

Current violent juvenile treatment methods costly, ineffective, researcher finds

January 27 2011

In a time of shrinking budgets, one University of Missouri professor believes that the current approach to juvenile crime is much too expensive to continue – and he has the numbers to prove it.

Charles Borduin, a professor of psychological sciences in the MU College of Arts and Science finds that multisystemic therapy (MST) is more effective in the lives of troubled youth and costs less.

Borduin has pioneered the model for the treatment and prevention of serious mental health problems in children and adolescents throughout the course of his career. MST interventions involve the offender's entire family and community, as opposed to the current method of individual therapy, where the offender visits a therapist who offers feedback, support and encouragement for behavior change.

With the assistance of Steve Aos from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy and Stephanie Kliez, a psychological science graduate student, Borduin formulated a cost-benefit analysis based on 176 juvenile offenders. With factors such as re-arrest costs and for resources such as law enforcement and correctional facilities, Borduin found that MST cost nearly 10 times less than the current system.

"We wanted to know, what does MST save taxpayers and crime victims? We have demonstrated that the net cumulative benefit of providing MST to a single juvenile offender resulted in a savings of \$75,110 to \$199,374 throughout the course of almost 14 years," Borduin said. "To put it

another way, \$1 spent on MST provides \$9.51 to \$23.59 in savings to taxpayers and crime victims in the years ahead."

Borduin readily admits that MST is initially more expensive because of the extent of the therapy that takes place in the home, schools and community. MST works because the therapy takes into account different environmental causes for behavior, and as a result, participants are half as likely to be arrested again. The numbers are so convincing that the country of Norway has adopted the practice, and states like Ohio, Colorado, Connecticut and Pennsylvania are reforming their systems, according to Borduin.

"Most current treatments are based on the idea that the problem lies entirely within the child," Borduin said. "If you look at the scientific literature, it's not about the individual kid – it's about family problems, low household warmth, high levels of conflict, abuse, neglect, involvement with the wrong group of kids, school problems, and so on. The way we approach violent juvenile crime now is similar to taking a car with a noisy motor to a mechanic, and the mechanic just changes the tires. The sad part is that the vast majority of current treatments are not effective while being very costly."

Borduin hopes that by addressing the problem in monetary terms, he can influence decision-makers and ultimately help more children.

"As widely disseminated as MST is, it's only reaching a fraction of the kids who need it," Borduin said. "I'm sure there are people who are saying 'We're doing the best we can,' but are we really? The monetary costs and the re-arrest statistics don't lie."

More information: Borduin's findings, "Cost-Benefit Analysis of Multisystemic Therapy With Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders," was recently published in the *Journal of Family Psychology*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: Current violent juvenile treatment methods costly, ineffective, researcher finds (2011, January 27) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-01-current-violent-juvenile-treatment-methods.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.