

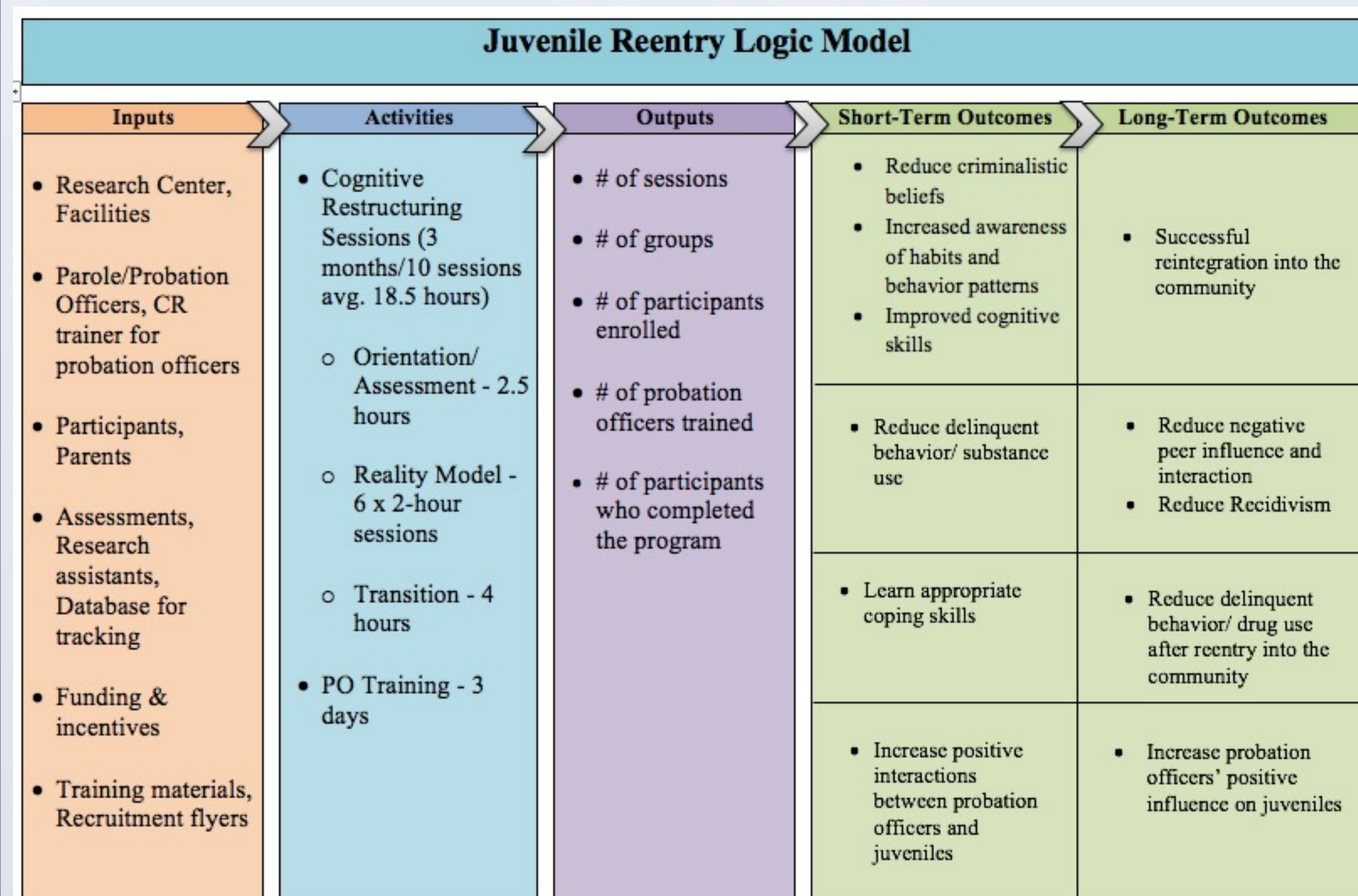
The Effects of Cognitive Restructuring on Reducing Negative Peer Involvement and Mental Health Symptoms Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System

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INTRODUCTION

The Juvenile Reentry Program focuses on providing appropriate services to youth re-entering the community after being released from a juvenile justice residential treatment facility. Many of these incarcerated youth have drug use problems, mental health disorders, and criminal histories, including property crimes, drug sales, and violent offenses. The main component of the program is focusing on a cognitive process called Cognitive Restructuring (C.R.). This process believes that juveniles in the criminal justice system have developed individual attitudes, perceptions, and ways of thinking that contribute to criminal behavior. The Juvenile Reentry Program has been developed with multiple program activities. The first activity is C.R. Sessions, which are divided into three phases when working with juvenile offenders. Phase two introduces the Reality Model to the juveniles and the third and final phase is the transition phase which assists youth with identifying community resources relevant to their transition.



EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- To what extent does the completion of the Juvenile Reentry Program reduce involvement with peers who engage in delinquent behaviors among adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system?
- What is the effect of Cognitive Restructuring (C.R.) on mental health symptoms or distress among adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system?

LITERATURE REVIEW

- CBT has significant effects on recidivism, substance use, and mental health and distress among youth (Lipsey, 2001).
- CBT has also been found to increase problem-solving and impulse control in violent adolescents from low social and economic backgrounds (Tarolla, 2002).
- Programs that are structured, directive, and skill-oriented have a more significant impact on reducing reoffence rates than non-structured programs (Lipsey, 2001).
- CBT had a substantial impact on other anxiety-related symptoms, depression, and overall quality of life, showing that CBT's effects can go beyond the symptoms of the specific disorder being treated (Carpenter, 2018).
- Community involvement incorporated in the Juvenile Reentry Program's transition stage appears to have a positive impact on peer influence.
- Articles and research studies relevant to this topic are a bit outdated, therefore limited, and require an increase in current research.

ABSTRACT

The study assesses the impact that the Juvenile Reentry Program and the Cognitive Restructuring sessions had on adolescents' involvement with peers who engage in delinquent behaviors, and its effects on the individual's mental health symptoms and distress. This study followed a classic experimental pretest-posttest control group design with data collected through face-to-face interviews. Results showed that adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system were less likely to be involved with peers who engage in delinquent behaviors after completing the C.R. sessions, similar to those in the control group. From baseline to post, both groups saw a decrease in mental health symptoms; however, the control group continued seeing a decline while C.R. group's symptoms increased from post to follow-up. With more knowledge of the effects of C.R. on youth in the juvenile justice system, we can determine the best interventions for a client or system and ensure that existing similar services accomplish their goals.

METHODOLOGY

Evaluation Design:

- This evaluation utilized secondary data from the Criminal Justice Drug Abuse Treatment Studies (CJ-DATS): A Comparison of Two Reentry Strategies for Drug Abusing Juvenile Offenders, 2003-2009 {United States} dataset, ICPSR # 30143 (Jainchill, 2015).
- Evaluates the effect of Cognitive Restructuring to reduce mental health symptoms and distress and involvement with peers who engage in delinquent behaviors
- The study follows a classic experimental pretest-posttest control group design

Sample:

- 95 intervention participants receiving cognitive restructuring
- 92 individuals in the control group receiving standard aftercare
- Single adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system
- 95% female participants
- 67% identified as African American/Black

Measures:

- The dependent variable (DV) is the reduction of mental health symptoms or distress and involvement with peers who engage in delinquent behaviors
- Based on client's self-reporting of criminalistic behaviors in the last 90 days
- Utilized two assessment tools, the National Youth Survey Delinquency Scale (NYS) and the Youth Self-Report (YSR)
- Assessments had questions that measured violent behavior, serious and minor property crimes and drug sales
- The range of score was 23-115 based on the 23 questions and a scale of 1-5 for the NYS (with the higher number meaning less likely) and a range of score of 0-40 based on the 10 questions and a scale of 0-2 for the YSR (with the lower number meaning higher distress)

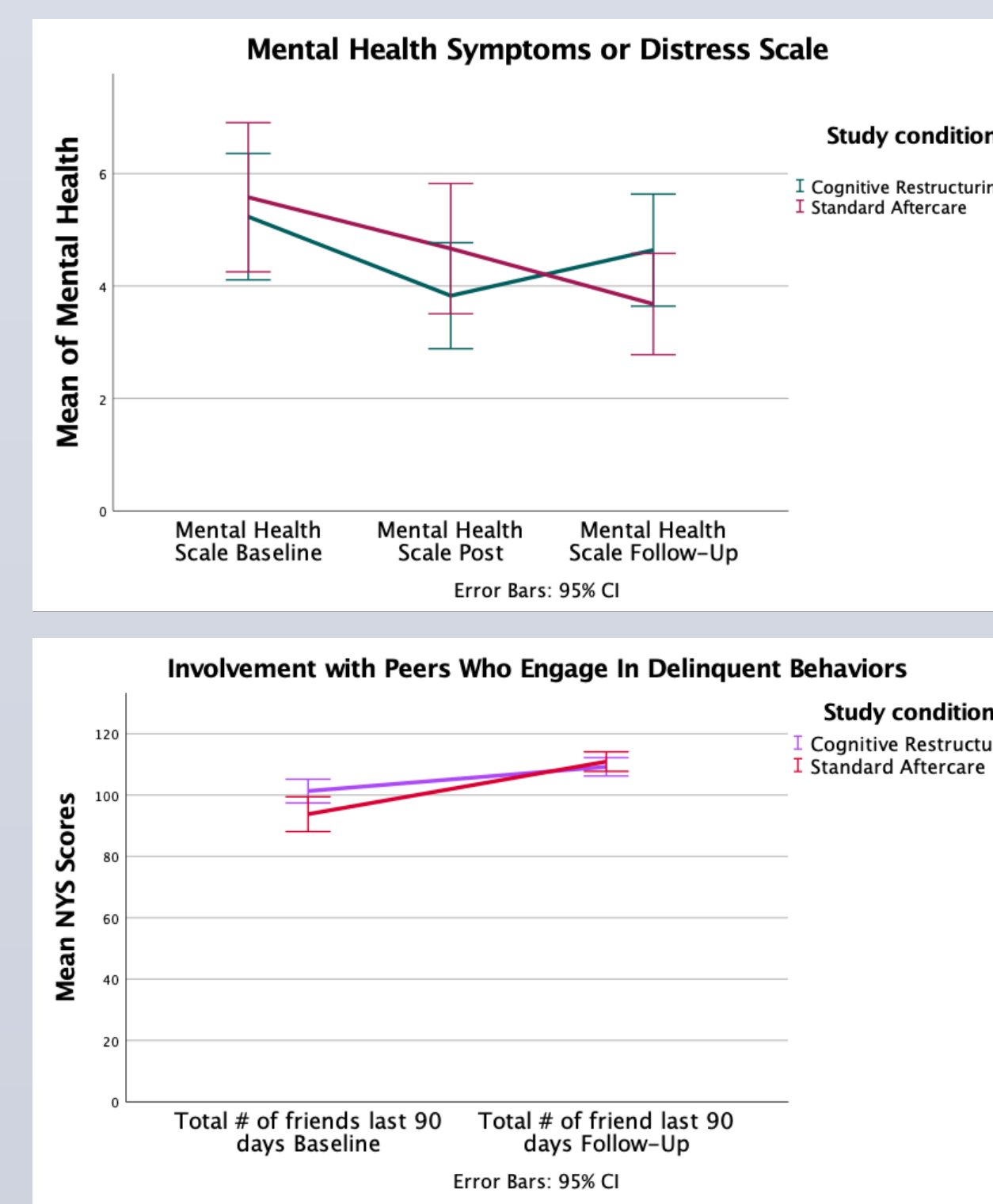
Data Collection:

- Face-to-face interviews between trained research assistants (RA) and clients.
- Interviews lasted up to 2 hours and were administered in combination with treatment sessions
- These interviews were conducted again at three and nine months (9 months post-separation from the facility)

Mental Health

- A Wilcoxon signed-ranks test compared the baseline, post, and follow-up mental health symptoms or distress.
- A significant difference was found in the results ($Z = -1.98, p < .047$) from baseline to post. No significant difference was found in the results from baseline to follow-up and post to follow-up.
- The change in scores followed the same magnitude of decrease for cognitive restructuring and standard aftercare from baseline to post.
- However, standard aftercare continued seeing a decrease in mental health symptoms or distress while cognitive restructuring increased from post to follow-up.

RESULTS



Peer Involvement

- A Wilcoxon signed-ranks test compared the baseline and follow-up involvement with peers who engage in delinquent behaviors.
- A significant difference was found in the results ($Z = 3.99, p < .001$).
- Adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system who completed the juvenile reentry program were less likely to be involved with peers who engage in delinquent behaviors.
- However, the differences were similar to that found in those who were in the control group receiving standard aftercare.

DISCUSSION

Implications for Social Work

- Ability to determine the best interventions for a client or system and ensure that existing similar services accomplish their goals.
- Advocate for funding for more research to be conducted on the impact of CBT on deviant peer involvement.
- Research suggests that CBT and cognitive restructuring could have a positive impact on mental health or distress and deviant peer involvement.
- Literature evaluating the effectiveness of this topic are outdated and limited.

Recommendations

- More in-depth training for the probation officers implementing the Cognitive Restructuring protocol to the juvenile youth.
- Social workers and therapist to be part of the program to provide a different perspective to officers while providing youth involved in the juvenile justice system a safe and confidential environment to express criminal activity without the fear of retaliation.
- Help youth process issues or events (trauma) contributing to criminal activity and drug use.
- Intense case management services (job training, college enrollment, food & housing, and continued mental health treatment for continuity of care and successful reintegration into the community.

Limitations

- Most of the sample consisted of female participants.
- The program's effect on participants by location (Delaware or Miami).
- Internal and external validity could not be determined through the data produced (missing data).
- The youth's lack of trust in law enforcement leading to dishonest surveys and items being intentionally left blank.
- Although the treatment group showed improvement, the control group showed the same results, it not better.
- More studies need to be conducted to make inferences about validity.

CONCLUSION

This study did not support the program's intended outcome stating that the utilization of cognitive restructuring in the juvenile reentry program will reduce involvement with peers who engage in delinquent behaviors and decrease mental health symptoms and distress among adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system. Further research is suggested to determine effectiveness of cognitive restructuring among youth offenders.

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