A program evaluation of the effectiveness of the thinking for a change program on reducing African-American juvenile recidivism

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL WORK

REID, TERA R. B.S.W. NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY, 1996

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE THINKING FOR
A CHANGE PROGRAM ON REDUCING AFRICAN-AMERICAN JUVENILE
RECIDIVISM

Advisor: Dr. Sandra J. Foster

Thesis dated May 2003

This evaluation examines the effectiveness of the Thinking for a Change Program on reducing recidivism among African-American juveniles. Thinking for a Change is a program that teaches cognitive restructuring, social skill interventions, and problem solving techniques. The sample consisted of 29 African-American male adolescent offenders who were released from a Youth Development Campus in Georgia prior to December 1, 2002. The evaluation attempted to decipher if participants of Thinking for a Change increased their social skills and problem-solving knowledge, obtained new criminal charges after completion of the program, or violated their conditions of probation after the program. The findings for the study do not support the hypothesis that Thinking for a Change is effective in reducing recidivism among African-American male offenders. Recommendations from this evaluation can be used to help those working with adolescents find more effective ways of intervening with offenders.
A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE THINKING FOR
A CHANGE PROGRAM ON REDUCING AFRICAN-AMERICAN JUVENILE
RECIDIVISM

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
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ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 2003
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of The Thinking for a Change Program on reducing African-American male juvenile recidivism, while improving social and problem solving skill development.

The Program

Thinking for a Change evolved out of the Cognitive Approaches to Changing Offender Behavior seminar that is offered by the National Institute of Corrections in their facility in Longmont, Colorado, and other facilities throughout the country. A panel of cognitive behavioral intervention experts developed the curriculum. The program was designed to present cognitive restructuring and cognitive skills in a generic and practical manner. The experience of this program shed light on the fact that criminal behavior was more susceptible to pro-social change when offenders were able to intermingle and use the tools from both cognitive restructuring and cognitive skills programs (Bush, Glick, & Taymans, 1997). As a result, Thinking for a Change was created to combine the interventions into one integrated program.

Thinking for a Change is an integrated cognitive behavior change program created by Jack Bush, Ph.D., Barry Glick, Ph.D., & Juliana Taymans, Ph.D. in 1997, for
the National Institute of Corrections. The program was designed to teach cognitive restructuring, cognitive skills, social skill interventions, and problem solving techniques.

Social Skills are taught and integrated throughout the curriculum. The main idea behind *Thinking for a Change* is that “We can take charge of our lives by learning more effective ways of thinking” (Bush, Glick, & Taymans, 1997).

The program uses a combination of approaches to increase self-awareness and also awareness of others. It integrates cognitive restructuring, social skills, and problem solving techniques, with the desired result of enabling participants to relate learned skills to life situations in a pro-social, rather than an anti-social manner.

Thinking for a Change is composed of 22 sessions, designed to teach social skills and problem solving techniques. Session one is an introduction and overview of the program. Session two involves teaching participants active listening skills. Session three teaches participants how to ask questions for clarification. Session four teaches participants how to give feedback. Sessions five through nine teaches participants to become more aware of how thinking controls actions and leads to trouble. Sessions ten through fifteen teaches participants how to recognize their feelings, as well as the feelings of others. It also teaches alternate ways of handling stressful situations. Sessions sixteen through twenty-one teaches participants the problem solving process. Session twenty-two is a self-evaluation for participants to determine what other skills they need to successfully deal with situations that can potentially lead to problems.
The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice implemented *Thinking for a Change* with juvenile offenders on the Youth Development Campuses (YDC) in 1999. Youth Development Campuses are locked juvenile correctional facilities throughout the state of Georgia. The time span spent in an YDC can range from three months to five years, depending upon the sentence. The desired result behind implementing this program is that juvenile offenders will learn alternate ways of handling situations and be able to apply the cognitive restructuring skills to everyday life situations, thereby reducing future criminal behaviors and recidivism.

**Background of Problem**

Prior to 1898, juvenile offenders were treated as adults and subject to the same punishment for crimes, including solitary confinement, hangings, and beatings. In 1898, the juvenile justice system was created. The first juvenile court opened in Chicago in 1899. The reasoning behind starting the juvenile justice system was to offer rehabilitation, not punishment. The courts desired to offer counseling and schooling to offenders.

The country has shifted in efforts over the years to try and offer various rehabilitation programs to juvenile offenders. While in some instances these programs have delivered some results, overall, juvenile crime continues to rise, especially among African-American youth. The statistics on increased offending have given rise to the demand to develop effective intervention efforts.
Over the last thirty years, cognitive behavior programs have evolved as a result of a growing trend in interventions. During this time, cognitive restructuring modalities and cognitive skills training have been developed and explored as a form of psycho-social-emotional intervention (Bush, Glick, & Taymans, 1997). *Thinking for a Change* is one such program.

**Statement of Problem**

Although violent offenses, such as aggravated assault, criminal homicide, robbery, and weapons offenses among juveniles decreased in 1997, the overall offense rate among juveniles increased. Between 1988 and 1997, person offense cases increased 97%, drug law violations increased 125%, and public offender cases increased by 67% (Puzzanchera, Stahl, Finnegan, Snyder, Poole, & Tierney, 2000). These statistics indicate that although violent crimes have taken a downward shift, other offense categories have grown tremendously.

Juvenile crimes among African Americans present some alarming statistics of their own. African-American juveniles account for approximately 15% of the juvenile population. However, the representation of these offenders is grossly disproportionate to their counterparts. African-American juvenile offenders were responsible for a total of 34% of delinquency cases nationwide, with 89% of gambling arrests, 58% of murder arrests, and 55% of robbery arrests in 1997 (Juvenile Offenders and Victims, 1999 National Report).
Although intervention methods for juvenile offenders are constantly being updated, restructured, and increased, the number of criminal offenses by juveniles continue to rise. There is also a large gap in finding effective research and literature on intervention and prevention programs geared towards African-American juveniles (Rodney, Tachia, & Rodney, 1999).

Locally, DeKalb Multi-Service Center, a county division of the Department of Juvenile Justice, serves approximately 1000 youth each year. For the fiscal year 2002, (July 1, 2001-June 30, 2002), the DeKalb Multi-Service Center served 1037 offenders. These youth are ninety percent (932) African American, five percent (51) Caucasian, two point four percent (25) Hispanic, point four percent (6) Asian, and two point two percent (23) other. (GA DJJ JTS, 2002).

DeKalb County, Georgia, is a suburb of Atlanta. According to US Census 2000 reports, the population of DeKalb County is 665,865. Of those persons, African-Americans comprise fifty four point two percent (361,111), Caucasians comprise thirty five point eight percent (238,521), Hispanics comprise seven point nine percent (52,542), and Asians comprise four percent (26,718).

DeKalb County does boast of a higher African American population rate, and would therefore be expected to have a higher number of African American juvenile offenders. However, the documented offense rate among these offenders is extremely disproportionate in relation to the county population. African-Americans comprise 54.2% of the DeKalb County population, but account for 90% of the juvenile offender
population represented with the Department of Juvenile Justice's DeKalb Multi-Service Center.

Significance of Evaluation

After discovering such a disproportionate number of African-American juvenile offenders, one must wonder what types of intervention efforts are truly effective for those offenders.

Research has shown that treatment interventions have been associated with reduced recidivism among juvenile delinquents (Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, & Rooney, 2000). However, the debate has remained that those intervention methods that have continually lead to a reduction in recidivism were described as “effective interventions.” Effective treatment interventions have been described as those that follow the principles of risk, need, and responsivity (Andrews, Bonta, & Hodge, 1990).

Risk is described as catering a program to the risk level of the offender (Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, & Rooney, 2000). For example, a high-risk offender cannot be subjected to the same type of intervention methods as a low-risk offender.

The distinction of need in intervention methods responds to the needs of the offender. Although the actions of juvenile delinquents are categorized as criminal, not all offenders’ needs are related to criminal behavior. Some offenses are a reaction to emotional needs, or influenced from traumatic events. Some theorists argue that instead of targeting non-criminal needs (self-esteem, anxiety, etc.), greater success is achieved by focusing on criminal behavior (Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, & Rooney, 2000).
The responsivity principle of intervention focuses on the importance of matching the treatment modality to the cognitive and personality characteristics of the offender. In relation to responsivity, cognitive-behavioral interventions were found to be more effective (Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, & Rooney, 2000).

The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice does use a classification system with its offenders. For the fiscal year 2002, the scale used by the Department analyzed the juvenile’s offense history, residence issues, alcohol and drug needs, vocational, educational, and interpersonal needs. Upon calculation of these needs, the offenders were given a placement, risk, and needs score. Once calculated, the offenders are recommended for a program based upon that score. Scores can range from two and up. A score lower than seven is generally a low category, seven to twelve is medium, and twelve and above is high. Generally, offenders in the Youth Development Campus category score twelve and above. These scores are used to determine the level of service interventions needed with the offender.

This evaluation of Thinking for a Change was used to determine if it is indeed an effective treatment intervention in reducing recidivism among African-American juvenile offenders, who score twelve and above on the placement, risks, and needs assessment.

Research Questions
Keeping in mind that cognitive-behavioral interventions have been cited as more effective, several research questions will be explored. Does *Thinking for a Change* increase social skills and problem solving knowledge? Did program participants obtain new criminal charges after their participation in the program? Did program participants violate their conditions after completion of the program?

First of all, we must ask if participants in *Thinking for a Change* increased their social skills and problem solving knowledge? According to Bandura’s Self-Efficacy Theory, if a youth has social and problem solving skills, then his behavior will subsequently change. In other words, a youth’s self perception causes him to process stimuli in a socially “acceptable” manner (Brenzina, 2000).

The second research question to be explored is, did participants obtain new criminal charges after their participation in the program? New criminal charges can be an indication that an individual did not properly learn or process the techniques taught during the *Thinking for a Change* course. It may also be an indicator that the offender’s risk and needs were not properly matched to the program.

Lastly, this study will determine whether or not participants violated their conditions of probation after the program. Once juveniles are released from the Youth Development Centers into the community, they are still under the supervision of Dekalb Multi-Service Center. Their conditions of probation are the rules they are to abide by during their supervision time. If these conditions are found to be continually violated, then one may infer that *Thinking for a Change* was not an effective intervention method.
It may also be suspected that an intervention in a controlled environment, away from family, may not be effective once that individual returns to that family and community environment.

Summary

This chapter introduced the Thinking for a Change program that is implemented into service plans with juvenile offenders in Youth Development Campuses in Georgia. Various shifts have occurred in treatment interventions with adolescent offenders over the years. Most recently, cognitive restructuring methods have been a growing trend. Thinking for a Change is one such cognitive intervention method. According to the literature, African American juvenile offenders have statistically higher offense and arrest rates. In Dekalb County, Georgia, the focal point of this study, 90% of the juvenile offender population is African-American. Therefore, a study of this type is significant in attempting to deter further recidivism.

Three research questions will be posed to determine if Thinking for a Change is an effective intervention method. These three questions are:

1. Does Thinking for a Change increase social skills and problem solving knowledge?

2. Did participants of the program obtain new criminal charges after their participation in the program?

3. Did participants violate their conditions of probation after the program?
If offenders are found to be in violation of their conditions of probation after release and obtaining new charges, then an assumption may be inferred of the actual social skills and problem solving knowledge obtained by participation in the program. This study will determine whether or not *Thinking for a Change* is an effective intervention for reducing juvenile recidivism.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Classification of Juvenile Delinquency

Adolescent offenders are classified upon entry into the Department of Juvenile Justice. The classification system utilized in the Department for the fiscal year 2002 was not directly related to any service or intervention methods; rather, it was simply used to determine the level of supervision a youth is in need of.

Juvenile delinquents are often classified for at least one of four purposes. Those purposes are to improve understanding of criminal behavior, improve matching offenders to interventions, improve offender population management, and to improve prediction of behavior (Harris & Jones, 1999).

There has been widespread agreement that classification can improve the overall effectiveness of interventions, although little of this has been done in the past two decades (Harris & Jones, 1999). According to Van Voorhis, Cullen, & Applegate (1995), three areas were found to be key in responsivity to specific intervention needs. They are:

1. High-risk offenders are more likely to benefit from intensive treatment programs, whereas low risk offenders are more likely to be harmed by these programs.
2. Targeting criminogenic needs is more likely to reduce future delinquency.
3. There is an obvious match between treatment approach and individual characteristics that are often ignored.
Some authors criticize juvenile classification systems, by saying that they often are not based upon any theoretical basis for intervention (Harris & Jones, 1999). Therefore, the programs offered to juvenile offenders are often not appropriate due to improper classification.

Classification has also been criticized for a lack of racial efficiency. Creating typologies to different racial groups make the classification system more subjective and less effective (Sechrest, 1997). This fact becomes imperative when generalizing intervention methods to offenders.

Although classification is often thought to be key among intervention methods with juveniles, the relevance of classification to treatment approach has not been fully explored. In addition, treatment programs and classification systems are often formed independently; therefore, the use of classification in planning and evaluation of programs is often unknown (Harris & Jones, 1999). In addition, there has been a lack of focus on treatment outcomes; and the impeding importance on public safety often outweighs the importance of classification categories.

In conclusion, classification has been shown to be key to treatment approaches, but its relevance to specific approaches has not been confirmed. It is also important to be aware of the racial bias and subjectiveness of classification and it’s effect on treatment approaches with African-American youth.

Social Orientation and Problem Solving Techniques
Juvenile delinquency has often been cited as a problem solving approach by adolescents in response to daily life pressures. It has been proposed that adolescents may elect to pursue conventional or delinquent solutions to problems of goal attainment (Brezina, 2000). However, the delinquents who use criminal methods for goal attainment were found to be more “adolescence-limited offenders.” Their offending behavior was generally a response to developmental and maturity issues, as opposed to “life-course persistent” criminals, who grew up in violent, substance abusing, low-income, etc. type situations (Moffitt, 1993).

Another popular theory is that juvenile offenders often receive negative reinforcers as a result of their offending, and are more prone to continue criminal behavior (Patterson, 1982). An example of a negative reinforcer is when a child steals a desired brand name clothing article from a department store, but does not get caught. In turn, his negative behavior has been reinforced because he now has the clothing, and received no consequences. The consequences for the behavior may not come until several more shoplifting trips down the road. Negative reinforcers alleviate undesired states. The shoplifter mentioned above may not have otherwise been able to obtain the clothing. Therefore, by shoplifting the desired clothing, he alleviated his problem.

According to Brezina (2000), three elements are related to juvenile delinquency in response to adolescent development. The three areas are:

1. Perceived control,
2. Positive evaluation of self-worth,

3. Dysphorialnegative affect.

Perceived control involves the developmental stage in adolescence, where forming independence and control are important in a young person’s life. Any type of denial of an adolescent attaining that power, can lead to rebellion, or delinquency, on the part of the juvenile.

Positive self-evaluation relates to the tendency of adolescents to be overly concerned with how they are perceived by others. They are very sensitive to how they are perceived. Often, if an adolescent is not perceived as popular, negative self-evaluations may occur. This negativity may lead to anger or other ways of acting out to deflect the youth’s distress at not being “accepted.”

Delinquency has been proposed as a reason for reducing the negative affect associated with rejection and low self worth. Satisfactory feelings often come from desires for retaliation and revenge, therefore creating openings for delinquency to occur.

Delinquent adolescents have been found to have less effective strategies for resolving interpersonal conflict and less sophisticated skills for integrating the perspectives of self and others (Kupermine, Allen, 2001; Allen, 1990; Freedman, 1978; Haines & Herrman, 1989; Pont, 1995; Leadbeater, 1989; Lenhart & Rabiner, 1995).

Research has supported an association between social problem solving skills and adolescent problem behavior. However, there has been inconclusive evidence for long-
term reductions in the incidence of problem behaviors through social skill enhancing interventions (Kupermine & Allen, 2001).

Adolescents may differ in overall orientation to social tasks in ways that determine how well they demonstrate their competence (Kupermine & Allen, 2001). For example, a youth who participates in a social skill enhancing intervention may show gains in measured skills, but may not view those skills as relevant to meeting real life challenges (Selman, 1992).

Dysphorialnegative affect refers to the use of criminal behaviors by adolescents to respond to negative perceptions and rejection from others (Brezina, 2000). Deviant behavior and peer affiliations have been found to represent a response to the peer limitations imposed on children by earlier peer rejection and problematic peer relationships (Fergusson, Woodward, & Horwood, 1999). In other words, delinquency has been found as an adolescent’s way of responding to early peer and societal rejection.

Children who have difficulty associating with peers, or experience peer rejection early in life, have been found to form deviant peer groups later in life (Fergusson, Woodward, & Horwood, 1999). These deviant peer groups often engage in activities that reject the “societal norm,” and choose to participate in delinquent activities instead. *Thinking for a Change* seeks to teach offenders ways to enhance their social skills and behavior in a socially “acceptable” manner.
Theory has provided that adolescent reactions to social demands are often determined by psychological-motivational factors, including values and beliefs about their abilities (Kuperminc & Allen, 2001).

Ryan and Deci (2000) further explored Bandura's self-efficacy theory by suggesting three situations in which individuals who possess high levels of social skills, might resort to less than optimal means of handling difficult situations. These three situations are:

1. Individuals do not view competent strategies as adaptive in their current environment.
2. Individuals do not value the outcomes that those strategies are expected to produce.
3. Individuals do not believe the strategies will work for them.

These three areas are important to keep in mind as possible limitations to this study.

Rational choice theory is based on the belief that offenders are rational and active decision-makers (Lopez & Emmer, 2000). In a study conducted of juvenile offenders, offenses were found to be in one of three categories, emotion-driven, belief-driven, and reward-driven (Lopez & Emmer, 2000).

Emotional categories were generally found to be crimes committed after emotional events such as anger, grief, stress, etc. Belief categories were found to be
more revenge or reactive type crimes, such as drive-by shootings, or fighting a rival gang member. Reward categories were found to be crimes motivated by a token or "prize." Emotions, beliefs, and rewards, are all a part of cognitive processes. Often the psychology of an offender is taken into consideration, but not the situational context surrounding the crime. Also, addressing cross-cultural beliefs and values is an area that is often ignored when addressing cognitive offender behaviors (Lopez & Emmer, 2000).

It becomes imperative to keep in mind emotion, belief, and reward driving process, when implementing cognitive intervention efforts. Often individuals may possess the social skills necessary to handle a situation in an "ideal" fashion, however, they may not see that option as viable for their situation. Since cross-cultural beliefs have been ignored when addressing these behaviors, African-American juveniles are often at a disadvantage when participating in intervention efforts created by other ethnic groups.

The theories and cognitive processes mentioned above would lead one to believe that social skills knowledge may not have a direct effect on adolescent deviance. If this is found to be true, then Thinking for a Change is not going to be an effective intervention.

Strengths of Literature

The literature supported the importance of cognitive behavior change interventions in work with juvenile offenders. It shed light on how self-awareness is a major predictor of behavioral change and consensus to "desired societal norms."
Adolescents have been found to develop behavioral problems because of difficulties within either the immediate family, or the broader social environment (Perkins-Dock, 2001). Family focused interventions have been found to be more effective with delinquent youth than individual treatment efforts (Sexton & Alexander, 2000). The literature points out that intervention methods that were administered individually and without family involvement, were more likely to fail once an offender returned home to the same family environment. This factor is important to keep in mind because Thinking for a Change is an individual cognitive-behavioral change program. It does not include family participation or involvement.

Weaknesses of Literature

The literature review did not find any social work studies on specific types of cognitive-behavior change interventions that have been found to be “effective” with African-American male juvenile offenders. There have been individual studies on various populations, but no major interventions have been documented on African-American male youth.

The literature did not support the cross-cultural issue of intervention methods with offenders. Specifically, since Dekalb County has such a large African-American offender population (90%), there were no studies found to be relevant to African-American offenders. The results of cognitive behavior change interventions, with African-American offenders from this study, will be important for researchers to compare
future findings of similar studies.

Conceptual Framework

Bandura’s Self-Efficacy Theory has largely influenced cognitive behavioral change approaches. Self-efficacy states that self-referent thinking is the core element of perceived control (Cervone, 2000). In other words, one’s self perception in relation to thinking determines their behavioral response to various stimuli.

An important point made by Cervone (2000), is that, despite what one believes about the causes of past outcomes or the contingencies between responses and outcomes in the environment, people are unlikely to take action to control events if they doubt their own capability to execute requisite behaviors.

According to self-efficacy theory, juvenile offenders who have learned the proper social and problem solving skills will not re-offend due to cognitive process. These adolescents will be apt to choose alternate ways of handling potentially criminal situations.

Self-efficacy theorists would propose that adolescents who complete the Thinking for a Change program, should not re-offend because they have learned the “proper” social and problem solving skills.

Summary
Classification of adolescent offenders is utilized in the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice with its offenders. The literature has proposed that improper classification often leads to improper treatment and intervention approaches.

In contrast to the self-efficacy theory, the literature has pointed to juvenile offenders being aware of their actions, however, they choose to continue offending due to “negative reinforcers.” An example of a negative reinforcer is stealing an item and not getting caught. The offender has been reinforced for his negative behaviors.

It has also been proposed that delinquency and criminal behaviors are responses to control factors, perception of self by others, and level of self-worth. These factors have supported an association between social problem solving skills and adolescent problem behavior.

Adolescent offenders have also been cited as responding to social demand based on psychological-motivational factors. For example, offenders may be fully aware of problem solving techniques and methods, however if they do not see the methods as adaptive in their environment, do not value the outcomes of those strategies, or do not believe the strategies will work for them; they will not employ them.

The literature was strong, in that it supported the importance of cognitive behavior change interventions, in work with juvenile offenders. The literature was weak in relating specific cognitive behavior interventions to African-American adolescent offenders.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Sample

There were fifty documented African-American male youth released from a Youth Development Campus on or prior to December 1, 2002, who have remained under the supervision of DeKalb Multi-Service Center. Of those fifty, twenty-nine were eligible for this study. Participants were selected from the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice Juvenile Tracking System (JTS). JTS is a computer database that contains records on all juveniles committed to the Department.

Data Collection

Data for this evaluation was collected using the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice Juvenile Tracking System. The system contains juvenile demographics, legal history, placement dates, and case notes that are relevant to this evaluation. The legal history and case notes section provided data on the juveniles re-offenses, or violations of their conditions of probation since completion of the Thinking for a Change program.

Individual client case files were also utilized to collect data regarding client participation in Thinking for a Change. The evaluator used the case files to determine if clients had participated in the program while at a Youth Development Campus. The
Juvenile Tracking System was utilized to determine which of the YDC facilities the offenders had participated in *Thinking for a Change* program. Although there are nine YDC facilities across the state of Georgia, participants had been released from one of five: Wrightsville YDC (N=5), Ireland YDC (N=13), Sumter YDC (N=3), Eastman YDC (N=7), and Augusta YDC (N=1). The JTS was also utilized to determine the offender’s age, time since release from YDC, new offenses obtained, and violations of conditions.

Content Analysis

The study utilized analysis from individual case files and the JTS system. The evaluator carefully examined the content found in the files and JTS system, to draw conclusions on the participants of *Thinking for a Change*. The content analysis involves categorization and counting of variables within human communication. The hypotheses about the relationship between the variables were then tested (Yegidis, Weinbach, & Morrison-Rodriguez, 1999).

Internal threats to the validity of the intervention, are the differences in curriculum delivery and facilitators during the program. There are five different Youth Development Campuses represented in this study. Although *Thinking for a Change* training is uniform, different facilitators and styles can deter program delivery from being uniform.
Another internal threat is the differences in participant comprehension. There are handouts and homework that go along with the program. Some participants may not be able to read, or fully comprehend the information presented.

An external threat to the validity of the measure is the fact that the legal offense and case note information may not be accurate or up to date. Case files and JTS information may not always be accurate, therefore misleading the evaluators of the effectiveness or lack thereof.

Procedures

The data collection occurred in the month of December 2002. The evaluator contacted the network administrators of the Juvenile Tracking System to gather names of all youth under the supervision of DeKalb Multi-Service Center. The evaluator then selected youth from the list that had been released from the Youth Development Centers within the time frame prior to December 1, 2002.

The evaluator then documented each youth that had completed the Thinking for a Change program and had, or had not, re-offended or violated their conditions of probation, since their release from the Youth Development Center. The participant documentation was gathered on a spreadsheet for comparison (See Appendix C).

Statistical Analysis

The hypothesis of this study is that Thinking for a Change is effective in reducing recidivism among African-American juvenile offenders.
Data for this evaluation were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive statistics explain the general demographics of the sample. Correlation coefficients were used to compare age, time since release from YDC, new charges obtained, and violations of conditions. Graphs and charts are also used for simplified interpretation of the results.

Summary

The methodology section explains that twenty-nine participants were analyzed to determine if Thinking for a Change is effective in reducing recidivism. Content from the individual case files and JTS were analyzed to determine participant information. The data was collected in December 2002. The statistical analysis was conducted utilizing correlation coefficients and descriptive statistics, in order to determine if Thinking for a Change was effective in reducing recidivism. The methodology section seeks to simplify the findings of this study into a manner practical for general and broad understanding.
CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the findings of this evaluation. It presents the population demographics, results for the research questions: 1. Did Thinking for a Change increase social skills and problem solving knowledge? 2. Did program participants obtain new criminal charges after their participation in the program? 3. Did program participants violate their conditions after completion of the program? An interpretation of the findings will also be discussed.

Demographics

A total of fifty participants were released from the Youth Development Campus on or prior to December 1, 2002. Of those fifty, twenty-nine participated in Thinking for a Change while in a Youth Development facility.

All of the participants in this study were African-American males. Of this sample, there was one (3.4%) fourteen year old, seven (24.1%) sixteen year olds, five (17.2%) seventeen year olds, eight (27.6%) eighteen year olds, seven (24.1%) nineteen year olds, and one (3.4%) twenty year old. Release dates for the participants ranged from August 1999 to December 2002. Three (10.3%) or the participants had been released for less than six months, eleven (37.9%) participants had been released for six to twelve months, eight (27.6%) of the participants had been released for twelve to eighteen months, two (6.9%) of the participants had been released for eighteen to twenty-four
months, and five (17.2%) participants had been released for twenty-four or more months. (See Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics (N=29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Elapsed Since Release from YDC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 6 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 12 months</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 - 18 months</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 24 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 + months</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Questions

There were three original research questions. Does Thinking for a Change increase social skills and problem solving knowledge? Did program participants obtain
new criminal charges after their participation in the program? Did program participants violate their conditions after completion of the program?

The first question, regarding increased social skills and problem-solving knowledge, will be addressed in the discussion since it is being inferred based on results from the participants incurring new charges and violating their conditions of probation.

The second question asked if participants obtained new criminal charges after their participation in the program. Fourteen (48.3%) of participants did obtain new charges after their release from the Youth Development Campus. The other fifteen (51.7%) did not obtain new charges after their release. (See figure 1)

**Figure 1** New Charges obtained after release

The last research question asked if participants violated their conditions of probation after completion of the program. Twenty-three participants (79.3%) did violate their conditions of probation after their release. The other six (20.7%) participants did
not violate their conditions of probation upon release from the Youth Development Campus. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2. Number of Youth Violating Conditions of Probation

Summary

This chapter presented the findings for the evaluation by utilizing descriptive analysis and frequencies. According to the findings, 48.3% of participants obtained new charges upon their release from a Youth Development Campus. Approximately seventy-nine percent of participants violated their conditions of probation after their release. The results from these findings show that a large percentage of adolescents continue to re-offend, even after their release from the Youth Development Campuses. The chapters
to follow will discuss the findings presented and give interpretations and implications for future social work practice.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter examines the outcome and discusses relevant findings of the evaluation. The data obtained from the evaluation was found to reject the evaluator’s hypothesis that Thinking for a Change is effective in reducing recidivism among African-American adolescents.

The first research question asked if Thinking for a Change increased social skills and problem solving knowledge? The findings from the study have rejected this question. According to self-efficacy theory, juvenile offenders who have appropriately learned proper social and problem solving skills would not re-offend after completion of such a program (Cervone, 2000).

The second research question asked if program participants obtained new charges after completion of the program. Approximately forty-eight percent of adolescents studied obtained new criminal charges after completion of Thinking for a Change. Again, the hypothesis has been rejected by the data obtained from this study.

A correlation was found to exist between age and obtaining new criminal charges (See Table 2) The Pearson correlation coefficient between age and obtaining criminal charges was .012. (A perfect positive correlation is +1, meaning an increase in one variable, leads to an increase in the other). The two-tailed test of significance was .950. These findings suggest that age is related to offenders obtaining new charges. In other
words, the older the adolescent, the more likely they are to re-offend. This factor leads support to early intervention programs being implemented with those identified as at risk (Rodney, Tachia, & Rodney, 1999).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation Between Age and Obtaining New Charges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Pearson Correlation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sig (2-Tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Charge Pearson Corr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig (2-Tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A negative correlation was found to exist between time since release and new charges being obtained (See Table 3). The Pearson correlation was found to be -.359. The two-tailed test of significance was .056. These findings suggest that the longer a youth has been out of the Youth Development Campus, the less likely they are to obtain a new criminal charge. This leads support to the theory of some offenders only participating in “adolescence-limited” offending (Moffitt, 1993).
Table 3

**Correlation Between Time Since Release and New Charges Obtained**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time since Release</th>
<th>New Charges Obtained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Release</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig (2-Tailed)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Charge</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>-.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sig (2-Tailed)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third research question asked if program participants violated their conditions of probation after completion of the *Thinking for a Change* program. Approximately seventy-nine percent of adolescents in this study did violate their conditions of probation after program completion.

A strong correlation was found between age and violating conditions of probation (See Table 4). The Pearson correlation was found to be .056. The two-tailed test of significance was .772. These findings suggest that the older an offender is, the more likely they are to violate their conditions of probation. The perceived control theory can be used as an explanation for this behavior. Adolescence is a time where forming independence and control are extremely important. Any denial of that control can lead to rebellion on the part of the juvenile (Brezina, 2000).
Table 4

Correlation Between Age and Violating Conditions of Probation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Violation of Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig (2-Tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation</td>
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<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig (2-Tailed)</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A negative correlation was found to exist between time since release and violation of conditions of probation (See Table 5). The Pearson correlation was found to be -.412. The two-tailed test of significance was .027 (Correlation is significant at the .05 level). Findings from this suggest that the time since release from a Youth Development Campus has no influence on a youth violating their conditions of probation.
Table 5

Correlation Between Time Since Release and Violation of Conditions of Probation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time Since Release</th>
<th>Violation of Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Release Pearson Corr.</td>
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<td>-.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig (2-Tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation Pearson Corr.</td>
<td>-.412</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig (2-Tailed)</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, one must be careful to draw inferences on adolescent offenders lack of social and problem solving skills. As stated earlier, empirical research supports the association between social problem solving skills and adolescent problem behavior. However, evidence for long-term reductions in the incidence of problem behaviors through social skill enhancing interventions has been inconclusive (Kuperminc & Allen, 2001). It has been postulated that individuals who possess high levels of social skills might resort to less than optimal means of handling difficult situations if they do not view competent strategies as adaptive in their current environment, do not value the outcomes that those strategies are expected to produce, or do not believe that the strategies will work for them (Brezina, 2000). This factor has been found to be critical in research on
adolescent delinquency among African-Americans males, particularly from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Family involvement has often been found to be critical to adolescent problem interventions. Adolescents often develop behavioral problems because of difficulties within either the immediate family, or the broader social environment (Perkins-Dock, 2001). Research has repeatedly shown that family interventions, rather than simply with the children, are more effective (Rodney, Tachia, & Rodney, 1999). Children receiving treatment in a facility without parental involvement are at a disadvantage when returning to an environment with the same stressors upon their release.

Peer influence has also been highly correlated to adolescent deviance. Children select friends and peers on the basis of similarities in behavioral, personality, academic, and dispositional characteristics (Fergusson, Woodward, & Horwood, 1999). Keeping this in mind, juvenile offenders are more likely to be attracted to peers with similar characteristics. This may also be cited as a reason for re-offending.

Limitations of Evaluation

The first limitation of the evaluation is the population studied. The small sample size makes generalizations to the larger population difficult. Although the study did produce evidence of recidivism, the larger population may be different due to demographics.
The second limitation to the study was the lack of valid documentation on intervention efforts. It was very difficult for the evaluator to determine if the research subjects had indeed participated in *Thinking for a Change*. Only after verifying with administrators was the evaluator able to determine that the subjects had participated in *Thinking for a Change*. Missing and undocumented records led to problems in determining the intervention methods used with the participants during their YDC stays.

The third limitation was the method of data collection utilized. By relying solely on JTS and case file information, valuable recidivism information was lost. A more thorough evaluation may have been conducted by personally contacting the subjects and their families to determine if they had indeed obtained new criminal charges. The research subjects themselves could have also provided more thorough information on the re-offense rates. There also is the factor of negative reinforcement, wherein offenses have never been caught. Those offenses cannot be accounted for and may produce even larger offense rates.

A fourth limitation was the fact that participants represented five different Youth Development Campuses. Although facilitator training for *Thinking for a Change* is uniform, delivery of the program can vary greatly depending upon the facilitator, campus, and population being served.
Suggested Research for Future Practices

A great deal of research is still needed on the effectiveness of intervention methods with African-American juvenile offenders. One suggestion would be for the Department of Juvenile Justice to establish more efficient documentation and tracking procedures to track offender re-offense rates from the time of intervention to aftercare. Another suggestion would be to conduct research on the effectiveness of intervention methods utilized in Youth Development Campuses. Lastly, the Department of Juvenile Justice would benefit from a classification system that is better equipped to determine appropriate youth treatment and intervention needs.

Summary

The findings from this study rejected the initial hypothesis that Thinking for a Change was effective in reducing recidivism. It also rejected all three research questions posed of the program.

It is important to keep in mind the many possible reasons for adolescent re-offending when considering intervention methods away from the family and community environment. The literature supports family involvement during the treatment process. It is not feasible to “fix” the child away from the family and then place them in the same environment after completion of the program. Family and environmental intervention should be considered when treating offenders.
The literature also cites that offenders often possess “appropriate” social and problem solving skills, but utilize methods that may be more realistic for their current situation. It would be helpful to determine if the skills taught in Thinking for a Change are actually applicable to real life situations faced by juvenile offenders.

There were several limitations to this study. First of all, documentation and record keeping were found to be disorganized and incomprehensible at times. The content analysis was based solely on the case files and JTS. Therefore, with a lack of valid documentation, results may be skewed. There were also five different facilities represented in this study. The degree of variance between facilitators, program delivery style, and population can vary greatly from one facility to another.

Overall, this study found that the Department of Juvenile Justice may benefit from keeping better records, documents, and developing tracking devices. The agency would also be more productive in conducting research to determine the effectiveness of the intervention programs it implements with it’s clients.
CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The purpose of this evaluation was to determine if Thinking for a Change is an effective intervention method for adolescent offenders. The findings did prove that juvenile re-offending continues after release from a Youth Development Campus. Social workers can utilize this information to re-evaluate the intervention methods used with offenders. Practitioners can also conduct needs assessments, to more effectively match offender needs with treatment methods.

It would be recommended that family and social environment be considered when creating intervention methods. Although it is difficult to require family participation in intervention methods, it should always be strongly suggested and made possible. In doing so, transportation and other environmental contexts must be considered and hopefully accommodated.

Practitioners must evaluate intervention programs and their feasibility to the population they are being implemented with. Race, soci-economic status, family situation, and other environmental factors must be considered when creating and implementing intervention measures with adolescents.

Social workers should also be more proactive in integrating preventative measures into work with youth identified for risk at early stages. Preventative measures have been found to be more effective with alleviating adolescent problem behavior. Practitioners
should advocate for more proactive programs that can help to eliminate societal problems such as person and property crimes before they have a chance to get started. Social workers can be very instrumental in advocating for policy changes, writing grants for funding, and making the need for such programs known.

Summary

This chapter summed up this evaluation by providing recommendations and expectations for future social work practice in the field of juvenile delinquency. Further research is needed in this area to determine what prevention/intervention methods can truly be effective for identified youth at risk. It would be ideal for this evaluation to be considered useful to the field of social work, and in leading to more effective treatment methods in working with adolescents and families.
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM FOR EVALUATION

Informed Consent Form

This evaluation will examine the effectiveness of Thinking for a Change on juvenile recidivism rates among African-Americans. This evaluation is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of a Masters degree in the School of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University.

The names, birth dates, and other identifying information of research subjects will be kept completely confidential. For further information, please feel free to contact Ms. Tera Reid at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. A verbal consent will be required to continue this evaluation. Thank You.
APPENDIX B: SITE APPROVAL LETTER

We, ________________________________, give Tera Reid permission to conduct a program evaluation of our agency for the sole purpose of completing the degree requirements for the Master of Social Work at Clark Atlanta University. It is understood that Tera Reid will receive the necessary documents to help fulfill these requirements.

_________________________________  ________________________________
Researcher                                    Site Liaison
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Release</th>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>TFC</th>
<th>New Offense</th>
<th>VOAP</th>
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<td>No</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6-12 months</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>less 6 months</td>
<td>Sumter</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>less 6 months</td>
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<td>No</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>6-12 months</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
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REFERENCES


Sechrest, L. Classification for Treatment. 1997. In Harris and Jones. Differentiating delinquent youth for program planning and evaluation.
