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**ANNOTATION:**

From September 1, 1997 to September 30, 1999, 458 juveniles participated in the Restorative Justice Conferencing Experiment.

**DESIGN:** Using a random assignment experimental design, 232 youth were assigned to the RJ group and 226 to other diversion programs. The model of Family Group Conferencing utilized in this program relies on control and deterrence theory and reintegrative shaming. The other diversion programs to which control group youth were referred included Shoplifting Program, Victim Offender Mediation, Teen Court and a host of others. The article offers no description of how these other diversion programs actually function.

Data include record data, observations, and interviews with a subset of participants: conference victims (42); control group victims (50); conference youths (52); control group youths (47); conference parents (52); control group parents (47).

**SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS:** The referrals were first-time juvenile offenders under age 14 who had not been arrested for a serious, violent offense, who had no other charges pending, and who had admitted responsibility.

**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:** One hundred and eighty-two conferences were conducted and 86% of these were observed. The average length of conference was 43 minutes and a reintegration ceremony averaged an additional 10 minutes after the conclusion of the conference.

**SATISFACTION:** Over 90% of the victims in conference cases reported being satisfied or strongly satisfied with how their case was handled contrasted with 68% of victims in the control group. Over 90% of youth, conference and control, were satisfied. Nearly all the victims participating in a conference would recommend the program to a friend in a similar situation contrasted with about a quarter of the control victims. Eighty-five percent of conference youth would recommend the program compared to 38% of the control youth.

One possible explanation for victim dissatisfaction with control programs is the completion of program rate. Eighty-three percent of the conference youth completed the program compared with 58% of the control youth. The most frequent reason for non-completion within the conference group was "re-arrested prior to conference program." For the control group, 26 of the 71 failing to complete did so "due to juvenile waiver from program." And 28 of the 71 failed to complete for "reason unknown."

**RECIDIVISM:**

6 months after initial incident, total sample: Youths participating in conferences: 20% compared to control group 34%, Chi Square statistically significant p < .01.

6 months after initial incident: youths who completed conferencing 12% compared to control group youths who completed other diversion programs 23%, Chi Square statistically significant p < .05.

12 months after initial incident, total sample: Youths participating in conferences 31% compared to control group 41%. Chi Square statistically significant p < .05.

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Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking

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