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## Juvenile justice in Louisiana: an exploratory study of trends surrounding juvenile incarceration

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JUVENILE JUSTICE IN LOUISIANA:  
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TRENDS SURROUNDING JUVENILE  
INCARCERATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Social Work

in

The School of Social Work

by  
Sabrina Whitney  
B.S., Southern University Baton Rouge, 2010  
May 2012

In Loving Memory of

Reverend Fred L. Jones, Sr.

March 29, 1939- February 3, 2012

My Best Friend and Beloved Father

For I know, that you are in heaven smiling and giving praises  
for my accomplishments.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”* Proverbs 3:5-6 KJV

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the State of Louisiana, one of the major problems surrounding youth is juvenile delinquency. Several studies have been conducted regarding juvenile delinquency, however, actual research pertaining to recidivism among youth offenders who were later incarcerated as an adult vs. those who were not incarcerated as an adult are limited. For this study, chi-square analyses were conducted to analyze the association between six variables and recidivism. The age of first OJJ contact was the only variable that was not statistically significant. Such knowledge is crucial for research and policy formation at the local, state, and national levels for positive progression on this issue. Based on the chi-square analyses results, the researcher learned that majority of the independent variables (gender, race, supervision level, number of OJJ contacts, and gang affiliation) had a statistically significant relationship with recidivism.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Juvenile delinquency is a serious problem in today's society because of the massive number of youth incarcerated. As of 2008, it was reported that law enforcement agencies arrested approximately 2.1 million youth under 18 years of age (Puzzanchera, 2008). Such statistics are essential when researching as it enlightens the possibility of recidivism among this population. Recidivism, a result measure, involves continuous acts of insolent behavior that is classified as breaking the law and re-entry into the justice system (Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001). This seems to become a pattern, especially when risk factors and environmental needs are in place. Previous literature noted that criminal careers are typically established early in the adolescent years, meaning that recidivism could develop from this problem.

Before this study can be further discussed, the definition of a juvenile delinquent must be clearly defined. A juvenile delinquent is a person who has not yet reached the age of majority, and whose behavior has been labeled delinquent by a court (Bartol & Bartol, 1989). Definitions and age limits of juveniles vary by state; the maximum age is set at 14 years in some states and as high as 21 years in others. Juvenile delinquency may refer to violent or non-violent crimes committed by persons who are usually under the age of eighteen and still considered to be a minor (Bartol & Bartol, 1989). There is a continuing debate as to whether or not children should be held criminally responsible for his or her actions. Juveniles often commit crimes because of abandonment, social institutions, and peer pressure. Delinquency, failure to do what is required, negligence, or misdeed, may result from conflicts and pressures in an individual's home and community environment (Waegel, 1989). Delinquency is a contributing factor of crime which attracts the news media, law enforcement, and politicians. The purpose of this exploratory study

is to examine the relationship between youth that were incarcerated as juveniles and those who later returned to the adult prison system.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Brief History of the United States Juvenile Justice System**

The United States Juvenile Justice System has existed over 100 years and currently functions throughout every city and state in the courts. The initial establishment of America's juvenile justice system was to provide rehabilitation and treatment for juvenile offenders (Fox, 1996). However, at one time, children did not receive treatment services and were treated similar to adults. Children were placed in adult prisons to serve time for offenses that they committed (Hinton, Sims, Adams, & West, 2007; Zimring, 2000). Juveniles often encountered discipline for misbehavior from the courts, that was rather harsh and severe (Hinton et al., 2007; Pisciotta, 1982).

In the late 1800's, the restructuring of the juvenile justice system focused on laws and policies that were germane to juvenile offenders. The first approach of this reorganization came from reformers in New York City, who wanted to encourage treatment that focused on rehabilitation of juveniles (Adams, 2001). Research shows that the New York House of Refuge opened in 1824 and housed juveniles for rehabilitation and treatment (Fox, 1996). After this House of Refuge opened, other states such as Philadelphia built institutions primarily with similar ideologies of rehabilitation in 1828. Fox (1996) mentioned that adult correctional institutions were not disregarded for children and in some cases children were still sent there as a reminder of the offense. The House of Refuge generated controversy among people that indicated their ideas of youth punishment for committing offenses. Some people did agree that youth needed rehabilitation; yet they felt as though adult institutions would teach them a valuable lesson. Yet again, New York reformers argued that the penalties for children were cruel and

unreasonably insensible (Zimring, 2000). Their perspective enabled them to believe that a new juvenile court would not destroy children; rather it could allow them to learn from their mistakes.

Chicago, Illinois created the first juvenile court in 1899, through the Illinois Juvenile Court Act (Fox, 1996). The purpose of this act was to no longer place children into adult facilities, consider the best interest of the child, and validate agencies' role in child care (Fox, 1996). *Parens Patriae*, which is the power of the state to act and provide care on behalf of the child, played a vital role in the juvenile court proceedings (Hinton et al., 2007). *Parens Patriae* took the role of the child's parent awaiting adulthood or constructive behavior.

The juvenile justice system was created during "The Progressive Era", which was from 1900 to 1918 under the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt (Siegel & Senna, 2008). This era acted as an age of social modification for the United States. Americans saw changes in the child labor laws, reduction in exhausting work hours, growth in the women's suffrage movement, and social welfare benefits (Elrod & Ryder, 2011). In addition, juvenile court systems became aware that juveniles encountered mental health problems and additional services would be needed to prevent juveniles from re-entering the juvenile court (Hinton et al., 2007). Furthermore, the Progressive Era gave Americans hope that social and economic problems would improve and life would be completely different from the past. Hinton et al. (2007) explains this era as a moment of community transformation. Before the Progressive Era, children were housed with adult offenders as a method of discipline for offenses. It became evident that children had very different needs than adults. Children were viewed as individuals who needed special attention due to extensive child labor abuse and lack of parental guidance (Pisciotta, 1982). Therefore, child welfare reformers, such as Jane Addams, decided to address these issues by placing children into foster care facilities (Hinton et al., 2007). The idea of this social change was to

improve the conditions that children encountered and to ensure that other policy changes would proceed immediately.

Juveniles were not always given or informed of legal rights in the justice system. The United States decided that juveniles should have the same legal rights as adults under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution (Stansby, 1967). This decision occurred as a result of a landmark case entitled *In re Gault*, consisting of a fifteen (15) year old male being arrested and not given his legal rights. Important facts noted by Stansby (1967) are that the boy's parents were not informed of the arrest, alleged charges, and an attorney was not present. The boy was also unable to cross examine the alleged victim. According to Stansby (1967), Gerald Gault's parents made it well-known that they did not receive due process in their son's case and demanded that actions be taken to change this method of handling juvenile hearings. From this case, juveniles were granted due process and equality which included the right to have counsel present in court and during questioning, right to be notified of alleged charges in a reasonable timeframe, right to appeal and record and the right to cross-examine witness (Stansby, 1967).

In 1909, the White House hosted its first conference that focused on children. Many participants at this conference voiced concerns about issues relating to children. Several members suggested that an agency be established to oversee and address problems concerning children; this action took place three years later (Curtis, 1999). In an article titled *The Rise and Fall of the U. S. Children Bureau*, Carp (1997) wrote that the first federal agency that primarily addressed children's problems was the United States Children's Bureau, which was established in 1912. The purpose of this agency was to examine and deal with issues that were related to the well-being of children (Carp, 1997; Curtis, 1999). In addition, the agency was also responsible for increasing health among families, serving as a support system for needy families, and

providing safety for children that were abused (Carp, 1997). The U. S. Children's Bureau did an exemplary job with investigating and providing reports that led to a decrease in child mortality. The U.S. Children's Bureau continued to produce successful reports on findings; yet policy makers felt as though more work needed to be done. The next idea was for policy makers to formulate legislation that could further meet children's needs by funding programs through federal aid (Siegel & Senna, 2008).

The Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (JJDP) was eventually passed by Congress. The purpose of the JJDP Act was to implement "deinstitutionalization" among juveniles in the adult prison system and mandated that they be removed from adult correctional facilities (Siegel & Senna, 2008). Siegel and Senna (2008) noted that through this act, the federal government created the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to provide programs for youth and juvenile prevention. The current functions of OJJDP are similar to those of the past. OJJDP allocates grants to states in order to provide prevention programs to juveniles. OJJDP also evaluates the effectiveness of states to monitor program interventions and reduce juvenile crime. OJJDP seeks to provide preventive treatment to juveniles and their families that will build healthy relationships (Siegel & Senna, 2008). OJJDP continues to offer many resources that allow juveniles to receive preventive treatment that could prevent their escalation into adult criminality.

### **Brief History of the Louisiana Juvenile Justice System**

Segregation and racism have been prominent elements of the juvenile justice system. These racial barriers brought about separate but equal institutions and harsh treatments. Southern states were known for discrimination, racism, and inequality among African Americans and lower-class citizens. Louisiana engaged in discriminatory acts toward individuals. For

example, Louisiana Legislators opened its first State Reform School for Boys in the early 1900's. This institution was only used to accommodate white male delinquents. Approximately two decades later, the State Industrial School for Girls was established for white females, ages twelve to nineteen who participated in delinquent behavior (Gilmore, 2006; Adams, 2001).

Many advocates from other areas in Louisiana were disappointed and felt that this action was cruel and unjust. According to Gilmore (2006), African American youth males were forced to attend the Louisiana State Penitentiary (Angola) when they committed crimes because there were no juvenile facilities for them. Therefore, African American educators, J. S. Clark and J. D. Lafarque felt that it was necessary to establish juvenile institutions for African Americans that were similar to the reform schools for Caucasian males and females (Gilmore, 2006). In 1948, the State Industrial School for Colored was opened to accommodate African American male and female juvenile delinquents. After this foundation was established, an additional dorm for the females opened to separate male and female offenders. A few years later, the Supreme Court ordered an end to separation by race and equality in all training schools and correctional facilities (Gilmore, 2006).

During the 1970's, the Louisiana juvenile justice system began to refocus on the original goals and objectives of the United States Juvenile Justice System, which was to provide treatment to juvenile offenders (Fox, 1996). In 1975, Louisiana became affiliated with the JJDP Act and within the same year the Office of Youth Development (OYD) was formed. In less than ten years, the state also appointed the Department of Public Safety and Corrections to oversee OYD including probation, parole, and group home placement if deemed necessary (Gilmore, 2006). Government officials assumed that crime would decrease, but juvenile crime increased throughout the state of Louisiana, as did the national statistics on juvenile crime. OYD became

the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) in 2005 with the mission to develop better treatment and services for youth in custody of the state (Gilmore, 2006; State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). In 1991, The Office of Juvenile Justice's Assistant Secretary Don Wydra, who coordinated the *Timeline for Change*, adamantly argued that the system needed change. The focus of this report was to recommend changes within the juvenile justice system since the agency was taking a new name and mission. In this report, Wydra revealed that the system should be revamped due to difficulties between equalizing rehabilitation for juveniles and public safety within communities (Gilmore, 2006; State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). Additional secure juvenile correctional facilities began to open for juvenile offenders in 1991 to deal with increasing public pressure to address the juvenile crime problem.

### **Louisiana's Secure Juvenile Facilities**

As previously mentioned, the first juvenile correctional facility was opened in Monroe, Louisiana for white boys only in 1904 (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). Since the opening of the facility, the facility has been through several names and as of today it is known as Swanson Center for Youth (SCY). Since this correctional facility was for white males, the next step was to create an institution for white, female juvenile offenders (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). The State Industrial School for Girls opened in Ball, Louisiana in 1926. However, in 1989, the school closed and the girls were transported to SCY. After two years, the female program was re-established at the Jetson Center for Youth in 1991 (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). The girls unit closed again in 2005 after they were transferred to other state facilities (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). Girls are now sent to the Ware Center for Youth in Coushatta, Louisiana.

The next facility to open for youth in Louisiana was the State Industrial School for Colored Youth in 1948. As previously noted, this youth facility was established to provide African Americans with equal correctional practices as Caucasians (Gilmore, 2006). The location of the center was in Scotlandville, Louisiana and it housed African American males and females (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). The name changed three times and the current name is Louis Jetson Center for Youth. In 1972, a youth correctional facility opened near New Orleans, Louisiana, known as Louisiana Training Institute-Bridge City (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). At one time, this facility housed rebellious females but its primary population was males. This facility was historically used to serve very young offenders, but it changed its focus in recent years, and serves the regional population. Today, the center still remains as a treatment center for youth and operates under the name Bridge City Center for Youth (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011).

In 1994, the Tallulah Correctional Center for Youth (TCCY) was opened in Tallulah, Louisiana, under a private firm (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). The City of Tallulah viewed the opening of TCCY as an agency that would bring an abundance of jobs to the small town. The center in Tallulah opened for ten years, but closed due to the harsh treatment that juveniles received from staff workers. TCCY was generally used as placement for juveniles who had serious mental health and behavior problems (Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project, 2000). TCCY personnel hired individuals who were not properly trained to work with children and most importantly handle mental health problems that many of the children experienced. Due to inadequate training, guards and staff members physically and mentally abused inmates. During Department of Justice investigations, nurses reported that multiple children would appear in the infirmary everyday with broken bones, scars, and black eyes.

Moreover, children reported to investigators that they were constantly physically abused, spent prolonged hours in isolation, and deprived of food (Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project, 2000). Government officials tried their best to improve TCCY by allowing the state to take over the privately owned facility and appointing two wardens who had great experience and visions for the center. However, the abuse and neglect did not improve and in June 2004 TCCY closed. At the same time that TCCY was experiencing trouble, another private facility was opened and closed rather abruptly. This facility was located in Jena, Louisiana and closed in June 2001 as a result of financial issues, abuse among juveniles, and inadequate education and food (Guin & Adams, 2001).

Ware Youth Center was built in 2009 to house youthful female and male offenders. This fairly new facility is located in Coushatta, Louisiana (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). Ware Youth Center is equipped to house 24 female and male offenders; in addition, there is a unit (16 beds) for those offenders in substance treatment program. This facility offers an array of treatment services for female offenders while they are housed (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). These services include but are not limited to GED training, substance abuse therapy, individual and group therapy, medical treatment, and on-school services. Youth are allowed to engage in recreation on and off campus. Recreational activities for youth offenders include various sports games, parties during special holidays, shopping, and movie nights (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). Although the facility is structured, youth are allowed to make limited phone calls and receive visitation from family members.

## **Louisiana's Non-Secure Juvenile Facilities**

The original mission of the juvenile justice system was to rehabilitate juvenile delinquents. It was also important for reformers and governmental agencies to take preventive measures that would decrease the number of children sent to secure juvenile facilities. However, when youth committed crimes, they were sent to secure facilities to serve time for their offenses. Youth who committed several offenses were generally viewed as troublemakers and could potentially pose harm to the community (Hinton et al., 2007). On the other hand, non-secure facilities were established for youth that encountered problems in the home and had no other place to go. According to a study conducted in Louisiana by the Casey Strategic Consulting Group (2003), juveniles should only be placed into secure custody when they pose a threat to the community, disobey probation/supervision, and commit a delinquent offense. The Louisiana juvenile justice system decided to use other options rather than jail, prisons, and/or detention centers to assist youth with issues ranging from delinquency to problem in their living environment (Casey Strategic Consulting Group, 2003).

In an effort to more effectively deal with delinquency, OJJ promoted and funded non-secure facilities. These facilities include but are not limited to group homes, foster care, and short-term and long-term treatment facilities. The non-secure facilities were intended to be used as positive means of treatment for juveniles. OJJ assumed that non-secure facilities would decrease crime and behavioral disorders experienced by youth (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). These facilities are scattered throughout the state of Louisiana and they offer multiple services that are helpful in improving youth's delinquent behavior. Services offered in non-secure facilities include educational programs (such as high school diplomas and

GED programs), counseling (individual and group), and social activities (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011).

Educational programs consist of courses taught at the youth's current grade level. School placement for youth is based on their last enrolled grade; however, in some cases youth are placed in classes with additional grades levels when there is a shortage on teachers. Also, vocational/technical careers are offered for youth who have an interest in that field but generally youth that receive a GED take this opportunity (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). Counseling consists of individuals who are trained to provide sessions such as life skills, anger management, and team building (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). These therapeutic sessions are used to assist youth with coping and improving their behavior upon re-entry into the community. In the group sessions, professionals train youth to avoid confrontation situations, use better judgment when faced with difficult choices, exert self-control, and work more effectively with others. The counseling also allows youth to meet with professionals individually to discuss any personal and/or social problems. In reference to social activities, youth are allowed to take trips off the premises to shopping malls, movies, and skating rinks to socialize with other children and experience joyous festivities. Social activities that occur on the premises are basketball/football games, field days, movie nights, and family and friend visitation (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011).

Ware Youth Center is a secure female facility that also provides non-secure substance abuse services to males and females. The males and females are housed separately and offered an abundance of interventions to decrease and alleviate substance abuse (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). There is a substance abuse treatment team that assesses the youth's substance intake and if necessary, formulates a treatment plan to change their behavior.

Even though substance abuse treatment is a main priority, these youth are also allowed to participate in recreational, educational, and personal activities. In the facility, youth have the opportunity to communicate with others, practice self-care, and engage in stress-free activities (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). Recreational activities for these residents include indoor and outdoor games (basketball, volleyball, baseball, and running), service learning at outside agencies, and attendance at various shows. While in the facility, youth must attend classes consisting of regular and special education high school classes, GED classes, and standardized testing. There is also a vocational approach used at the youth center. Classes are offered in home economics and welding (State of Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice, 2011). In summary, Ware Youth Center has a variety of educational and recreational activities in place to assist youth offenders with social and educational progress.

For many years, there has been controversy surrounding institutional care versus foster care. Richard Barth, author of *Institutions vs. Foster Homes*, (2002) argues that children in group homes have more difficulties with social and emotional adjustments than children who are raised in foster care settings. Some of the issues that children face in institutional care are abuse, neglect, behavioral issues, and mental health complications. An example of abuse in institutional care would be the physical and mental abuse that juvenile delinquents have faced while in youth correctional facilities. It is quite natural that these children will face challenges as a result of harsh treatment, pain and suffering. In contrast to institutional settings, children who are in foster care have a greater chance of avoiding the juvenile justice system due to the support from a home centered environment (Barth, 2002). In this type of setting, youth generally have a mother and father figure in the home, stable home environment, sense of security, and unconditional love. The idea that all children will be placed into foster care is appealing but

realistically, there are not enough adoptive parents to provide for youth. A potential improvement for institutional settings would be to make the environment similar to that of foster care by providing mentors/counselors to the children.

### **Children Housed with Adults**

Juveniles were housed with adults historically and this trend has continued with youth who are transferred to adult court and treated as adults. In the beginning, African American youth offenders were sent to adult prisons because the juvenile reform school in Monroe did not accept youth offenders of color (Gilmore, 2006). Evidence of this incident was written in the Baton Rouge State Times (1916) in an article titled, *Another Infant Sent State Prison*. An eight year old, African American male was sent to Angola for stealing canned goods. It is fair to say that there was a crime committed, but the ruthless consequence was inappropriate for an 8 year old. Although African Americans were not allowed in the reform school, there could have been other options for this young man rather than the state penitentiary (Gilmore, 2006). The actual outcome of the boy's incarceration was never mentioned. Years after this incident, the state opened an Industrial School for African Americans, bringing an end to African American youth being sent to the state's adult penitentiary.

Will children who have been housed with adult criminals return to the criminal justice system at a higher rate than those who are housed with other youth? According to the New York Times (2008), children housed with adults in prison system are at a high risk for becoming hardcore criminals and returning back in the criminal justice system. The New York Times (2008) also noted that children who were housed with adult offenders would most likely experience problems with anger management and emotional distress. It is heartbreaking to imagine what these children face while they are locked up with adult criminals. In addition,

children in adult prisons could potentially experience physical, sexual, and emotional abuse from adult criminals.

### **Theories Associated with Delinquency**

Albert Bandura, originator of the social learning theory, tries to explain how human beings have the ability to impact their environment. According to Ashford and LeCroy (2010), Bandura believed that people learn best through observation of one's disposition or character. People learn by observing others' attitudes, behaviors, expressions, and overall perceptions (Bandura, 1997). Most human behavior is learned through observations and modeling. Bandura further believes that the social learning theory explains human behavior in relation to constant interactions between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences (Ashford & LeCroy, 2010). The social learning theory is related to delinquency theory because youth tend to engage in activities in which they see others participating. Furthermore, the social learning theory demonstrates the importance of observing the attitudes and behaviors of others (Bandura, 1997).

Erich Goode noted that youth associate good or bad conduct with behaviors observed in surrounding affiliations (Regoli, Hewitt, & Delisi, 2010). Goode exemplified the manner in which adolescents begin their association with drug usage. He explains this association by describing when youth experiment with drugs and continue with this usage due to peer pressure and/or social environmental influence. Another criminologist explained his theory of understanding delinquent behavior through the differential association theory. Edwin Sutherland argues that juvenile delinquency is a learned behavior (Regoli, Hewitt, & Delisi, 2010). He theorized that this behavior can be learned from a variety of factors such as peer groups, family members, and media. Sutherland's theory includes nine principles that explain how delinquent behavior results from learning:

1. Delinquent behavior is learned; it is not inherited. Biological and hereditary factors are rejected as explanations for the cause of delinquency. Only sociological factors explain why youth commit crime.
2. Delinquent behavior is learned through interaction with others by way of communication. This communication can be either verbal or nonverbal.
3. Learning occurs in intimate groups. It is in small, face-to-face gatherings that children learn to commit crime.
4. In intimate groups, children learn techniques for committing crimes as well as the appropriate motives, attitudes, and rationalizations for doing so. The learning process involves exposure not only to the techniques of committing offenses, but also to the attitudes or rationalizations that justify those acts.
5. The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal code as being favorable or unfavorable. The term “definitions” refers to attitudes. Attitudes favoring law breaking are common, for instance, among youth who engage in vandalism against schools or companies that adolescents feel “deserve” to have graffiti sprayed on their buildings.
6. A juvenile becomes delinquent owing to an excess of definitions favorable to the violation of law over definitions unfavorable to the violation of law. This sixth principle is the core of the theory of differential association. A parent who even hints through words or actions that it is acceptable to fight, treat women as potential conquests, cheat on income tax returns, or lie may promote delinquency in children unless these statements are outnumbered by definitions (attitudes) that favor obeying the law—for example, driving within the speed limit. Definitions

favorable to the violation of law can be learned from both criminal and noncriminal people.

7. The tendency toward delinquency will be affected by the frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of learning experiences. The longer, earlier, more intensely, and more frequently youth are exposed to attitudes about delinquency (both pro and con), the more likely they will be influenced. Sutherland used the term *intensity* to refer to the degree of respect a person gives to a role model or associate. Thus correctional officers are not likely to become criminals, despite the positive things inmates say about living a life of crime. The reason is that officers do not respect the inmates and, therefore, do not adopt their beliefs, values, and attitudes.
8. Learning delinquent behavior involves the same mechanisms involved in any other learning. While the content of what is learned is different, the process for learning any behavior is the same.
9. Criminal behavior and noncriminal behavior are expressions of the same needs and values. In other words, the goals of delinquents and non-delinquents are similar. What is different are the means they use to pursue their goals. (Regoli, Hewitt, & Delisi, 2010, pp. 183-184).

### **Criminal Life Course Perspective**

The purpose of the life course perspective is to analyze an array of events that occur in an individual's life span (Sampson & Laub, 1990). These events consist of an individual's life history, background, family assessments, and future goals that are determined by choices made in their earlier life. The life course perspective offers the chance for researchers and other

professionals to gain an in-depth understanding of illegal behavior and why people have problems with changing their criminal patterns (Piquero & Mazerolle, 2001). Sampson and Laub (1990) identify “trajectories” as forces that exam an individual’s life course. Trajectory refers to the streamline of events that occur over time such as career establishment, potential family structure, charisma, and behavior. Trajectories are defined as streamlines of events that show behavioral signs (Piquero & Mazerolle, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 1990). Transitions are known as precise life occurrences that surround trajectories and develop during a shorter time range than those of trajectories (Sampson & Laub, 1990). The life course perspective best helps to understand both concepts as contributors to criminal behavior and positive life transitions thereafter.

In an attempt to better understand criminal behavior, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck conducted a longitudinal study while working at Harvard University in 1937. The study consisted of 1000 males from Boston, Massachusetts who were placed into an experimental and control group (Sampson & Laub, 1990). One group included 500 delinquent males who had been involved in delinquency more than once. The other group was 500 males who did not have any problems with delinquent behavior (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Each group was measured and compared by the same set of variables: intelligence quotient (IQ) level, age, ethnicity, and economics status (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Piquero & Mazerolle, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 1990). Data were collected from study participants, family members, respective agency personnel, probation officers, case managers, school teachers, and other individuals that interacted with the participants (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Sampson & Laub, 1990). Glueck and Glueck research signifies that personality traits generally would not have an effect on an individual to commit delinquent behavior. Nevertheless, the ability to commit such acts are

influenced by environmental situations (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). Before completing the third assessment, Glueck and Glueck retired and the study was archived in the Harvard Law School Library (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Since that time, other researchers have continued to study additional aspects of the original classic longitudinal study.

For many years, there has been a continuous debate to determine if juvenile offenders who are incarcerated progress into adult criminality at higher rates than non-juvenile offenders. Also, many researchers are interested in determining if there are correlations between childhood behavior and on-going adult development. In a study titled *Crime and Deviance Over the Life Course: The Salience of Adult Social Bonds*, the authors examined criminal behavior during the adult life span (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Data for this study was extracted from the longitudinal study that was conducted by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck. Sampson and Laub (1990) argue that youth delinquency derives from environmental factors associated with later adulthood. These researchers projected that disruptive childhood behavior will escalate into major criminal activity as delinquents approach adulthood and that a positive reinforcement environment can be successful to change the potential development of criminal behavior. This study found that delinquents who later establish successful careers and families have a higher chance of avoiding re-entry into the criminal justice system (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Furthermore, Sampson and Laub (1990) emphasize those children who were adjudicated delinquents as youth do not always resort to crime in later adulthood.

In the paragraphs above, literature identifies historical contents of the juvenile justice system and theories associated with criminal behavior. From an historical view, the literature review allows readers to understand where the juvenile system began, the changes (policies) that occurred over time, and the state of the current system. This literature expands even further to

discuss secure and non-secure facilities in Louisiana and resources that are provided while detained. The literature does give an overview of the juvenile justice system; however, there are not many articles that examine the differences. Apparently, in the literature, there are gaps of knowledge between these offenders. When researching, there was not much information surrounding youth offenders who were later incarcerated as an adult vs. those who were not incarcerated as an adult. Being that there is little evidence on this, the researcher decided to formulate a question to explore this concern and explain gaps in knowledge of this differences.

### **Research Question**

1. Are there any differences between youth offenders who were later incarcerated as an adult vs. those who were not incarcerated as an adult?

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

This research used secondary data analysis. Data analyzed for this research was provided by the Louisiana State University School of Social Work Office of Social Services Research and Development (OSSRD). The subjects in this study were extracted from Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) and the Department of Corrections (DOC) databases. The total sample of youth offenders for this sample was 29, 793. All youth offenders in the sample were involved in the Louisiana juvenile justice system during 1980-1989. The sample included 6, 153 (20.65%) females and 23, 640 (79.45%) males. In regards to race, the number of offenders consisted of 18, 861 (63.31%) Black, 10, 463 (35.12%) White, and 469 (1.57%) Other. There were 451 juvenile offenders who were affiliated with gangs. The overall study sample has been approved previously; therefore, additional approval was not needed.

### **Measures**

#### **Recidivism**

The dependent variable in this study is adult recidivism. Incarceration is defined as confinement to a secure-care facility for the reason of not adhering to the judicial system (Siegel & Senna, 2008). Individuals become incarcerated when they have committed a crime and are forced to spend time, in jails, as a consequence for their actions. Depending on the severity of the crime, some offenders are granted short-term sentencing while others serve long-term sentencing (Siegel & Senna, 2008). Recidivism occurs when crime has been repeated and the individual has previously served time for delinquent behavior (Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001). Other terms that reference recidivism are re-sentence, re-conviction, re-arrest, relapse, and re-entry (Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001).

## **Variables**

Independent variables involved in this study will consist of race, gender, supervision levels, age of first OJJ contact, gang affiliation, and number of OJJ contacts. Race was one independent variable used in this study to examine frequency and significance. Race was classified into three categories, which were Black “1”, White “2”, and Other “3”. Gender was coded as female “0” and male “1”. Supervision levels for OJJ contact referred to the level of supervision for each juvenile offender. The codes for this variable consisted of parole “1”, secure custody “2”, probation “3”, and non-secure custody “4”. The age of first contact with OJJ ranged from nine to nineteen. Gang affiliation was coded as No gang “0” and Gang “1”. The number of OJJ contacts represented the number of times that the individual came in contact with OJJ and ranged from one to five.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Design**

An exploratory study was utilized for this research. Rubin and Babbie (2011) defined an exploration study as exploring information that is relatively new or has not been clearly identified. This information includes reviews of literature, case analysis, case interviews, and other resources useful in understanding the subject. An exploratory study enlightens researchers with imperative information that could give direct answers to the topic (Rubin & Babbie, 2011).

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics for all non-parametric variables will be reported with frequency and percent. Descriptive statistics for all parametric variables will be reported using means and standard deviations. Chi-square tests will be utilized to examine the differences and relationships among the population in the sample. According to Rubin and Babbie (2011), the

chi-square test compares the relationships of variables to determine if they are different by categories or levels. For the chi-square analysis, the p value was set at level .05.

**CHAPTER 4:  
RESULTS**

**Demographics**

The total sample included 29, 793. The sample was primarily composed of Black youth. The sample included 6,153 females (20.65%) and 23, 640 males (79.45%). The majority of participants were Black (n=18, 861) (63.31%), White (n=10) (463, 35.12%), and Other ethnicities (n=469) (1.5%) (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Frequency of Demographics by gender and race**

Race	Gender	
	Females (n=6, 153)	Males (n=23, 640)
Black	3, 966 (13.31%)	14, 895 (50.00%)
White	2, 120 (7.12%)	8, 343 (28.00%)
Other	67 (00.22%)	402 (1.35%)

The number of offenders that were not gang affiliated was 29, 342 (98.49%) and those involved with gang affiliation was 451 (1.51%). The population of those gang affiliated were males (n=424) and females (n=27) (See Table 2).

**Table 2: Frequency of Gang Affiliation by Gender**

Gang	Gender	
	Females (n=6, 153)	Males (n=23, 640)
No Gang	6, 126 (20.56%)	23, 216 (77.92%)
Gang	27 (00.10%)	424 (1.42%)

From 451 that were gang affiliated, there were 343 Black, 102 White, and 6 Other (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Frequency of Gang Affiliation by Race**

Gang	Race		
	Black (n=18, 861)	White (n=10, 463)	Other (n=469)
No Gang	18, 518 (62.16%)	10, 361 (34.78%)	463 (1.55%)
Gang	343 (1.15%)	102 (00.34%)	6 (00.02%)

**Chi-Squared Analysis**

The sample of this exploratory study consisted of 29, 793 juvenile offenders. A chi-square test was conducted to compare the frequency of occurrence of criminal offenses between gender, race, supervision levels, age of first OJJ contact, gang affiliation, and number of OJJ contact. Table 4 shows the frequencies and percentages of recidivism among gender. There is a statistically significant relationship between recidivism and gender  $\chi^2(1, N=29, 793) = 1.4e+03, p < .001$ (See Table 4).

**Table 4: Frequency Statistics of Recidivism and Gender**

Recidivism	Gender	
	Females (n=6, 153)	Males (n=23, 640)
No Adult Charge	5, 419 (18.19%)	14, 959 (50.21%)
Adult Charge	734 (2.46%)	8, 681 (29.14%)

**Pearson  $\chi^2(1, N=29, 793) = 1.4e+03, p < .001$**

Table 5 shows the frequencies and percentages of recidivism according to race.

Statistically significant and strong correlations emerged between recidivism and race  $\chi^2(2, N=29, 793) = 270.9373, p < .001$ .

**Table 5: Frequency Statistics of Recidivism and Race**

Recidivism	Race		
	Black (n=18, 861)	White (n=10, 463)	Other (n=469)
No Adult Charge	12,268 (41.18%)	7, 744 (25.99%)	366 (1.23%)
Adult Charge	6, 593 (22.13%)	2, 719 (9.13%)	103 (00.34%)

**Pearson**  $\chi^2(2, N=29, 793) = 270.9373, p < .001$

Among other variables, the relationship between supervision levels and recidivism  $\chi^2(3, N=29, 793) = 1.4e+03, p < .001$  was statistically significant (See Table 6).

**Table 6: Frequency Statistics of Recidivism and Supervision Level**

Recidivism	Supervision Level			
	Parole (n=273)	Secure Custody (n=9, 485)	Probation (n=18, 180)	Non Secure Custody (n=1, 855)
No Adult Charge	179 (00.60%)	5, 123 (17.20%)	13, 807 (46.34%)	1, 269 (4.26%)
Adult Charge	94 (00.31%)	4, 362(14.64%)	4, 373 (14.68%)	586 (1.97%)

**Pearson**  $\chi^2(3, N=29, 793) = 1.4e+03, p < .001$

As shown by Table 7, there was not a statistically significant relationship between age of first contact and recidivism  $\chi^2(10, N=29, 793) = 15.5468, p = .113$ .

**Table 7: Frequency Statistics of Recidivism and Age of First OJJ Contact**

Recidivism	Age of First OJJ Contact					
	9 (n=3)	10 (n=151)	11 (n=493)	12 (n=1, 241)	13 (n=2, 829)	
No Adult Charge	2 (00.01%)	101 (00.34%)	332 (1.11%)	853 (2.86%)	1, 940 (6.51%)	
Adult Charge	1 (00.00%)	50 (00.17%)	161 (00.54%)	388 (1.30%)	889 (3.00%)	
	14 (n=5, 397)	15 (n=7, 882)	16 (n=8, 925)	17 (n=2, 634)	18 (n=205)	19 (n=33)
	3, 600 (12.08%)	5, 477 (18.38%)	6, 086 (20.43%)	1, 812 (6.08%)	152 (00.51%)	23 (00.08)
	1, 797 (6.03%)	2, 405 (8.07%)	2, 839 (9.53%)	822 (2.76%)	53 (00.18%)	10 (00.03%)

**Pearson**  $\chi^2(10, N=29, 793) = 15.5468, p = .113$

Gang affiliation and recidivism have a statistically significant relationship  $\chi^2(1, N=29, 793) = 151.1849, p < .001$  (see table 8).

**Table 8: Frequency Statistics of Recidivism and Gang Affiliation**

Recidivism	Gang	
	No Gang (n=29, 342)	Gang (n=451)
No Adult Charge	20, 190 (67.77%)	188 (00.63%)
Adult Charge	9, 152 (30.72%)	263 (00.88%)

**Pearson**  $\chi^2(1, N=29, 793) = 151.1849, p < .001$

There was a statistically significant relationship  $\chi^2(4, N=29, 793) = 240.1626, p < .001$  between recidivism and the number of OJJ contacts.

**Table 9: Frequency Statistics of Recidivism and Number of OJJ Contacts**

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	<u>Number of OJJ Contacts</u>				
<u>Recidivism</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
No Adult Charge	27, 271	2, 262	239	19	2
Adult Charge	18, 995 (63.76%)	1, 252 (4.20%)	123 (00.41%)	8 (00.03%)	0(0.00%)
	8, 276 (27.78%)	1, 010 (3.39%)	116(00.38%)	11 (00.04%)	2 (00.01%)

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**Pearson**  $\chi^2(4, N=29, 793) = 240.1626, p < .001$

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

This exploratory research study was conducted to examine the relationship between youth that were incarcerated as juveniles and those who later returned to the adult prison system. Although there was only a relatively small portion of the sample that identified a gang affiliation, the results indicated that for those youth who are gang affiliated, they are more likely to reoffend later as adults. According to Tapia (2011), youth involvement with gangs are negatively influenced and this often leads to higher recidivism rates. There has been very little research that shows a connection between gang affiliation and its relationship to recidivism.

For both race and gender, Blacks and males offended at a higher frequency than others. Race and gender appears to have an influence on those individuals that are involved in the juvenile justice system. Findings of this study were similar to those of Steffensmeier and Demuth (2006), who found that race has a stronger influence on sentencing and recidivism. They further found that males are more likely to gain more sentences and commit a higher amount of crimes than females (Steffensmeier & Demuth, 2006).

After analyzing all variables, the only variable that did not have a correlation with recidivism was age of first OJJ contact. These results were interesting because findings from previous research indicated that the age of OJJ contact is usually a consistent predictor of recidivism. Findings from the Långström and Grann's (2002) study on young offenders indicate that age of first contact has a relationship with violent recidivism. The rationale behind these findings resulted from childhood behaviors and unstable life styles (Långström & Grann, 2002). David Day (1988) further argues that the age of first contact has a connection with recidivism due to early criminal on-set of delinquent behavior.

## Research Question

“Are there any differences between youth offenders who were later incarcerated as an adult vs. those who were not incarcerated as an adult? Yes, there is a difference between youth offenders who were incarcerated as an adult vs. those who were not incarcerated as an adult (see table 8). These results indicated that 00.88% of youth who were gang affiliated were later charged as an adult, and, 00.63% of those who were not gang affiliated had no adult charges. Conversely, approximately 31% who were not gang affiliated had adult charges. To support this finding, Huebner, Varano, and Bynum (2007) recognizes that gang membership and peer pressure does influence criminal behavior among adolescents and teenagers. Youth offenders, specifically those in low income neighborhoods, feel that peer influences give them a sense of security (Baumer & South, 2001). They tend to feel that group affiliation defines their character and that they officially have a sense of belonging (Clasen & Brown, 1985).

To further answer this question, the findings in the study showed that the supervision levels had a statistically significant relationship with recidivism. A study by Hanley (2006) reported that proper supervision has the power to reduce recidivism with high risk offenders. The second difference is shown in table 6. The number of offenders on parole that were charged as adults was 94 (00.31%) and the number of those with no adult charge was 179 (00.60%). Those in secure care that were not charged as adults was 5, 123 (17.20%) and the remaining 4, 362 (14.64%) were charged as adults. There were 18, 180 offenders on probation. Of that population, there were 13, 807 (46.34%) that were not charged as adults and 4, 373 (14.68%) that accumulated adult charges. Lastly, the number of offenders in non-secure custody with adult charges was 586 (1.97%) and those with adult charges consisted of 1, 269 (4.26%).

Youth who were assigned to secure care were more likely to reoffend as adults (Hanley, 2006). When these youth are in secure custody, they often become accustomed to what they encounter while incarcerated. At such a young age, these youth could potentially become persuaded by peers incarcerated with them. Also, while incarcerated, these youth lose contact with social and life skills outside of the facility (Hanley, 2006). Those youth assigned to less restrictive placements have more privileges than those incarcerated. Youth in less restrictive placements may have rules and regulations, but in most instances they still have freedom and access to the outside world (Barth, 2002). It is also possible that those youth who are placed in secure custody may be higher risk, which is why they were placed in secure care.

In the present study, there was a statistically significant relationship between recidivism and the number of OJJ contacts. Youths who had more OJJ contacts were more likely to reoffend as adults. Orsagh and Chen (1988) discovered similar findings that indicated the possibility of time served in prison influences recidivism. The researcher found from previous studies that the amount of time spent incarcerated has an impact on social skills and community detachment.

### **Limitations**

The researcher encountered few limitations during this study. This study used a secondary data analysis. Therefore, there were some limitations in regards to the data that were available. Initially, the researcher attempted to examine trends of juveniles that were incarcerated in secure care facilities. The length of stay would have been beneficial for the researcher to determine if there was a statistically relationship between time served and recidivism. However, this data was not available.

Lastly, the education level of this sample population would have been beneficial to this research project. This information was available through OSSRD, but time limitations did not allow to researcher to examine this variable. The education level would have shown the number of youth that received high school diplomas, GED, alternative vocational certification, or school dropout. It is important to know the educational level, so that community leaders will know which groups are at higher risk for criminal behavior. Education level could potentially be a determining factor for recidivism. Furthermore, the educational level gives researchers indicators of how future recidivism results will impact society. Recidivism rates have a tendency to predict the future of offenders based on their charges and crimes. Educational level serves as a predictor of youth offenders that will re-enter in the justice system.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

This project was conducted to better understand recidivism and the differences in youth offenders who were later incarcerated as an adult versus those who were not incarcerated as an adult. From this study, other researchers can gather information and help to determine “what’s next”. The next step for other researchers could consist of conducting longitudinal studies that focuses on young who entered the justice system at an early age and upon release track the number of times (if any) that they re-entered into the justice system. One idea generated from this research is that juvenile delinquents should be allowed to participate in activities that are outside of the facility. Richard Barth (2002) mentioned that if youth reside in institutions then they should be involved with activities outside the facility to continuously use social skills. This idea is related to this study because if offenders who are incarcerated as youth have access to these skills, then it is possible that there might be a decrease in the number of offenders that re-enter into the criminal justice system as adults. As mentioned previously, other authors explain how the length of time and number of contacts influence recidivism. As social workers, counselors, and community workers, there is a duty that has to be met when working with vulnerable populations and this is the best opportunity to change the pathway into crime. “What’s next” further allows researchers and clinicians to examine what needs to be done to assist with reducing recidivism rates among juvenile offenders.

Before conducting this project, the researcher was not aware of the differences between youth offenders who were later incarcerated as an adult vs. those who were not incarcerated as an adult. However, after this study, the researcher has more knowledge and understanding about this topic. There is a difference between both of these groups. Supervision levels, gang participation, number of OJJ contacts, gender, and race all have an influence on recidivism.

Gang affiliation does have an influence on recidivism. Those youth offenders that are gang affiliated continuously become involved with illegal activity (drugs, alcohol, murder, robbery, arson) and as a result when they are caught, the consequences for their actions lead to incarceration. Offenders that are not gang affiliated but charged as an adult also have a higher risk for recidivism. Supervision levels, especially secure custody, can determine whether or not offenders re-enter into the justice system.

It is important to continue researching this subject in order to improve juvenile justice research in Louisiana. Hopefully, these findings will be useful to OJJ, DOC, OSSRD, and other agencies as they continue to find groundbreaking research to assist this population.

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## VITA

Sabrina Michelle Whitney, a lifelong native of the “great city” of Tallulah, was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi. In 1988, Sabrina became the youngest daughter of the late Reverend Fred L. Jones, Sr. and Mrs. Ruby L. Williams. She graduated from Madison High School in 2006. Most of her life, she volunteered and mentored many at-risk youth in north and south Louisiana. Sabrina graduated from Southern University and Agricultural & Mechanical College of Baton Rouge, Louisiana with a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice and a minor in political science. Being that she is from a rural area, she has encountered several juveniles who stated that life “would have been better” if they had a support system. This is where her interest in working with children and families began.

Upon graduating from Louisiana State University with a Master of Social Work, Sabrina Michelle Whitney plans to continue working with at-risk youth in the community. She also plans to conduct further research studies surrounding juvenile recidivism. Furthermore, Sabrina anticipates opening her own business, which will cater towards assisting at-risk youth with resources that will prevent them from re-entering the criminal justice system.