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# Juvenile court study finds goals in conflict

Clashing conflicting goals of juvenile courts throughout the country, a University of Michigan study claims the courts can't do an effective job.

The goals—local control and social rehabilitation—are incompatible, according to researchers for UM's National Assessment of Juvenile Corrections (NAJC).

According to professors Rosemary C. Sarri and Howard Hasenfeld, juvenile courts view the offender in two differing ways. The first views the offender as a threat to the community and mandates the court to determine guilt or innocence and administer punishment.

The second sees the offender as a victim of circumstances—social, economic, psychological and biological—and attempts to supply the resources the child has been deprived of. It looks at his needs, instead of his crime.

The objectives neutralize each other, according to the researchers, generating a system that is riddled with internal inconsistencies and paradoxes.

The study, "Brought to Justice: Juvenile Courts and the Law," is the seventh and final report of the five-year, federally funded NAJC. It examines the structure of the nation's juvenile courts, including case processing, staff characteristics, due process and service techniques like diversion, probation and detention.

The editors of the study, both professors in the UM School of Social Work, found that the courts varied widely in both structure and practice within states, as well as among them.

The researchers found some courts small, hearing as few as 50 cases per year, while others processed as many as 4,000 cases annually and employed a probation staff of more than 300.

The study would provide reliable information about the numbers of youths processed, their age, sex, race or offense. Many courts could not provide full budget information.

In short, the typical juvenile court has no system for providing information and rational problem solving, according to Sarri and Hasenfeld.

Juvenile codes in each of the 50 states were so dissimilar that the NAJC found comparisons impossible. The differences ranged from the definition of an offense to the structure of the court, types of detention facilities and length of punishment. We have been repeatedly confronted with ambiguities and contradictions in the

goals, structure and operations of the juvenile courts," the researchers said.

"The source is the statutes themselves, which have been weak and vague, leaving enormous discretion to the juvenile court judge. Few distinctions were made between serious delinquency, minor delinquency, dependency or neglect."

During the past 10 years, the supreme court, state legislatures and private and public interest groups have stimulated the development of new juvenile justice practices and revised codes.

But a key issue that still needs attention, Sarri and Hasenfeld stress, is the contradiction between "youth concern" and "crime control."

"Courts operate under the assumption that they must protect the community, yet more than 40 per cent of the cases referred to them are, in fact, juvenile misdeeds. Court personnel themselves consider that truancy, curfew violations and the like are no community threat, and assert that youth service agencies should handle the cases."

Instead, the courts' broad yet vague mandate over many juvenile problems enables the schools, family service agencies and even parents to use it as a dumping ground for youth whom they do not want to deal with, according to the researchers.

Institutionalizing such youths is an appropriate and in many cases harmful, our survey indicates that more than half of the juveniles referred to the courts are exonerated, warned and released, or simply dismissed. Others may be put on probation, which is little more than surveillance, since few, however, are put in touch with needed services.

The current trends in social welfare and criminal justice programming are "decriminalization, deinstitutionalization and deterrance," the NAJC study reports.

Research findings have consistently shown that intervention does not deter subsequent criminal behavior.

In fact, statistics show that the earlier a youth is processed through the system and the more stringent the punishment, the greater the chance that the youth will be back for more serious law violations.

The founders of the juvenile court were seeking to reduce the harsh and undifferentiated treatment that characterized youth handling in the criminal system prior to the 20th century, the NAJC says. But the system lacks strong guidelines, consistency in case handling and account ability.

Past decades have resulted in an expansion of the juvenile justice system with the expectation that youths would become more law abiding under the threat of ever-cruel punishment. Sarri and Hasenfeld conclude:

Since juvenile crime has continued to increase, it is clearly time to try other alternatives.

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## Christmas stamps on sale today

Two 1976 Christmas stamps will go on sale Thursday in Pontiac.

One features an 1893 Nathaniel Currier print and the second is a Madonna and child painted more than 200 years ago.

Winter Pastime, the Currier lithograph was placed on sale two years before Currier learned with James Cox, John Singleton Cooper's painting, "Nativity," was completed in London although Cooper was born in Boston. The original painting hangs in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

## Conference set for handicapped

Problems faced by the physically limited and the mentally impaired will be the focus of the Michigan White House conference on handicapped individuals to be held Oct. 31 and Nov. 1 in the Hyatt Regency Dearborn.

It is expected that from the conference will come recommendations for state and national programs on health, education, economic, social and other concerns of the handicapped.

Michigan, 100 persons are expected to attend. Fifty per cent of the participants are required to be persons with a handicap. Twenty-five per cent should be experts in the field. Twenty per cent parents, guardians or spouses of persons with handicaps.

A major goal of the event is identification of necessary services and programs that will help the handicapped to lead productive lives.

## BHASE sponsors Nov. 7 art auction

The Bloomfield Hills Association for Special Education (BHASE) will sponsor an art auction Nov. 7 in the lower level of the Kingdley Inn, Bloomfield Hills.

A champagne preview will start at 2 p.m. and the auction will begin at 3 p.m.

Proceeds from the auction will benefit the Bloomfield Hills School District's SCAMP program, the Wing Lake Developmental Center and the Hi-Cap program for hearing-impaired youngsters.

Tickets will be available at the door.

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