



The Impact of Teen Court on Recidivism and Other North Carolina Initiatives

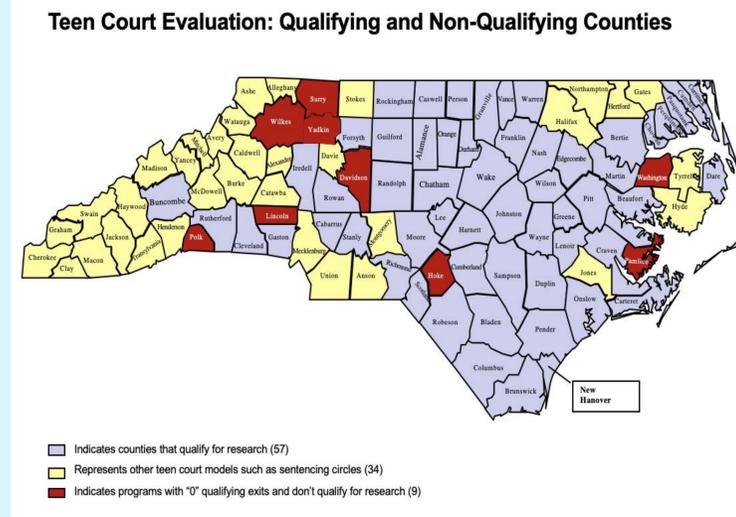
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Abstract

Teen courts are a diversion program that serve as an alternative to processing juveniles through the traditional justice system. They allow juveniles to take accountability for their crimes by engaging with their peers and community. In contrast to the traditional justice system, teen courts allow juveniles to participate in their rehabilitation process. The purpose of this research is to analyze if teen courts have a significant impact on the juvenile recidivism rate in North Carolina. To answer this question, the larger grant project utilizes three primary types of analysis 1) site visits across teen courts, 2) surveys distributed across counties, and 3) statistical analysis. The findings are still in progress; however, literature review suggests that teen courts lead to a decrease in the likelihood of a juvenile reoffending. Understanding the influence teen courts have on recidivism is essential to ensure that fewer juveniles continue committing crimes into their adulthood. On a societal level, teen courts improve the justice system and shift towards a more holistic, community-oriented approach. By understanding which system is best-suited, policymakers can effectively make justice system decisions, and juveniles can be better reintegrated into society.



Background

Teen courts allow for youth to divert from formal prosecution and possible adjudication. Teenagers serve in positions like court clerks, bailiffs, and jurors. Teen courts are composed of volunteers; however, many are former defendants who return to serve as a part of the jury or are involved in cases as a part of their sentence. We are interested in examining how teen court programs affect the recidivism rate in North Carolina. Youth is referred through their community or directly from juvenile justice. Most referrals come from the community, which includes school resource officers, administrators, or local law enforcement. Upon completion, the teen will not receive anything on their record.

- typical youth: first-time offenders aged 14 to 16
- sentences: community service, paying for damages, and writing apology letters
- typical crimes committed: non-violent ex. vandalism, stealing, etc.

Other Initiatives

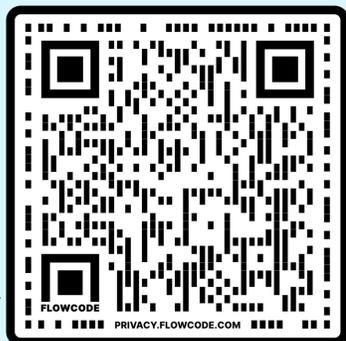
The North Carolina Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP) helps facilitate research between the state and the research sector. They encompass all types of research, not just projects relating to criminal justice. They welcome pitches and determine the necessary type of data and funding depending on the scope. Our research is conducted through OSP and involves Montreat College and the NC Department of Public Safety. Aside from our initiative, there are an array of ongoing projects:

- A recent review found that implementing better training is essential in prison settings. One initiative is researching how to improve training for mental health providers to support incarcerated individuals with a higher risk of suicide or self-harm. This project aims to create a training program, test its effectiveness, and receive quality feedback.
- Another project examines how the NC Office of Indigent Defense can provide high-quality and cost-effective services long-term to all of their counties. This initiative aims to help provide legal representation to those who are impoverished in cases where it is considered a constitutional right.
- Women are a part of a growing demographic within the justice system. Since they account for a smaller portion, current research is catered towards men. One of the initiatives is currently focusing on this disparity and researching how to divert women with mental health issues into treatment instead of the justice system.

Preliminary Conclusion and Discussion

Preliminary statistical analysis shows that juveniles that go through teen court are less likely to recidivate than those that do not. We have finalized the survey, sent it out, and are waiting for the results. We hope these results will provide descriptive information for how the teen court structure and process varies across county in North Carolina. Teen courts are unique in connecting parents, peers, and the community. Our research is critical to understanding the current justice system in North Carolina. It is essential to understand which diversion tactic is most beneficial for juveniles to keep them from committing more crimes. We are hoping to find that teen courts are the most effective. In addition to our research, the other initiatives North Carolina is funding are necessary to aid in creating future policy and for the betterment of society.

References



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Methods

- Our team focused on the survey research which entailed distributing a survey to North Carolina counties to gain descriptive information about the structure and processes of teen court.
- While there are 68 counties in North Carolina that use teen court, our survey will be sent to every county with the hopes of learning about alternative diversion programs as well.
- Site visits were also conducted to examine the nature of the teen court.

Figure 1 depicts the dates and locations of site visits

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

Figure 2 displays survey design information

Juvenile Justice Survey	
Regions with established teen court programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational details such as the type of teen court model • Key components- operating hours, cases, etc. • Volunteer recruitment and training • Referral criteria • Sanctions • Challenges • Future initiatives
Regions with no teen court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of teen court programs • Reasons for their absence • Alternative diversion programs • Challenges faced • Community engagement • Preventive measures for at-risk juveniles