cases adjudicated delinquent in the Lagrange County Juvenile Court. These findings offer support for the “differential selection” hypothesis, which attributes minority overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system to extralegal factors.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In 1992, the issue of disproportionate minority confinement (DMC) was added as a requirement of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act of 1974. In 1994, the Clinton Administration tried to ensure that states were formally monitoring DMC and devising ways to reduce it by directly linking compliance to funding. If states could not verify that they were formally monitoring DMC or devising a formal plan to reduce it, they risked losing federal funding (Lieber, 2002). Since 1994, therefore, a considerable emphasis has been placed on DMC, or what is now generally referred to as disproportionate minority contact, by all levels of government.

The specific process of applying for grant funds to address DMC involves four phases: the identification phase, the assessment phase, the intervention phase, and the monitoring phase (Lieber, 2002). The identification phase is often quite descriptive and involves jurisdictions identifying the number of minority youth processed in the juvenile justice system. It is important that these numbers are broken down by race/ethnicity in order to determine whether DMC is present. The assessment phase addresses why minority youth may be overrepresented in the juvenile justice system. In the literature, DMC has been generally linked to one of two factors: greater involvement in crime (especially serious crime) among minorities (legal factors) or racially biased or discriminatory practices in the system (extralegal factors). The intervention phase requires jurisdictions to outline formal ways that DMC will be addressed if present (Lieber, 2002).
According to Piquero (2008), a better theoretical and empirical description of racial similarities and differences in criminal activity will provide useful information for prevention and intervention efforts aimed at limiting differences in offending. Gaining a better understanding of the determinants of racial inconsistencies early in the juvenile justice system should help improve such disparities later in the system. It is important to fully understand disproportionate minority contact by considering all the factors that affect differential offending, differential arrest, differential referral and intake decisions, and differential adjudication and disposition outcomes. This study specifically focuses on two decisions or outcomes in the juvenile court process: referral to a diversion program and adjudication.

Of course, the debate over disproportionate minority contact must be free of bias. This debate must be guided by empirical research that directly addresses racial disparities in criminal involvement and the responses to such crime throughout the juvenile justice system. It is important that such research address the complex ways in which racial differences in offending initially emerge and the ways in which public practices generate or maintain racial inequality. Research can also assist in identifying what actions can be taken to counter racial disparities in the juvenile justice system (Piquero, 2008).

This thesis will use three years of data (2009-2011) from the Lagrange County (pseud.) Juvenile Court to identify whether minority juveniles receive harsher punishments or outcomes, to assess whether any difference in outcomes is possibly due legal or extra-legal factors, and to offer recommendations on possible interventions. It is important to identify whether there are differences in juvenile court outcomes across
racial and ethnic groups because funding exists to assist jurisdictions in addressing any racial or ethnic disparities which is morally the right thing to do. Additionally, this thesis will look at possible racial disparities in juvenile court outcomes for Safe School Ordinance (SSO) violations that are handled in the Lagrange County Juvenile Court. Particular attention has been paid in recent years to disciplinary policies or measures in schools specific to minority students (Wald & Losen, 2007).

More specifically, this thesis will first assess to what extent minority youth, specifically Black youth, are overrepresented in juvenile court data relative to White youth. Approximately six years ago, in a report issued by a joint taskforce (DMC Workgroup, 2008), DMC was empirically identified in the Lagrange County juvenile justice system, and it was determined that formal steps needed to be taken to remedy this overrepresentation. This thesis will explore whether any meaningful change in minority overrepresentation has occurred with more recent data from the Lagrange County Juvenile Court.

This thesis will also examine whether any differences in juvenile court outcomes are possibly related to legal (differential involvement) or extra-legal (differential selection) factors. First, there will be an assessment of whether Black youth are referred to the juvenile court for more serious crimes than are White youth. One explanation for why Black youth are overrepresented in juvenile court data is because they commit more serious crime that is more deserving of a formal response. This argument is known as the differential involvement hypothesis (Piquero, 2008). Second, there will be an analysis on whether juvenile court outcomes differ for Black and White youth after controlling for
the severity of offenses they commit. If racial effects are found, after controlling for severity of offenses, this would then support the differential selection hypothesis.

In addition to an assessment of offenses in the community, Safe School Ordinance (SSO) violations will be examined. There has been much written about the “school-to-prison” or “school-to-detention” pipeline, a process whereby students are referred to the juvenile court for a school-related matter or offense, and this referral increases the chances of eventually being detained in a correctional facility (Advancement Project, 2005). Theoretically, school-related offenses offer the opportunity for exercising wide discretion because schools could simply choose to handle the incident “in-house.” There is little research that has focused exclusively on school-related incidents with juvenile court data.

The thesis will conclude by offering recommendations for possible ways to address DMC in Lagrange County. The last decade has seen much growth in the assessment of practices aimed at reducing DMC. In particular, a policy response is offered that argues that the juvenile justice system should be involved in early intervention as a way to address DMC.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to study racial differences in juvenile court outcomes, it is necessary to first look at the history of DMC along with the racial politics involved. This section will discuss the background, racial politics involved in the acknowledgment of DMC, study the extent of DMC in both the community and in schools, review the current theories that attempt to explain issues surrounding DMC, and discuss the relevant research available in this area of study.

Background

According to Piquero (2008), minority youth have been overrepresented at every stage of the United States’ juvenile justice system for many years. Many people attribute racial disparities to either “differential involvement” or “differential selection.” Differential involvement attributes racial disparities in the juvenile justice system to differences in offending between minorities and Whites, and differential selection is the belief that the justice system treats minority and white offenders in different ways. Kempf-Leonard (2007) indicates that Black youth are detained at higher rates than White youth, and that Black youth are more likely than White youth to be charged in juvenile court and to receive an out-of-home placement, even when they are referred for similar offenses as White youths. In fact, racial differences seem to grow larger as youth make their way through the various stages of the juvenile justice system (Piquero, 2008). From pretrial detention, to formal hearings, to adjudication, to out of home placements, to finally waiving youth to adult courts, minority overrepresentation grows larger at each stage. In 2002, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act broadened its
terminology from disproportionate minority confinement to disproportionate minority contact (or DMC) to recognize that minorities are overrepresented at every stage of the juvenile justice system.

The Racial Politics of DMC

According to Ward, Kupchik, Parker, and Starks (2011), how local court authorities tackle the issue of DMC is not well established, even though the federal government made addressing DMC a requirement for receiving block grants. It is important to understand how court personnel filter and interpret guidelines related to DMC, but little research exists on local juvenile court authorities’ attitudes regarding DMC. Ward et al. (2011) also notes the importance of reviewing local court research to understand how court personnel screen and apply rules and regulations that are imposed from the outside. Some studies strongly suggest that racial politics may condition the attitudes and behaviors of local authorities that are assigned to address DMC (Ward et al., 2011).

Disproportionate minority confinement, as it was originally called, grew over the course of the 20th century, especially after the 1960s when civil rights reforms forced the racial integration of public institutions and as shifts in juvenile crime and justice policy yielded a more punitive model of juvenile justice (Ward and Kupchik, 2009). The incorporation of the DMC component into the amendment of the Juvenile Justice Act in 1992 resulted in a number of advantages that made it easier to address the issue of race and race bias (Leiber, 2006). Furthermore, the integration of the DMC component allowed for states to collaborate and address overrepresentation from a national perspective. In addition, it also provided funding to assist states and localities to address
minority youth overrepresentation. A result of making DMC a federal issue is it showed that racial discrimination was still prevalent within the juvenile justice system and that “race still matters” (West, 1993). There was a great deal of politics involved in adding the DMC component in 1992 because the topic of race and race bias still generated a great deal of controversy.

According to Leiber (2006), however, many states did not want to address DMC or be seen as operating in ways that disadvantaged minority youth, so there was a push to downplay minority overrepresentation. For example, in Delaware, when overrepresentation was shown, there was a push to focus more on the crimes that were committed rather than the race of the suspect. Also, according to a Coalition for Juvenile Justice Report (1999), many states and other invested parties attempted to exert pressure on Congress to “water down” or downplay minority overrepresentation. In response to these political maneuverings, the Office of Justice and Delinquency Prevention took a judicious approach to ensuring that something would be done to improve minority overrepresentation, rather than keep things the same and require nothing from the states (Leiber, 2006).

DMC Evidence

*In the Community*

Minority youths are disproportionately overrepresented at each and every stage of the juvenile justice process. Poe-Yamagata and Jones (1999) found that minority youth are treated more severely than White youth at every point of contact in the system, even when charged with the same crime. According to Feld (2013), the National Academy of Sciences reported that Black youths constituted about 15% of the population aged 10 to
17, 26% of juvenile arrests, 30% of delinquency referrals, one-third of petitioned delinquency cases, and 40% of inmates in institutions. The proportion of minority youths increases at each succeeding step in the juvenile justice system and the largest disparities occur in the initial stages. Because the juvenile justice system operates cumulatively, the risk for minority overrepresentation grows at each stage to where the end result shows that Black youth are three times more likely than White youth to end up in residential treatment or simply be incarcerated (McCord, Widom, & Crowell, 2001).

In 1988, Congress amended the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 1974 and required states that receive federal funds to examine minority overrepresentation in detention facilities and institutions. Pope (1994) indicated that 41 of 42 states that responded to the amended JJDP Act found racial disparities in that minority youth were overrepresented in detention facilities. All 13 states that examined post-adjudication institutional placements found disproportionate minority confinement (Pope, 1994). In general, minority youth serve longer periods of incarceration and out-of-home placements than do White youth charged with and convicted of similar offenses (Bishop & Leiber, 2012).

Congress once again amended the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act in 1992 by requiring states to monitor minority overrepresentation at all stages of the juvenile justice system. According to Leiber (2002), following the incorporation of DMC as a core requirement to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act in 1992, states began to collect data on DMC at a time when there was a huge increase, nationally, in juvenile crime and a greater investment in fighting the war on drugs. There was a belief among certain states that minorities were overrepresented in these data because they commit
more crime, and, therefore, these states did not see a need to invest time in addressing DMC (Leiber, 2002).

In Schools

It is widely known that minority youth are overrepresented in juvenile justice systems, but there is also significant evidence that while in school, minority youth are subject to harsher discipline, such as out-of-school suspensions and expulsion, than white students. According to Wald and Losen (2003), there is growing evidence that shows a relationship between the school and justice systems, recognizing what has come to be known as the “school-to-detention pipeline.” The Children’s Defense Fund (1975) was the first to document that Blacks were suspended at higher rates than Whites. Since that time, racial disparity in school discipline has been a consistent finding. Studies (e.g., Thornton & Trent, 1988; Streitmatter, 1986) also suggest that black students are not as likely to receive less corrective alternative sanctions as white students once they are referred for discipline.

According to Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, and Valentine (2009), the use of exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspension) by schools ultimately fuels or contributes to DMC in the juvenile court. As a matter of fact, Wald and Losen (2007) argue that the racial disparities found in the education and juvenile justice systems are so similar that it is impossible not to see a causal relationship. That is, it is firmly believed that the school-to-detention pipeline has directly caused minority overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system.

There are two observations that show a correlation or relationship between DMC in schools and DMC in juvenile justice system (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009). First,
there is significant evidence that school disciplinary decisions can help shape the underlying patterns of delinquent behavior that contribute to DMC in the juvenile justice system. Drawing from the discipline of psychology, studies (e.g., Sprague, Walker, Stieber, Simonsen, Nishioka, & Wagner, 2001) exploring “labeling theory” suggest that youth who are disciplined at school without just cause can become delinquent as a result of being stigmatized. These disciplined students tend to develop a negative self-concept that adversely affects their behavior. According to Bernburg, Krohn, and Rivera (2006), labeling theory suggests that schools that disproportionately discipline Black youth can create a self-fulfilling prophecy where these youths become delinquent at higher rates than White youth.

Devine, Coolbaugh, and Jenkins (1998) noted that expulsions, suspensions, and other forms of discipline in the school system contributed to delinquent behavior and justice system contacts in youth offenders from five different states. Schools that single out Black youth for expulsion and suspension are prone to see and encounter delinquency at higher rates among this demographic. Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions contribute to DMC in the community because the student is not in school and possibly associating with other delinquent youth suspended or expelled from the school system as well (Devin, Coolbaugh, and Jenkins, 1998).

Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2009) also notes that when black students are excluded from the school system, their behavior becomes more scrutinized by the juvenile justice system. Black and Latino students who are expelled or suspended from school are more likely to be in poor neighborhoods that are heavily populated by police and therefore more likely to be stigmatized. As a result, minority overrepresentation in the school
system correlates with minority overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system. The study done by Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2009) shows that among a sample of schools in Missouri, black students were more likely to be targeted for out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than white students, even when the offense committed was the same. The implication is that black and white students are treated differently by schools and because of this differential treatment; it affects the juvenile justice system by creating greater racial disparities (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2009).

Theoretical Arguments

Differential Involvement

Piquero (2008) believes that it is important to take a look at three different hypotheses to assist with answering the question as to why minority youth are overrepresented within the juvenile justice system. The first, “the differential involvement hypothesis,” argues that minorities are overrepresented at every stage of the juvenile justice system because they commit more crimes, and their differential involvement in crime leads to more formal processing within the system. One of the rationales behind this theory is that many minority youth are living in neighborhoods and attending schools that are economically disadvantaged and racially segregated.

Studies that have relied on official data to measure rape, robbery, and assault are generally consistent with self-report data in finding support for the differential involvement hypothesis (Anderson, 1999). The statistics researched in Bishop (2006) on murder and other serious crimes in the United States consistently show that Blacks have rates four to 10 times higher than Whites. Furthermore, based on evidence presented in Bishop (2006), persons who are Black appear to possess the social conditions and learned
responses that contribute to criminality at much higher rates than Whites. Moreover, the results in Anderson (1999) show that with both victimization and official arrest data, minorities are more involved in robbery, rape, and assault incidents.

In a study done by Chauhan, Reppucci, Burnette, & Reiner (2010), the results showed how differential involvement leads to DMC. They found evidence in both official and self-report data that minority youth offend at higher rates than White youth. Such findings may be attributable to the poorer neighborhood conditions mentioned above for minority youth. Neighborhoods have received considerable attention in studies regarding DMC (e.g. Peterson & Krivo, 2005; Sampson & Wilson, 1995; and South & Messner, 2000). Indicators of neighborhood disadvantage typically include the percentage of people living in poverty, the number of households on public assistance, and the percentage of households led by females. Research in Peeples and Loeber (1994) and Peterson and Krivo (2005) suggests that many Black people live in disadvantaged neighborhoods that have higher rates of crime, and they are not able to move out of these neighborhoods primarily due to a lack of resources compared to their White counterparts.

A report from OJJDP (2002) indicated that 10 of 50 states in 2000 identified a lack of educational resources in schools, the inability to prevent early and high rates of school dropout, and the failure of minority students and their families to participate fully in the educational system as causes of early academic failure and delinquency among minority youth. Lastly, in this same OJJDP (2002) report, 11 of 50 states revealed that a disproportionate number of incarcerated minority youth came from low-income, single-parent (female) households with low-paying jobs and unsteady employment. In other
words, a lack of parental financial assistance further exacerbates an already bleak situation for many minority youth in the juvenile justice system (OJJDP, 2002).

**Differential Selection**

The second hypothesis Piquero (2008) discusses is the “differential selection and processing hypothesis,” which asserts that the police differentially patrol and profile in minority neighborhoods. Likewise, the hypothesis contends that discrimination within the court and correctional systems leads to more minorities being arrested, convicted, and incarcerated. It is argued that this hypothesis is especially relevant for victimless crimes, such as drug use or property crimes, because they offer the opportunity for the system to exercise more discretion.

**The Police**

Feld (2013) examines how police interrogation policies vary by jurisdiction as it relates to urban versus suburban settings. The youth’s race and crimes vary with geographic locale and affects the interrogation practices. Police officers from urban cities question a larger proportion of minority juveniles charged with more serious offenses than do police officers from suburban or rural jurisdictions. The strategies and tactics used by the police are different for Black youth compared to White youth. It is also interesting to note that minority youth respond to questioning by police differently than do White youth (Feld, 2013).

According to Bishop (2005), crime problems that are encountered by police officers vary by community characteristics and play a considerable role in how they respond. Personnel recruitment and selection, community policing philosophies, and department structure further contribute to variations in police policies. Officers in
professional departments emphasize the need to strictly follow general rules and enforce laws evenhandedly. These professional departments arrest juveniles at twice the rate as do those in nonprofessional departments, where police officers may use a more flexible, informal response (Bishop, 2005).

Bishop and Leiber (2012) note how affluent families have, over the years, used their economic and political clout to protect their children. Police, rather than bringing formal charges, handled the children of affluent families internally. External political pressures from politicians and wealthy people can persuade the police to be tough on crime for less fortunate youths. Given that minority youth are more likely to live in poverty, their families have less leverage in influencing the system (Bishop & Leiber, 2012).

The interrogation practices addressed in Feld (2009) showed that youth of different races all responded differently to police interrogators. White youth tended to be more cooperative, gave longer explanations, had better attitudes, and confessed at significantly higher rates; whereas twice as many Black youth displayed a resistant attitude, gave negative responses, and denied criminal involvement. The differences are consistent with racial differences in experiences with the juvenile justice system (Feld, 2009).

Police disproportionately arrest minority youth because they live in urban centers that are patrolled more heavily than suburban and rural areas (Feld, 2009). This takes place mainly because police tend to patrol neighborhoods that are heavily populated with minorities, which indirectly leads them to arrest minority youth for violent and drug crimes. Thus, a juvenile’s race correlates with locality, delinquency patterns, and justice
system responses to produce disproportionate minority confinement and selection (Feld, 2013). This holds true for Lagrange County, which will be discussed further in the results chapter.

In conclusion, the police are a crucial part of the juvenile justice system because they are the first line of defense and the gateway for many youth who enter the system. The police are afforded a lot of discretion, far more than any other agency, so the police may contribute to differential selection (Piquero, 2008).

The Courts

Criminal justice officials may also act in a discriminatory manner and, as a result, minority youth and White youth who are charged with the same crime will be treated differently within the juvenile justice system. For instance, studies in Shelden (2008) show that Black youth in the juvenile justice system are given more restrictive dispositions than their white counterparts, even when they have committed the same offense and have the same prior record. Black youth are also sentenced more harshly than White youth for the same crimes. Lastly, evidence suggests that Black youth are more likely to be transferred to adult court than are White youth, regardless of age and offense type (Piquero, 2008).

In a report issued by OJJDP (2002), when five of the 50 states enacted laws or policies that gave wider discretionary authority to probation officers and other juvenile court workers, it contributed to harsher treatment of minority youth. Additionally, it was noted in the report that the practice of stacking offenses on a single incident against Black youth occurs quite frequently by police, probation officers, and school system personnel (OJJDP, 2002).
Urban courts are more due process oriented, place more minority youth in pretrial detention facilities, and sentence offenders more severely than do suburban and rural courts. Feld (2013) indicates that no particular studies show that urban minority youth are less competent than other youth; however, time and time again, judges appoint lawyers for them less often than do urban judges. Minority youth disproportionately live in urban settings relative to White youth. Police tend to arrest urban youth for more serious charges, which leads to urban youth accumulating more extensive records (Bishop, 2005). Thus, some geographic differences in justice administration reflect differences in the present offenses and the criminal histories of delinquent youth.

From a historical perspective, Feld (2009) asserts that juvenile courts’ rehabilitative ideology has emphasized intervention in a youth’s best interests. By individualizing and treating each youth, this philosophy encourages decision-makers to treat offenders differently based on perceived needs and circumstances. From the juvenile court’s inception, control of ethnic and racial minority youth was one of its most important functions. In the 1980s and 1990s, get-tough policies directed at juveniles further amplified racial disparities and punished minority offenders more harshly than White youths (Penn, 2006).

Research reviewed by Ward et al. (2011) suggests that racial attitudes of individual decision makers and characteristics of courts contribute to DMC and are therefore important to DMC intervention. This research in Ward et al. (2011) provides further indication that racial attitudes and prejudiced or biased behaviors of court personnel are likely contributors to “differential selection,” at least in some court
contexts, and that diversity among court personnel may be an important factor in DMC intervention (Ward et al., 2011)

According to Graham and Lowery (1998), juvenile court personnel respond to real or perceived disparities among youths of different races, and their decisions, based on preconceived ideas, play a critical role in minority overrepresentation. For example, juvenile personnel may perceive or view Black youth as more threatening than White youth and may ascribe their delinquency to personal choices rather than external forces. Either perception may result in harsher sanctions being given to minority youth. If juvenile justice system personnel continue to refer more youth for formal processing on the basis of a lack of social structure or on service needs, then the juvenile court will indirectly mirror racial disparities (Ward et al., 2011).

*Differential Involvement and Selection*

The third hypothesis that Piquero (2008) suggests as a possible reason for the overrepresentation of minority youth is a mixture of the previous two. Piquero (2008) strongly suggests that both differential involvement and differential processing and selection operate together to produce racial overrepresentation in official crime statistics. Data limitations make it difficult to conduct a strong empirical test of this theory. One study (Bishop, 2000) suggests that differential involvement is important earlier in the judicial process and that differential selection and process matters more as individuals move farther into the juvenile justice system. While this third hypothesis is more theory than evidenced based, more research should be done on both of these competing hypotheses to better understand why minorities are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system.
The Current Study

*Lagrange County*

In attempts to contribute to the knowledge base on DMC, this study will focus on DMC in Lagrange County. More specifically, with three years of data (2010-2012) from the Lagrange County Juvenile Court, this study addresses whether minorities are overrepresented in juvenile court outcomes. These outcomes are examined separately for Safe School Ordinances (SSO) cases and non-SSO cases. School-based cases have been examined sparingly in research, and because school-based offenses are often of a minor nature, one contention is that they offer greater opportunity for discretion and racial disparity.

SSO cases represent instances throughout every report released by the Lagrange County Juvenile Court from 2010 to 2012. Minority youth were charged more than White youth in every crime category listed. (Lagrange County Statistical Reports, 2010-2012). In 2010, there were a total of 7,292 offenses handled by the juvenile court, and 4,413 (or 61%) involved Black youth and 2,289 (or 31%) involved White youth. Of the 5,872 cases disposed of in 2010, 3,513 (or 60%) were Black youth and 1,888 (or 32%) were White youth. Even more staggering is the number of Black youth who were committed to the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) in 2010. Of the total number sent to DYS from Lagrange County, 23 (or 82%) were Black youth and 4 (or 14%) were White youth. The same racial pattern emerges for youth who were committed to DYS and/or certified as adults from 2006 through 2010. The detention statistics for 2010 follow a similar pattern. In 2010, for instance, of the total number of youth booked into the Juvenile Detention Center by a law enforcement officer, 2,761 (or 73%) were
minority and 1,001 (or 27%) were white. Lastly, in 2010, 1,748 minority youth were admitted to the Juvenile Detention Center and not eligible for release until a detention hearing occurred, compared to 618 White youth who were admitted and not eligible for release until a detention hearing occurred.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the background surrounding DMC, along with the politics that have played a vital role in states acknowledgment of DMC. In addition, the extent of DMC in the community and in schools was discussed. Theoretical explanations that address why minority youth are overrepresented at each stage of the juvenile justice system were also reviewed to determine the factors that play a role in the racial differences in juvenile court outcomes. Finally, this chapter concluded with a brief discussion of the main purpose of this study, which is to assess select juvenile court outcomes (i.e., informal handling, adjudication) differ by the race of a juvenile. The juvenile court focused on here has, as mentioned, identified racial differences in such outcomes in prior years.
CHAPTER III
DATA AND METHODS

Lagrange County Demographics

The data for this research comes from Lagrange County, Ohio. Lagrange County is located in a Midwestern state. It has a population of approximately 455,054. The racial makeup of the county is 77.5% White, 16.9% Black, 4.5% Hispanic or Latino. There were 182,847 households in 2010 of which 31.1% housed children under the age of 18, 44.7% were married-couple households, 14.7% had a female householder with no husband present, and 36.4% were non-family households. The average household size is 2.4, and the average family size is 3.0 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

In the county, 26.3% of the population is under the age of 18, 9.8% from 18 to 24, 29.1% from 25 to 44, 21.7% from 45 to 64, and 13.1% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age is 35 years. The median income for a household in the county is $38,004, and the median income for a family is $48,190. In addition, about 10.7% of families and 13.9% of the population lived below the poverty line in 2010, including 19.7% of those under age 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The City of Decatur (pseud.), which is the largest city in the county, represents 66% of Lagrange County’s population, 57% of the Caucasian population, 95% of the Black population, and 91% of the non-White population (Lagrange County Statistical Reports, 2010-2012).

Juvenile Court Sample

The present study utilizes data derived from a sample comprised of 19,399 juvenile cases handled between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2012 by the Lagrange County Juvenile Court. Thirty-six percent of all the cases were disposed of in 2010, 32%
in 2011, and 32% of the cases were disposed in 2012. Data were gathered from the agency records of youth who had cases with the Lagrange County Juvenile Court. The data included information on: (1) Year of the disposition; (2) gender of the juvenile; (3) race of the juvenile; (4) type of offense; (5) number of offenses charged with at time of disposition; (6) number of prior dispositions; (7) whether the case was handled informally (referred to a diversion program); and (8) whether the case was adjudicated delinquent.

The Lagrange County Juvenile Court normally compiles data to assess DMC and to assess the job they are doing as it relates to juvenile crime prevention.

According to Maxfield & Babbie (2005), the use of such secondary data is valuable for examining racial differences in juvenile court outcomes or decisions. It further allows for research to be done on a large sample without the time and expense of original data collection. Nonetheless, there are a few disadvantages of secondary data. One of the concerns of secondary data is validity. The purpose or intention of the original research may differ from information the secondary researcher is studying. The question then becomes can the data accurately represent the new research? In addition to the issues of validity, key variables may require different measurement before analyzing the data for secondary research. Lastly, when using secondary data, problems arise when data is missing or coding is used that is confusing, which means time has to be taken to determine how the variables were collected and coded to get a fuller understanding of what needs to be done to conduct the secondary research. Overall, using secondary data reduces the costs of collecting new data while, at the same time, granting the opportunity to answer new research questions (Maxfield & Babbie, 2005).
Variables

*Dependent Variables*

The purpose of this study is to assess whether minority youth are overrepresented in juvenile court outcomes. Overrepresentation is determined in this study by focusing on two outcomes. First, this study assesses whether the initial charges were handled informally, which means that a juvenile was referred to a mediation or diversion program. Referral to a diversion program offers the benefit of having no charges indicated on a youth’s record if they successfully complete the program. The second outcome, which occurs later in the juvenile court process, is whether the case resulted in a formal adjudication. It is hypothesized, based on the existing research, that minorities have their cases handled formally and adjudicated delinquent more than White youth. Each of these dependent variables were measured at the nominal level, where the cases are coded one if a juvenile was referred to diversion program or the case resulted in a formal adjudication.

*Independent Variables*

Thirteen independent variables were also examined in the current study. The first three independent variables account for the year the juvenile case was disposed or formally decided: 2010, 2011, or 2012. In most instances, a case was formally filed and disposed of in the same year. Cases where there was a lengthy delay between being filed and disposed of were removed from the analysis or sample.

The next four variables address race. These variables differentiate youth based on whether they are White, Black, Latino, or other. There is another demographic variable, male, that denotes the gender of the juvenile. Another set of variables control for offense-related characteristics: robbery/theft offense, sexual offense, weapon offense,
drug offense, alcohol offense, property offense, nuisance offense, status offense, number of charges, and number of prior dispositions.

Analysis

The analysis of the current data involves three parts. First, the descriptive statistics are examined to assess the distribution of the independent and dependent variables. Second, Pearson Chi-Square tests assess the relationship between race and whether a case was handled informally or adjudicated delinquent for both SSO cases and non-SSO cases. Third, logistic regression was done to determine whether race effects materialize or persist after controlling for the other independent variables that might explain juvenile court outcomes.

Pearson Chi-Square

According to Greenwood (1996), a Pearson’s Chi-Square tests the null hypothesis of no relationship between two variables that are measured at the nominal level. In particular, the test is used to assess one of two things: (1) to test whether or not a frequency distribution differs from a theoretical distribution and (2) to test whether observations on two variables are independent of each other (Greenwood, 1996). The various events must be mutually exclusive and have a total probability of one.

Logistic Regression

According to Hosmer and Lemeshow (2000), logistic regression measures the relationship that exists between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. Logistic regression can be binomial or multinomial (Harrell, 2001). Menard (2002) states that a binomial logistic regression deals with situations in which the observed outcome for a dependent variable can have only two possible types and is coded
as “0” or “1.” Logistic regression analysis makes use of one or more independent variables that may be either continuous or categorical measures used for predicting binary outcomes of the dependent variable rather than continuous outcomes.

Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the methodology of the current study. Specifically, the dataset and sample was described. Additionally, both the independent variables and dependent variables being tested were identified, along with the statistical tests used for analysis. Finally, the limitations surrounding the use of secondary data were addressed, along with the benefits provided of using such data.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are several independent variables that
are known correlates of racial differences in juvenile court outcomes, such as the nature
of offense and prior court history. This study accounts for these measures and assesses
whether racial differences still exist in the decision to handle cases informally or
adjudicate. Descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables are first
presented, followed by the results of the Pearson Chi-Square and logistic regression
analysis.

Descriptive Statistics

In Table 4.1, the data showed that 60% of the cases involved Black youth and
33% involved White youth. .58 of the cases had at least one prior disposition, while 26%
of the 19,399 cases were handled informally, and 32% of all the cases were adjudicated
delinquent. Twelve percent of the total cases were felony offenses, while 14% of the
cases were status offenses. Lastly, 13% of all the cases were safe school ordinance
violations for the years 2010-2012.

Of the total cases, 6,499 (33%) involved White juveniles and 11,728 (60%) cases
involved Black youth. In addition, 10% of the White cases were felony offenses
compared to 13% of the cases involving Black youth. These data suggest that offending
differences between White and Black youth are modest and, therefore, there is not strong
evidence of differential involvement.

Another interesting comparison is the contrast in the number of SSO violations
between White juvenile cases and Black juvenile cases. Of the 6,499 White juvenile
cases, 10% were SSO violations compared to 15% of the Black juvenile cases. In addition, White youth had their cases handled informally 31% of the time, whereas Black youth had their cases handled informally only 23% of the time. Lastly, 28% of the cases involving White youth were adjudicated delinquent, but 35% of the cases involving Black youth were adjudicated delinquent.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for Total Sample and by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 19,408</td>
<td>N = 6,499</td>
<td>N = 11,728</td>
<td>N = 827</td>
<td>N = 354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felony</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe school ordinance</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. charges</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. prior dispositions</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal handling</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjudicated</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pearson Chi-Square Analysis

*Non-SSO cases*

The first test that was performed was a Pearson Chi-Square test (see Table 4.2) on non-SSO cases and whether or not these cases were handled formally or informally. The null hypothesis for the Pearson Chi-Square test is that race and whether a case was handled informally are statistically unrelated. The chi-square value is 163, with a significance value level of .000. When the level of significance is less than .05, the null hypothesis of no association between race and whether a case was handled informally is rejected. The cross-tabulation table confirms this association in that 78% of Black youth cases are handled formally, whereas 69% of the White cases are handled formally.

| Table 4.2: Crosstabulation Table for Race and Handled Informally (Non-SSO Cases) |
|--------------------------|----------|--------|--------|--------|
|                           | White    | Latino | Black  | Other  |
| Formal                   | 4058     | 577    | 7750   | 228    |
|                          | 69.2%    | 79.5%  | 78.0%  | 70.2%  |
| Informal                 | 1804     | 149    | 2185   | 97     |
|                          | 30.8%    | 20.5%  | 22.0%  | 29.8%  |

Chi-square = 163, *p* = .000

Looking at the cross-tabulation table for offenses adjudicated delinquent in Table 4.3, the number of Black youth cases adjudicated delinquent almost double the number of White youth cases adjudicated delinquent. Looking at the chi-square test, the chi-square value is 83. More importantly, the p-value of .000 indicates that there is a significant relationship between race and whether or not a juvenile incident was adjudicated delinquent. When the value is less than .05, there is a small probability that the observed difference is due to chance, as was the case with the non-SSO incidents handled
informally. Out of 16,848 cases, Blacks are more likely to have their offenses adjudicated delinquent than are White youth who are charged with non-SSO offenses.

| Table 4.3: Crosstabulation Table for Race and Adjudicated Delinquent (Non-SSO Cases) |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                                 | White  | Latino | Black  | Other  |
| Informal/Dismissed              | 4270   | 481    | 6559   | 234    |
|                                 | 72.8%  | 66.3%  | 66.0%  | 72.0%  |
| Adjudicated                     | 1592   | 245    | 3376   | 91     |
|                                 | 27.2%  | 33.7%  | 34.0%  | 28.0%  |

Chi-square = 83, $p = .000$

**SSO cases**

The cross-tabulation for SSO cases (see Table 4.4) that were handled formally/informally are fewer in number, but, interestingly enough, the results are somewhat similar to the previous tests that have been addressed. There were a total of 2,551 SSO cases, and simply looking at the breakdown according to race, Black youth are charged more than are youth of other races. The chi-square test gives a more definitive understanding of the numbers. The Pearson Chi-Square value is nine, and the $p$-value is .026. When this number is less than .05, which it is, it is statistically improbable that the observed difference is due to chance.

| Table 4.4: Crosstabulation Table for Race and Handled Informally (SSO cases) |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|                                 | White  | Latino | Black  | Other  |
| Formal                         | 429    | 68     | 1300   | 16     |
|                                 | 68.0%  | 67.3%  | 72.6%  | 55.2%  |
| Informal                       | 202    | 33     | 490    | 13     |
|                                 | 32.0%  | 32.7%  | 27.4%  | 44.8%  |

Chi-square = 9, $p = .026$
Lastly, a Pearson Chi-Square test (see Table 4.5) was performed on SSO cases that were adjudicated delinquent. There were a total of 2,551 cases in all over the three year period: 2010-2012. Among these cases, Black youth had their offenses adjudicated delinquent more often than White youth. The Pearson Chi-Square value is 12.34, and the p-value is .006. When the p-value is less than .05, it is statistically improbable that the differences in the observed values are due to chance, which further affirms that Black youth are more likely to be charged formally with SSO violations and have their offenses adjudicated delinquent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal/Dismissed</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjudicated</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square = 12, \( p = .006 \)

Logistic Regression Analysis

*Non-SSO cases*

The second test that was performed was a logistic regression on non-SSO cases (see Table 4.6) and whether or not they were handled formally or informally. The pseudo r-square value is .329, which means that approximately 33% of the variation in the outcome is accounted for by the independent variables. There are a few variables in the equation that have p-values of .000. For those who have prior offenses/cases, the odds ratio of .179 indicates that it is 82% less likely that those who have prior offenses will have their cases handled informally. Likewise, for Black youth, it is 47% less likely that
non-SSO cases are handled informally. The same is the case for Latinos who are charged with non-SSO offenses. With an odds ratio of .472, they are 53% less likely to be charged informally than their white counterparts.

Table 4.6 displays the logistic regression output for the non-SSO cases that are adjudicated or non-adjudicated. The pseudo r-square value is .206, which means that roughly 20% of the variation in the outcome is accounted for by the independent variables. A number of variables in the equation are statistically significant. Black and Latino youth are 47% more likely to have their cases adjudicated delinquent than are White youth. Males are 117% more likely to have their cases adjudicated delinquent than are females.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.6: Logistic Regression Models for Non-SSO Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. of offenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. of priors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob/theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuisance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nagelkerke R Square for Predicting Informal Handling = .329
Nagelkerke R Square for Predicting Adjudication = .206
**SSO cases**

The logistic regression output for SSO cases handled informally or formally is displayed in Table 4.7. The pseudo r-square value is .08, which means that eight percent of the variation in the outcome is accounted for by the independent variables. The variables in the equation that have statistically significant p-values of .000 are males, Black youth, and priors. With an odds ratio of .777, Black youth SSO cases are 76% less likely to be handled informally compared to their white counterparts. With an odds ratio of .242, youth with prior violations are 76% less likely to have their cases handled informally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>.997</td>
<td>.979</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.903</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>.679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.522</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.777</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>.942</td>
<td>.800</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. of offenses</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.896</td>
<td>.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num. of priors</td>
<td>.242</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.886</td>
<td>.336</td>
<td>.311</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nagelkerke R Square for Informal Handling = .086
Nagelkerke R Square for Adjudication = .027

Lastly, the logistic regression output for SSO cases adjudicated or non-adjudicated is displayed in Table 4.7. A pseudo r-square of .027 means that roughly three percent of the variation in the outcome is accounted for by the independent variables. The two variables in the equation that are statistically significant are males and Black youth. With an odds ratio of 1.675, there is a 68% greater likelihood that males will be
adjudicated for school-related offenses. The same is the case for Black youth. With an odds ratio of 1.468, Black youth are 47% more likely to be adjudicated delinquent on an SSO violation.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the results of the current study. First, the descriptive statistics of both the dependent and independent variables were given. Second, the results of the Pearson Chi-Square test were provided that showed that Black youth are less likely to have their cases handled informally, but their cases are more likely to be adjudicated delinquent. Finally, the results of the logistic regression analysis were presented. Similar to the Pearson Chi-Square results, these results showed that Black and Latino youth are less likely to have their cases handled informally but more likely to have their cases adjudicated delinquent.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overrepresentation of Black youth occurs at all stages of the juvenile justice system. For instance, African-American youth constituted roughly 15% of the juvenile population in 2000, but they represented 26% of all juveniles arrested, 45% of those detained, and 40% of those in residential treatment facilities (OJJDP, 2002). Piquero (2008) suggested or indicated that such differences could be attributed to differential selection or differential involvement.

Discussion of Current Study

The results of this study show consistently that minority youth are overrepresented, especially Black youth, in the Lagrange County Juvenile Court. The findings of the tests performed do not offer much support for the “differential involvement” hypothesis. That is, while the current findings suggest that Black youth may be more involved in delinquent behavior overall, the crimes they commit are generally no different in nature than those committed by White youth. Second, the findings lend support to the differential selection hypothesis in that Black youth are disproportionately affected early (i.e., decision to handle informally) and late (i.e., decision to adjudicate) in the juvenile court process.

Seeing a need to address DMC in a tangible way, OJJDP launched a national training and technical assistance initiative to foster the development, documentation, and nationwide dissemination of effective strategies to reduce DMC through a cooperative agreement with a private provider, Research and Evaluation Associates (REA), in 1997. The idea behind this initiative was to give states and localities broad-based knowledge
and tools on how to target and address factors that contribute to DMC (OJJDP, 2002). REA, in conjunction with OJJDP, has initiated training and curriculum that is available to states. OJJDP decided to make all of this information available to the states as a resource rather than forcing or mandating states to use the curriculum and technical assistance that was available. In so doing, another initiative that was constructed was the Building Blocks for Youth Initiative. This initiative is a partnership of organizations from fields such as law, justice, communications, and public policy. The main objective of the Building Blocks initiative is to protect minority youth in the justice system and to promote fair and efficient juvenile justice system policies. Building Blocks promotes an integrated five pronged approach: conducting new research, analyzing decision-making in the system, advocating for minority youth, building constituencies for change, and developing communications strategies. The problem, however, is that this integrated five-pronged approach, which was largely adopted by Lagrange County (DMC report), is not working as evidenced by the current findings. With all the funding that the federal government through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act has allocated to assist states in assessing DMC, minority overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system has remained largely unchanged.

Limitations and Future Research

While the current study was limited in scope due to the use of secondary data, gleaning from its findings and past studies, at least two avenues for future research should be considered. For example, a study addressed by Ward et al. (2011), found that reports submitted to judges for consideration at sentencing that were prepared by probation officers led to more severe punishments for minority youth compared to White
youth. White probation officers were more likely than their Black counterparts to form negative opinions about Black youth delinquency, but there were too few Black authorities in the court to test this correlation. Although delinquency of White youth was attributed to external pressures, Black youth with the same case profiles tended to receive assessments that were tagged as more serious and the assessments actually encouraged judges to incarcerate Black youth. This relationship further suggests that racial bias plays a considerable role in perpetuating DMC.

The study done by Ward et al. (2011) reveals that race stereotypes and biases are relevant to the study of differential treatment of minority youth. Further research should look closer at the perceptions and ideologies of intake officers, prosecutors, judges, and other court workers who are charged with addressing DMC policy. DMC may still persist because of a failure on the part of government and researchers to assess the orientations and backgrounds of those who are charged with addressing the issue. The wide racial perceptions that still exist among workers may play an active role in the DMC problem.

The current study also was unable to specifically address the issue of legal representation of minority youth. Feld (2013) found minorities received more representation than did non-minorities. There was an assumption that minorities were in court for more serious offenses. More non-minority youth had private counsel paid for by their families. However, youth with legal counsel tended to receive more severe sanctions than those without legal representation. Future research should attempt to look into the correlation between the overrepresentation of minorities and how legal representation may affect the decision to handle cases informally or formally.
Lastly, because this study relied on secondary data, not enough information regarding the circumstances of the SSO cases was provided to account for possible difference in their severity. The lack of such information limits the ability to further study the intricate details surrounding the nature of the SSO cases. Further research should attempt to account for the conditions surrounding SSO cases, the personnel that administer them, and what procedures are in place that determine whether an SSO violation has occurred. It would also be interesting to investigate the reasons why SSO violations are more prone to take place at schools located in poor neighborhoods. Such a study could assist in gaining a better understanding of the issues youth may be dealing with and help to better address problems of delinquency before an SSO offense is committed.

Policy Response

Taken together, the results from the current study and previous research offer a number of policy responses. Up until the 1960s, according to Farrington (2012), the American juvenile justice system was concerned with not only the juvenile offenders but with problem children as well. It was the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration who, in 1967, recommended that the juvenile court be a place of last resort and that the juvenile court be an agency of last resort. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 incorporated these recommendations and therefore restricted the ability of juvenile courts to handle status offenders, non offenders, child delinquents, and dependent and neglected children. These measures indirectly led to the juvenile court becoming, for all intents and purposes, a criminal court for youth. The
juvenile court was given no room to intervene early in a youth’s life in order to prevent the escalation of child issues into serious juvenile offenses (Farrington, 2012).

In 2000, the OJJDP Prevention Study Group on Very Young Offenders summarized information on juvenile offenders up to age 12 (Loeber & Farrington, 2000, 2001). The Study Group concluded that existing techniques for dealing with child delinquents were insufficient and strongly suggested early intervention was essential. According to Farrington (2012), based on 2012 figures, early intervention programs implemented across the nation could prevent one third of all homicides in the United States. Furthermore, it is estimated that early intervention programs could save 4,200 lives and nearly 80,000 years of potential life lost. This could, in actuality, save almost 225,000 person-years of incarceration and more than $5 billion per year (Farrington, 2012).

It is vitally important to implement effective intervention programs for children between the ages of six to 11 years of age who find themselves in trouble, in order to prevent them from escalating into violent juvenile offenders. Interventions should be based on a risk needs assessment. Wright et al. (2012) show that an early intervention program is effective with children who are prone to commit offenses and that a prosecutor-led program is even more effective. It is interesting to note that the prosecutor-led program came under serious scrutiny and resistance from parents; however, it was still an essential program that saw tremendous results in the number of youth who were able to change direction and focus.

Investing money in early intervention programs for troubled children, many who happen to be minorities, between the ages of six to 11 prevents them from committing
many serious crimes at later ages. It also helps minority youth to develop positive relationships with prosecutors and police officers, which tends to be hostile (Feld, 2013). It is important to create a relationship of trust with minority youth at an early age. It can prove meaningful later in life and affect minority overrepresentation in the system.

Conclusion

In general, this chapter served to further summarize the results of the current study, which consistently show that minority youth are differentially affected in the juvenile justice system. The findings were discussed in relation to the literature and the understanding of the issues related to DMC that was addressed in Chapter Two. Overall, the findings of the current study show strongly that DMC is still just as much an issue today as it was in 2002 when the terminology was broadened from disproportionate minority confinement to disproportionate minority contact to recognize that minorities are overrepresented at every stage of the juvenile justice system. With all the funding that is being provided to states to monitor and reduce DMC, future research is necessary to further understand racial implications surrounding DMC and the various juvenile justice officials (or agents) such as police officers, probation officers, and judges that have influential discretionary power as it relates to the decision to informally or formally process juveniles.
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