Community-Based Juvenile Offender Programs in South Africa: Lessons Learned

Willem Roestenburg & Emmerentie Oliphant

To cite this article: Willem Roestenburg & Emmerentie Oliphant (2012) Community-Based Juvenile Offender Programs in South Africa: Lessons Learned, Journal of Community Practice, 20:1-2, 32-51, DOI: 10.1080/10705422.2012.644226

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2012.644226

Published online: 12 Mar 2012.

Article views: 415

View related articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=wcom20
Community-Based Juvenile Offender Programs in South Africa: Lessons Learned

WILLEM ROESTENBURG
Department of Social Work, University of Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

EMMERENTIE OLIPHANT
School of Social Work, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas, USA

Youth crime is, both nationally and internationally, a dilemma affecting the social environment of a country. On the one hand, community factors contribute to the occurrence of youth offending and, on the other, the community is responsible for taking corrective action against those youth who commit crimes. The purpose of this article is to present findings from a South African study on this dual role of the community. Although much information exists on juvenile crime, there is still a limited amount of information available on the effectiveness of community-based intervention programs, specifically in the South African context. Not only is the discussion directed at contributing factors to youth crime originating in the community, but the complexities of community-based diversion programs in the South African context are explored.

KEYWORDS youth, community-based, diversion programs, evaluation, contributing factors, juvenile, crime, Africa

Like many other sub-Saharan African countries, South African society is characterized by a complex array of social problems such as racial and gender imbalances, inequality, poverty, unemployment, and crime. One of

We acknowledge the Department of Social Development for their initiative in commissioning this research. Research funded through the Department of Social Development Research Grant.

Address correspondence to Willem Roestenburg, Department of Social Work, University of Johannesburg, P.O. Box 524, Auckland Park, Gauteng, 2006, South Africa. E-mail: wimr@uj.ac.za
the harsh realities experienced in the country is juveniles living in poverty, and this is often considered as a main contributing factor toward juveniles in conflict with the law (Palmary, 2001; United Nations, 2005). The instability in the economic, social, and political environment severely impacts on the quality of life of juveniles in the country. Based on human rights principles, community development, and social action, social welfare services in general, but specifically in response to juvenile delinquency, are guided by a perspective of social development. This philosophy is embedded in The White Paper for Social Welfare (Republic of South Africa, 1997), which serves as the main guiding policy document upon which social services are based. In this policy document, juveniles in conflict with the law is identified as an at-risk population in need of specialized services. The document states that services should be accessible to all juveniles in conflict with the law as an alternative to the punitive system, to prevent recidivism. Another document that supports a social intervention into crime is the White Paper on Safety and Security (South African Government, 1998). This document specifically calls for any interventions that “reduce the social, economic and environmental factors conducive to particular types of crime” (p. 12). This implies that juveniles who are in conflict with the law are treated within the context of community-based development programs such as community reintegration and community empowerment projects. Rather than following a residential or individual approach based on incarceration, the ideal is to employ community development strategies to bring about change and empowerment to juveniles.

The purpose of this article is to identify lessons learned from community strategies with juveniles in conflict with the law in Gauteng, South Africa. Lessons are derived from a research study on the perceptions of juveniles regarding community-based diversion programs we conducted in 2008. The study focused on identifying contributing factors to juvenile offending, and obtaining perceptions regarding different types of services, most of which are community-based and aimed at rehabilitation or skills training of juveniles, who had committed mostly serious crimes. With this study, we wanted to establish if the profile of contributing factors to youth crime had changed during the course of South Africa’s developing democracy and how juveniles perceived the community-based programs they were subjected to. The main research questions driving this project were the following: What community factors contribute toward juveniles coming into conflict with the law? How do juveniles who have committed an offense perceive the programs they were subjected to? Did these community-based programs contribute to any change in the functioning of juveniles? The study was comprehensive and included multi-level interpretation of factors and services. What lessons have we learned since 1994 on community development services as it pertains to juveniles in conflict with the law?
It is assumed that the apartheid system in South Africa (pre-1994) has contributed to the status of juveniles in conflict with the law in the country. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, and socioeconomic class are regarded as major contributing factors impacting the lives of juveniles. Several studies support the association between macro-level social problems such as poverty, unemployment, and juvenile crime. According to the main guiding policy document, the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997), community-based strategies should be utilized to provide rehabilitative services to ensure that juveniles in conflict with the law are treated with their own best interest as focus. Referring to a broad spectrum of services and strategies, community-based intervention strategies are regarded as key to reaching a number of goals, among others to eradicate poverty and the social problems related to poverty (Bollens, 2000; Gray & Mubangizi, 2009; Ledwith, 2005). The White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) provides specific guidelines for services related to juveniles in conflict with the law:

- Juveniles are connected to family, community, and culture and by providing rehabilitative services in the community these ties can be strengthened.
- Strategies and services dealing with the needs of juveniles in conflict should be aimed at empowering and educating the child, parents and community. The involvement of the family and the community in the rehabilitative process is thus emphasized.
- Diversion programs and alternative sentencing programs (preventing re-offending) should be developed from within the community.
- Communities should be involved more intensely in the supervision of sentences of juveniles through the development of special programs for this purpose.

In South Africa, different types of programs are implemented for youth offenders. These programs include diversion programs and correctional programs. In a diversion program, juveniles are not placed in a correctional facility, but under the supervision of a community-based agency—in most cases a nongovernmental organization (NGO). This agency is responsible for supervision of these juveniles, as well as their rehabilitation. The focus of services is to divert the child away from the traditional correctional environment or child welfare system and provide a skills-orientated intervention system that equips the child to fulfill a more productive role in the community. A correctional program traditionally provided the necessary protection for the community against criminal behavior, but did little else to ensure that children did not become hardened criminals. This implies that safeguarding
Juvenile Offender Programs in South Africa

is the first priority, rather than rehabilitation. This option is most often selected for reoffenders.

In addition to national policy, specific international standards such as the Standard Minimum Rules for Administration of Juvenile Justice formulated by the United Nations (1990), commonly known as the “Beijing Rules,” have been used to underpin diversion programs in South Africa. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations (1989) was also used to streamline services related to juveniles. These standards make specific provision for the delivery of a range of services for juveniles in conflict with the law. According to Standard 10.4, “Offenders should, when needed, be provided with psychological, social and material assistance and with opportunities to strengthen links with the community and facilitate their reintegration into society” (General Assembly, 1989, p. 4). Specific suggestions are made to enhance community participation; for example, “Conferences, seminars, symposia and other activities should be regularly organized to stimulate awareness of the need for public participation in the application of non-custodial measures” (General Assembly, 1989, p. 4). Clearly, the emphasis is on strong community involvement with members who are able to take responsibility for the effective reintegration of released juveniles.

Who is considered as a juvenile in South Africa? The definition used by welfare services in the country and different social agencies is outlined by the South African legislation namely that “a child (juvenile) is a person under the age of 18 years” (Children’s Act 38, 2005). The National Youth Policy formulated by the National Youth Commission (1997) and adopted by the Department of Social Development regards a person between the ages of 14 and 35 years as a youth. Juveniles under the age of 14 are protected by the Children’s Act 38 (2005) and the responsibility for the crime is transferred to the parents of the child who committed the crime. However, some of the incarcerated juveniles in this age group have been involved in serious crimes such as murder and rape. These young adults are, however, considered to be juveniles and, in most cases trial as juveniles. In severe cases like these, the responsibility of the crime cannot be transferred to the parents and these cases cannot be referred to Children’s Court. Section 7(2) (c) of the Correctional Services Act, 1998 (Act 111 of 1998) stipulates that juveniles should be kept separate from adult offenders and in accommodations appropriate to their age, as young offenders are predisposed to negative influences from adult offenders. The aim of this separation is the provision of distinctive custodial, development and treatment programs, as well as religious care, in an environment conducive to the care and motivation of youth toward the development of their potential. This important part of legislation allows for the separate and specialized treatment of the juvenile in conflict with the law. Two types of programs are provided to juveniles, diversion programs and home-based supervision programs. The
former consists of a range of different skills-development programs, such as conflict and anger management, communications skills, and conflict resolution skills. The second strategy involves supervision services by assistant probation officers who visit children at home, monitor behavior and household discipline, set behavioral rules in the family, and monitor participation at school (Wood, 2003). In both options, a child is diverted away from prison and remains in the family, while school is attended and the program during afternoon sessions. Program duration varies between a few weeks and up to 6 months.

Most sources confirm that a multitude of factors contribute toward the phenomenon of youth crime. A combination of macro-, mezzo-, and micro-level social factors that are often interrelated can be regarded as contributing to the phenomenon. No single contributing factor can be identified as solely responsible for youth crime. A short overview is provided of factors at different levels and how these apply to the South African society. On a micro-level, contributing factors such as behavior problems, mental health, and substance abuse can be identified, although observed in practice there are limited South African studies done to provide evidence of micro-level factors. However, studies conducted in other countries provide some insight. For example, Wasserman et al. (2003) maintained that juveniles in conflict with the law experience behavior problems that manifests in aggression, attention deficiency, and frustration. McClelland, Elkington, Teplin, and Abram (2004) are of the opinion that substance abuse is one of the major contributing factors on an individual level. Clay (2008) also confirmed that there is a correlation between substance abuse and youth offending: “There’s a real strong correlation between drugs and crime, one that has been established in study after study for about 40 years now” (p. 1).

In addition to behavior problems and substance abuse, posttraumatic stress has also been identified as a major contributing factor to juvenile crime. McClelland, Elkington, Teplin, and Abram (2004) studied posttraumatic stress amongst juveniles in conflict with the law. The authors clearly indicate that psychiatric conditions and in particular posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) play a prominent role in juvenile detention. The precise extent of this remains undetermined, largely because most studies in this area are too small, too unique (hampering attempts to generalize), or they lack standardized diagnostic assessments. In another study, Abram, Teplin, McClelland, and Dulcan (2003) emphasized the fact that mental health disorders in combination with substance abuse result in so-called comorbidities that, again, result in conflict with the law.

Contributing factors on a mezzo level include family-related problems, peer group pressure, and problems related to social relations such as teacher–pupil relations. Families experiencing social, health, and financial problems create a social environment in which family symptoms can be maintained. Offending behavior among juveniles is one of the symptoms
often described in literature. Ryan and Lane (1997) and Oliphant (1994, 2001) confirmed that behavioral patterns are transferred from one generation to another. These systemic assumptions imply that juveniles who are in conflict with the law have learned certain behavior from their parent(s) and are mimicking this behavior. Borduin, Heggeler, Hanson, and Harbin (1987) found that juvenile offenders often have family members (such as a parent) who, themselves, have committed offences. This implies that emotional and physical circumstances are created within the family system that enables the child to mimic the destructive behavior of the adult.

Mandisa (2007) studied family behavioral patterns of South African juveniles in conflict with the law and found that factors such as emotional deprivation, family violence, lack of support from parents, and unhealthy nurturing contributed to offending behavior. According to this study, poor and single parented families were more likely to produce stressful living conditions that led to criminal behavior. Due to the circular nature of behavioral patterns in families, these juveniles were more likely to react to the destructive communication and behavior they experience themselves. Furthermore, juveniles in single parent families became angry and rebellious because they believed they were deprived from a positive relationship with parents as well as a role model. Single parents are responsible for all household duties as well as the financial support of the family system. This may result in feelings of systemic overload and a lack of adequate attention to emotional needs of juveniles. A study by Roestenburg (1999) involving 508 families from different cultures confirmed that single-parent-headed families were at greater risk of developing well-being problems across a number of domains than dual-parented families. Juveniles whose parents did not provide them with sufficient emotional affection were more likely to look elsewhere for this affection, such as in a gang (Mandisa, 2007).

In addition to family composition and specifically the increased vulnerability of single-parent family constellations, vulnerability toward crime can be associated with poverty and unemployment. Youth offenders often come from poverty-stricken homes or communities (Abrams, Kim, & Anderson-Nathe, 2005; Currie & Covell, 1998). There are multiple reasons why researchers believe that poverty has a direct effect on whether a youth becomes an offender or not. These reasons refer to juveniles who are raised in poverty, have parents who are too busy trying to make ends meet and do not have the time to spend with their juveniles and teach them right from wrong. Ayland and West (2006) referred to entitlement, implying that an impoverished child may regard crime as an acceptable way toward ensuring personal and family survival. Besides family systemic problems, peer-group pressure has been described as one of the most apparent contributing factors of crime in the social environment. According to Sheidow, Gorman-Smith, Tohn, and Henry (2001), peer-group pressure plays an important motivational role in the initiating and maintenance of criminal activities. Ryan and
W. Roestenburg and E. Oliphant

Lane (1997) referred to peer-group pressure as an external, rather than internal, motivation toward crime. In a social context where family systems are disrupted due to poverty, peer groups and gangs become substitute family members. These substitute families provide destructive models of behavior, often encouraging juveniles to become involved in crime.

On a macro-level, the immediate environment (community), as well as conditions in the larger environment (country), is considered a significant contributing factor. The negative influences of a community and society have been well described by various authors (Abrams, et al., 2005; Carr & Van Diver, 2001; Currie & Covell, 1998; Lattimore, Macdonald, Piquero, Linster, & Visher, 2004; Omar, 1997). These studies confirm the contributing role of socioeconomic conditions, political instability, and climate in the occurrence of juvenile crime. For example, because most crime tended to be viewed as politically inspired during the apartheid era, the contributory role of socioeconomic conditions in juvenile delinquency was mostly ignored. Omar maintained that a vast majority of juveniles held for political crimes in apartheid South Africa actually committed ordinary crimes as a result of their poor socioeconomic circumstances. The socioeconomic circumstances that are part of the legacy of apartheid did not change, however, and many juveniles remained caught up in the criminal justice system. As this example suggests, the influence of environmental factors are often disregarded in the way crime is addressed. Regarding the role of socioeconomic conditions, much research supports the notion that persistently poor socioeconomic conditions in communities contribute to juvenile crime in a variety of ways (Abrams et al., 2005; Carr & Van Diver, 2001; Currie & Covell, 1998; Lattimore et al., 2004; Mandisa, 2007; Ryan & Lane, 1997).

Circumstances unique to the South African context contribute to a breakdown of social moral. The presence of poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, and crime in the country creates a negative environment that, again, results in negative individual behavior. Ryan and Lane (1997) and Ryan (1999) suggested that offensive behavior in juveniles is motivated by specific internal and external factors. They proposed some 18 internal and external factors as contributory to juveniles offending. According to these authors, criminal behavior is most likely caused by a combination of these factors, and the risk for and severity of the crime may correspondingly increase as more of these apply. For example, the availability of weapons in a community may turn a break-in or theft into an armed robbery, thereby contributing to a more severe offence.

The reality of HIV/AIDS should be acknowledged when youth offending is considered. Some authors suggest that HIV/AIDS either contributes to or is a result of criminal activity. A study on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among juveniles in conflict with the law in South Africa by Anderson et al. (2004) found the majority of their sample to be HIV positive at the time when they committed a crime. HIV/AIDS was not found only to have a
diminishing effect on family resources, increasing the risk for poverty, but children from poor family conditions would be more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior for commercial purposes and as a livelihood strategy as confirmed by Mbirimtengerenji (2007).

From this overview of the literature, it is clear that a complex array of micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level factors are perceived to be contributing, directly or indirectly, conjointly and with compounding effect, to juvenile crime. Although this article mainly focuses on contributing factors that increase risk and not on resilience factors per se, the potential role of resilience factors in preventing risk should not be under emphasized as postulated by Palmary (2007).

RESEARCH METHODS

The data for this study was collected only in Gauteng Province, known to be one of the wealthiest of South Africa’s nine regions. The study utilized mixed methodology in that a combination of a quantitative and qualitative approach was utilized to collect data from two different samples. In this way, triangulation of data sources and methods was achieved and the researchers succeeded in viewing diversion programs from two perspectives.

Quantitative Study

A cross-sectional survey design was utilized involving a cross section of juveniles (12–18 years) who were in various diversion programs at the time of the study. The research participants were juveniles who had presentencing status or were incarcerated or in a diversion program. The population at the time was estimated to be 503. The sample size was set at 350 based on 95% statistical power and a minimum effect size (Cramer’s V) of .275 (Faul & Erdfelder, 1992). Respondents were selected randomly at different agencies and sampling continued until the required sample size was achieved.

A self-designed questionnaire was utilized. This consisted of a biographical section with 38 questions and 91 program-related questions. Questions were derived mostly from literature and covered topics related to personal and family social functioning, crime perceptions, and program-relevant perceptions. Items were evaluated by staff members working in various programs. The draft questionnaire was tested on a small sample of juveniles (6) prior to the main study. Juveniles sampled for the pilot study were not in diversion programs at the time, but shared similar demographic characteristics to the population of study. Based on their feedback, specific changes were made to items mainly due to language complexity and contextualization of some items. Items were, on average, 10 words long, and the shortest sentence was three words. The finalized version of the questionnaire
was then transferred into an Excel spreadsheet for data capturing purposes. Underlying dimensions of measurement were established by means of exploratory factor analysis, Principle Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation. Reliability alpha coefficients were calculated for each derived subscale. Six empirical dimensions were derived that adequately reflected theoretically constructed dimensions of measurement (see Table 1).

The data was analyzed by utilizing $t$-tests and one-way ANOVA tests with Dunnet T3 and Scheffe Post Hoc tests where applicable. The objective of analysis was to identify whether interventions changed perceptions in the aforementioned areas and identify crime-related factors. This was achieved by means of group comparisons.

**Qualitative Study**

The qualitative study comprised of focus groups with service providers in diversion programs to gather data on their perceptions of contributing factors to crime and program effectiveness. Participants in the qualitative study were selected on a purposive basis. Selected participants had to be directly involved with juveniles in the program and needed to have an in-depth knowledge of program contents. Fourteen focus groups were conducted involving a total of 115 participants.

Focus group data was recorded by means of tape recorders of which transcripts were made. The data was analyzed by means of a computerized analysis program QSR NVivo 9 (QRS International Pty Ltd, Cambridge, MA; http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx) following content analysis procedures. These procedures included open and comparative coding. Within the NVivo environment, this method involved analysis at two levels. First, a project model map was developed based as a result of the detailed analysis of three textual manuscripts of tape recorded data. Thereafter, NVivo queries were utilized to further populate categories. Categories were added based on further coding by means of specific queries (text, content). At the second level, interrelationships between different structures and categories were manually derived, on the basis of which the main conclusions were drawn. Derived themes were compared with

---

**TABLE 1** Questionnaire Dimensions and Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>Reliability Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family risk behaviors (FRB)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service perceptions (SP)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program impact (PI)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postprogram behavior (PPB)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>.910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postprogram insight (PPI)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postprogram remorse (PPR)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
quantitative results from the first study. The trustworthiness of the qualitative results was further enhanced by comparing results with literature.

RESULTS

In accordance with the research questions, the results are presented in discussion format as lessons learned. Because a mixed-methods design was used, the research questions were to be answered by both the qualitative and quantitative study. The questions are: What community factors contribute towards juvenile offending? Did community-based programs contribute to any change in the functioning of juveniles? The views of program service providers were obtained to answer these questions. The quantitative study aimed at addressing how juvenile offenders perceive the community-based programs to which they were subject. Overall, we wanted to establish what lessons can be learned regarding community-based services to juveniles in conflict with the law?

We first report on findings from the qualitative study and then examine instances where these findings confirm the quantitative findings. Next we proceed by formulating the combined findings of both studies into lessons that were learned from both studies. The study was conducted in a province that may be regarded as one of the richest, economically productive, and predominantly urbanized environments in South Africa. In contrast to high levels of industrialization, Gauteng province is characterized by large-scale urban poverty, unemployment, and social problems such as crime. Due to its economic potential, the province is also a popular destination for migrants from other African countries. The qualitative study provided a range of findings that are summarized in Table 2.

The left-hand column represents opinions of service providers about the rationale for interventions. The second column explores causes, column three perceptions about programs, and the last column represents most commonly found crimes of juveniles. It is significant to note that crime factors reflect personal and family conditions, environmental conditions, and, specifically, substance abuse. These results were partly confirmed by the results of the quantitative study, where the crime committed was mostly attributed to lack of self-control, need for money and greed, social pressure from friends, survival issues related to poverty, and, last, the influence of media, such as TV, that presents images of wealth and behavioural freedom.

The quantitative study comprised of 87% boys and 13% girls. Respondents were mostly in the 15–18 year age group with about 0.4% between 12–14 years. The demographic profile of respondents in the study contradicts current assumptions about family demographics of youth offenders. Most respondents (89%) came from complete families, and only about 11% have been homeless before. About 80% of juveniles regarded
TABLE 2 Main Findings From Qualitative Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Goal</th>
<th>Causes of Juvenile Crimes</th>
<th>Perceptions About Treatment</th>
<th>Most Predominant Crimes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote restorative justice</td>
<td>“Poverty is on the rise”</td>
<td>Caseworkers need to understand applicable legislation</td>
<td>Housebreak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide retributive system</td>
<td>Youth and young adults grow up in violent environments</td>
<td>“Treat every case differently”</td>
<td>Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevent inconsistent interventions</td>
<td>The media influences youth to commit crimes</td>
<td>Assess the youth’s environment before making recommendations on treatment</td>
<td>Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include incarceration</td>
<td>Single parenting at a young age</td>
<td>Difference between interventions and punishments</td>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make the punishment fit the crime</td>
<td>Single parent households</td>
<td>Expect negative results</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be an alternatives to ruthless actions</td>
<td>Single parenting</td>
<td>Parents should not be afraid to seek help for their child</td>
<td>Housebreaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should remove juveniles from their environment and place them in a more nurturing one</td>
<td>Drug and substance abuse</td>
<td>Parents can seek education on parenting skills</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should promote positive attitudes</td>
<td>Mental disabilities</td>
<td>Interventions towards restorative justice</td>
<td>Assault</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

themselves as coming from a stable family background and their parents owned the house they currently live in. About half of the sample had lived in their current neighbourhood for more than 5 years. Forty percent of youth live with their complete families with about 19% of juveniles living in some form of alternative care. Some 63% of juveniles are supported by one or both parents earning a salary or income from a business in 10% of cases; 12.5% rely on social grants as primary source of income. It thus appears that the majority of juveniles in the survey are from complete, upper-middle class families whilst and a third of such youth come from incomplete and poor families.

Most youth were regularly attending school when they first got involved in crime (72%). Reasons for not attending school were family conflicts (32.9%) and school specific behavioural problems that caused suspension from school in 18.8% of cases. The age of greatest vulnerability for dropping out of school was 15 years. From this result the researchers learned how crime is accommodated in communities in that youth offenders appear to be middle-class juveniles who attend school. This profile does not confirm
what literature postulated above namely that youth from poor, unemployed families were most likely to commit offenses. In this study a relatively small proportion of offenders are vulnerable to survival issues compounded by issues such as school dropout.

Crimes committed by juveniles appear to be serious and violent as most respondents were arrested for committing one of three types of offenses: rape (11.3%), housebreaking (11.3%), and theft (11.3%). This was followed by assault (10.0%) and robbery (8.2%). At the time of the survey, 20% of respondents were apprehended for committing their second offense. Most offenses mentioned violated various forms of community-specific boundaries, most noteworthy personal boundaries.

Reasons for committing offenses are not limited to socioeconomic factors. In 25% of cases the main reason for committing offense related to socioeconomic reasons such as to buy things for the family. Peer pressure was indicated as the main reason in 22% of cases, and lack of parental supervision was prevalent in 7.5% of cases. Boredom was the main reason in 6.2% of cases and family conflicts were cited in 5.1% of cases. The qualitative study confirmed these reasons but included irregular attendance patterns in school, individual behavior problems, mental health and mental status problems, boredom, substance-related issues, and lack of parental supervision. The qualitative evidence shows that juveniles who were on drugs at the time of the incident were less likely to rehabilitate. Historical data obtained by Roestenburg and Oliphant (2008) indicated an increase in family member presence during juvenile crime during the period 2006 compared to 1995. This is a departure from the 1995 trend and indicates a shift in parental/family involvement in offending, as illustrated in Figure 1.

From the focus groups with service providers, it appears that the need for material goods contributed most to youth committing offenses. The need for fancy goods, weak societal values, peer group pressure, and fulfilling material needs of the family was seen as most prevalent reason for committing an offense.

Community involvement contributed to effective rehabilitation and reintegration as community-based diversion programs were rated most positively by youth, compared to home-based care that were rated most negatively. Placing the child under supervision of the parent was rated second-most effective intervention, compared to diversion programs that were rated most positively by juveniles, $F(3, 191) = 7.498, p = .000$. Diversion programs were found to be most effective in promoting insight $F(3, 175) = 3.191, p = .025$ and had the most general impact, $F(3, 161) = 4.026, p = .009$; above any other form of intervention. In home-based supervision, an assistant probation officer would regularly visit the family, set up, and monitor behavior rules. It appears that this form of community-based intervention was least appreciated by youth, as it was described as intrusive of their family functioning.
FIGURE 1 Person accompanying juveniles during crime (1995 period) (color figure available online).

The family as community system played a significant role in the youth offender’s perceptions about community-based diversion program. Juveniles with strong family ties generally were in greater appreciation of what diversion program could do for them. Juveniles who were at home during the incident were far more positive about various aspects of the program. They recorded lower scores on family risk behavior, $F(1, 306) = 10.285, p = .001$; indicated that the program had a greater impact on them, $F(1, 243) = 9.408, p = .002$; showed more constructive postprogram behavior, $F(1, 261) = 5.335, p = .022$, and insight $F(1, 261) = 9.881, p = .002$. Those who were in alternative care, such as foster care, were less optimistic about the program. Juveniles whose parents were married were more positive about diversion programs, $F(5, 280) = 2.179, p = .006$. Specifically those who indicated that they had family problems did not benefit as much from the program as juveniles from healthy families. This result underscores the importance of the family as a primary socialization institution in the community context. It further indicates to the increased risk for offending in cases where family problems are evident.

Juveniles with strong religious and church ties were generally more likely to show insight in their own behavior than juveniles not involved with a church group. It appears that participation in a church youth group at least helped a child develop insight into own behavior. This result also emphasizes the link between the child and the community as support system. Juveniles who went to school regularly indicated that the program they attended had a greater impact on them, $F(1, 242) = 5.480, p = .020$; showed more insight in the nature of their own behavior, $F(1, 260) = 10.461, p = .001$. They were also more likely to change their behavior after completion of the program, $F(1, 242) = 8.375, p = .004$, and showed more remorse for what they had done, $F(1, 258) = 6.544, p = .011$. Factors such as the school grade at the time of the offense or whether the child had a reason for dropping out of school did not produce any observable effect.

Housing conditions in the community contribute to positive community integration. Specifically, the study showed that stability in housing conditions contributed to a more positive attitude toward the community-based diversion program being attended. Specifically, those who had been living in the same community for most of their lives were far more optimistic about the program than those who had recently moved into an area. Where parents owned the house the family lived in, the child was significantly more optimistic about the diversion program. A significant indicator of program impact was stability in the parent’s income. Juveniles whose parents were unemployed or did not have a stable income indicated that the program had less impact on them. The socioeconomic status of the family within the boundaries of the community was an important contributor to family stability and the amount of remorse felt by juveniles.
The type of crime committed appeared to have an impact on the child’s motivation to rehabilitate and change behavior. Juveniles who committed robbery were more negative about community-based diversion programs than juveniles who had committed murder, $F(5, 254) = 2.857, p = .016$. Juveniles who committed robbery were significantly more likely to have serious family and behavioral problems at the time of the offense, $F(5, 261) = 2.270, p = .048$. It is possible that robbery is committed as a method to survive and entitlement plays an important role here. This finding indicates that more serious and violent crimes amongst this group of youth can be associated with family and behavioral factors, further emphasizing the importance of the family as institution.

There is a discrepancy between juveniles’ preferences and needs as it relates to family involvement. Based on the qualitative data; juveniles themselves do not consider home-based services as the most effective method for intervention. According to the participants, home-based services includes parents and caregivers and they do not favor this involvement. It seems that the parent and caregiver’s involvement adds an unwanted dimension of control to the child in conflict with the law. This is an interesting insight because programs are geared toward the involvement of responsible adults in the community. The study also confirmed that family involvement has a definite positive impact on the child’s effective rehabilitation and community integration.

It is evident from the qualitative data that specific problems impact the way social workers, community developers, and probation officers deliver services. Lack of funding, lack of professional staff, problems with case management, inadequate information about the child in concern, and an unprepared community are some of the problems faced by the South African welfare and correctional systems.

**DISCUSSION**

This study provided a rather unique opportunity to view community-based interventions in juvenile crime from both the service provider and the juvenile program recipient’s perspective. This opportunity gave us an idea of how the two groups differ, and perhaps agree, regarding the nature of interventions, factors contributing towards crime, and the views of these groups regarding what works as far as interventions are concerned.

It is often assumed that juveniles in developing countries such as South Africa are marginalized and at a disposition to become criminally active. Macro-level issues such as poverty and unemployment are considered as the main predisposing factors towards youth crime. South Africa, with its recent history of apartheid and oppression fresh in mind, can be considered a breeding place for juvenile crime. It is possible that political factors and
Juvenile Offender Programs in South Africa

Deep seated macro issues such as poverty do contribute to the phenomenon of youth crime. It is, however, clear from this study that although community issues such as poverty and unemployment do contribute, juveniles from all socioeconomic and family backgrounds are at predisposition to become involved in crime. In fact, this study has shown that the majority of children in Gauteng, at least, were from complete families that cannot be classified as poor. Contributing factors were confirmed to exist on macro-, mezzo- and micro-levels. Involvement of juveniles with community structures such as schools, church, and family tended to promote more adaptive levels of postprogram functioning and improved community integration. In cases where family members played a supportive role in the rehabilitation process, this was found to have a positive effect on the child’s adaptive functioning. We were convinced by this research that the family in the context of the community as environment, indeed, plays a vital role in the effects of intervention programs. We are convinced that community-based programs have a definite contribution to make, because they are offered in the environment of the child. The community-based program has the advantage that the child as participant is close to home, is often known in the community, and may continue with previous activities such as attending school while attending the program. The community-based model has the advantage of offering better integration opportunities and more control of family interactions because the service provider is close to the home of the child and is in a better position to facilitate integration with the family and community structures. Such opportunities would not exist where the child is removed from the community and placed in a different environment. In contrast, some service providers regarded this as a disadvantage and recommended removal of the child from the community in which the child resides.

The White Paper on Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) indicated that communities have to take responsibility for the reintegration of juveniles in conflict with the law into the community. It is, however, clear from this study that there are limited programs available to guide community members on reintegration processes. The responsibility of the re-integration process is mandated to NGOs and this, in itself, results in a complexity of problems. It raises many questions. How are these programs coordinated? How many of these programs are available? How can these programs contribute to a structured database containing information about all community-integration services? How are community members trained to take responsibility for the services? How are community-integration programs evaluated and effectiveness predicted? These questions could be addressed in further research.

We were able to formulate suggestions and recommendations to service providers, which would enable them to enhance service delivery to juveniles in conflict with the law. One of the most important recommendations was the design and development of appropriate intervention strategies
that will empower the community to present reintegration programs. For example, because the presence of family-related issues was considered as one of the contributing factors, it is recommended that the parents or primary caregivers become more actively involved in the actual intervention program. Although parental involvement in the rehabilitation process was viewed negatively by respondents, it appeared to have a positive impact on juvenile’s progress in programs. It is suggested that parents and primary caregivers are informed of all program processes at all times and through family counseling are informed about their negative role in sustaining criminal activity. By doing this, family members are not only passive observers in intervention programs, but will be able to take responsibility for reintegrating juveniles, a process for which they can be held accountable. It is thus concluded that a community-based intervention program should not only focus on the juvenile as client, but should involve the parent system.

It is also suggested that specific assessment categories and specifically an assessment model be developed, which is relevant and applicable to the juvenile offender in context of the community. Such assessment model should enable community-based practitioners to appropriately consider multiple community factors, crime factors, and specifically the assessment of strengths in the environment that can be used to promote rehabilitation. Such an assessment model should be used to develop appropriate intervention strategies and should assess the community as a support system.

Although policy puts an emphasis on the importance of collaboration between all role-players on a national, provincial, regional, and local level, it is important for the South African government to make constituencies aware of the value and outcome of such collaboration. By enhancing the working agreements, for instance, between government departments including social welfare and correctional services and law enforcement units, the emphasis is placed on coordination and streamlined services. In addition, it is clear from this research that professionals and community members should enter into ongoing discussions. Discussions should focus on strategies toward empowering agencies to receive the juveniles back into the community.

CONCLUSION

During the process of researching community-based diversion programs, we became acutely aware of those social factors contributing to youth offending in South Africa. It was realized that the structural components of the community, which includes the school, the church, support systems and mezzo-level organizations, and, most important, the institution of the family play important roles in the prevention and effective management of youth offending. This study has confirmed the importance of involving the family and the community in the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders. Removal of
Juvenile offenders and putting them away in remote places of detention will not have nearly the same impact as managing them within the community, within the scope of an agency that provides the intervention right there in the community. Our only critique about the community-based approach to intervention is that in the South African context, at least, community-based programs tend to differ from each other in terms of content, focus, intended outcome, and duration. Such programs run on minimal funding, and are often understaffed or not staffed by professionally trained counseling staff. The inherent lack of consistency associated with community-based programs complicates its future evaluation and implementation. In spite of these limitations, it can be concluded that the state of these community institutions contributes to prevention of youth offending. It is evident from the study that services to juvenile offenders in South Africa use a community development perspective as a departure point. Although services have been geared toward community-integration, there is a need for refining and reinforcement of these services.

REFERENCES


