

**Florida State University and
Florida Department of Juvenile Justice
Researcher-Practitioner Partnership**

**Assessing the Causes and Consequences
of School-Based Referrals**

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Zero Tolerance Era in Schools

- Accelerated in the late 1990s and early 2000s
- Moral panic and high-profile school shootings
- Adoption of mandatory disciplinary policies
- Increased security measures
- Enactment of federal laws

School-to-Prison Pipeline

- Increased contact with juvenile and adult justice systems
- Youth are pushed out of the educational system

PRIOR RESEARCH

Criminalization of Minor Behavior

- Youth are arrested at school for relatively minor offenses

Formal System Contact Leads to Future Offending

- Labeling theory

Educational Attainment

- Decreases high school graduation and college enrollment

School Referral Rates

- School characteristics affect crime

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Purpose

- Examine variation in and consequences of school-based referrals
 - Addressing major limitation of prior research

Individual-Level

- Compare youth with first-time referrals for school-based offending to youth with first-time referrals for community-based offending

School-Level

- Compare schools by their in-school referral rate as well as a school-to-community referral ratio

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Individual-Level Research Questions

- *For school-based referrals relative to community-based referrals,*
 1. what types of offenses are youth referred for?
 2. what is the effect on subsequent juvenile offending?
 3. what is the effect on high school completion?

School-Level Research Questions

- *Among mainstream schools,*
 1. are schools “over-referring” students?
 2. what characteristics are associated with higher referral ratios?

DATA AND METHODS

Florida Department of Juvenile Justice

- Accelerated cohort of first-time offenders between 2004-2009
- Indicator of offense location
- Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT)

Florida Department of Education

- School records for first-time offender cohort
- School and district characteristics

Sample Restrictions

- Youth enrolled in a Florida public school at time of offense

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL FINDINGS

Types of Offenses

- School youth were most likely to be referred for...
 - Simple assault and/or battery
 - Disorderly conduct
 - Misdemeanor drug offenses
 - Felony weapon/firearm offenses

Subsequent Juvenile Offending

- School youth were less likely to be re-referred within a year
- School youth more likely to be re-referred for school-based offending

High School Completion

- Community youth completed high school at a higher rate

SCHOOL-LEVEL FINDINGS

Schools “Over-Refer” Students

- Misidentification of which schools “over-refer”
 - High school referral rate *but* low school-to-community referral ratio
 - Low school referral rate *but* high school-to-community referral ratio

Characteristics Associated with High Referral Ratios

- Middle schools
 - Free/reduced lunch, truancy rate, in-school suspension rate
- High schools
 - Demographics, student behavior, academics, teacher/staff, school size, district characteristics

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Work with Schools to Increase Civil Citation Use

- School youth tend to commit minor offenses

Target the Right Schools with Interventions

- Identify schools that are truly “over-referring” youth

Collect Additional Data on School Referrals

- School where the offense/referral occurred
- Whether the youth was a student at that school
- Who arrested the youth (SRO versus local LEO)

THANK YOU

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