

Inadvertent Integration of the School-to-Prison Pipeline: The Effects of Correctional School Crime Policies on Criminal Involvement among Secondary School Adolescents



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Abstract

The criminalization of youth in school systems across the U.S. has been a controversial topic in education policy and practice (Pigott et al., 2017). In order to address a gap in the literature, the current study aimed to examine the effects of correctional school crime policies on criminal involvement among secondary school students. The current study controlled for sociodemographic factors. This secondary data analysis examined cross-sectional data from the 2006 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS). The subsample for the current study included public schools and public charter schools (N=1,872). Overall, the current study found mixed results. Results showed that specific correctional school crime policies are more effective in reducing school crime than others, while other policies/practices do not have significant effects. The current study suggests policy implications for the grander public school system and school social work field through its evaluation of concurrent policies/practices.

Introduction

Background

- The phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline has unfolded through the development of policies and practices that have focused on the perpetrators of juvenile delinquency (Pigott et al., 2017).
- Recent statistics represent safety and violence as present and ongoing issues for U.S. public schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019).
- Further exploration and research is applicable to determine the realization of the phenomenon in modern-day schools (Jennings et al., 2011).
- Literature is limited in its analysis of the efficacy of correctional school crime policies/practices in reducing rates of referrals to the juvenile justice system and criminal involvement among students (Fissel et al., 2019; Marchbanks et al., 2018; May et al., 2018).

Research Question

- What is the effect of correctional school crime policies/practices on criminal involvement among secondary school adolescents, controlling for sociodemographic information?

Hypothesis

- Correctional school crime policies/practices are positively associated with criminal involvement among secondary school adolescents, after controlling for sociodemographic information.

Literature Review

- Security guards/sworn law enforcement in schools are positively associated to non-serious or serious incidents of violence and reported incidents to police (May et al., 2018; Na & Gottfredson, 2013; Pigott et al., 2017).
- Schools, including schools with student resource officers (SROs), refer a high percentage of youth to the juvenile justice system for status offenses, such as truancy or alcohol possession (May et al., 2018).
- Research findings have demonstrated that punitive policies and practices are not significantly effective in deterring student criminality or misconduct (Brady et al., 2007; Chen, 2008).
- Extant literature has identified that schools are more likely to use punitive policies/practices in low-income, ethnically diverse, middle schools and high schools (Brady et al., 2007; Chen, 2008; Kupchik & Ward, 2014; Welch & Payne, 2012).

Theoretical Framework: The Ecological-Systemic Perspective

- The ecological-systemic perspective explicates that school systems, and the interactions embedded within schools, are a part of the mesosystems that converge with adolescent development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).
- In addition, the juvenile justice system and the U.S. educational system represent the grander exosystem due to their indirect effect on students.

Methodology

Research Design and Data Collection

- The current study is a secondary data analysis of the original 2006 School Survey on Crime and Safety (SSOCS), which provided nationally representative safety and crime data.
- SSOCS (2006) mailed questionnaires to elementary, middle, combination, and high schools. School principals or school administration personnel completed and returned the questionnaires accordingly, on behalf of their schools.

Sample and Sampling Method

- The current study's subsample consisted of 1,872 public schools and public charter schools, including middle schools (n=948) and high schools (n=924).
- The original study conducted stratified sampling to obtain a sample from its sampling frame, entitled the NCES's Common Core of Data (CCD) Public Elementary/Secondary Universe data file.

Measures

Independent Variables

- Correctional school crime policies/practices** were measured with eight variables, such as "practice dog sniffs for drugs" and "behavior modification." Respondents indicated whether the policy/practice was utilized at their school (yes/no).

Dependent Variables

- Six measurable variables (including incidents of robbery without a weapon, theft/larceny, distribution of drugs, vandalism, hate crimes, and gang-related crimes) operationalized the current study's dependent variable of criminal involvement.

Control Variables

- The current study controlled for sociodemographic factors (such as, school size, urbanicity, percent of special education students, etc.)

Results

Multiple Linear Regression

Correctional school crime practices and minor crimes

- The school practice dog sniffs for drugs predicted a decrease in the occurrence of incidents of robbery without a weapon ($b = -.415, p = .034$).
- Schools that used guards armed with firearms predicted an increase in the number of incidents of theft/larceny – total ($b = 2.19, p = .012$) and in the total number of distribution of drugs ($b = 1.27, p = .031$).
- The uses of grounds locked ($b = -.842, p = .045$) and security cameras that monitor the school ($b = -.86, p = .049$) significantly decreased the occurrence of incidents of vandalism.

Correctional school crime practices and severe crimes

- Correctional school crime policies/practices were not statistically significant predictors of the number of hate crimes in the sample [$F(27, 1327) = 1.39, p = .09$], with an R^2 of .027].
- Guards armed with firearms predicted an increase in the number of gang-related crimes in the sampled schools ($b = 1.02, p = .026$).
- Additionally, the use of security cameras predicted a decrease in the number of gang-related crimes ($b = -.77, p = .036$).

Results (con't)

Table 5

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting the Total Number of Distribution of Drugs (N=1872)

Variable	Model 1 (N=1872)			Model 2 (N=1872)		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Grounds locked (1=yes)	1.63	.483	.091***	.442	.453	.025
Practice dog sniffs for drugs (1=yes)	.538	.494	.030	.638	.462	.036
Require drug testing for athletes (1=yes)	.861	1.35	.028	-.861	1.21	-.028
Require drug testing for extracurricular activities (1=yes)	-2.32	1.65	-.061	-.030	1.48	-.001
Security cameras monitor the school (1=yes)	1.72	.512	.091***	.197	.472	.010
Behavior modification (1=yes)	.315	.719	.012	1.06	.651	.040
Guards armed with firearms (1=yes)	1.65	.659	.068*	1.27	.590	.053*
Security enforcement and patrol (1=yes)	3.25	.819	.107***	.671	.751	.022
Percent of student w/ limited English proficiency				.025	.020	.034
Percent of special education students				-.007	.024	-.007
Percent of students below 15 th percentile of standardized tests				.003	.016	.006

Discussion

Implications for Social Work and Education Practice

- School systems should consider adjusting policies based on the results, instead of continuously implementing policies/practices that do not reduce criminal involvement among students.
- School social work practice can collaborate with educators and implement interventions that guide students in coping with experiences of school crime and the related policies/practices.

Future Direction

- Future research should identify additional policies/practices that demonstrate utility in the reduction of criminal involvement among secondary school adolescents.
- Future research should also analyze the mental health effects of correctional school crime policies on students.

Strengths and Limitations

- The study was limited in its examination of the various manifestations of school crime.
- The current study was a secondary data analysis of cross-sectional data. Therefore, causal interpretation could not be provided.
- It is also important to note that the original data was potentially subject to response bias through its questionnaires.
- The study's subsample was representative of secondary schools in the U.S., including those with varying levels of school crime.
- The study addressed a gap in the literature by determining the efficacy of specific correctional school crime policies.