
ANNOTATION:

DESCRIPTION: Restorative justice processes, and family group conferences in particular, have become increasingly common in justice system practices across the globe. There has also been significant scholarly interest. Yet, with several notable exceptions, much of the research has been characterized by relatively weak designs, and questions related to the impact of family group conferences on re-offending remain unanswered. This research is intended to begin to address these issues.

DESIGN: The study is based on an experiment conducted in Indianapolis, Indiana whereby young, first-time-offending youths were randomly assigned to either a family group conference or one of a number of court-ordered diversion programs. Nearly 800 youths participated in the experiment, and the cases were tracked for 24 months following their initial arrest. Survival analysis techniques were used to compare prevalence patterns of re-offending among the treatment and control groups.

FINDING: The results indicated a significant difference between the two groups with the control group experiencing higher rates of failure (re-offending). The differences were most pronounced during the period of 3-8 months following the initial arrest. Incidence rates were also compared. Assignment to the treatment group was negatively related to incidence of offending. Given the consistent finding of victim benefits in restorative justice processes, the results suggest that conferences hold promise as an effective intervention, at least for young first-time offenders, and warrant continued experimentation.

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