

REVIEW PROTOCOL FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH TOPIC AREA

Highlights

- The objective of this review is to determine the quality of existing causal evidence of programs that aim to improve the employment, earnings, education, or recidivism outcomes of youth involved in the justice system. Examples include programs that divert youth from further justice system involvement, provide mentoring or other community-based supports, or facilitate successful reentry from juvenile incarceration.
- This topic area includes causal impact studies only.
- To identify this set of studies, CLEAR compiled studies identified for two other systematic reviews, as well as studies identified from additional research repositories. Therefore, this is not a systematic review.

Introduction

Youth who become involved in the juvenile justice system face challenges completing their education, getting a job, and earning a livable wage. Before their involvement with the system, youth may have struggled academically, lived in unstable homes, or have been exposed to neighborhood poverty and violence. As a result of these experiences, they may have limited expectations for their employability and career options. Once they have a juvenile record or have been incarcerated, they face additional barriers to resuming their education and securing employment, making later contact with the criminal justice system more likely.

At different points of contact with the juvenile justice system, nonprofit organizations or juvenile justice agencies develop and administer programs to provide (1) alternatives to probation, including intensive support and case management; (2) drug courts targeting treatment and services to youth with substance use disorders; (3) mentoring programs, which provide justice-involved youth with adult mentors; (4) reentry programs, which provide transition services for those reentering the community; and (5) teen courts, which are diversion programs for first-time offenders that allow youth to avoid the traditional juvenile court system.

The objective of this review is to determine the quality of existing causal evidence of programs that aim to improve employment, earnings, education, or recidivism outcomes of youth involved in the justice system. The primary outcomes of interest are employment-related, though the review included other outcomes as appropriate. The domains of interest include the following:

- **Employment**, including measures such as employment rate, tenure on the job, and consecutive months employed
- **Earnings**, including monthly, quarterly, or annual wages; hourly wages; and cumulative wages over the follow-up period

- **Education and/or training attainment and completion**, such as earning a high school diploma or GED, vocational certificate, or associate's degree, or completing a training program that does not necessarily result in a certificate

In addition to the labor-related outcomes, the reviews collected information on recidivism outcomes (Maltz, 1984).¹ Studies that focus solely on recidivism outcomes (and do not report employment, earnings, or education outcomes) were included in this review. The definition of recidivism can vary widely and can include multiple measures of contact with the justice system. For CLEAR, this outcome domain is described as:

- **Recidivism**, including measures of violations of probation or parole, arrests, convictions, probation, and incarceration

To be included in the review, recidivism measures must be based on administrative data. A combination of the above measures, such as “any new police contact,” could also be reported. Studies may also examine self-reported violent behavior or participation in delinquent activities. However, these are not common definitions of recidivism, which implies contact with the justice system, not simply participating in antisocial, delinquent, or criminal behavior. In addition, self-reported measures of such behaviors are generally unreliable. Therefore, these self-reported outcomes are not included in the review unless no administrative outcomes are available.

Evaluations of drug court programs may also report measures of substance use or abuse. We only report drug use based on drug testing, and do not report self-reported use (due to reliability concerns). For CLEAR, this outcome domain is described as:

- **Drug use or abuse**, including the number or percentage of failed drug tests, or binary indicators of having failed at least some number or percentage of drug tests

The frequency of drug testing need not be the same for the intervention and comparison groups. However, in the event that the frequency of drug testing between program and comparison groups differs, we also include a note such as the following in the considerations section of a profile when drug use is reported:

“The measure(s) of drug use reported in the study are based on results from drug tests. These results should be interpreted with caution given the higher frequency of drug testing of the treatment group during the study period.”

Eligibility Criteria

The CLEAR team used the following criteria to screen the identified studies to determine eligibility for review under this topic area:

¹ Maltz, M. D. (1984). *Recidivism*. Academic Press, Inc. For more information, see Durose, M. R., Cooper, A. D., & Snyder H. N. (2014). *Recidivism of prisoners released in 30 states in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010*. U.S. Department of Justice. www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rprts05p0510.pdf; and National Institute of Justice. (2008). *Measuring recidivism*. www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/Pages/measuring.aspx.

1. **Does it examine a program whose primary aim was to improve the employment, earnings, education, or recidivism outcomes of justice-involved youth (younger than age 25)?** Studies could have focused exclusively on justice-involved youth or included a subgroup analysis of justice-involved youth.
2. **Does it examine effectiveness?** To meet this criterion, the research must use quantitative methods to assess the effectiveness of a program, policy, strategy, or other intervention. This includes research using quantitative methods that authors claim identify a causal impact even if the study design did not support such claims.
3. **Does it examine an outcome of interest?** The research must examine impacts on employment, earnings, education or training attainment or completion, or recidivism.
4. **Was it conducted in a relevant time and place?** To be most relevant to practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders, the research must have been conducted in the United States (including the 50 states, the District of Columbia, territories, and tribal entities) and published during or after 2005.

The CLEAR team reviewed studies that met these criteria according to the CLEAR Causal Evidence Guidelines, Version 2.1. The full set of guidelines is available at <https://clear.dol.gov>.

Causal Evidence Guidelines Specific to the Topic Area

The causal evidence guidelines specify three possible ratings for reviewed studies: high, moderate, and low. A high rating means we are confident that the estimated effects are attributable to the intervention, and not to other factors. A moderate causal evidence rating indicates that there is evidence that the study establishes a causal relationship between the intervention being examined and the outcomes of interest, but other factors that were not included in the analysis might also affect the outcomes of interest. Designs that do not meet the guidelines receive a low causal evidence rating, which indicates that we cannot be confident that the estimated effects are attributable to the intervention being examined.

Attrition in randomized controlled trials (RCTs). The causal research in this topic area includes studies with both experimental and nonexperimental designs. CLEAR assesses the quality of evidence for RCTs using standards adapted from those of the Institute of Education Sciences' What Works Clearinghouse.² RCTs can receive a high causal evidence rating if there are no obvious confounding factors to the design and if the level of attrition is low. This topic area uses the conservative attrition standard, on the presumption that attrition in studies of programs for at-risk youth may be linked with their labor market outcomes. If CLEAR determines that an RCT cannot receive a high causal evidence rating, it uses the CLEAR nonexperimental causal evidence guidelines to review the study.

Control variables for nonexperimental designs. CLEAR causal evidence guidelines for nonexperimental studies were developed in consultation with a technical working group of methodological experts. The guidelines cover most nonexperimental designs, including fixed effects, difference-in-differences, instrumental variables, and regressions. Nonexperimental

² See <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/InsidetheWWC.aspx> for details.

designs and RCTs with high attrition can receive a moderate causal evidence rating if they include adequate controls and can demonstrate or adjust for anticipating the intervention and confounding factors. To meet the requirements for a moderate causal evidence rating, nonexperimental studies and RCTs with high attrition in this topic area must control for the following:

- Age
- Race/ethnicity
- Gender
- A pre-intervention measure of the employment, earnings, education, or recidivism outcome
 - For analyses of employment or earnings outcomes, studies must control for a baseline measure of any employment or earnings outcome.
 - For analyses of education or training outcomes, studies must control for highest level of education completed preintervention, dropout status, or previous enrollment in training or completion of a certificate.
 - For analyses of recidivism measures, studies must control for a baseline measure of court contacts, court involvement, or criminal history (prior arrests, convictions, or incarceration).
- Degree of disadvantage. Given the high likelihood that justice-involved youth come from disadvantaged households (Hawkins et al., 2000; Wu & Fuentes, 1998), regardless of their program status, CLEAR does **not** strictly require authors to statistically control for a measure of disadvantage for these reviews.³

Regression methods that incorporate a matching design, which uses statistical methods to create a comparison group that is as similar as possible to the group receiving the program, must match on each of the control variables listed above, or must include them as controls in the regression.

³ Hawkins, J. D., Herrenkohl, T. I., Farrington, D. P., Brewer, D., Catalano, R. F., Harachi, T. W., & Cothorn, L. (2000). *Predictors of youth violence*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs; Wu, B., & Fuentes, A. I. (1998). Juvenile justice processing: The entangled effects of race and urban poverty. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 49, 41–54. doi:10.1111/j.1755-6988.1998.tb00780.x

APPENDIX A: LITERATURE SEARCH

To identify studies for this protocol, CLEAR first compiled relevant studies originally identified during the Opportunities for Youth Topic Area review search, which systematically searched the literature to identify programs geared toward youth. This included keyword searches of Scopus, which covers 19,500 peer-reviewed journals, 400 trade publications, 360 book series, and articles in press from more than 3,850 journals. Unpublished research was identified by searching the Social Science Research Network, which contains abstracts on more than 464,100 scholarly working papers and forthcoming papers. See the Opportunities for Youth Topic Area protocol for more information on the parameters and search terms.

CLEAR then added relevant comparison group studies and randomized controlled trial studies identified by another systematic review for the Evaluation of Grants Serving Young Offenders project. The studies for this systematic review were identified by consolidating information from systematic reviews on drug courts (Mitchell et al., 2012), aftercare programs (James et al., 2013), prevention and intervention programs (Greenwood, 2008), programs for violent youth (Garrido & Morales, 2007), and formal processing programs (versus informal processing or diversion, Petrosino et al., 2010). Studies were included in the review if they met criteria based on date (published between 1986 and 2013), location (intervention in the United States), age group of participants (younger than 25), and design (using either a quasi-experimental design or randomized controlled trial).⁴

Lastly, in 2016, CLEAR searched and reviewed the studies available on two existing resources: crimesolutions.gov and the What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse. Studies that were found to meet the CLEAR criteria were reviewed under this protocol.

⁴ Mitchell, O., Wilson, D. B., Eggers, A., & MacKenzie, D. L. (2012). Assessing the effectiveness of drug courts on recidivism: A meta-analytic review of traditional and non-traditional drug courts. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 40*(1), 60–71; James, C., Stams, G. J., Asscher, J. J., & De Roo, A. K. (2013). Aftercare programs for reducing recidivism among juvenile and young adult offenders: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 33*(2), 263–274; Greenwood, P. (2008). Prevention and Intervention Programs for Juvenile Offenders. *The Future of Children, 18*, 185–210; Garrido, V., & Morales, L. A. (2007). Serious (violent or chronic) juvenile offenders: A systematic review of treatment effectiveness in secure corrections. *Campbell Systematic Reviews, 3*(1), 1–46; Petrosino, A., Petrosino, C., & Guckenberg, S. (2010). Formal system processing of juveniles: Effects on delinquency. *Campbell Systematic Reviews, 6*(1), 1–88.