

JUVENILE COURT OUTCOMES ACROSS RACE/ETHNICITY

by

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Introduction

The Juvenile Justice System

The juvenile justice system was created because children and adults are developmentally different, less culpable for their behavior, and may be more likely to change their behavior compared to adults. Thus, the juvenile system approaches youth and their alleged offense(s) with these factors in mind and focuses more on rehabilitation rather than punishment. The juvenile justice system focuses on a restorative justice view, opposite of the adult system, aiming to help juveniles better understand their wrongdoing, and provide rehabilitation rather than solely punish youth for their behavior. This approach is different from the adult criminal justice system that aims to punish and institutionalize (Altschuler, 2011; Juvenile Justice, 2022). The juvenile justice system includes the steps of arrest, detainment, petitions, hearings, adjudications, dispositions, placements, and reentry (Altschuler, 2011; Juvenile Justice, 2022).

In the juvenile justice system, a youth who is arrested, or taken into custody, can be detained just like an adult, if the judge believes that it is in the best interest of the community and or juvenile to be detained pretrial. (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995) If a child is detained, the detention hearing they will undergo usually takes place a lot sooner than it does for adults, usually within 24 hours (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). Then, the prosecutors or officers handling the intake will file a petition as to whether they believe the case would be better decided or handled more appropriately in adult court. After that decision, the process tends to move forward into hearings either in the criminal or juvenile court depending on the petition (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). Once a juvenile has gone through their initial hearings, if they are adjudicated (i.e., found guilty), they are given dispositions which are post sentencing instructions such as probation or placement. Each juvenile receives a specific disposition that the judge, prosecutor,

or juvenile justice administrator sees fit. This thesis will focus on the back half of the juvenile justice process, with a particular focus on the decisions that might impact the dispositions (i.e., sentence) that youth receive.

To provide an overview of the problem, in 2020 there were 72, 822,113 juveniles in the entire population of the United States and 722, 600 cases involving juveniles were handled by the juvenile courts (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, n.d.). Overall, the trend in cases being handled by the juvenile justice system has been declining since the peak in the mid-1900s. Of all the formally adjudicated cases in 2019, 51% received probation as the harshest disposition. Although probation was the most common disposition, youth who did not receive probation were given another disposition, which sometimes involved being placed in a residential facility. In 2019 there were 36, 479 youth in residential facilities. Of those 36, 479, there were for every 100,000 youth, there were 315 Blacks, 92 Hispanics, and 72 Whites (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, n.d.).¹

Aftercare/Reentry

One goal of juvenile aftercare is to assist juveniles with the transition from institutionalization back into their community. Unfortunately, it is common for juveniles who are released from an institution to engage in a subsequent delinquent act and find themselves back in the juvenile system (Geis, 2003, p. 1). Reentry programs are diverse in the way that they are structured but should be tailored to each youth and include a community-based component to involve more people in helping the juveniles and be developmentally appropriate to meet the needs of a juvenile reentering society (Jain et al., 2018). Different aftercare programs use diverse ways of measuring success within their programs. More specifically, some programs use

¹ For detailed information on the structure and process of delinquency cases in juvenile court, please see Hockenberry (2020). Annual case processing diagrams can be found at <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/court/faqs.asp>

measures such as the recidivism rate of juveniles that were part of their program and others by using community engagement (Abrams et al., 2011). Studies that have examined issues in aftercare have found that the longer a juvenile receives aftercare, the less likely they are to recidivate (Abrams et al., 2011).

Race/Ethnicity in the Juvenile Justice System

While prior research indicates that legal factors (e.g., crime severity, type of offense) play a role in the decision-making process, studies suggest that characteristics of the youth also influence the court process. One attribute, the race/ethnicity of the youth, has received much empirical attention since the juvenile justice system's creation. To date, research suggests that a juvenile's race impacts decision-making on the back end of the juvenile justice system (e.g., detention, waiver to adult court; Brown & Sorensen, 2013; Rodriguez, 2010). In general, research documents mixed findings regarding the sanctioning of youth based on race/ethnicity. Some research finds that a juvenile's race predicts court outcomes (Brown & Sorensen, 2013; Gann, 2019), but other research documents no relationship (e.g., Mears et al., 2014). A more recent meta-analysis suggests that the impact of race on court decisions varies depending on the stage being examined (Zane & Pupo, 2021). The other aspect of juvenile justice that some older studies have examined is the rate at which youth are assigned to detention or mental services (Seigle et al., 2014). This study showed that Black youth were detained at a higher rate while their White counterparts were sent to more rehabilitative facilities to improve their mental well-being. Thus, this study will focus on the back end of the system with a particular focus on the disposition, or final outcomes, received across juveniles of different race/ethnicities.

Who Receives Aftercare

Typically, youth who receive aftercare are juveniles who were committed to an “away from home” facility, such as a detention or residential center (Gordon, 2012). Most of the youth who are assigned to these groups are nonviolent. Some studies indicate that the age range of youth who are eligible to be given aftercare or enter rehabilitative programs is from 11 to 18 years old (Gordon, 2012). However, there seems to be more youth eligible for aftercare than participating in aftercare in the United States (Deschenes & Greenwood, 1998).

Many states have specific task forces designed to improve juvenile reintegration into their community after encountering the juvenile justice system. The goal of many of these programs is to reduce recidivism through intensive case management and other specialized programs (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). Specialized programs, for example, include AMIkids which provides functional family therapy, gender responsive programs, and trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy. Importantly, several of the programs offered caution that extensive research has not been done in all areas that will help improve the success of aftercare programs (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). The aftercare/reentry process is seen as the last step in a juveniles' journey through the juvenile justice system. The goal is that even though the reintegration process may look different, the task force and the juvenile system will continue to monitor the progress being made towards the juvenile's plan (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995).

Literature Review

Aftercare

Youth who have been confined often do not receive programming (e.g., mental health, education programs) within facilities to increase success when they return home (Sedlak & McPherson, 2010). Moreover, many youths struggle when they return to the environment and circumstances that contributed to their involvement in the juvenile justice system. Thus, youth

require services that can increase protective factors and reduce the likelihood of returning to the system. The purpose of juvenile aftercare is to prepare juveniles who have been held in a facility to reenter their community. Juvenile aftercare was created to combat the “more than 50% of youth that are rearrested within 3 years” after returning to their communities after being in custody for a certain period (Geis, 2003, p. 1). Policy makers and program designers implement aftercare to bridge the gap between custody and their communities for youth when undergoing their re-entry process. Aftercare is multipurpose and establishes collaborations designed to meet the service and supervision needs of youth (Weaver & Campbell, 2015). More specifically, it often consists of home programs, supervision, intensive treatment facilities and then juveniles are returned to their communities and homes. Ideally, aftercare would begin immediately after sentencing and continue through confinement and release into the community.

Despite the time lapse since the creation of the juvenile justice system, problems remain with the philosophy and concept of aftercare. Although system actors and scholars acknowledge the importance of aftercare, it remains the most understudied and underfunded component of the juvenile justice system. However, there are common goals and objectives of aftercare that have been identified: (1) release when the youth is ready, (2) prepare youth for reintegration, (3) reduce recidivism, violent acts, and drug use, (4) increase community confidence in aftercare, (5) decrease crowding in facilities, and (6) discourage returning to street gangs (Bartollas et al., 1994). Unfortunately, since the planning for aftercare occurs at the facility level, it is not always fully developed, evidence-based, or available.

The goal of aftercare in the short-term is behavior control. The aftercare approach is two pronged in the way that the programs are structured, regarding the general goals of the juvenile justice system (Altschuler, 2011; Juvenile Justice, 2022). The first prong consists of determining

how serious of an offender the youth was based on the crime committed (Gies, 2003). The second prong is to decide what kind of facility or program will benefit that specific individual. Youth will, while reentering into their communities, be provided with certain services (socialization teachings, goal-oriented practices, psychological counseling, and transition plans for youth and their families) as well as distinct kinds and levels of supervision (e.g., weekly probation meetings, residential supervision, in-home meetings (Nellis et al., 2009). These services are catered to the needs of the youth, in which they will only receive specific care if they need that level of service (e.g., mental health services or psychological counseling), and with not all areas or locations have the same accessibility to specific services (Seigel et al., 2014).

Second, youth undergo participation in intensive services, which are more frequent and invasive than probation. Supervision can present itself in many ways. One way youth can be supervised is through probation, with check-ins and certain criteria they must meet over a course of time, or through the requirement of participating in community programs, meeting with a group (e.g., Alcohol Anonymous) that pertains to their specific offense and being required to be present at those meetings of the groups (Seigel et al., 2014). Other options for programs a juvenile can be supervised are court-ordered programs. These programs are similar in the fact that they are less intense and restrictive than residential facilities. They differ in that they have criteria that youth must meet to participate. For example, a higher risk, violent offender, may not respond to the treatment of weekly meetings with a therapeutic group as well as a low-level offender in the juvenile system (Weaver & Campbell, 2015). Additionally, youth could also be placed on intensive aftercare supervision. The Intensive Aftercare Program (IAP) uses a variety of theoretical perspectives (e.g., social control, social learning, strain theory) to guide reintegration into the community. Pilot programs across several states indicate that IAP prepares

high-risk offenders for reentry by slowly increasing their responsibility and freedom within the community (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). This type of program structure, the two-pronged approach, is a more proactive approach compared to the traditional justice systems, which does not typically assist youth post-release (Gies, 2003).

There are different options for youth who enter juvenile aftercare programs. Some of the different options are residential, where the youth spend most of their time in a secondary facility, intervention programs, probation meetings, or have requirements for substance abuse groups. These programs can be broad or target specific areas of concern and dynamic and criminogenic characteristics (Sherman et al., 1997). In each program, there is an implementation plan strictly followed by aftercare professionals and youth. Programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous are targeted at specific risks and needs, and youth who have experience with substance abuse can benefit from being assigned to these programs.

More specific programs aim to include everyone but target communities where reentry may be especially hard due to social factors (Campbell et al., 2018). Some programs are community based and integrate youth back into their community while they are reentering to help increase effectiveness, while other programs consist of “transitional support” (Bouffard & Bergseth, 2008). These supports involve, for example, helping students get enrolled into school or programs that will further their ability to get a job. Others, like the “Nokomis Challenge Program, which is run by the Michigan Department of Social Services, is an innovative correctional program for low and medium risk delinquents. This program is a total of one year long and combines “three months of residence and outdoor challenge programming, with nine months of intensive community-based aftercare” (Deschenes & Greenwood, 1998, p. 267). This type of hybrid program allows for less money to be spent on this aspect of the system, thus

inviting the idea of creating more of these programs and discontinuing the solely residential aftercare programs.

More recently, states have started offering a “continuum of care” that involves six stages of success: (1) assessment, (2) case planning, (3) institutional treatment, (4) prerelease, (5) transition, and (6) community reintegration (Gies, 2008). Although there has not been much research on the effectiveness of these programs regarding recidivism, it is clear they provide needed services to youth who are in the process of community reintegration.

Eligibility

In most states, the executive branch of state governments maintains the right to make decisions regarding the release of youth from facilities (Torbet & Hurst, 1993). Few states allow the probation or parole officer or other board agencies to make these decisions. Usually, youth who will be eligible to receive aftercare and enter these programs are juveniles who were committed to a detention facility or any “away from home” facility, such as a detention or residential center (Gordon, 2012). Most of the youth who are assigned to these groups are nonviolent. The average age for most programs is 11 to 18 (Gordon, 2012), but some programs have difficulty maintaining youth eligibility. For instance, some research suggests that “only about 5% of youth who should be eligible for evidence-based programs participate in one” (Deschenes & Greenwood, 1998, pg. 203).

Defining Youth “Success” or Program Effectiveness in Aftercare Programs

Some programs define success as not only measuring the rate of recidivism after a juvenile completes an aftercare program, but also the seriousness and frequency of any subsequent arrests that the juvenile may receive post-release from an aftercare program (James et al, 2012). Most programs define their success based on how many juveniles were a part of their program and how many of those juveniles commit another crime (James et al., 2012). Other

studies indicate that there may not be an exact way to measure success, but some things that do lead to success post- aftercare is when programs focus especially on key individual characteristics of each juvenile and the needs they present based on offense and severity of such (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). Some of these key individual characteristics include the environmental factors that the juvenile will be reentering into (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004), their mental health, or mental disabilities (Seigel et al., 2014) and substance abuse issues (Aos, 2004).

Race/Ethnicity in Aftercare

Approximately one hundred thousand youth are released from juvenile facilities each year, though up-to-date statistics on aftercare remain limited (Maruschak & Bonczar, 2013). Almost half report living in a single-family household, two-thirds report being sent to a facility for a mental health disorder, and most state they will be returning to an impoverished community upon release (Abrams & Snyder, 2010). Most youth released from facilities identify as nonviolent, male, and non-white (39 % Black; 20% Hispanic; 37% non-Hispanic White; Abrams & Snyder, 2010).

Since the creation of the juvenile justice system, race/ethnicity has been at the forefront of the discussion. From the disparities in opportunities when the system was first created to differences in treatment throughout the juvenile justice system today. Research suggests disparities might exist in the back end of the juvenile system, particularly when sanctioning youth to rehabilitative versus punitive programs (Gordon, 2012). Research shows that at disposition, racial disparities are even larger than at adjudication (Campbell et al., 2018). Aftercare is the very last step in the juvenile justice process, and some research demonstrates that white youth may receive a more personal level of aftercare, meaning more individually driven

programs (Gordon, 2012), and these types of programs have been shown to have a more positive effect on the youth (James et al., 2012).

Further, a research project conducted by Pessin (2008) studied the impact of race on the assignment of aftercare services and concluded that Black youth were incarcerated for longer, treated harsher, and assigned aftercare less than their White counterparts. This is surprising given that White youth consisted of over three quarters of the judicially processed youth, and just over half of the youth that were sent to residential programs. Black youth comprised one quarter of youth in this study but made up almost half of the individuals that were sent to residential programs (Pessin, 2008). These findings indicate that there may be disparities between minority youth and White youth regarding rehabilitation and hybrid aftercare programs.

Aim of Current Study

The aim of the current study is to investigate differences in final case outcomes (i.e., disposition) across a juvenile's race/ethnicity. More specifically, two research questions will be examined: (1) Do extralegal factors impact the type of disposition juvenile receive? (2) Are there any effects of race/ethnicity when examining rehabilitative versus punitive dispositions? These questions will be answered using a dataset of all juvenile complaint data from 2018 within one eastern state in the United States.

Implications for Current Study

The results from the studies show that there are some data sets that indicate differences in disposition and aftercare possibilities for juveniles (Campbell et al., 2018; Robles-Ramamurthy et al., 2019). For example, Robles-Ramamurthy and colleagues looked at the effect of a juvenile's race on judicial decisions, and Campbell et al. (2018) examined program referral and their outcomes regarding minority (i.e., Black, Hispanic, White) youth. Their study showed that

Black youth were more frequently referred to low intensity intervention programs or informal probation assignments as compared to other youth. Few studies show differences in results across cultural and racial demographics (Robles-Ramamurthy et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2018), and that may be due to a lack of control of some underlying factors in the study. One review of juvenile aftercare programs in Virginia showed that “there was no difference in the recidivism rate of the two groups, but minority youths who were in a traditional facility were 18% more likely to be charged than non-minority youth” (Gordon, 2012).

As mentioned by Robles-Ramamurthy et al. (2019), it can be difficult to identify disparities in the juvenile justice system because of the relationship between social factors (e.g., examples) that many minorities youth deal with and crime (Robles-Ramamurthy et al., 2019). Other studies suggest a difference in the opportunities to get into some intensive aftercare programs and the way juveniles are assigned to them (Campbell et al., 2018; Gordon, 2012). However, the discrepancies shown in these studies indicate that the differences are minimal. Many studies that find support for differences across race/ethnicity (e.g., White, Black, and Latino youth) were conducted using two different data sets (i.e., Nokamis Challenge Program), where one dataset consisted of a White group and the other consisted of a Black or minority group. Thus, any program differences across race/ethnicity cannot be directly compared. Very few studies have disaggregated the term ‘minority youth’ into each specific minority in their studies (Fagan, 1990; Wilson et al., 2003). Based on the results from previous studies (e.g., Wilson et al., 2003), this may not be beneficial because programs assigned at disposition and aftercare should be culturally tailored for youth to be successful in their post-aftercare program life.

In summary, there are two major limitations of research that warrant the current study. The first limitation regards aggregating minority youth when identifying decisions regarding the placement to aftercare programs (and other components of the system). The second limitation is that there are programs that cater to specific groups of youth being reintegrated into their communities (e.g., standardized substance abuse tests that give people running the programs the info they need, as well individual case management of the juveniles), yet the current studies do not address the number of racial groups assigned to those and how those programs can better benefit specific racial groups.

Current Study

The current study analyzes the extent to which dispositional outcomes, that are either rehabilitate or punitive in nature, vary across race/ethnicity. The results could provide more information about the treatment of minority youth compared to white youth at a critical stage in the juvenile justice system. If no differences are identified, contingent upon crimes committed, the results may suggest that disparities are minimal at this point in the juvenile justice system. However, if differences in assignments arise, the findings can be useful in determining why these differences might have occurred.

The current study addresses two major limitations of previous research by answering two research questions: (1) Do extralegal factors impact the type of disposition a juvenile receives? (2) Are there any effects of race/ethnicity when examining rehabilitative versus punitive dispositions? These research questions will be answered using a dataset of all juvenile complaints from 2018 within one eastern state in the United States.

Methodology

Data and Sample

The data for the current study was obtained from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive (NJCDA), which is a subcategory of the National Center of Juvenile Justice (NCJJ). The data is a compilation of all the adjudicated complaints filed in one southeastern state in the year 2018. The final sample size is 3,978 complaints. Demographics of race and age, and legal information such as prior referrals that each youth had were provided in the data released to the authors.

Table 1. Description of Variables ($n = 3,978$)

Variable	Value	N	%
<i>Dependent</i>			
Disposition ^a	0 – Rehabilitative	2799	70
	1 – Accountability/Punishment	1179	30
<i>Independent</i>			
Race/Ethnicity ^b	0 – White	1405	35
	1 – Black	2176	55
	2 – Hispanic	397	10
<i>Controls</i>			
Age	Number	M = 13.85 SD = 1.23 Range = 6 – 15	
Sex	0 – Male	3170	80
	1 – Female	808	20
Prior Referrals	Number (low to high)	M = 1.83 SD = 2.29 Range = 0 – 22	
Detention	0 – No	3364	85
	1 – Yes	614	15
Offense Severity	0 – Misdemeanor	3066	77
	1 – Felony	912	23

Use of Weapon	0 – No	3354	84
	1 – Yes	624	16
Serious Injury	0 – No	3876	97
	1 – Yes	102	3
School-Related Offense	0 – No	2192	55
	1 – Yes	1786	45

^a Rehabilitative contains referral to services, day treatment, and probation. Accountability/punishment includes items such as wilderness bootcamp and residential facilities.

^b Reference category is White.

Dependent Variable

Case decisions that were made at the stage of judicial disposition were coded to differentiate between juveniles who were referred to *rehabilitative* service such as day treatment and probation (coded 0) and juveniles who were sanctioned to dispositions of *accountability or punishments* like wilderness bootcamps and residential facilities (coded 1). The coding scheme for the dependent variable was based on the coding of variables in previous articles.

Independent Variable

The independent variable of interest is the juvenile's race/ethnicity (0 = White, 1 = Black, 2 = Hispanic). Based on an eastern state's statutes, three racial/ethnic categories were created. Race/ethnicity groups were coded to distinguish between White, Black, and Hispanic youth. All three categories were dummy coded and included in the final sample. Dummy coding these variables allows for direct comparisons between racial/ethnic categories. Fifty five percent (55%) of the sample was Black, thirty-five percent (35%) of the sample was White, and ten percent (10%) of the sample was Hispanic.

Control Variables

The remaining measures that were included were treated as control variables in this study based on variables that have been shown to impact disposition decisions in prior literature. The average age for youth in the sample was 13.85 (SD = 1.23). A dichotomous indicator was created to represent a youth's sex (0 = male, 1 = female). Eighty percent of the sample was male and 20% identified as female. Other variables related to the courts were also included, such as how many prior referrals a juvenile had and was coded numerically from lowest to highest (0 - 22). The data showed that the youth in the sample had an average of 1.83 prior referrals. The status of if a juvenile had ever been held in a detention center during their time in the juvenile justice system was also coded (0 = no, 1 = yes), with 85% not being previously held in a detention center and 15% previously being held in a detention center. The severity of prior offenses was also controlled and was broken down into misdemeanors and felonies (0 = misdemeanors, 1 = felony). A total of 3,066 juveniles (77%) committed misdemeanors, and 912 (23%) had felony offenses. To add to the data of severity of the crime, the use of a weapon (0 = no, 1 = yes) was included and 84% (n = 3,354) of juveniles involved did not use a weapon and 16% (n = 624) did use a weapon. Data also included a measure of serious injury (0 = no serious injury, 1 = serious injury) and showed that 97% (n = 3,876) of juveniles did not inflict serious injury, and 3% (n = 102) had inflicted serious injury. Lastly the data included a measure to distinguish between school and non-school related offenses (0 = no, 1 = yes). Approximately 55% (n = 219) of youth did not commit a school-related offense and 45% (n = 1,786) did commit offenses that were school related.

Analytic Procedures

Bivariate statistics provide details into the relationship between two variables. If two variables are not significantly related at the bivariate level, we would not expect them to be significant at the multivariate level. A chi-square test tells us if two variables are independent of one another. To investigate the relationship between the categorical independent variable (race/ethnicity) and the categorical dependent variable (whether the juvenile received rehabilitative or punishment-based disposition), chi-square tests were employed. The control variables (age at offense, sex/gender, school related offense, weapon use, serious injury, prior referrals, preadjudication detention, and offense severity) were also included in the bivariate tests. For the continuous independent variable (prior referrals) and the categorical dependent variable (rehabilitation, punishment), a t-test was used.

After conducting the descriptive and bivariate results, the relationships between several variables were examined using multivariate analysis. More specifically, binary logistic regression was used because the dependent variable was dichotomous (binary; rehabilitative = 0; punishment = 1). The results from the logistic regression model provided the answer to the research questions of interest. In more detail, the results of this model illustrate if extralegal factors impact disposition decisions made in juvenile court. The results from this model will be used to estimate the individual effects of race/ethnicity on the likelihood of receiving a rehabilitative or punitive disposition.

Results

Table 2 provides an overview of the results of the bivariate tests. Results indicate which independent and control variables are significantly related to the dependent variable. The bivariate tests reveal the variables that are significantly related to the dependent variable but do not identify the strength or direction (i.e., positive or negative) of the relationship. The chi-square

test for race/ethnicity and disposition outcome revealed that race/ethnicity was significantly related to receiving either rehabilitation or punishment ($\chi^2 (2) = 72.923, p < .001$). Each control variable, including sex, school-related offenses, weapons used, if serious injury was inflicted, preadjudication detention, and the severity of the offense, was significantly related to whether a juvenile received rehabilitation or a punishment as their final disposition. Based on the results of the bivariate chi-square tests between the independent and control variables, all variables were included in the multivariate binary logistic regression.

Table 2. Bivariate Analysis across Final Disposition Outcomes

Variable	Rehabilitation	Punishment	Test Statistic
<i>Independent</i>			
Race/Ethnicity			
White	1089 (39%)	316 (27%)	
Black	1409 (50%)	767 (65%)	
Hispanic	301(11%)	96 (8%)	$\chi^2 (2) = 72.923, p < .001$
<i>Controls</i>			
Sex/Gender			
Male	2166 (77%)	1004 (85%)	
Female	633 (23%)	175 (15%)	$\chi^2 (1) = 30.959, p < .001$
School-Related Offense			
No	1442 (52%)	750 (64%)	
Yes	1357 (48%)	429 (36%)	$\chi^2 (1) = 49.052, p < .001$
Weapons Used			
No	2385 (85%)	969 (82%)	
Yes	414 (15%)	210 (18%)	$\chi^2 (1) = 5.723, p < .05$
Serious Injury			
No	2743 (98%)	1133 (96%)	
Yes	56 (2%)	46 (4%)	$\chi^2 (1) = 11.998, p < .001$
Preadjudication Detention			
No	2477 (88%)	887 (75%)	
Yes	322 (12%)	292 (25%)	$\chi^2 (1) = 111.794, p < .001$
Offense Severity			
Felony	531 (19%)	381 (32%)	
Misdemeanor	2268 (81%)	798 (68%)	$\chi^2 (1) = 83.602, p < .001$

Table 3 (below) provides the results of the bivariate t-test. A t-test is used when the independent or control variable is continuous (i.e., a count) and the dependent variable is categorical. The results from the t-test show that youth who received punishment as opposed to rehabilitation had, on average, 2.66 prior referrals. In contrast, youth assigned a rehabilitative disposition had, on average, 1.47 prior referrals. The t-test indicated that differences in prior referrals were significantly different for youth who received a rehabilitative versus punishment-focused disposition ($F = 193.73; p < .001$).

Table 3. T-Test

Variable	Rehabilitation	Punishment	Test Statistic
Prior Referrals	$N = 2,799$ $M = 1.47$	$N = 1,179$ $M = 2.66$	$F = 193.73; p < .001$

Note: M = mean

Multivariate Results

Table 4 displays the results from the binary logistic regression, which included the independent and control variables and their impact on the dependent variable (i.e., rehabilitation vs punishment). Results suggest that Black youth are 42% more likely to receive punishment compared to white youth. Females are 74% less likely to receive punishment than males, and juveniles who inflict serious injury were 62% more likely to receive punishment than those who do not. As the number of prior referrals increased, youth were 18% more likely to receive punishment. Youth who received preadjudication detention were approximately 50% more likely to receive punishment as their disposition compared to youth who were not detained prior to their adjudicatory hearing. Moreover, if youth committed a felony, they were less likely to receive punishment at disposition than those who committed misdemeanors. Once the independent variable, race/ethnicity, was disaggregated and Black and Hispanic youth were

compared to White youth, the odds of Hispanic youth receiving rehabilitative or punishment-focused dispositions were not significantly different. Moreover, some of the control variables, including age, school related offenses, and weapon use, were not significantly related to disposition outcomes of rehabilitation or punishment. Therefore, the results indicate that there are differences in disposition outcomes across *some* but not all extralegal factors (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender/sex but not age). More specifically and directly related to the independent variable of interest (i.e., race/ethnicity), the results suggest that Black youth have a greater likelihood of being sanctioned to punishment-based sanctions compared to White youth. This same relationship does not hold true when comparing Hispanic and White youth.

Table 4. Logistic Regression Results Predicting Final Disposition Outcome

Variable	b	S.E.	B
<i>Independent</i>			
Black ^a	.352	.082	1.422**
Hispanic	-.014	.137	.986
<i>Controls</i>			
Sex/Gender	-.307	.098	.736*
Age at Offense	.061	.032	1.063
Serious Injury	.481	.214	1.618*
Prior Referrals	.161	.016	1.175**
Preadjudication Detention	.407	.104	1.502**
Felony	-.334	.091	.716**
Used Weapons	.017	.100	1.017
School Related Offense	-.133	.079	.875
Constant	-1.956	.449	.141**

*Note: b = regression coefficient; S.E. = standard error; B = odds ratio ^aWhite is the reference category
*p < .05; **p < .001

Discussion

The basis of this research was to investigate whether extralegal factors impact the type of disposition a juvenile receives and the potential effects of race/ethnicity on whether youth receive a rehabilitative or punitive disposition. Using a dataset of all juvenile complaints from

one eastern state in 2018, the present study sought to determine if extralegal factors impact the type of disposition juvenile receives. More specifically, the present research examined if there were any effects of race/ethnicity when examining rehabilitative versus punitive dispositions.

Related to the first research question, extralegal factors (i.e., race/ethnicity, sex/gender) played a role in the decision to sanction youth to either a rehabilitative or punitive disposition. While race/ethnicity will be discussed further in the section below, it is important to note that there were differences between Black and White youth, but no significant differences in treatment between Hispanic and White youth. These findings relate to previous work that have examined differences in disposition across race/ethnicity and show that White versus Black youth have been sent to programs in different percentages (Gordon, 2012; Saloner & Cook, 2013). One reason that there could be differences in treatment for Black versus White youth but not when comparing Hispanic and White youth is the differences in population numbers as Hispanics are the lowest represented minority compared to Black youth in the juvenile justice data that we do have as well as the overall population of the country (Initiative P.P., 2020). Results related to the sex of a juvenile suggested that males were 26% less likely to receive punishment than rehabilitation. This is like some past research that states the justice system is more lenient on female offenders (Geppert, 2022).

Regarding the second research question, which was the primary interest of this research, the current study shows that the dispositions across race/ethnicity are different. As shown in the binary logistic regression Table 4 (presented above), Black youth were 42% more likely to receive punishment at disposition than White youth. Importantly, stating that there is a difference between Black and White youth does not explain why there are differences or if the differences are meaningful. It is also important to recognize that not all areas (e.g., rural, urban) have the

option of aftercare programs while others are reliant on organizations such as the Department of Social Services, which sometimes results in youth being handled more punitively (NC Department of Public Safety, 2014).

Limitations

Consistent with all research, this study has limitations that should be noted. First, this research is restricted to one state and one year of juvenile complaint data. As such, it only provides a snapshot of information and does not provide trends over time. Second, certain variables that might pertain to the decision to sanction youth to rehabilitative versus punitive dispositions were not included in the dataset. For example, measures related to access to treatment and rehabilitation and information related to neighborhood characteristics and types of households were not included in the dataset. Other variables not included but that could impact decision-making at disposition include the presence of legal representation, a juvenile's age of onset, co-participants in the alleged crime, and information related to a court actors' determination of culpability and amenability to treatment.

Future Research

Future research should seek to include information related to neighborhood settings. For example, socioeconomic status, one-or-two parent households, and level of education the parent and youth have. This information would permit examining the problem with multilevel modeling, which would provide details about individual and neighborhood characteristics. Then, we could determine if individual or neighborhood factors (i.e., geographic region) have an influence on the disposition youth receive. Moreover, future research should attempt to quantify how many counties with this eastern state have access to rehabilitative disposition options because lack of access could play a role in whether youth receive a rehabilitative (rather than punishment) focused disposition. Thus, additional research is needed to fully understand why,

and under which circumstances, Black youth are more likely to receive a punishment-focused disposition compared to White youth. Mixed methods research, or methods that combine quantitative and qualitative reports (e.g., written reports, interviews with juvenile justice officials) of decision-making would provide additional information on why court actors sanction certain youth to harsher dispositions.

Conclusion

Overall, the current study suggests that there is a difference in the way that Black youth and White youth (but not Hispanic and White youth) are assigned post-adjudication disposition, and whether it is punitive or rehabilitative in nature. The present study suggests that additional research is needed to determine *why* there is a difference in treatment across race/ethnicity. The findings indicate that future research should also seek to disaggregate the “Hispanic” category (e.g., Cubans, Puerto Ricans, etc.) to determine if there are differences in treatment within and across racial/ethnic groups. The Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act aims to target disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system, and one of their goals is to “provide assurance that youth in the juvenile justice system are treated equitably on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity family income, and disability” (Public Law 93-415; 88 Stat. 1109, Juvenile justice and delinquency prevention act of 1974, 2018). The results of the current study suggest that there are additional action items that should be in place to safeguard against decision-making based on the perceptual shorthand, potential implicit bias, or unfamiliarity with resources that are available for youth.

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