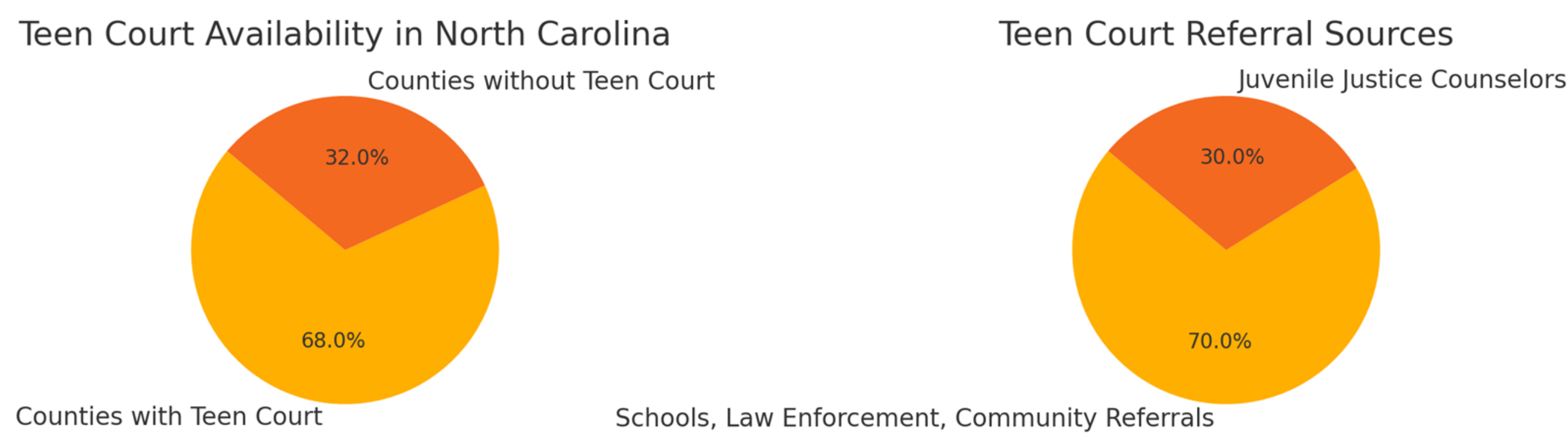


Evaluating Teen Court Success

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Background

Under North Carolina law § 7B-1501, teen courts provide a diversion program for youth accused of a first-time or low-level offense, preventing formal juvenile records and promoting rehabilitation. Participants take part in court proceedings facilitated by other youth. Unlike punitive measures, teen courts focus on accountability, peer-led encouragement, and repairing harm to the community.



68 counties operate teen courts, serving 3,400 youth in 2022, while 32 counties do not have a program. 70% of youth enter teen court through schools, law enforcement, or community referrals, while 30% come from juvenile justice.

Materials & Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing survey analysis, site visits, and statistical modeling to evaluate the effectiveness of North Carolina's Teen Court programs in reducing juvenile recidivism.

Surveys developed with Alchemer software were distributed to all 100 counties in North Carolina, including 68 counties with Teen Court programs and 32 without (62 responses received for a representative sample).

Visits and Observations at ten sites across three NC regions: Western, Piedmont, and Eastern North Carolina:

- Each visit involved observation of Teen Court sessions, documentation of courtroom setups, stakeholder interactions, and procedural elements.
- Observations included parent impact letters, mandatory juror questioning, and a Public Safety class.

Statistical Analysis & Data Sources analyzed 6,554 youth, categorized into:

- Teen Court participants (1,944)
- Juvenile Court referred (2,194)
- Other programs (2,416)
- Recidivism rates were measured over a two-year period, defined as any new offense recorded in the juvenile or adult system
- Propensity Score Matching (PSM) was used to control for differences in the cohorts. T-tests compared recidivism rates across the three groups, showing that Teen Court significantly reduced reoffending compared to juvenile court and other diversion programs.



Teen Court participants of the North Carolina Teen Court Association, which serves as a link to connect all Teen Courts across the state, providing knowledge and resources [Source: ncteencourts.org]

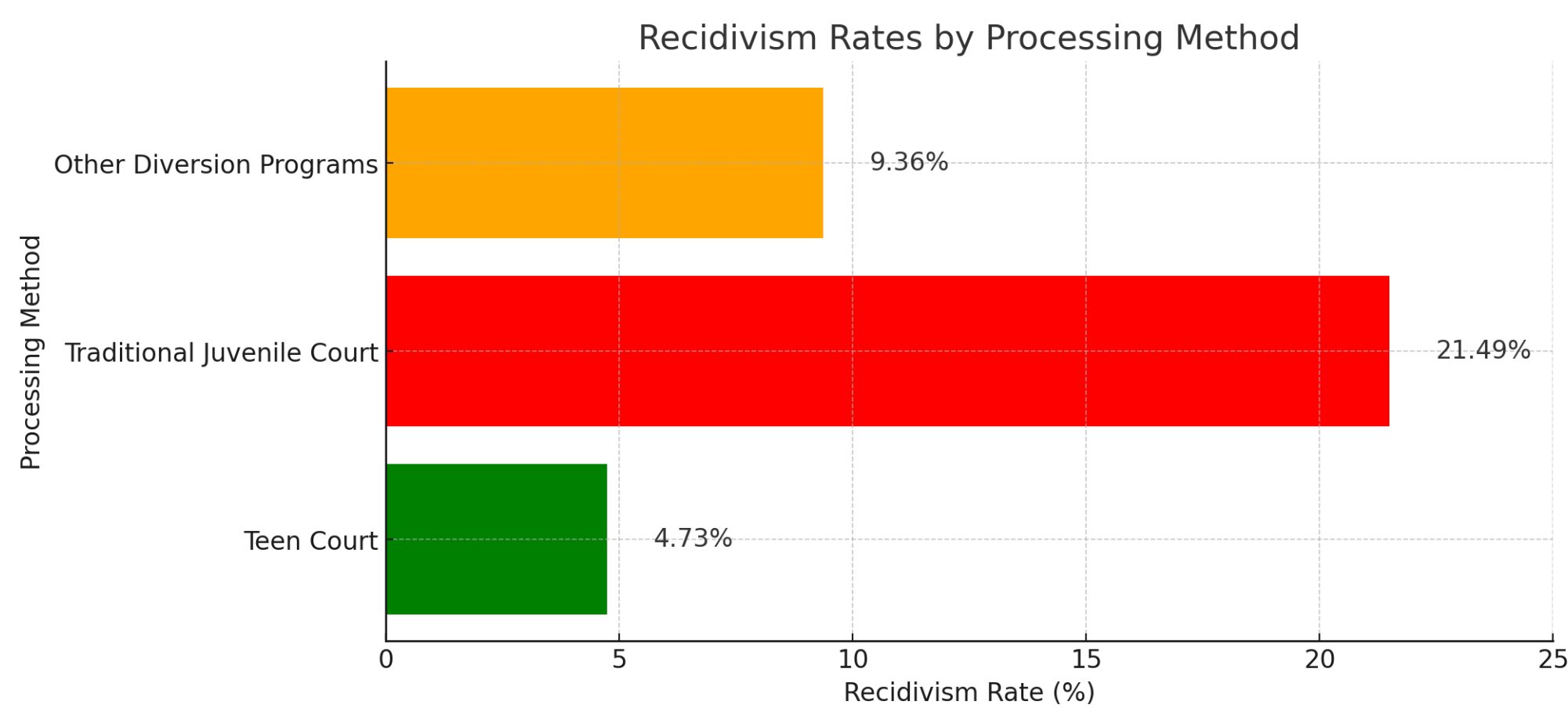
The ABC's of Teen Court:

Alternative to Criminal Record
Belief in Restorative Justice
Community Based

Teen Court Evaluation

Assessed the Impact of North Carolina's Teen Court programs on juvenile recidivism using surveys, site visits, and statistical analysis. Here are the key findings:

1. Survey Results:
 - 89% of surveyed counties use the traditional Teen Court model
 - Most respondents agreed that schools and communities support Teen Court.
 - Counties without Teen Courts cited the absence of an agency to oversee the program and funding barriers
2. Site Visit Observations & Recidivism Rate Reduction:
 - Teen Courts varied in structure but generally took place in courthouses.
 - Some programs incorporated unique elements, such as parent impact letters, requiring jurors to ask questions, and involvement of public safety classes.
 - Teen Court participants are significantly less likely to reoffend compared to other treatments.



Future Directions

The research strongly supports Teen Court as an effective diversionary program that reduces youth recidivism compared to other diversion programs. Addressing funding, parental involvement, and transportation challenges (such as transporting rural youth to Teen Court sessions) could further enhance its effectiveness.

Our current research has expanded to the State of Florida. Active site observations are underway in Alachua and Leon counties with plans to include other local Teen Court sites. Encouraged by our North Carolina research findings showing that Teen Court is successful we are looking into how the different models used in Florida (E.g., sites operated by law enforcement agencies versus court administrators) may have similar impacts on Florida's youth.



Resources

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