



# Assessing the Impact of North Carolina Teen Court on Recidivism



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## Research Question

What is the effect of North Carolina Teen Court on recidivism? How does the effect on recidivism compare to other diversionary programs and the traditional juvenile court systems in the state of North Carolina?

## Teen Court

Teen courts are a type of diversionary program used in lieu of the standard legal system when dealing with juveniles. Teen courts are primarily intended for first-time or low-level offenders and serve to interrupt any developing patterns of criminal behavior. Teen courts use informal processing and sanctions in place of standard procedure to deter future offenses. This program is aimed to provide juveniles with the opportunity to reform by connecting them more specifically with their crime. The sanctions received not only punish the juvenile for the crime, but they also encourage them to restore the damages their crime has caused to the community.

## Methods

By employing a quasi-experimental research design an analysis will be run through two different comparisons: between at risk and court involved juveniles that completed teen court and those that were diverted to an alternative program, and between those who successfully completed teen court and those that received no diversion plan, and were admitted into the traditional juvenile court system.

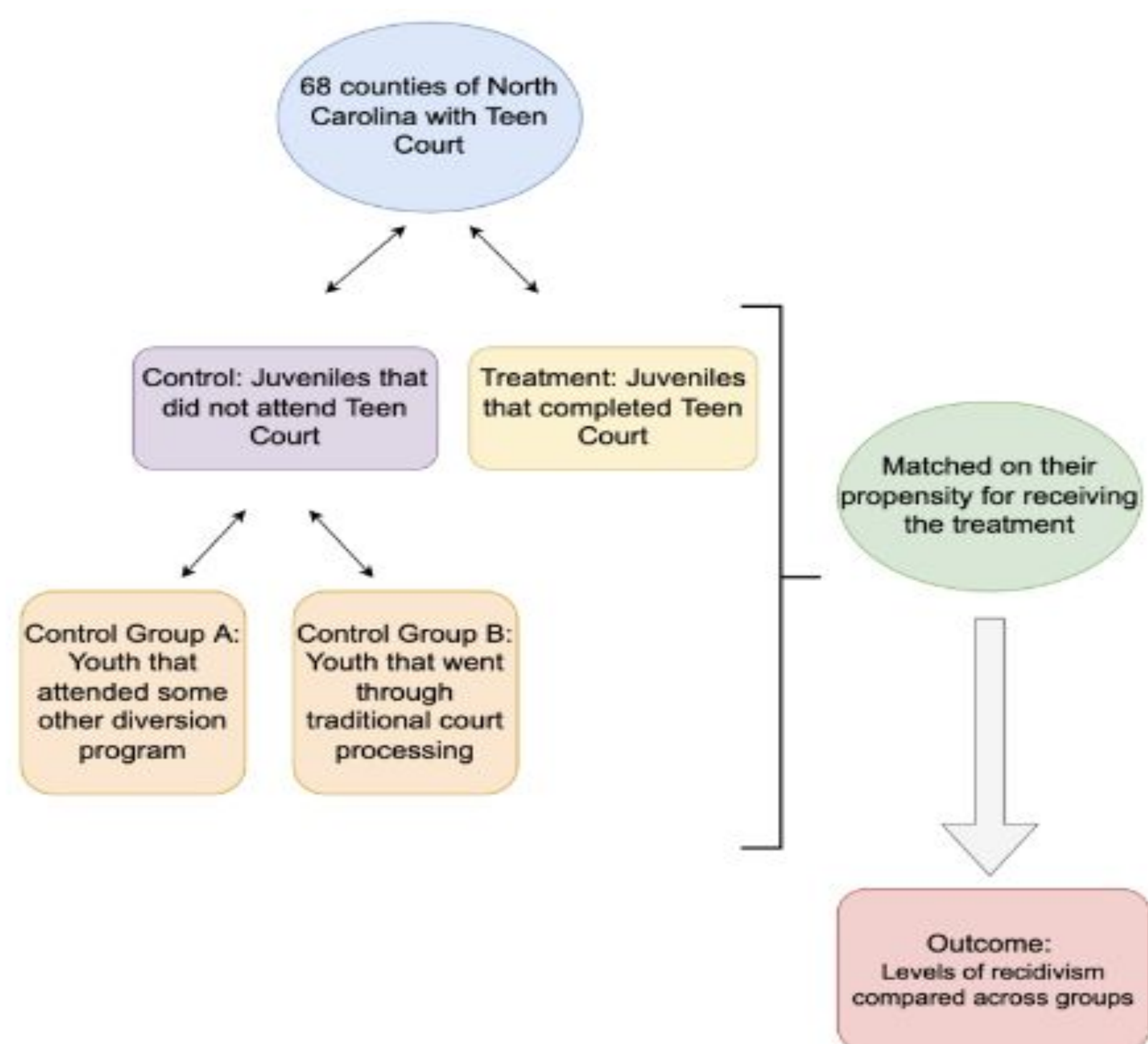


Figure 1: Treatment and Control Groups

## Survey & Site Visits

We developed a comprehensive survey that was distributed to all 100 counties in North Carolina. The survey aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the juvenile justice landscape in North Carolina. With the answers received from the survey, our objective was to shed light on the wider consequences of juvenile justice initiatives and teen court programs throughout the state. The team also visited ten teen court programs across North Carolina between November 2023 and February 2024.

Site Visits	Date
Gaston County Courthouse	November 14
Iredell County Courthouse	November 20
Cabarrus County Courthouse	November 27
Guilford County Courthouse	November 28
Randolph County Courthouse	November 30
Roman County Courthouse	December 5
McDowell County Courthouse	December 11
Buncombe County Courthouse	January 22
Pitt County Courthouse	February 20
Stanly County Courthouse	February 27

Table 1: Site Visit Locations

## Preliminary Results

After matching the data based on propensity of receiving the treatment, we utilized a difference of means test and the logit model to estimate the effects of our treatment across the two comparison groups.

	Traditional Court	Other Diversionary Programs
t statistic	24.10	5.66
p-value	< 0.01	< 0.01

Table 2: Results (Difference of Means Test)

Variables	Court Comparison	Diversionary Programs Comparison
Teen Court	-1.507***; (0.150)	-0.717***; (0.314)
Poverty Rate	0.022; (0.016)	0.011; (0.013)
Disconnected Youth	-0.039; (0.029)	-0.029; (0.024)
NCARV Score	0.168***; (0.027)	0.199***; (0.026)
Male	0.448**; (0.171)	0.586***; (0.150)
Minority	-0.231; (0.155)	-0.492***; (0.140)
Age	-0.059; (0.046)	0.292; (0.027)

Table 3: Results (Logit Model)

## Conclusions

Teen Court has a statistically significant reduction in recidivism across both comparison groups. On average, *Teen Courts* have a statistically significant negative effect on recidivism when compared to traditional courts ( $p < 0.01$ ) and when compared with other diversion alternatives ( $< 0.01$ ).

We use these coefficients to produce more relevant quantities of interest, such as the estimated influence of Teen Court on the likelihood that a juvenile will re-enter the system within two years, assuming other independent variables are held at center values. Juveniles who successfully finish Teen Court have a 49.03% lower chance of recidivism than those who are referred to another program. The first difference has a 95% confidence interval that spans from 48.67 to 49.37, indicating statistical significance. In both comparison groups, the effect's magnitude is comparable. Compared to juveniles handled through traditional court, those who successfully complete Teen Court have a 46.85% lower chance of recidivating [95% CI: 45.98, 47.50].

## Public Policy Recommendations

After concluding that the completion of Teen Court decreases the likelihood of recidivism, expanding the institution of Teen Court to every county in North Carolina can prove beneficial in ensuring the successful reintegration of juvenile delinquents back into society.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

Sources referenced and used throughout the research process to solidify our understanding of Teen Court and its potential implication.

