SPRING 2026

Translational Criminology

Promoting knowledge exchange
to shape criminal justice research,
practice, and policy

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GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY®

From the Editor in Chief

Translational Criminology Magazine (also known as *TC Magazine*) began as a newsletter for the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) early in our founding (in 2008) and became a more formal magazine in 2011. This unique, free-to-all magazine was envisioned as a translational forum with broad access for members of the evidence-based crime policy community—researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike—who could collaborate on short pieces that illustrate how research becomes practice. The magazine also highlights personifications of evidence-based crime policy, including inductees into the Evidence-Based Policing Hall of Fame, recipients of CEBCP's *Distinguished Achievement Award in Evidence-Based Crime Policy*, and other people and organizations working to make science an impactful driver behind justice policy and practice.

From its humble beginnings, the magazine is now in its 15th year and continues to thrive. A few years back, we expanded our editorial team to include six senior editors with diverse subject-matter expertise, a managing editor, and a creative editor (see the team at https://cebcp.org/tcmagazine/). The magazine enjoys a diverse readership of thousands, comprising practitioners, academics and researchers, decision-makers, and community members. It is also indexed in EBSCO. Features are written in a practical, casual magazine style that discourages esoteric references, jargon, and overly technical, statistical, or methodological material. As one of CEBCP's translation tools, *TC Magazine* is intended to be easily digestible for all, regardless of topic, and for an audience with a general understanding of crime and justice.

The question I'm frequently asked is, "Can I contribute to *Translational Criminology Magazine*?" Many of our readers may not realize that the answer is a resounding "Yes!". What makes for a good *TC Magazine* article? Ideal features are collaboratively written by researchers and practitioners, showcasing examples of translation, implementation, institutionalization, or the building of receptivity to scientific knowledge and evidence in practice. While features may often report on a study from a peer-reviewed publication or an official project report, they often discuss aspects of those projects that do not make it into those publications. These include the opportunities and challenges of research-practice partnerships, the lessons and technicalities of implementing programs (or studies thereof), and the human stories behind efforts to institutionalize research into practice. We have frequently highlighted other organizations, groups, or individuals that are similarly focused on CEBCP's core goals of advancing evidence-based crime policy.

Our current issue showcases excellent examples of what *TC Magazine* features should look like. For example, lessons, benefits, and challenges from research-practitioner partnerships are detailed by Chapman and Yang's article on co-responders and Hendrickson and Lacoe's feature on early representation for charged individuals. Brownstein and colleagues describe the value of interdisciplinary teams to tackle complex public concerns, such as opioid misuse and overdoses. Bolotin from the Council on Criminal Justice, one of CEBCP's organizational colleagues, highlights the many efforts the Council has taken since its inception to use data and evidence to bridge partisan and ideological divides and advance progress on safety and justice. And Kimbrell, Wilson, and Olaghere share the results and implications of their updated meta-analysis on restorative justice practices for youth. Finally, Dan Nagin writes about our good colleague and friend, Al Blumstein, who passed away in January. Al's lifelong commitment to impactful research and policy development shaped our discipline into what it is today. He will be deeply missed.

The editorial team welcomes you and your colleagues to reach out to us with ideas for the magazine. You can always reach out to me directly at clum@gmu.edu, but if you recognize one of our senior editors and work in their area, please feel free to run your ideas by them as well. Guidelines for authors are also located on the magazine's landing page (https://cebcp.org/tcmagazine/). I hope this encourages all of you to consider contributing a feature to the magazine. Sharing the "secret sauce" of evidence-based crime policy is our mission, and we look forward to hearing from you!

Cynthia Lum
Editor-In-Chief, *Translational Criminology Magazine*
& Director, Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy

When Research Meets the Street: Translating Randomized Co-Responder Trials into Practice

BY JAMES A. CHAPMAN AND SUE-MING YANG

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James Chapman   Sue-Ming Yang

Police-mental health co-response teams have been viewed as a promising approach to enhance the capacity of police to respond to individuals in crisis. These teams generally refer to cooperation between the police and mental health service providers to respond to encounters related to people with mental health issues (PWMI). While such teams may seem like a good idea, few studies have rigorously examined their effectiveness. Additionally, building these teams can be challenging, especially in under-resourced jurisdictions.

In 2016, George Mason University researchers began collaborating with the Roanoke County Police Department (RCPD) in Virginia to better inform the agency's response to people in mental health crisis. Over several years, we conducted two randomized controlled trials to evaluate co-response teams in RCPD and nearby suburban/rural agencies. Both studies seemed to indicate that co-response teams showed promise, at least in the long run, leading to fewer calls for service or numbers of hospitalizations by those who had received the treatment. However, our experience in doing these studies revealed several implementation challenges and possible solutions. As leaders from both the practitioner and researcher teams on the projects, we share these insights along with recommendations for other agencies interested in starting their own co-response teams.

The Roanoke County Mental Health Co-Response Teams Project

In our first study, we examined a police-mental health professional (MHP) co-response model in which mobile crisis teams responded to mental health-related calls with officers providing immediate access to treatment and services.[1] In that study, we randomly assigned police shifts to either the treatment or control condition. During treatment shifts, after securing the scene, officers would contact clinicians through a 24/7 crisis hotline, and a clinician would respond to the scene within one hour (within 30 minutes in most cases). During control shifts, officers responded to calls according to standard operating procedures, which included the use of crisis intervention training (CIT) and de-escalation strategies. Between June 2016 and June 2019, we randomly assigned 1,416 shifts to treatment and 1,379 shifts to control conditions. We recruited 140 people who were involved in police calls for service and were experiencing a mental health crisis to participate in the study (93 in the treatment group and 47 in the control group). While the initial difference between the groups was not significant, we observed long-term impacts of the co-response teams, with reduced calls for service by the treatment group, on average, after 12 and 18 months.

Despite the study's promise, introducing a co-response program alongside a randomized control trial had its share of challenges. On the positive side, the RCPD Chief had prior experience with co-responder programs at a larger department and had seen firsthand its positive outcomes. This helped him shape a vision for the program that spoke to the advantages of engaging clinical staff early, improving officer safety through a reduction in use of force incidents, and the value-added of doing action research. This leadership commitment was important for both the success of the research partnership and the implementation of the co-response program. Researchers became part of the leadership team, and together the team helped minimize barriers for officers and clinicians to work together. While most officers could conceptualize how involving clinicians in their work could help them, this was less obvious for involving researchers. The leadership team continued to emphasize our joint commitment to the project and the importance of research to inform policy decisions about the co-response program.

However, building out the research protocol to implement the program came with its own set of challenges. We had to rely heavily on the Emergency Communications Center (ECC) in Roanoke County for help. ECC staff played a key role in entering data into a shared system and ensuring clients were placed into the correct

treatment or control group. We leaned on telecommunications officers to run additional checks to avoid cross-contamination between study groups. While the extra effort from ECC might not be needed in the everyday implementation of a co-response, it was absolutely essential for the researchers to test whether such an approach is useful in the first place.

As with any new initiative, training on implementing the co-response initiative was necessary for all officers assigned to the patrol division. However, this training also had to include implementing the study. These training sessions were conducted in person prior to the implementation of co-response teams. The instructional staff for these sessions included police leadership, researchers, and the mental health provider. During the focus groups, officers expressed frustration with the randomization process because they could not refer an individual during the control shifts. This meant they would have to fall back on using emergency custody orders (ECO), which take longer, or that they could not provide services to people in need. Additionally, field situations were often more complex than the initial training scenarios, necessitating ongoing refresher training and personalized follow-ups with officers.

The Roanoke Valley Co-Response Teams on Mental Health Hot Spots Project

The second experiment was built on the foundation of the first study but was expanded to include four police agencies in the Roanoke Valley.[2] We had one full-time clinician and one half-time clinician dedicated to the co-response teams from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday through Friday, during the study period. Due to the complexity of the multi-agency operation and limited available clinical resources, we adopted a hot spots policing model, randomizing mental health hot spots across agencies using calls for service data from the

*Team Members from left to right: **Yi-Fang Lu** (University of Iowa), **Ben Dulea** (Crisis Clinician w/ Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare), **Andy Pulley** (Roanoke City Police Department), **James Chapman** (Virginia Crisis Team Coalition), **Mary Mowbray** (Crisis Clinician w/ Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare Crisis Clinician), **Sue-Ming Yang** (GMU)*

priorMfive years. Co-response teams then responded to mental health calls for service in the treatment hot spots, but not in the control hot spots. This design enabled us to isolate treatment effects for evaluation while concentrating limited resources on places that needed them most.
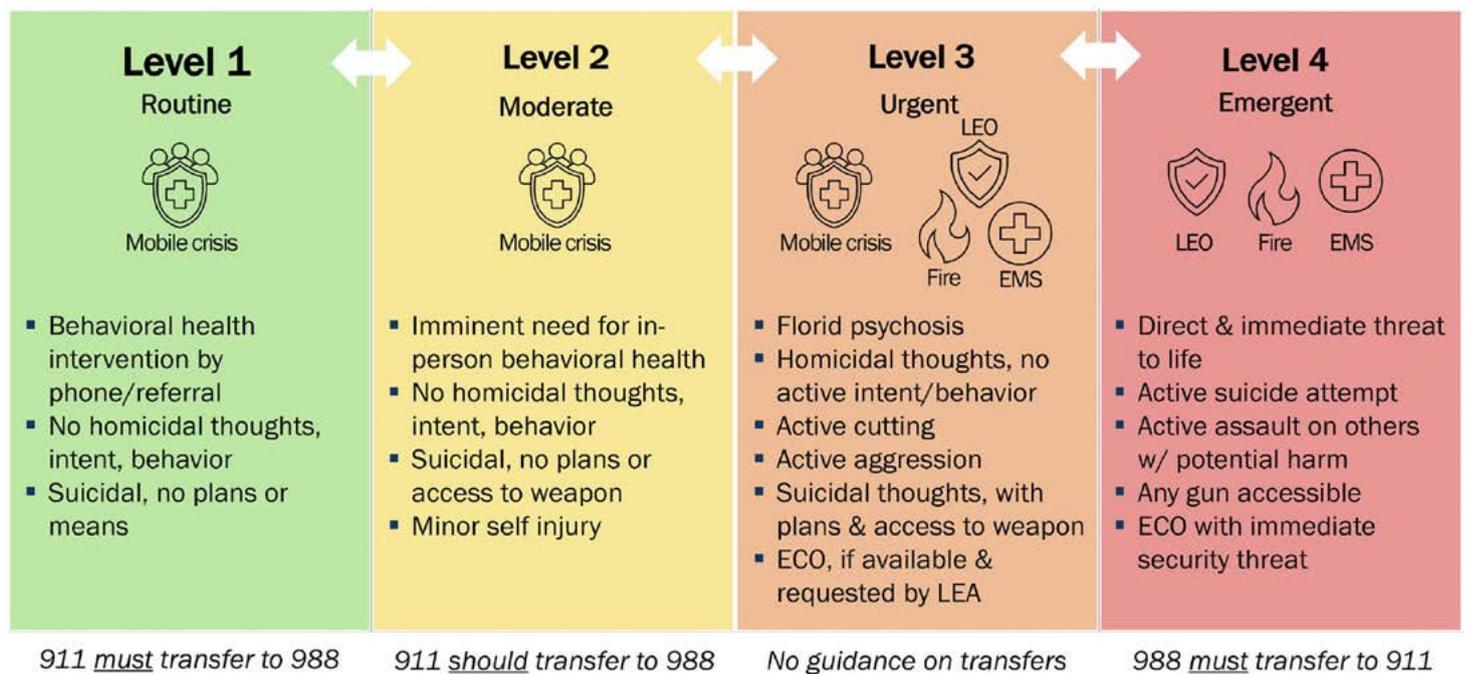
The results were promising, suggesting that the co-response teams had a significant effect on reducing the subsequent number of temporary detention orders (TDO), which require people experiencing mental health crises to receive immediate hospitalization for further evaluation and stabilization. The mental health hot spots in the treatment group experienced a reduction in the number of TDO cases, from 74 prior to implementation to 53 during the implementation of the co-response teams. Meanwhile, the control hot spots experienced an increase in TDO cases, rising from 61 to 79.

Again, the study revealed several implementation challenges that added new insight into co-response teams (and research about them). One of the biggest challenges was how to effectively communicate the intervention *and* the study implementation across multiple par-

clarity when partnering with clinicians. Agencies also differed in terms of supportive leadership, commitment, and buy-in.

However, although the co-response teams initially encountered some pushback during the research process, the partnership experience facilitated a unified adoption of co-response teams during the implementation of the Virginia state-mandated Mental Health Awareness Response and Community Understanding Services (MARCUS) Alert system in 2020. The goals of the MARCUS Alert system include minimizing law enforcement involvement in mental health crises, decreasing arrests and use-of-force, and prioritizing non-lethal, health-focused interventions. In Virginia, law enforcement agencies serving jurisdictions with populations of 40,000 or more must commit to establishing a mobile crisis response.

On July 1, 2023, the MARCUS Alert program launched in the Roanoke Valley. All agencies involved in the research projects adopted MARCUS Alert protocols including two serving populations under 40,000. Police leadership provided substantive support during the implementation process. Police leaders leveraged the well-established partner-

Level 1 Routine Mobile crisis	Level 2 Moderate Mobile crisis	Level 3 Urgent Mobile crisis / LEO / Fire / EMS	Level 4 Emergent LEO / Fire / EMS
• Behavioral health intervention by phone/referral • No homicidal thoughts, intent, behavior • Suicidal, no plans or means	• Imminent need for in-person behavioral health • No homicidal thoughts, intent, behavior • Suicidal, no plans or access to weapon • Minor self injury	• Florid psychosis • Homicidal thoughts, no active intent/behavior • Active cutting • Active aggression • Suicidal thoughts, with plans & access to weapon • ECO, if available & requested by LEA	• Direct & immediate threat to life • Active suicide attempt • Active assault on others w/ potential harm • Any gun accessible • ECO with immediate security threat
911 _must_ transfer to 988	911 _should_ transfer to 988	No guidance on transfers	988 _must_ transfer to 911

Image Source: Commonwealth of Virginia, Behavioral Health Commission. (2025). Implementation and effectiveness of the Marcus Alert system 2025. Report Document #652, p.3. https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2025/RD652/PDF

ticipating organizations. We had four police departments, three emergency communication centers, and one behavioral health service organization, in addition to the research team from the Center for Evidence-Based Policy at George Mason University. Ensuring that all parties were on the same page required substantial effort. At the same time, this challenge is likely one that rural communities that share regional resources will encounter. Additionally (as expected), we also encountered reservations and varying degrees of commitment to either co-response or the study from frontline officers. Some officers from one police agency voiced concerns about liability and role

ship with the local Community Service Board staff and the benefits demonstrated from the studies when building the valley-wide co-response program. Currently, co-response teams involving six law enforcement agencies and five crisis clinicians are operational in the Roanoke Valley that are aligned with the Marcus Alert Bill.

From Research to Practice—Lessons Learned

Both research and practice are challenging endeavors, especially when they challenge the status quo. Implementing both together can therefore increase the challenges of training, implementation, and leadership. We need research to understand if practice is effective, and we need practice to test out the feasibility of ideas. But done together well, they can not only reveal important lessons for implementation, but also develop partnerships and processes that facilitate future policy and practice. The two experiments provided officers experiences with co-response teams and with evaluation research. Despite some officers' skepticism, they learned how to work effectively with clinicians and developed clear expectations about what the partnership and study could achieve. In the end, when the state mandated the MARCUS Alert system, agencies were better positioned to collaborate and implement co-response models. Several lessons were learned from our collaborations with each other:

Context matters. Although the traditional co-response model is ideal for resource-rich agencies, this is often impractical for small, mid-sized, or rural agencies. Creating a co-response program that fits the local context is more important than fidelity to the traditional model. When creating a co-response program, agencies need to consider geography, funding and staffing restraints, and the ability to leverage long-standing working relationships with their local behavioral health professionals. Through creative, outcome-oriented problem-solving, under-resourced communities can develop alternative co-response programs that align with their current regional cooperative agreements, minimize staffing demands, and maximize citizen support.

Leadership, legitimacy, and resource commitment are paramount. Not surprisingly, leadership emerged as a decisive factor in both program implementation and long-term sustainability. Leaders who are visible, vocal, and provide substantive support to the program are key to integrating clinicians into mental health response protocols. When leadership removes barriers for clinicians, resolves interagency friction, and enables access to resources and personnel within a police agency, programs flourish, whereas in programs where leadership is limited to rhetoric or adoption through compliance, they do not.

Early clinical engagement is central. Across agencies, the most critical factor of a successful co-response program is early clinical engagement. Practitioners described co-response as enabling timely clinical triage, reducing reliance on emergency custody orders, and increasing diversion from hospitals and jails. The presence of clinical decision-making at the earliest point of contact was viewed as the primary driver of effectiveness. Additionally, pre-existing relationships between officers and clinicians through CIT training made it easier to build the co-response teams. In the Roanoke Valley, CIT training has a long history as the foundation for how officers interact with individuals in crisis. The training is provided by the local CSB, and the law enforcement agencies and the CIT Coordinator interact frequently. Over the years, this relationship has created trust and open lines of communication, and according to practitioners, CIT is considered "the relational glue" that builds mutual respect. This reinforces the position that co-response programs are most successful when built upon pre-existing collaborative frameworks rather than introduced in isolation.

Police-clinician partnerships bring additional benefits beyond response to PWMI. In Roanoke Valley, clinicians are now often called upon to assist with incidents beyond standard mental health calls, including fatal accidents, homicides, and other traumatic events, where they provide support to officers, victims' families, or community members impacted by tragedy. Clinicians can address the emotional needs of those involved in ways that police officers cannot within the scope of their roles. Gradually, clinicians have also become an important addition to a comprehensive officer wellness program. For instance, clinicians have been practicing "compassionate loitering," intentionally being present in agencies, especially after a critical incident, to provide officers with informal emotional support. While this may not be a typical partnership for communities with sufficient mental health resources, in rural areas, we recommend leveraging co-response teams to support workforce wellness. Clinicians and officers alike are exposed to trauma, and mature programs recognize the need for reciprocal care, including informal check-ins and the inclusion of clinicians in post-incident debriefings.

Taken together, these findings suggest that co-response programs should be evaluated not simply by their structural conformity but by their alignment with local context, leadership commitment, and relational capacity. Co-response teams work in reducing PWMI's subsequent police contacts and hospitalization. However, building effective co-response teams requires careful planning to achieve their intended goals. Organizations can ease the difficulty by leveraging existing partnerships, expanding CIT training, and acknowledging the cascading value clinicians add to the community and beyond, not only in diverting individuals from restrictive systems but also in building trust and supporting officer wellness. Policymakers and practitioners should prioritize flexibility, invest in foundational partnerships, and resist pressure to implement co-response teams solely for symbolic or political purposes.

Endnotes

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College of Humanities and Social Sciences

CENTER FOR EVIDENCE-BASED CRIME POLICY

George Mason University®

How We Got Here

The University

The CEBCP is housed in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, at George Mason University. We are an integral part of the educational mission of our large, public, R1 classified institution.

People

The CEBCP team has grown from 4 people in 2008 to a center of more than 50 team members of faculty, senior fellows, affiliates, research associates, and graduate research assistants. Twenty-one of our research assistants earned PhDs while at Mason, and we've supported many careers through our synergistic activities.

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The CEBCP's total grants portfolio exceeds $55 million and includes over 90 funded projects since 2008. CEBCP faculty and students are highly productive, having developed hundreds of publications, reports, and practice-based guides.
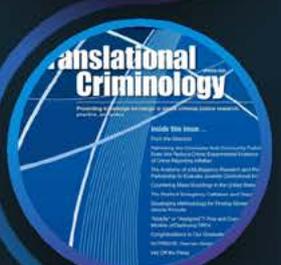
Translation

Known for its translation tools and activities, the CEBCP plays a critical role in advocating for the use of science in justice practice. The CEBCP has also supported free symposia, congressional briefings, the *Translational Criminology* magazine, awards, and doctoral summer schools to advance our translational mission.

Partnerships

The CEBCP has partnered with over 80 organizations and groups for research, training, translation, and educational activities. These include the American Society of Criminology, the National Policing Institute, the Campbell Collaboration, and the Washington/Baltimore HIDTA, among many others.

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Doing Interdisciplinary Research to Better Inform Policy and Practice

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Henry Brownstein   Ankit Bansal   Samuel Workman

Jean-Philippe Richard   Gordon Smith   James Nolan

Oreoluwa Runsewe   Mahdi Saadati   Bouchra Er-Rabbany

Early in the twentieth century, before the introduction of computers, much social research was qualitative, with studies conducted to understand the meanings of people's social experiences given the ecological characteristics of their shared environment. By mid-century, with the introduction of the first mainframes and then personal computers, computerized storage of data from official and unofficial sources, and the growing number and capacity of statistical programs, social research increasingly favored quantitative studies to explain social phenomena.[1] Early in the twenty-first century, as social scientists sought more comprehensive ways to better understand and explain social behavior, relationships, and institutions, mixed methods combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches gained prominence.[2]

Today, technological advances offer new methods for conducting social research using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning. These are more familiar to industrial engineers and computer scientists than they are to social scientists. Consequently, there is a growing interest and need for broad interdisciplinary research on crime and justice. Here, we present an example of this type of interdisciplinary research in the area of substance abuse, and showcase how these collaborations can better inform policy and practice.

Interdisciplinary Research to Study Opioid Overdoses and Crime

In 2023, the National Science Foundation (NSF) solicited proposals through its Division of Civil, Mechanical and Manufacturing Innovation for studies to address *Disrupting Operations of Illicit Supply Networks*.[3] The solicitation welcomed proposals for studies that would "support systems research to advance our understanding of networks that traffic in illicit or illicitly produced goods and services." Through professional networks, university contacts, and personal relationships, we put together an interdisciplinary team to study the impact of policy and program interventions on two significant public health and safety challenges—opioid overdose deaths and crime.

Consequently, our team includes researchers from sociology, criminology, criminal justice, public health, public policy, computer science, and industrial engineering, each bringing extensive substantive knowledge, experience, and methodological expertise from their respective disciplines.

Substantively, our collaboration allowed us to study the problems of health and safety related to drug use and trade from a broader perspective, bridging the silos of thinking that focused exclusively on law enforcement or harm reduction. Methodologically, our team was able to harmonize data from a variety of sources using methods commonly used in different disciplines. Our collaboration offered an opportunity to inform policymakers and practitioners from a variety of disciplinary perspectives using diverse methodological approaches leading to comprehensive, strategic, and evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice.

We chose to utilize data from West Virginia, a rural state that has experienced, and continues to experience, an unusually high level of social and health problems, notably overdose deaths related to the misuse of opioids[4] and a wide disparity in crime rates among counties with higher rates in rural areas.[5] Among the 55 counties in the state, there is significant variation in programs and policies, and in the social environment that directly contributes to these problems. There is also wide variation in drug fatalities and crime.

We proposed three aims for our study: (1) establish a statewide county-level database combining traditional outcome measures for crime and diseases of despair from survey, census, and county-level public policy data and input from policymakers; (2) develop a model that seeks to explain the connection between mixes of public spending and the wide variation in crime and health disparities across counties; and (3) translate findings into actionable communication products and systems to inform and engage county stakeholders on place-based responses to public health and safety problems in their counties.

Benefits of Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Scholars have established that conducting research with collaborators from diverse disciplines is beneficial, as each discipline is relevant to the research topic.[6] For example, as social scientists, we have disciplinary knowledge of theory, methods, and history as well as access to data, organizations, and people who participate in the world we study. By collaborating with scholars from other disciplines, we gain access to knowledge, methods, and access to data sources that are not widely known or used by social scientists, and they gain from us. But as in the research-to-practice endeavor more generally, the challenge with interdisciplinary work is one of *translation*. Understanding what each researcher brings to the table, how they can contribute to other disciplines, and how multiple perspectives can be used as a force multiplier for problem solving is the key. This translation occurs within several areas of interdisciplinary collaboration:

Finding common ground. The NSF solicitation was in part addressed to industrial engineers. They would have the knowledge

and methodological capabilities to design models to improve systems and optimize outcomes, leveraging recent advances in machine learning. But they would not necessarily have the requisite substantive knowledge to address our research questions about drugs and crime, which are complex social challenges. Thus, team members shared knowledge of the history and sociology of illicit drug distribution systems, crime statistics, relevant public health and safety concerns, and the state and county policy environment in West Virginia. This became the foundation for common ground for moving forward.

Designing the study. Once the team was assembled, weekly meetings were key to group learning and translation, where members could discuss common interests, aims, goals, and objectives for a study that could inform policy. For example, the team hypothesized that variation in policy decisions based on county spending decisions could have consequences for both drug overdose deaths and disparities in crime across counties. Using our knowledge and skills across our respective disciplines, we identified county spending patterns over time for each annual county budget category, taking into account socio-economic and political factors, to discern the relationship between spending and opioid overdose and crime. This exercise helped us identify the data we needed and how to access it.

Collecting data and constructing a harmonized data file. The social scientists on the team identified and accessed relevant socio-economic measures in West Virginia, from data sources including the US Census, the American Community Survey, and statewide surveys conducted by West Virginia University researchers. Crime and criminal justice data were identified and accessed from the West Virginia Incident-Based Reporting System (WVIBRS). For overdose and other opioid-related measures, a public health researcher identified and accessed data from health sources in West Virginia, including detailed county-level drug fatality data. For public policy data, a political scientist identified and provided access to county-level data on spending, separated into six broad budget categories and their subcategories used to track county spending. Together, we spent several meetings discussing the official and actual meanings of different data elements and categories. Data were collected for all 55 counties for each measure over time, beginning in 2012 and extending to the most recent available data. Harmonizing the data required extensive collaboration to ensure that each selected item was appropriate with respect to its meaning, measurement, use in analysis, and contribution to county-level policymaking.

Data analyses. Once a harmonized data file was constructed, our discussions turned to how to use the file for analysis. Our objectives included developing an analytical model to identify optimal public health and public safety outcomes across varying public policies and socio-economic conditions. Social and political scientists and public health researchers could use the file to conduct statistical analyses commonly used in their fields, including descriptive, inferential, and regression statistics, as well as hypothesis testing. Industrial engineers could apply machine learning techniques to train models to classify

data and predict outcomes, with the view of incorporating them into larger decision-support models that could inform policymakers. Machine learning algorithms enabled analysts to infer, from training data, the outcomes for different inputs.[7] These discussions then led, for example, to conversations about the difference between how social scientists use counterfactuals in randomized controlled trials and how engineers use counterfactuals to search for optimal explanations using tree ensembles, which enables better predictions by combining multiple decision trees.[8] At one meeting, we discussed how counterfactual explanations could help us understand how a model's decision would change with minimal modifications to input features.

Policy and Practice: Better Informing Decisions and Actions

Ultimately, our study was designed to help local policymakers respond to problems related to the illicit distribution of opioids, overdose deaths, and the rate and disparity of crime in their counties. We regularly discuss whether we have strong enough evidence from the integration of our findings to make claims, present specific recommendations for balancing expenditures in the various budget categories, or instead to offer other options. We believe our interdisciplinary approach strengthens our ability in the "marketplace of claims"[9] that we find ourselves when entering this policymaking arena. When researchers enter this marketplace, they find themselves competing or collaborating with politicians, government officials, practitioners, lobbyists representing a variety of personal or business interests, and even other researchers.[10] The advantage for researchers is that, while others may make claims based on vested interests, those who have conducted research have evidence from their analyses of data on which to base their claims. Having evidence from findings derived from a diversity of perspectives and methods makes their case even stronger.[11]

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The Council on Criminal Justice: Building Bridges to Advance Safety and Justice

BY HANNAH BOLOTIN

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Hannah Bolotin

In 2019, the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) opened its doors with a clear and ambitious mission: use data and evidence to bridge partisan and ideological divides and advance progress on safety and justice. The Council occupies a unique niche in the field, combining a nonpartisan criminal justice think tank with invitational membership. Its 350 members comprise a broad cross-section of the nation's top leaders, experts, and innovators from law enforcement, corrections, courts, communities, advocacy, and academia, as well as formerly incarcerated people, crime victims and survivors, and others directly impacted by the justice system. This collective expertise helps CCJ translate research into policy roadmaps on topics ranging from policing to sentencing, the challenges facing veterans and women in the justice system, and the far-ranging impacts of artificial intelligence (AI).

Since the Council's launch, the profound polarization gripping our nation has intensified. Trust in our democratic institutions has grown increasingly fragile. Skepticism about science and research has spiked. And many Americans seem interested only in the facts that reinforce their beliefs. These dynamics make CCJ's work more vital, and more challenging, than ever. By providing a platform for collaboration across ideological and sector lines, the Council helps build the connections and common ground that are essential for progress in a fractured era.

Off and Running

CCJ was born shortly after the passage of the federal FIRST STEP Act in 2018 and dedicated its first independent task force to defining an agenda of next steps for the federal government. Chaired by former Congressman and Georgia Governor Nathan Deal, the Task Force on Federal Priorities[1] deliberated during the second half of 2019 and reached consensus on multiple areas for action by the legislative, executive, and judicial branches—from reducing violent crime to revising sentencing for drug offenses and acquitted conduct, the functioning of federal prisons, opportunities for release, and support for successful reentry. Many of the group's proposals had advanced[2]

by 2022 and others have gained traction[3] since.

Simultaneously, the Council launched Pushing Toward Parity,[4] a multi-year research project designed to bring empirical clarity to one of the most contentious issues in the field: racial and ethnic disparities. Contrary to popular opinion, disparities in imprisonment have narrowed over the past 20 years and CCJ's research sought to understand why. The first two reports, in 2019[5] and 2022,[6] assessed national-level trends in disparity in probation, parole, jail, and prison populations, as well as crime-specific changes in imprisonment disparities, differences in disparity by race and sex, and changes in reported offending rates and decisions at the key stages of criminal justice case processing. In 2024, the Council furthered this work by examining the impacts of sentencing reforms on disparity trends[7] in 12 states, analyzing imprisonment trends among female populations,[8] and exploring challenges in measuring Hispanic disparities.[9]

Meeting the Moment: COVID-19 Pandemic and Policing

In 2020, as the nation experienced the turmoil of a COVID pandemic, the police killing of George Floyd, and ensuing mass protests, we saw the end of a détente: gone was the era when many elected officials would check their partisanship at the door and work together to achieve both less crime and less incarceration. Building on the momentum of its early initiatives, CCJ convened a National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice[10] and a Task Force on Policing to guide the field through the impacts of this disruption.

Led by former U.S. Attorneys General Alberto Gonzales and Loretta Lynch, the commission quickly developed actionable guidance[11] to help criminal justice leaders respond immediately and directly to the pandemic. Later in 2020, the panel released a set of consensus recommendations[12] that addressed the broader implications of the pandemic and provided a roadmap for long-term, systemic reforms to policy and practice.

The commission's work drew attention not only because of its rigor and timeliness, but because of its bipartisan credibility. South Carolina Rep. James Clyburn emphasized the impact of CCJ's approach in a comment for a piece in *The Atlantic*: "Two former Attorneys General – one Democrat, and the other Republican; one Black, the other Latino – they have come out with a great report. Let's use that report as a foundation upon which to build back our judicial system."[13]

But 2020 was not just the year COVID arrived. In May, the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin sparked a wave of nationwide protests and new scrutiny of American policing. CCJ responded by launching a bipartisan Task Force on Policing,[14] whose members included Director Nancy La Vigne, who led the National Institute of Justice and justice policy at the Urban Institute, National Association of Police Organizations Vice President Sean Smoot, activist and Campaign Zero co-founder DeRay Mckesson, and leading researchers, such as George Mason University Professor Cynthia Lum. The task force assessed two dozen of the most commonly proposed policing reforms, from bans on chokeholds to the use of body-worn cameras, duty-to-intervene policies, and civilian oversight. The goal: to determine which reforms would have the greatest impact on preventing police use of excessive force, reducing racial biases, increasing police accountability, and improving the relationship between law enforcement and communities.

Providing a Better Picture of National Crime Trends

The Council's analyses of crime trends[15] has been one of its signature and ongoing contributions to the field. This work also began in 2020, when offending patterns started shifting rapidly early in the pandemic. Over the past five volatile years, CCJ's collection and analysis of crime data across a sample of U.S. cities have filled a data gap and allowed policymakers, the media, and the public to operate from the same set of facts about what is and isn't happening with homicide, carjacking, shoplifting, and other offenses. CCJ's crime reports have become a trusted, timely source of information cited by media thousands of times, with mentions spanning from The New York Times to Fox News and a vast range of outlets in between.

The Council has built on its crime trends research by convening two working groups—one that focused on developing a roadmap for reducing community gun violence and another that forged consensus on needed improvements in the nation's capacity to produce timely, accurate, and complete crime data. In 2021, CCJ established the Violent Crime Working Group[16] in response to the rapid rise of violent crime in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The group, comprising leaders from across community organizations, law enforcement, public health, and academia, produced a menu of short-term anti-violence measures that could save lives immediately, without the need for legislation and excessive expenditures. Many jurisdictions used the group's Ten Essential Actions[17] as a framework for their violence reduction efforts. And in December 2023, the U.S. Department of Justice released the *Violent Crime Reduction Roadmap[18]* based explicitly on the blueprint, noting "the breadth of experience of the working group and the widespread uptake of its final report."

A few years later, CCJ took its crime analysis work a step further by convening a Crime Trends Working Group.[19] With the FBI's release of national crime data lagging by many months, government and community leaders struggle to spot emerging crime issues and deploy appropriate interventions, a problem that has become more serious in recent years as the internet, social media, and other technologies have fostered the rapid spread of new types of crime. In July 2024, the working group released a set of recommendations, including a proposal calling on the federal government to assume the essential function of producing timely national crime data. In October of that year, the FBI announced it would soon begin publishing monthly reports.

From Responding to Crises to Raising Awareness

In its earliest years, CCJ tackled issues that were front and center in the national conversation about criminal justice—the impacts of COVID-19, policing reform, and rising crime rates. More recently, with its established credibility as a fact-checker and a convener, the Council has shifted its spotlight to issues and populations that have traditionally been under-researched and overlooked, including military veterans and women in the system, and to emerging topics such as AI.

Launched in August 2022, the Veterans Justice Commission,[20] led by former U.S. Defense Secretary and U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel (chair) and former Defense Secretary and White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta, developed three sets of findings and recommendations to reduce the number of veterans who land in prison or jail. Impacts of the group's research and recommendations are now surfacing in Washington and state capitals. The commission created a framework for diverting veterans from prosecution and incarceration that was adopted as model policy (the "Veterans Justice Act"[21]) by an influential group of state legislators; it was enacted in Nebraska and is under consideration in a dozen other states. In January, Congress approved $4 million to establish a National Center for Veterans Justice, as recommended by the commission, funding that is part of the Department of Justice budget.

In 2024, the Council convened the Women's Justice Commission,[22] a multi-year research, policy and communications initiative to document and raise awareness on the unique challenges facing women in the justice system, and build consensus for evidence-based reforms that enhance safety, health, and justice. Led by former U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch (chair) and Oklahoma First Lady Sarah Stitt (senior adviser), the project spans the full scope of the adult justice system—from arrest and diversion through prosecution, incarceration, release, and community supervision—with a particular focus on trauma-informed and gender-responsive prevention and intervention strategies. The commission released its first package of policy recommendations[23] in 2025, with guidance for the field on how to stem the flow of women into the justice system. The group also published a review[24] of community-led responses to women in behavioral health, domestic violence, and housing crises and a research brief[25] examining how drug use patterns differ for people with recent justice system involvement.

Most recently, with AI capabilities advancing at a rapid pace, CCJ created the Task Force on Artificial Intelligence[26] to develop

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A new report from the Council on Criminal Justice shows most major crime categories in Chicago are down below pre-pandemic levels, including homicides and sexual assaults.

By Anna Savchenko | WBEZ | Jul 25, 2025, 1:18pm MDT

FOX NEWS media

OPINION

America's crime drop isn't a coincidence. Trump's immigration policies are working

New report shows double-digit drops in homicides, robberies and carjackings as ICE arrests surge nationwide

OPINION By **Brett L. Tolman** , **Ja'Ron K. Smith** · Fox News

The Washington Post

Opinion
E.J. Dionne Jr.

The good news about murder

Homicides are way down. What happened, what we can learn and how progressives became crime fighters.

Today at 6:00 a.m. EDT

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evidence-based recommendations for its effective and responsible use in the criminal justice system. Chaired by former Texas Chief Justice Nathan Hecht, the task force in 2025 released a framework of five key principles[27] to guide the responsible integration of AI across law enforcement, courts, and corrections. This year, the task force plans to translate its governance principles into operationalized standards for the procurement and deployment of AI tools and identify best practices for implementing those standards for use by agency leaders, policymakers, and community groups. Through webinars, policy briefings, conference presentations, and other dissemination efforts, the task force will equip jurisdictions nationwide with credible guidance for navigating AI adoption in ways that enhance both safety and justice.

Building Common Ground

Before the Council's establishment, its founders engaged in a good deal of word-smithing as they considered how best to define the organization's purpose. In the end, they landed on this: "advance understanding of the criminal justice policy choices facing the nation and build consensus for solutions that enhance safety and justice for all." Six years have passed, and the evidence indicates that the Council has held fast to that mission while becoming a trusted voice and crucial partner for policymakers, the media, and other stakeholders. Looking ahead, the "consensus" piece of that defining statement feels more important than ever.

All CCJ reports footnoted in this article are freely available at https://counciloncj.org/.

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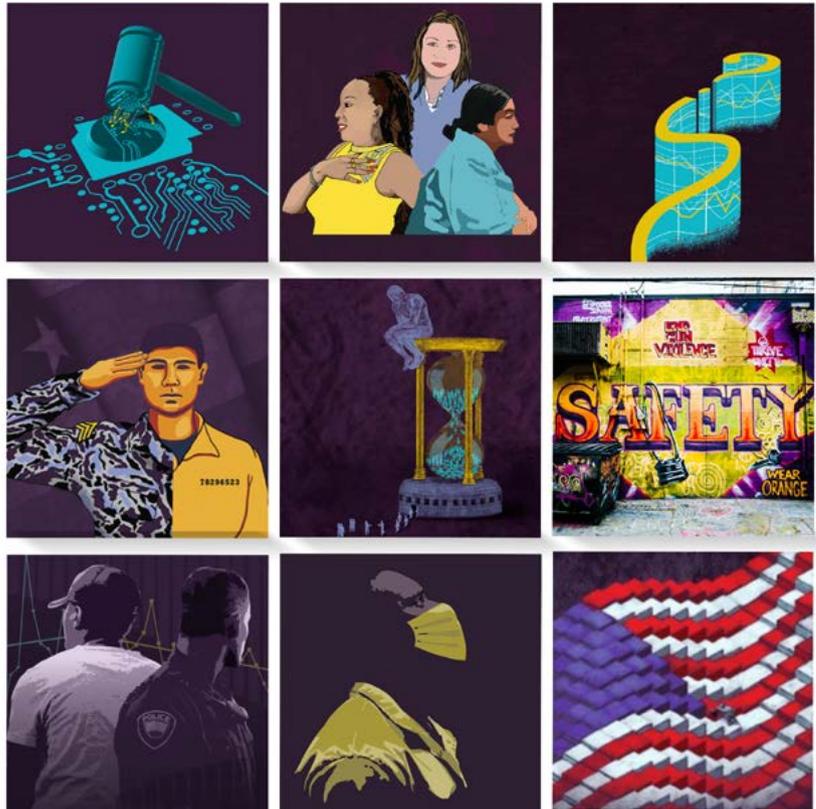
How Effective are Restorative Justice Programs and Practices for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System?

BY CATHERINE S. KIMBRELL, DAVID B. WILSON, AND AJIMAH OLAGHERE

Catherine Kimbrell   David Wilson   Ajimah Olaghere

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Restorative Justice (RJ) programs and practices are increasingly popular, particularly for addressing youth problem behaviors and conflicts. This trend is highlighted in the expansion of RJ in state laws, from 79 in 2009 to 229 in 2019.[1] As of 2026, 45 states have enacted laws supporting RJ, with 35 states explicitly integrating RJ into their official juvenile justice statutes.[2] For those unfamiliar, RJ programs are based on three fundamental principles: repairing harm, stakeholder involvement (e.g., the victim and the offender), and transforming the community's role in responding to criminal violations.[3]

RJ principles can be implemented in different ways; there is no single RJ program and they may adhere to one or two of these principles rather than all three. One example of an RJ program used in the juvenile justice field is victim-offender mediation. The typical version of this involves a meeting or conference between a victim and a responsible individual, often referred to as the 'offender,' following a fight or altercation. Once both parties agree to participate and have separate preparation meetings, they meet face-to-face with a mediator to discuss what happened, how it affected the victim, and opportunities for the offender to make amends. Other examples of juvenile justice practices that involve RJ principles include family group conferencing, victim impact panels/reparative boards, arbitration, teen courts, and restitution. Each of these aligns with at least one of the foundational principles of RJ. For example, restitution, a common criminal justice sanction, aims to repair the harm inflicted by the offender. RJ can also be used for more (or less) serious crimes and can involve police or community members. In other words, there is significant variation in how RJ is applied.

But how effective are RJ programs for youth involved in the juvenile justice system? Do these programs help to reduce problem behaviors and increase satisfaction with the administration of justice for both victims and offenders?

The Research Evidence on Restorative Justice Programs

To address these questions, we conducted a systematic review of known studies of restorative justice programs for youth in 2017 as part of a project funded by the US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency (OJJDP).[4] After our first review, however, RJ programs and evaluations continued to increase in popularity, prompting us to update our review in 2020.[5] Prior systematic reviews on this topic were limited in scope, focusing on a single program or practice. Furthermore, those reviews employed outdated statistical methods to summarize findings across studies. They also reached conflicting conclusions about the effectiveness of RJ. Given the definitional ambiguity of RJ, we conducted a broad systematic review of the evidence encompassing all RJ programs and practices for youth, defined as individuals 18 years old or younger.

In reviewing the evaluation research on RJ, we aimed to understand two issues: (1) How effective are RJ programs for youth in reducing future delinquent behavior and addressing other non-delinquency outcomes for victims and youth participants? (2) What is the relative effectiveness of different RJ program types and program components? Using rigorous systematic review and meta-analytic approaches,[6] we searched across 28 bibliographic databases and other sources for all relevant studies. Our search period ended in December of 2020. To be included, a study had to test the effectiveness of a juvenile justice program that had an RJ component. We included a broad range of programs. At one end were programs that fully embraced RJ principles, such as victim-offender mediation. At the other end were programs or practices that implement one or more RJ

feature (e.g., restitution). In other words, we threw a wide net to comprehensively evaluate RJ programs and practices for youth.

We did not include programs that took place in schools, given the significant differences between school-based interventions and programs addressing youth involved in the juvenile justice system. An eligible study's evaluation design had to be either a randomized controlled trial (i.e., youth randomly assigned to RJ or a comparison condition) or a non-randomized study that included an RJ and a comparison condition. We extracted findings related to both delinquency (e.g., arrest) and non-delinquency victim and responsible party outcomes (e.g., satisfaction). These findings were then quantitatively analyzed using state-of-the-art statistical methods, providing a comprehensive understanding of the impact of RJ programs.

In total, 57 studies, comprising 631 findings, met our inclusion criteria for the review. Most RJ studies were conducted in the United States (77%). The remaining studies came from Australia, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Canada. Two-thirds (38) of these studies were conducted between 2000 and 2020. In terms of research design, most studies were quasi-experimental (77%), with 42% classified as high-quality and 35% as low-quality. Finally, roughly a quarter (23%) of the studies used a random assignment design. Youth included in these studies had to have had some contact with the juvenile justice system, either as a diverted youth (i.e., no formal processing) or as an adjudicated youth (i.e., formally processed). Regarding program settings, we found that most RJ conditions occurred in the community (64%), whereas comparison conditions were mostly juvenile justice-based (80%).

Victim-offender conferencing was the most common RJ program type evaluated across these studies, accounting for slightly more than a third (37%). Victim-offender conferencing included programs such as victim-offender mediation, victim-offender dialogue, and victim-offender reconciliation, which we grouped together because of their similar program characteristics. The next most common type of RJ was hybrid/other program (20%). The hybrid category of programs included a combination of RJ programs or practices (e.g., a program that provided both victim-offender conferencing and community justice boards) or programs that did not neatly fit into any of the clearly defined RJ program categories. Other RJ program groups included restitution, teen/youth courts, family group conferencing, arbitration/mediation, and impact panels/reparative boards. For the comparison groups, court was the most common treatment element (56%), followed by probation (31%) and diversion (pre-court) (21%).

A majority of the programs studied (71%) included a facilitator or mediator, as well as a face-to-face meeting (69%), restitution (64%), the presence of a victim (59%), restorative agreements (57%), and community service (57%). Other common elements found in RJ programs included family involvement (49%), pre-conference mediation (33%), community involvement (33%), and an apology (27%).

Is Restorative Justice Effective for Youth?

We found a promising pattern of evidence that RJ programs seem to modestly reduce recidivism. Unfortunately, the more rigorous studies (i.e., random assignment studies) had a smaller average effect on reducing recidivism. This finding for the more rigorous designs raises the possibility that RJ programs have no appreciable impact on reducing delinquency. In other words, the delinquency outcome is promising; however, the effect may be small or zero.

When examining specific RJ programs, we identified two that showed promise in reducing future delinquency: victim-offender conferencing and hybrid/other programs. Victim-offender conferencing programs had a small-to-moderate effect, while the hybrid/other group showed a moderate-to-large effect. The family group

A reenactment of a victim-offender mediation process.

conference and victim impact panel/reparative board group showed potential promise, but the evidence was more limited, with only one high-quality quasi-experimental evaluation for each.

We also categorized the RJ components of the studies reviewed (e.g., apology). The goal of this was to examine whether specific components account for effectiveness. Unfortunately, the results failed to identify any particular component that produced larger positive effects than any other component. Thus, we still cannot say which specific RJ component or components are driving the reductions in recidivism when they work.

While the findings on RJ reducing delinquency are promising, they are far from definitive. In contrast, we can draw stronger conclusions regarding the non-delinquency outcomes, particularly for victim participants. We found large effects of RJ on fairness outcomes for both victims and responsible parties. We also found large effects for the victim satisfaction outcome. In fact, satisfaction for victims was the largest average effect in our meta-analysis.

Takeaways and Future Directions for RJ

We highlight four specific takeaways from this systematic review of RJ programs and practices for youth. First, we find overall promising results for RJ programs and practices for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Second, we see mixed support for specific RJ programs, with our most promising results being for victim-offender conferencing and hybrid/other programs. The impact on delinquency for the other programs evaluated is less promising; additional research is needed. We believe that future research should delve deeper into the 'hybrid/other' group of programs that were so promising. Research should better describe the elements of hybrid programs that appear to make them successful at reducing future delinquency.

For our third takeaway, better descriptions of RJ programs and practices are needed, including details on the elements that make up the programs. We found that many studies did a poor job of describing the actual implementation of the program. Better descriptions of RJ programs will help improve what we can do meta-analytically, allowing research synthesis to better inform policy and practice. This takeaway is particularly important when reflecting on the lack of definitional boundaries observed in the implementation of many RJ programs, as previously discussed. Therefore, a better understanding of the elements that make RJ programs effective (or ineffective) is particularly valuable.

Our fourth and final takeaway is that our meta-analysis found the strongest support for the non-delinquency outcomes for victim and responsible party participants. In other words, we found that reducing delinquency might not be the main benefit of these programs. Taken together, our work shows that RJ may reduce youth delinquency but has the advantage over traditional juvenile justice processing of being perceived as fair by both victims and youth participants, and of better satisfying victims than traditional juvenile justice options.

RJ programs are a popular and growing practice within the juvenile justice system. They are also expanding beyond the justice system, with schools adapting RJ to address problem behaviors.[7] Additional rigorous studies on RJ for youth conducted since our meta-analysis have continued to show promising results in favor of RJ,[8, 9] and these studies will be incorporated in future updates of our meta-analysis. For the time being, our review provides practitioners and policymakers interested in implementing RJ with the most up-to-date overview of research on RJ's effectiveness for youth and victims involved in the juvenile justice system and supports its continued use.

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The Santa Clara Blueprint: A Data-Driven Case for Early Representation

BY CHARLES HENDRICKSON AND JOHANNA LACOE

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Charles Hendrickson   Johanna Lacoe

Historically, pre-trial incarceration has been a tale of the haves and the have-nots. Imagine two people arrested on the same night. The first person has financial means; they call their lawyer after being booked into custody, promptly access legal advice, and post bail to gain freedom without delay. Their privately retained lawyer advocates with the district attorney for lowered charges or a non-filing *before* arraignment. That person quickly returns to their normal life.

The second person lacks the resources to afford a private attorney or bail. They might sit in jail for 48 hours or more without access to counsel. At arraignment, they meet their attorney for the first time. The attorney is also representing 25 or more people during that same court session and has minimal information about the client before the client enters the courtroom. During a brief in-court conversation, the attorney provides limited legal advice and gathers information about the person's community ties. After gleaning what information the attorney can and without an opportunity to follow up, the attorney presents the information to the arraignment judge who makes an all-important decision about whether to release the client pending trial.

Without early representation, this is the reality of pretrial justice for the indigent. Early advocacy protects against harms that can happen after even brief periods of incarceration, such as loss of stable employment, housing, and the ability to support dependent family members. The scale of need is large: in Santa Clara County, 85% of adults charged with a crime use a public defender and the office represents roughly 9,000 felony cases per year. To close this gap, the Santa Clara County Public Defender's Office (SCCPDO) is providing services to clients that more closely mimic those received by people who can afford a private lawyer.

The Pre-Arraignment Representation and Review Unit

The Santa Clara Public Defender's Pre-Arraignment Representation and Review (PARR) unit was formed, in part, to meet the standard of care set by the landmark California case, *In re Humphrey* (2018 Court of Appeal; 2021 Supreme Court). The *Humphrey* court found that it is unconstitutional to detain someone pretrial solely because they can't afford bail. Every person held in-custody pending trial has the right to an "individualized determination" regarding their ability to pay bail and whether any less restrictive alternatives to jail are appropriate for them.

The PARR team drew inspiration from the San Francisco Public Defender's Office Pre-Trial Release Unit (PRU), which launched in 2017. Early data from the San Francisco model showed promising results, including a marked increase in release rates at arraignment and a reduction in the total number of days clients spent detained. Santa Clara County sought to refine this model further, emphasizing deep verification of community ties and proactive, pre-arraignment advocacy directly with the District Attorney's office.

In its pilot phase, the PARR unit was a lean operation. It was staffed by two full-time attorneys—one supported by a grant from Civil Rights Corps, a non-profit dedicated to challenging systemic injustices, and another funded by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors alongside a paralegal and a social worker. PARR team members begin conversations with public defender clients within the first 48 hours of incarceration. In addition to learning about the circumstances of the client's arrest, they drill down on the person's community ties, employment, and overall life circumstances. This allows PARR attorneys to advocate robustly for clients at the outset of the criminal process, often before charges have been filed. After PARR team members meet clients, they communicate with clients' families and employers, conduct exigent investigation, connect clients with community resources, and advocate to the arraignment judge. Studies show that incarceration for as little as 36-72 hours can profoundly impact a person's life in many ways.[1]

While public defense work is often adversarial, the PARR pilot enjoyed a unique level of systemic support. The District Attorney's

Office and the Office of Pretrial Services both recognized the value of the program. There was a growing consensus within the county's legal infrastructure that supportive intervention at the earliest possible time would not only lead to fairer outcomes but also safer and more stable custodial releases.
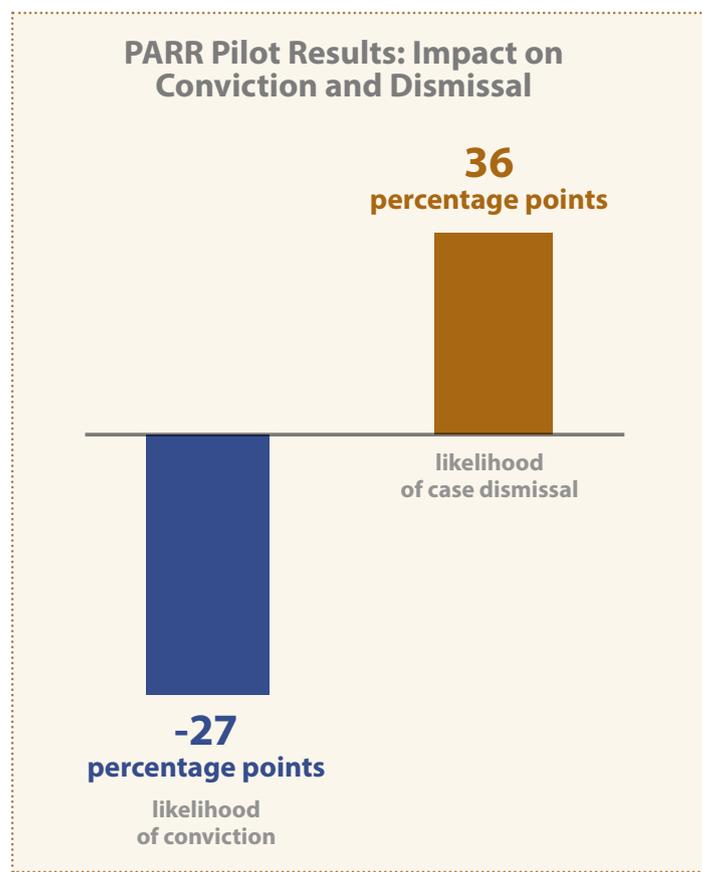
Intervention with Intention

From the beginning, the SCCPDO was interested in evaluating PARR to learn whether the model was as effective as they hoped, and to inform best practice in public defense across the state and beyond. In the summer of 2019, the SCCPDO met with researchers from the California Policy Lab (CPL) at UC Berkeley to discuss the possibility of a study. Because the SCCPDO involved researchers so early— prior to the start of the intervention—CPL was able to collaborate on a research design that met the implementation needs of the SCCPDO and allowed for a strong impact study. Still, those initial conversations were just that—conversations—where the research team generated design ideas, listened to the SCCPDO staff discuss why they were or were not feasible, and tried again.

Everyone understood that random assignment to PARR services was critical for generating the highest quality evidence of program impact. Without random assignment, the people who received PARR services were likely to differ from those who did not, making a comparison of outcomes between the groups problematic. But how to generate that randomization during a fast-paced, often chaotic booking process was less clear. Given the staffing constraints of the SCCPDO during the pilot period—only two full-time attorneys would be able to go into the jail to conduct interviews—it became clear that randomizing the day that PARR services were provided was more feasible than randomizing individual clients at booking. The research team designed a calendar denoting one day per week when PARR services would be provided to people booked into jail. To generate balanced treatment and control groups, the PARR day of the week was rotated across weeks. With the schedule in hand, the SCCPDO team began implementing PARR at the start of January 2020.

Did it Work?

The PARR pilot operated from January 2020 to March 2020, when the jails were closed to visitors due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing shelter-in-place orders. While the study was originally planned to extend well beyond that point, the circumstances required a pivot. During the pilot period, PARR clients met with an attorney shortly after their arrest, usually within 48 hours. In comparison, people who were booked on non-PARR days met with a public defender for the first time at their arraignment (up to five days after arrest) or tried to retain private counsel. Using statistical methods to identify the causal effect of PARR,[2] the researchers found that PARR participants spent less time in jail (by about 23 fewer days pre- and post-trial) relative to comparable people who did not receive PARR.

PARR Pilot Results: Impact on Conviction and Dismissal

36 **percentage points**

likelihood of case dismissal

-27 **percentage points**

likelihood of conviction

In addition, PARR participants were more than twice as likely to have their cases dismissed (avoiding a criminal conviction) and were far less likely to be convicted in the case.

The data confirmed what many public defenders had long suspected: early representation improves the attorney-client relationship and the quality of advocacy at the first court appearance. However, the pilot also highlighted areas for improvement. The SCCPDO identified several goals that were not fully realized during the initial run, such as:

- Developing a routine protocol for transmitting client information to "night" or "duty" judges who make release decisions before the formal arraignment.

- Establishing consistent outreach to parole and probation officers who often place "holds" on clients following a new arrest, preventing their release regardless of the judge's decision.

- Improving communication with prosecutors during the initial charging phase.

Using Evidence to Drive Policy

The SCCPDO used the findings to secure increased county funding to expand PARR to serve a larger population of eligible clients. At its peak, the team received Board of Supervisors funding for three

attorneys, one paralegal, an investigator, and a social worker to engage more clients prior to arraignment. The office also leveraged other resources and reorganized internally to further expand the team to eight lawyers and two paralegals. In March of 2024, the Public Safety and Justice Committee of the Board of Supervisors asked the public defender: "What additional resources are needed to provide PARR services to all in-custody clients pending arraignment?" The response identified a need for five additional attorneys and one additional social worker.

Additionally, SCCPDO has engaged in extensive outreach to public defender offices across California and beyond, sharing lessons learned to support the development of similar early representation programs. The efforts have included collaboration with the Office of the State Public Defender (OSPD), Los Angeles County, a consortium of Central California public defender offices, Santa Barbara County, San Diego County, Riverside County, and a convening of California's Chief Public Defenders. Early representation units in Santa Cruz, San Mateo, and Alameda Counties credit Santa Clara's success as motivation for their programs.

Recognizing the importance of early representation in promoting equitable access to defense services statewide, legislation was introduced in 2023 that would have required early representation services for all public defender clients in California. Although the bill did not advance due to state fiscal constraints, many policymakers have expressed interest in reviving the effort when the state's budget outlook improves.

Next Steps

As the field of early representation grows, the SCCPDO is looking to provide deeper, more specialized care. In addition to providing early representation for all incarcerated persons in California, Santa Clara would ideally expand the model to include consistent, routine communication with prosecutors making charging decisions, night or duty judges responsible for detention/release decisions prior to arraignment, parole and probation officers, and enhanced, tailored representation for clients experiencing mental illness. In the meantime, the SCCPDO and CPL are working together on a follow-up study of the scaled-up version of PARR that will consider longer-term recidivism effects of the program. This study will be critical—as the equal justice benefits of PARR are clear, the effects of higher release rates on recidivism are not yet known.
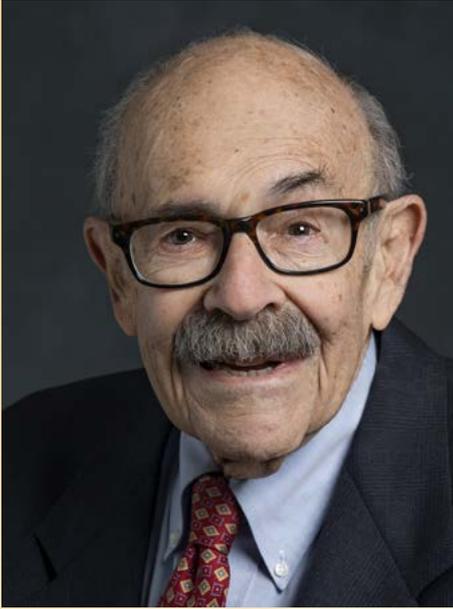
These goals will be challenged by state and local budget cuts. Reductions in the last two budget cycles have resulted in reductions of the PARR team. Demonstrating whether the program generates cost savings, through reductions in jail days and improvements in case processing efficiency, may help to justify PARR's funding, even in tight fiscal years.

Over the longer term, however, once Santa Clara County emerges from its current budget crisis, the Board of Supervisors has expressed strong enthusiasm for the program and intends to fund it. This support is grounded in PARR's demonstrated success, endorsement from the District Attorney's Office, Office of Pretrial Services, Superior Court judges, and the robust evidentiary foundation developed by the California Policy Lab.

Endnotes

1   A few days in jail can lead to a loss of employment (Dobbie, W., Goldin, J., & Yang, C. S. (2018). The effects of pre-trial detention on conviction, future crime, and employment: Evidence from randomly assigned judges. *American Economic Review, 108*(2), 201-240), stable housing (Heaton, P., Mayson, S., & Stevenson, M. (2017). The downstream consequences of misdemeanor pretrial detention. *Stanford Law Review., 69*, 711), and increases the likelihood of conviction and incarceration (Koppel, S., Bergin, T., Ropac, R., Randolph, I., & Joseph, H. (2024). Examining the causal effect of pretrial detention on case outcomes: a judge fixed effect instrumental variable approach. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 20*(2), 439-456).

2   For more details, see the full study: https://capolicylab.org/providing-early-legal-counsel-reduces-jail-time-and-improves-case-outcomes/

In Memoriam
Alfred Blumstein

BY DANIEL S. NAGIN

Al Blumstein, J. Erik Jonsson University Professor of Urban Systems and Operations Research emeritus at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), died on January 13 at 95. He leaves behind his wife, Dolores, three daughters, Diane, Ellen, and Lisa, and many grandchildren.

Al's academic training was distant from criminology. He received his undergraduate degree in engineering and his PhD in operations research. Before joining the CMU faculty in 1969, a position he held for his entire career, Al worked for the Institute for Defense Analysis. From that position, he served as a key staff member to President Lyndon B. Johnson's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. As part of his Commission work, Al coined the now ubiquitous term "criminal justice system" to describe his graph of the flow of arrestees possibly being charged to possibly being convicted, and on to the various possibilities for sanction.

His work on the Commission was the outset of his half-century-long career in criminology, which culminated in being awarded the discipline's two most prestigious honors: the Sutherland Award in 1987 and the Stockholm Prize in Criminology in 2007. In 1992, he was elected the President of the American Society of Criminology. Al also lived a parallel academic life with INFORMS, operation research's lead professional organization, where he was elected Fellow and served as President. His combined contributions to criminology and operations research won him election to the National Academy of Engineering in 1988.

It is no exaggeration to say that Al was among the key players who shaped criminology into what it is today. Following his early seminal work on modeling the criminal justice system, he was chair of three influential National Academy of Science consensus panels and was co-editor of their reports: *Deterrence and Incapacitation: Estimating the Effects of Criminal Sanctions on Crime Rates* (1978), *Research on Sentencing: The Search for Reform* (1983), and *Criminal Careers and "Career Criminals"* (1986). He was also a leading scholar documenting and explaining the decades-long decline in the crime rate that began in the early 1990s. As part of this effort, he co-edited with Joel Wallman the widely cited volume *The Crime Drop in America* (2000).

Beyond these personal accomplishments, Al was enormously generous with his time and encouragement in advancing the careers of young scholars. There are too many to single out, but the list includes me—Al was my dissertation advisor and longtime collaborator. His support for others was most visibly carried out in his direction of the National Consortium for Violence Research (NCOVR), which he led from 1996 to 2008. His generosity was characteristic throughout his career. Due to the combination of his own scholarly accomplishment and—even more importantly—his generosity and goodwill, his passing is mourned by many. His was a life well lived indeed.

Hot Off the Press
Select 2025-2026 Publications by CEBCP Faculty

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