

Balanced and Restorative Justice Survey

Summary of Findings

Prepared for
The Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers

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Center for Opinion Research
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The following summary report represents the findings of a survey of 500 adults Pennsylvanians. The survey was conducted by Millersville University's Center for Opinion Research on behalf of the Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers. Interviewing for the survey took place between November 8 – 19, 2001. Households were randomly selected using standard random-digit-dialing techniques. A respondent within each household was also randomly selected for interviewing.

Role of the Juvenile Justice System

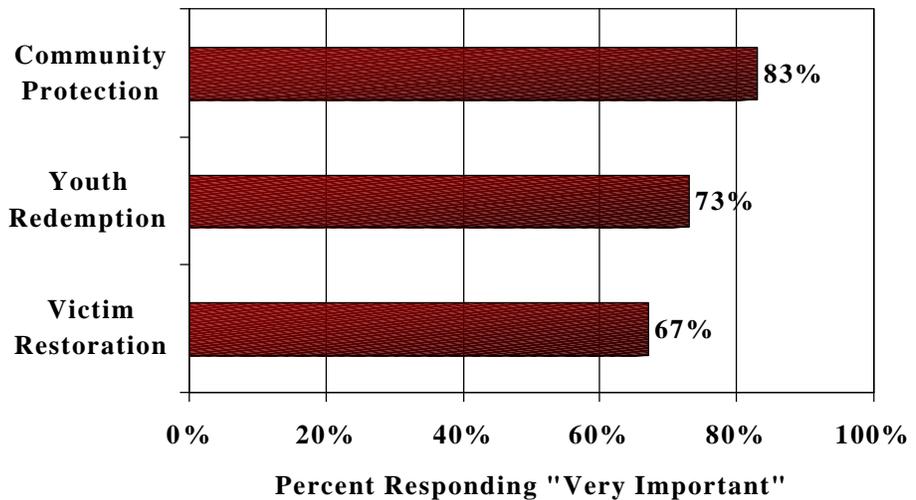
Top-of-mind, a majority of Pennsylvanians think the primary focus of the juvenile justice system should be on either rehabilitation (38%) or punishment (17%).

Many citizens believe that community members (64%) and victims (52%) should be involved in the sentencing and rehabilitation of juvenile offenders.

Most citizens are also strongly supportive of the three primary goals of the balanced and restorative justice approach. As Figure 1 illustrates, large majorities believe that community protection (83%), youth redemption (73%), and victim restoration (67%) are "very important" goals for the juvenile justice system.

“Most citizens are also strongly supportive of the three primary goals of the balanced and restorative justice approach.”

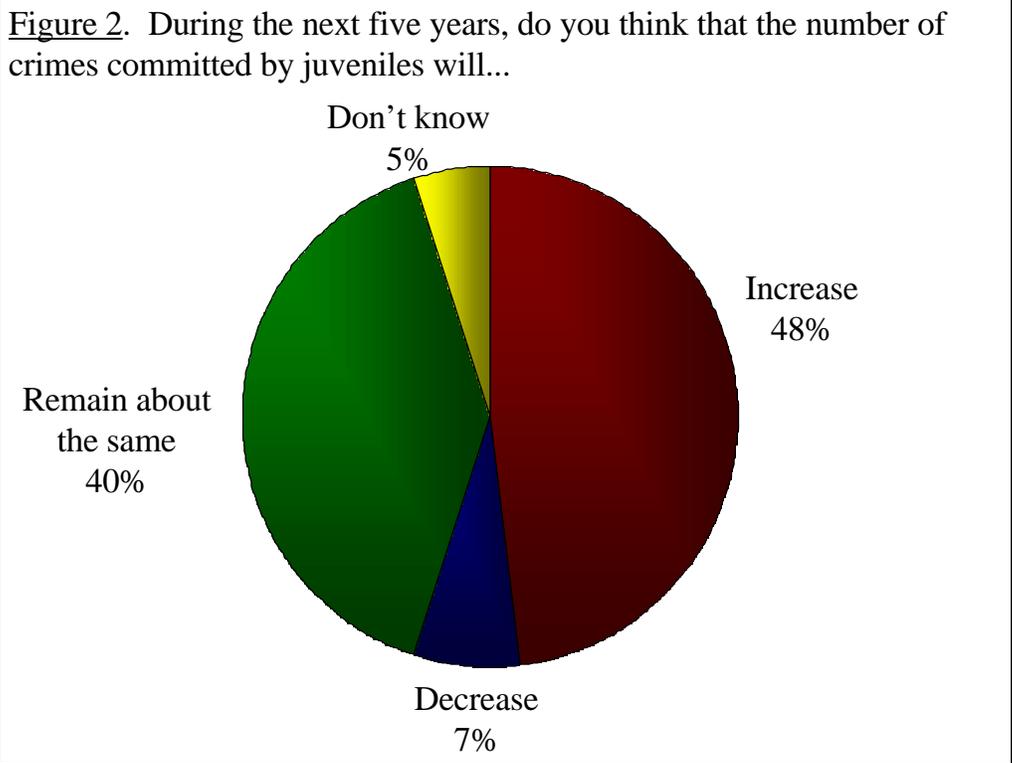
Figure 1. How important is it that...be included as a goal of Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system?



Setting the Context: Concern about Juvenile Crime in Pennsylvania

Currently, Pennsylvanians are not overly concerned about crime in general or juvenile crime in particular. Not quite one in seven (13%) Pennsylvania adults believe that crime is a "very serious" problem in their communities. This same proportion (13%) of Pennsylvania adults says that juvenile crime is a "very serious" problem. Even though there is not concern about juvenile crime at the moment, it does appear that Pennsylvanians expect juvenile crime to become a greater problem, as Figure 2 reveals. Nearly half (48%) of all Pennsylvanians expect juvenile crime to increase during the next five years. Few (4%) citizens were the victims of juvenile crime during the past year.

“Nearly half (48%) of all Pennsylvanians expect juvenile crime to increase during the next five years.”



Knowledge about Juvenile Crime and the Juvenile Justice System

Factual knowledge about juvenile crime in Pennsylvania is very low among the general public. As Table 1 illustrates, large numbers of citizens have misperceptions, or admit to simply not knowing, about specific juvenile crime facts. Most people incorrectly assume that referrals to juvenile court have increased in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and that most juvenile offenders are placed in facilities outside their homes. Knowledge about the balanced and restorative justice approach is extremely low--only one in twenty (6%) respondents had heard of the balanced and restorative justice approach before they completed the interview.

“Only one in twenty (6%) respondents had heard of the balanced and restorative justice approach before they completed the interview.”

Table 1. I am going to read you several statements. For each statement I read, please tell me whether you believe it is true or false, or if you don't know whether the statement is true or false.

	True	False	Don't Know
Since 1995, the number of juvenile offenders referred to juvenile court in Pennsylvania has increased.	74%	6%	20%
Since 1995, the number of juvenile offenders referred to juvenile court in the state's two largest cities, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, have increased.	71%	7%	21%
Most juveniles, more than half, convicted of committing a crime are placed in facilities outside of their homes, such as group homes, private institutions, or secure facilities.	47%	30%	23%

Satisfaction with the Juvenile Justice System

Pennsylvanians display little satisfaction with the state's juvenile justice system.¹ For instance, only one in four (26%) citizens rates Pennsylvania's juvenile system as "excellent" or "good" when it comes to dealing with juvenile offenders. Those who claim to know a juvenile who has been involved with the state's juvenile justice system tend to be less satisfied than those who do not know anyone involved in the system.² One-third (31%) of those who know a juvenile involved in the system rate the system as "poor" compared to only one in ten (12%) who do not know anyone involved with the juvenile justice system. African American respondents were twice as likely as white respondents to rate the system "poor," 32% to 15%. There were no differences in satisfaction ratings associated with county of residence, gender, age, or income.

Table 2 highlights some of the specific concerns that citizens have about the juvenile justice system. More than half of Pennsylvanians believes the state pays too little attention to the victims of juvenile crime (58%), is too lenient on juvenile offenders (54%), and does not do enough to protect the community (50%). In addition, half of the respondents disagree that Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system does a good job of rehabilitating juvenile offenders (53%) or keeping juveniles from becoming career criminals (49%).

“Only one in four (26%) citizens rates Pennsylvania's juvenile system as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ when it comes to dealing with juvenile offenders.”

Table 2. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Pennsylvania's juvenile justice system....

	Percent Responding “Agree”
Pays too little attention to the victims of juvenile crime.	58%
Is too lenient on juvenile offenders.	54%
Holds juvenile offenders accountable for their actions.	52%
Does not do enough to protect the community.	50%
Provides reasonable punishments.	43%
Helps keep juveniles from becoming career criminals.	34%
Deals with juvenile crime cost-effectively.	32%
Does a good job of rehabilitating juvenile offenders.	26%
Pennsylvania is a leader in dealing with juvenile crime.	26%

¹ We did suspect that satisfaction would be related to one's knowledge of the juvenile justice system; however, a comparison of satisfaction with the system (question 9) and one's knowledge of the system did not reveal any significant differences in satisfaction ratings.

² More than a quarter (29%) of state residents claimed to know a juvenile who has been involved with the state's juvenile justice system.