Alternative Sanctions for Juvenile Delinquents

Introduction

Recently, the issue of youth delinquency has become a common topic under discussion. It is important to understand that juvenile offenders in the community differ from adult ones significantly. In addition, there has been increased scrutiny of expenditures allocated for the maintenance of jails in America. States across the United States of America are struggling to manage the offender population growing rapidly in the face of major financial challenges. Prisons and jails in America have been functioning above their capacity, and the population of offenders continues to escalate. As the states and the federal government continue to experience this unparalleled increase in the number of individuals serving time in prisons with reduced resources, the development of alternative sanctions for juveniles has become a necessity (Inderbitzin, 2012). Nowadays, policy-makers focus on alternative sanctions for youths as a solution to overcrowding, recognizing the need to rely heavily on the economical method to oversee offenders safely, reduce recidivism, and stop juvenile criminals from cycling through the criminal justice system (Mallett & Julian, 2008). Leaders are asked to alleviate pressure in the system by supervising the increasing number of juvenile offenders. The efficiency and effectiveness of operations have to be enhanced, maintaining the safety of the public using a small budget per a large number of offenders.

Purpose Statement

The proposed study seeks to find out available alternatives to juvenile incarceration, which can be effective in alleviating overcrowding in the jail system, while offering intended lessons to youth offenders. The main purpose of correctional facilities is to assist offenders, mend their behavior, and enable them to be functional and productive members of society. The
A research proposal will delve into the manner in which alternative sanctions work, challenges that may be faced, some of the theoretical models that they follow, as well as their benefit to juveniles, community and the legal system. There are dissimilarities in laws developed by different states in relation to retributions and sanctions for juvenile delinquents. As such, the study will focus on the federal law mainly, but it will also analyze some of the respective state rules. In order to acquire relevant data for the research, the study will utilize both primary and secondary data collection methods. The primary ones include interviews with some officials who possess relevant knowledge of the juvenile justice system and correctional facilities. The secondary methods involve collecting data from books, previous cases and studies.

**Aim**

The aim of the proposed study is to understand what alternative sanctions are available for the correctional and legal department to administer to juvenile offenders.

**Objectives**

The study objectives include:

1. To identify the reasons why it is vital to have alternative sanctions for juvenile offenders;
2. To identify sanctions alternative to sending youths to serve time in correctional facilities;
3. To identify the advantages of alternate sanctions to young offenders, community and the legal department.

**Research Questions**

- What is the significance of implementing alternative youth offenders’ sanctions for juvenile offenders?
• What alternative sanctions exist that the legal department can implement for juvenile offenders?
• How will alternate sanctions benefit youth offenders, community and the legal department?

Theoretical Framework

Alternative sanctions and community-based alternatives include any activities conducted to assist offenders in establishing or reestablishing law-abiding duties in society. At the same time, they assist in monitoring the conduct of juveniles and its lawfulness. These sanctions should act as capacity-building and empowering approaches, which can be founded on the community-development strategy theoretically. The previous research in the area does not give a clear theoretical framework that can be used (Durlauf & Nagin, 2011). However, since community correctional programs involve social rehabilitation, this research will focus on social theories. In order to understand how community corrections work, several theoretical frameworks should be applied. When working with juvenile offenders, behaviorist theories are the most applicable. Some of the theories applied include social learning, social cognitive, prosocial modeling, desistance, and reparation and restorative justice theories. They focus on issues that cause juvenile offenders to commit offenses, and seek to analyze approaches that can be applied in order to model their behavior and improve their relationships with other community members.

Significance of the Study

The United States of America is the country that has the highest proportion of its juveniles confined as compared to any other developed country. Studies show that as of 2011, out of 100,000 juveniles in America, approximately 70,000 were confined in correctional
facilities throughout the nation (Sickmund & Puzzanchera, 2014). As a result of such high number, the issue of juvenile confinement has attracted attention of different members of society, including national and local policy-makers. It is especially due to skyrocketing costs associated with the imprisonment of such a huge number of juvenile delinquents. It is also considered that some of the conditions under which they are incarcerated are dangerous and may be a reason for the increased tendency to recidivism. Various alternatives, which are mainly based on community work, have been developed and proven to be effective in the correction of the youths’ behavior. Some alternatives can be applied at any point within the juvenile justice system. These are vital and include early interventions that will prevent the youth from getting into the juvenile justice system, as well as incarceration in a correctional facility prior to hearing their case.

**Literature Review**

The Center for Community Corrections (2012) published a paper titled *A Call for Punishments That Make Sense*. The publication highlighted the importance of incorporating community corrections into the U.S. correctional system. The authors recommended the creation of an operational relationship between the legal and correctional department experts and community members. It would assist in managing the rapidly growing offender population while undertaking their obligation in ensuring public safety and justice. It would be a great way for youth offenders to avoid incarceration. The Vera Institute of Justice (2013) illustrated a huge amount of federal and state funds channeled to jails and prisons without successful results. They suggested that policies favoring the use of community corrections should be implemented. It would reduce recidivism and the amount of funds channeled to prisons significantly. Lawrence and Hesse (2010) outline the importance of strategies that develop the utilization of community-
based correctional facilities as a viable intermediate sanction for juvenile offenders. It can also be an important part of moving the youth from the incarceration system and assisting them in making a reentry into the community.

**Research Methods**

**Research Design**

Common research designs include descriptive, explanatory and exploratory. The descriptive one needs a clear investigation process before the collection of data to portray a given event or situation. The explanatory design focuses on explaining the link between common variables and quantitative methods of data collection (Donley, 2012). However, the study will use the exploratory design since it aims to explore alternative sanctions for juvenile offenders. It will assist in the collection of adequate information regarding the research problem, enabling to come up with a conclusion on how to solve the issue of juvenile incarceration. The research will rely on the literature review, theoretical framework, and collection of primary data.

**Research Strategy**

Various research strategies are available when conducting studies, surveys, experiments, and grounded theories (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Depending on the strategy that suits the research objectives and questions, it is possible to apply several of these methods. The current study will focus on a number of correctional facilities in data collection, which will assist in examining the situation in the rest of the system. As such, various alternative sanctions that have been implemented will be analyzed to get a general picture in the country.

**Research Philosophy**

The applied research philosophy is based upon human beliefs and values that exist in the natural environment (realism), management and those that affect managerial, social
interpretations and behavior. People tend to be vigorously responsive to any change in their behavior or environment. Therefore, it is vital to identify behavioral aspects of alternative sanctions to be used in relation to juvenile offenders. The study will be based on examining real reactions of individuals to different programs in order to identify their effectiveness.

Collection of Data

The study will make use of first-hand and secondary data. Original data will be collected through interviews with the selected number of participants. These individuals possess the relevant knowledge in the legal system and correctional procedures. Interviews will be semi-structured and will have open-ended questions in order to increase responses of the respondents. In addition, it will be done either through face-to-face communication or through other alternatives such as phone calls or skype. Available literature will be the main source of secondary data, which will be analyzed and compared with the findings.
References


