**Juvenile Delinquents: Resocialization and Horses**

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EDUC 245: Human Growth and Development

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April 28, 2020

**Abstract**

Juvenile delinquency is an ever present problem throughout society. There are multiple causes and issues surrounding juvenile delinquency, ranging from problems in the juvenile justice system to the individual complications with the juveniles. Previous approaches to solving this issue have not all worked out. Traditional, tough programs, such as boot camps, that are meant to deter crime, are less effective than originally thought. A holistic, rehabilitative focus can do a great deal more good in helping these youths. The use of horses in the resocialization process can add even more to the healing process.

*Keywords:* juveniles, delinquency, resocialization, horses

**Juvenile Delinquents: Resocialization and Horses**

What is a juvenile delinquent and why should anyone care? Juvenile delinquents have been an issue from as far back as the 1880s, where over a fifth of inmates in the United States prisons were males who ranged from the ages of 13 to 20 (Morrison, 1969). Juvenile delinquency is not always a one-time occurrence. In fact, recidivism, the issue of being arrested again after an initial offence, has become a more prevalent problem. Many programs have been put into place in attempt to prevent recidivism and delinquency; however, the more traditional boot camp structured programs have actually been proven to be more harmful than beneficial (Paretta, 2018). If juvenile delinquency and recidivism are such serious problems, and if the traditional programs are not advantageous in solving these problems, what can be done to help?

**Background**

While the majority of people might not ever visit a prison or even see juvenile delinquents, that does not make them any less important. Juvenile delinquency is an ever present, very important topic, as it impacts society as a whole. Juveniles are the next generation. Their development and well-being should be a primary concern for societies.

As traditional tough programs do not benefit these juveniles, another approach must be made. General rehabilitation programs are more effective than the tougher programs. “Programs that promote individual rehabilitation, skills training, community settings, mentoring and school success are preferable to others” (Paretta, 2018, p.144). My research question is as follows: How do horses impact the resocialization of juvenile delinquents?

**Search Criteria**

In doing my research, I made sure to use the keywords “juvenile delinquency,” “recidivism,” and “rehabilitation.” I also used “juvenile delinquency + horses” to find more research specific to my question. In regards to my databases, I mainly used Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Test (1968-present) and SocINDEX, focusing on the sociology and criminal justice resources. I knew I needed to find information on juvenile delinquents and the issues involved, as well as articles that looked into ways to help these people. I excluded articles that seemed to be focused more on the different statistics of who is a juvenile delinquent, as well as more specific cases in different areas around the world. I wanted a couple articles outlining the problems that juvenile delinquency could cause as well as the importance of solving this issue. Other than that, I focused on the different ways people have tried to solve juvenile delinquency.

**Literature Review**

The majority of this research looked generally at juvenile delinquency, as well as recidivism, and how to prevent it. In an article by Morrison, she looked at the seriousness of juvenile delinquency, and the issues surrounding it. Because of their age, juveniles are often arrested for crimes that adults traditionally would not have been arrested for. Schools are also generally held as responsible for failing kids, leading those kids to commit crimes. Furthermore, the population of juvenile delinquents outnumbers the available workers who can help to deal with this societal issue. Kids are often just put into institutions because there is nowhere else to put them (Morrison, 1969). Another key issue is recidivism. After these delinquents are arrested one time, recidivism, being arrested a second time, becomes a new issue. One article looked into how neglect can be a leading factor for recidivism (Ryan, Williams, & Courtney, 2013); while another conducted a study to test a hypothesis that questioned the positive and negative influences of family members and peers, and how these influences impacted the juveniles’ chance for offending acts (Walters, 2018). In response to these offenses, Paretta looked at older 1990s programs that were meant to curb delinquency. He dubbed them “get tough” programs, as they were often programs such as boot camps. These such programs were actually proven to increase delinquency, and rehabilitation programs were seen to be more effective in reducing delinquency (Paretta, 2018). The White Buffalo Youth Inhalant Treatment Centre and the Cartier Equine Learning Center in Canada conducted a study with young girls who suffered from substance abuse to test the effectiveness of Equine Assisted Learning. They used a bio-psycho-social-spiritual framework, in a healing community environment. This study proved the effectiveness of a rehabilitation approach (Adams et al., 2015). Moreau works with young capital offenders by using equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EEP) and Erik Erickson’s psychosocial theory. This EEP program takes each of Erickson’s eight stages of development and, in eight weeks, reestablishes the positive side of each stage (Moreau, 2001).

**Delinquency**

Juvenile delinquency is easy to misinterpret and misjudge. The word “delinquency” may cause many people to bristle, but in reality, everyone has some form of delinquency, it is just a matter of how much. Misbehavior is often mistaken for crime, which is why juveniles are often arrested for acts adults may traditionally be let off for. The issue in this is that the standards for what constitutes a delinquent act and what constitutes a juvenile varies from state to state, as no one can seem to find clear, set lines (Morrison, 1969). Throughout schooling systems, there has been a trend towards a greater focus on fundamentals, which has added stresses on students to succeed; they have more to live up to with each consecutive generation as standards are being constantly raised (Feldman, 2016).

***Causes in Juvenile Delinquency***

Many studies have been done to ascertain the causes of delinquency in youths. According to Morrison (1969), the role of the school is highly important in developing law-following children. Schools are increasingly failing, especially when it comes to junior high students. This is the age when students feel they cannot live up to society’s standards, and they begin dropping out of school and sometimes becoming delinquents. In the majority of juvenile delinquency cases, a breakdown in family structures was linked to these cases.

In a study done by Walters (2018), a hypothesis was formed concerning the impact of positive and negative influences on people from childhood to adolescence. The study was done as an interview, where participants were asked who had influenced them the most, for better or worse, between set ages in their childhood and adolescence. Parents, siblings, and peers were looked at in who did the influencing, and the parents and siblings were shown to have had a greater impact on the participants. The results of the study also concluded that the positive influences had more of an impact on people than the negative influences (Walters, 2018). As family members have the greatest impact, a lack of positive familial influences can undoubtedly be seen as a link to delinquency in juveniles.

**Issues with the Juvenile Justice System**

***Lack of Resources***

As this is clearly an issue, many people have tried different ways to solve this. According to Morrison (1969), there is a significant lack of juvenile correction officers, and those officers who are in detention homes lack the proper education needed to help these youths. As there is such a low number of personnel compared to the juveniles, it makes for slim pickings in the way of qualifications. Not only is there a lack in officers and personnel, but there is also an abundance in juvenile delinquents. Children are often just placed into institutions because there is nowhere else for them to go. The institutions are not meant to help the youths, but rather just to hold them. Along these lines, there is a significant lack of resources for those who are mentally or psychologically ill (Paretta, 2018). With all the institutions packed with juvenile delinquents, and with such a lack in personnel, there is nowhere else to put the youths who need more help.

***Recidivism***

Recidivism becomes a pressing concern when looking at juvenile delinquency. Once a youth has been arrested once, they run the risk of being arrested a second time. Many studies have shown that a large amount of criminal behavior is caused by repeat offenders. Further, when recidivism occurs, that means that society is failing to reform those criminals (Paretta, 2018).

Published in 2013, a study was conducted to test the association between neglect and recidivism. The study was meant to prove that youths who are neglected and show signs of delinquency are at the greatest risk for recidivism. To see what kind of abuses and neglect, if any, the participants had experienced, the researchers looked at the records of all the participants. Furthermore, the family, education, peers, alcohol and drug involvement, and individual attitudes and beliefs were all taken into account. In the results of this study, it was found that participants who were dually involved in both the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system reported more physical violence and parental drug use. These individuals were also at the highest risk of recidivism, and those who were arrested a second time were generally arrested shortly after their first arrest (Ryan et al., 2013).

**Causes for Recidivism.** When looking at what can cause recidivism, there are certain traits and events that could be taken into account. According to Paretta (2018), these are the most common things to look at: demographic factors, personal factors, first offense, time with the criminal justice system, whether the arrest lead to prosecution, types of sentences, whether the juvenile spent time in an adult incarceration facility, and the amount of time since the previous offenses. As these are all key factors to take into account when looking at recidivism, they should be taken into account when looking at how to reduce recidivism. Furthermore, it is essential that juvenile offenders are kept away from any environments or situations that may lead to further crimes. Environmental and institutional factors are imperative in keeping juveniles from falling down the path of delinquency again.

**Approaches to Solving**

***Failed Approach***

Another issue in juvenile justice systems is the programs put into place that are meant to prevent recidivism. During the 1990s, many states focused on “getting tough” programs, such as boot camps, wilderness programs, and scared straight programs. More recently however, there is concern that these are more detrimental than beneficial in preventing recidivism and crime. These “get tough” programs have proven to be counterproductive, and programs should instead focus on rehabilitation, skills training, community, and school success (Paretta, 2018).

***Community Responsibility***

While juvenile delinquency may not be something easily seen by the majority of the population, that does not diminish its prevalence and importance. Society wants good programs for these juveniles so that they can reintegrate back into their communities without causing more trouble. If the ultimate goal is for the child to be a part of the community, that automatically implies involvement from the community. It must then be the responsibility of the community to provide properly trained personnel and employment opportunities, and beneficial environmental and facility resources (Morrison, 1969).

**Findings**

**Horses in Resocialization**

In 2015, a study was published that had been done in Canada with the White Buffalo Youth Inhalant Treatment Centre and the Cartier Equine Learning Center to test the effectiveness of Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) on female youths who had misused volatile substances. The study utilized a bio-psycho-social-spiritual framework for healing. *Biological* healing is used to test the individuals’ physical well-being, *psychological* healing looks at mental status, *social* healing refers to relationships with others, and *spiritual* healing looks at the individuals’ inner beliefs. This was a case study, and the data was collected through interviews, recordings, field notes, and journals from the youths, the Cartier EAL program facilitators, and the White Buffalo staff. Through this program, the girls connected physically with the horses, learning about healthy and safe ways to touch a horse. Further, they learned about the anatomy of horses as well as people. Through their time outside with the horses, they were able to connect with nature and the land around them. Looking at the psychological category, some of the girls said that they were able to learn who they really were, as well as learning how to have self-esteem and self-worth. They learned how to be positive, and they also learned how to problem solve. Relationships with facilitators, a greater sense of communication with body language, communication with each other, the importance of new experience, and a positive change in behavior were the five main developments in the social category. In the spiritual category, the importance of spending time with the horse, the significance of the relationship with the horse, some more participation in cultural activities, and a more connectedness to their spirit and to God were all aspects that were seen after the program (Adams et al., 2015).

Moreau (2001) started a program working with young capital offenders through the use of equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EEP). Moreau looks at Eric Erickson’s psychosocial theory. According to Erickson, there are eight distinct stages of psychosocial development, starting at birth and going all the way until death. Each stage has a positive and a negative outcome, and those outcomes are only possible during the time of that stage. If someone ends up with the negative outcome during the first stage, Trust vs Mistrust, then there is no earning that trust back; the stage is over (Feldman, 2016). Moreau states that children who do not master these stages with the positive outcomes are left with primitive coping mechanisms and low self-esteem, which can lead to acting out, anger, and frustration. Those kids often do not have many normal, loving childhood memories. Through conscious and unconscious decisions, children learn that acting impulsively can either lead to the gratification of a need or it can elicit a response from a caregiver. This can also lead to risk-taking and hedonism. Power and control typically drive these types of actions, and they often lead to violence and murder. Texas Youth Commission facilities put youths through resocialization training where they relearn how to think and feel. Moreau takes this basic concept and uses EEP with a smaller number of people so the youths can open up more. EEP uses horsemanship skills to recreate the different stages in Erickson’s theory. This offers the youths a chance to relearn the social and emotional skills they lack. A key outcome of EEP is learning how to create bonds and attachments, something that is hard for offending youths. Through the creation of bonds with horses, these juveniles can then learn to translate those processes to human relationships. With the help of a therapist, the youths learn trust, compassion, and empathy, while also learning to help and accept help from others. Finally, Moreau outlines an eight-week plan, following the first five stages of Erickson’s theory, in which the juveniles would learn how to overcome their past experiences (Moreau, 2001).

***Benefits***

There is a plethora of different benefits when it comes to resocialization with horses. Learning how to trust, whether it is trusting oneself, the horses, or those who are trying to help, is one key benefit. During Moreau’s (2001) first stage or Trust vs. Mistrust, the youths learn how to address their fears, dealing with it in a better way than anger. Social benefits are also readily available. Horses can help the juveniles grow relationships and connect with the horses and with other people. Further, they can learn to be positive and how to problem-solve (Adams et al., 2015). Moreau’s (2001) next stage teaches autonomy. The youths learn how to get their own equipment, how to ride on their own, and how to communicate and cooperate with the horse. Next, Moreau dives into overcoming guilt and taking initiative. Participants of the program learn to move on and learn from the mistakes of their past. Subsequently, learning perseverance is involved in Moreau’s program. Learning to do something until it is right, and learning to overcome obstacles are two key skills learned during this stage. Moreau then works with the juveniles to gain a positive identity. After weeks of learning more about themselves, the youths can then apply these things to becoming who they want to be. Along these lines, the youths can gain self-esteem and self-worth as they learn who they are. Finally, they may get deeper in touch with their spiritual or cultural side (Adams et al., 2015).

***Drawbacks***

While there are clearly many benefits to resocialization with horses, there are inevitably some drawbacks as well. As mentioned earlier, there is a significant lack of resources (Morrison, 1969). With such a lack in this area and with such an overflow of delinquents, there are not enough opportunities for these juveniles to find programs with horses than can truly help them. Furthermore, there are some dangers involved in using horses for such a situation. “The more damaging and dangerous the activity, the more satisfying it is” (Moreau, 2001, n.p.). This quote refers to delinquent youths before they enter the program; however, horses are living, breathing, thousand pound animals, and they could pose some danger to the youths, despite the many precautions put into place. Further, if the youths feel afraid of the horses, they could be likely to react in anger and violence, thereby putting the horses in danger (Moreau, 2001).

**Future Research**

There are two key ideas that others could look at if they were to further this research. The first would be different methods for resocialization. How could dogs help with the resocialization of juvenile delinquents? What about giraffes? Or koalas? Or other animals? Horses can certainly have their pros and cons when looking at resocialization, but they are not the only animals out there. Is there something special about horses or just animals in general? Furthermore, there could be other forms of resocialization that do not involve animals that may work equally or even better than horses. The second area to continue researching in would be the people who are going through the resocialization. There are plenty of children that grow up in a terribly abusive home who never commit crimes but still need help. For example, someone like Genie, who was a victim of social isolation, may be able to benefit from the resocialization tactics involved with horses.

**Conclusion**

How do horses impact the resocialization of juvenile delinquents? Delinquency has been a serious issue for many, many years. Society often ignores these problems, hoping they will go away on their own; however, in order for juveniles to integrate back into communities and society, the community itself must help. With all the problems surrounding the juvenile justice system, from a lack of resources to recidivism, it is crucial that an appropriate response is made. Tough, boot camp programs are detrimental, so a softer, rehabilitation approach is necessary. Through the use of horses, this can be accomplished. While using horses to re-socialize juvenile delinquents is not going to be the only answer, it is clearly one that could greatly benefit the youth of today.

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