

A Research Framework for Understanding the Practical Impact of Family Involvement in the Juvenile Justice System: The Juvenile Justice Family Involvement Model

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Abstract Family involvement is recognized as a critical element of service planning for children’s mental health, welfare and education. For the juvenile justice system, however, parents’ roles in this system are complex due to youths’ legal rights, public safety, a process which can legally position parents as plaintiffs, and a historical legacy of blaming parents for youth indiscretions. Three recent national surveys of juvenile justice-involved parents reveal that the current paradigm elicits feelings of stress, shame and distrust among parents and is likely leading to worse outcomes for youth, families and communities. While research on the impact of family involvement in the justice system is starting to emerge, the field currently has no organizing framework to guide a research agenda, interpret outcomes or translate findings for practitioners. We propose a research framework for family involvement that is informed by a comprehensive review and content analysis of current, published arguments for family involvement in juvenile justice along with a synthesis of family involvement efforts in other child-serving systems. In this model, family involvement is presented as an ascending, ordinal concept

beginning with (1) exclusion, and moving toward climates characterized by (2) information-giving, (3) information-eliciting and (4) full, decision-making partnerships. Specific examples of how courts and facilities might align with these levels are described. Further, the model makes predictions for how involvement will impact outcomes at multiple levels with applications for other child-serving systems.

Keywords Family involvement · Juvenile justice · Recidivism

Introduction

Juvenile justice policies are increasingly being shaped by research on adolescent brain development, social-emotional functioning and trauma exposure (Cauffman et al. 2004; Grisso et al. 2003; Steinberg et al. 1992). Concurrently, mandates for government accountability are increasing the visibility of cost-beneficial, family-based interventions for reducing recidivism (WSIPP and EBPI 2013). Together, these developments are driving greater awareness of the impact ecological factors have on youth behavior. Given this, it is unsurprising that growing attention is being paid to the area of parent involvement. Three large, national studies have documented the experiences of parents in the juvenile justice system in just the last few years (Arya 2013; Justice for Families 2012; OJJDP 2013). Further, an increasing number of papers are being released by advocacy, government and research agencies on the importance of parent participation in juvenile justice.

While the recent interest in family involvement may herald a new paradigm in modern juvenile justice, focusing on the parents of justice-involved youth is not new. The first juvenile courts cited parenting deficits as the rationale

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for invoking *parens patriae* (literally, “parent of the nation”), or the state’s power to act as caretaker for those unable to care for themselves, such as children (Barrows 1904; Platt 2009). Early juvenile court judges and reformers felt that inadequate parenting was largely, even exclusively, to blame for delinquency (Vincent 1977). Today, however, the dialogue regarding parent involvement has shifted. Discussions now focus as much on parents’ experience of the justice system as they do on actual parenting practices. Undoubtedly influenced by the consumer-focused paradigm which has reshaped the mental health system (New Freedom Commission on Mental Health 2003), parents are leading a movement for more responsive, informed, and collaborative policies in decision-making and programming. Although recommendations for involving parents in the justice process are plentiful (Burke et al. 2014; Justice for Families and Data Center 2012; Osher and Shufelt 2006; Pennell et al. 2011), research studies to guide these recommendations are only just emerging. This paper aims to incorporate the suggestions for parent involvement into a theory-based, testable framework that will benefit practitioners as they construct policies and practices, and will benefit researchers as they evaluate the effectiveness of these activities. The framework we present is informed by an integration of three areas of theory and research: (1) Parent involvement models in other child-serving systems (education, child welfare and mental health); (2) Perceptions of court fairness and procedural justice; and (3) Practice-based arguments for the likely benefits of increased parental involvement specifically in the juvenile justice system. Accordingly, in this paper we will review parent participation models in other child-serving systems in order to identify outcomes on parent and youth behavior, examine the social science research on court mistrust and behavior as a specific contextual variable for juvenile justice involvement, and then present the results of our content analysis of papers arguing for increased parent involvement in the justice system. Finally, we present an integrated research framework that draws from these separate areas of inquiry for conceptualizing the probable impact of parent involvement in the juvenile justice system on parent and youth behaviors.

Parents and the Juvenile Court

The juvenile court has historically been concerned with the involvement of parents in court proceedings. In the early juvenile courts, this took the form of holding parents responsible for youthful defendants’ behavior. For example, an early description of juvenile courts lauded efforts to mandate parental involvement given the assumption that parents were largely neglecting their responsibilities (Eliot

et al. 1904): “last and greatest of all, the section of the law compelling parents, when able to do so, to support their children wherever they may be, which would seem to be useful in every state...a result of juvenile courts has been to reveal the sources of contamination—lack of parental and social responsibility—of child life as they were never revealed before...the trouble is with the adults, not the children” (pg. XVI). This paper continues by describing categories of “unfit” parents. Displacing blame from youth to parents served the efforts of politically progressive reformers to remove children from adult courts and facilities. However, the view that youthful indiscretion was a result of parental failure became an arguably harmful legacy of the juvenile court that continues to affect proceedings today.

While the Supreme Court decision, *in re Gault*, specifies some parental rights in relation to juvenile offense matters (right to be notified about an arrest, why a child was arrested and where they are being held), most legal attention regarding parents and juvenile offenses pertains to a parent’s level of accountability for their child’s behavior. As noted, this was a focus of early juvenile courts, and many states subsequently developed statutes requiring various levels of parental responsibility. Many states still have laws that emphasize parental responsibility and hold parents accountable for improving supervision or other conditions seen as contributing to the youth’s delinquency (Harvell et al. 2004; MD Code CJ 3-8A-02; VA Code 16.1-309.2).

The philosophical origins of these laws and their continued existence speak to the recognition that parents are an integral part of shaping youth’s behavior and should be involved in the juvenile court process. However, the attempt to simply mandate parental involvement and supervision may fail to recognize that parents are often actively engaged in seeking out services and support for their child and/or may be highly distrustful of systems based on historical oppression, perceived incompetence, and discrimination (Justice for Families 2012). Excluding, blaming, and shaming parents of youth in the juvenile justice system are likely to be ineffective strategies to produce positive outcomes (Vincent 1977). In contrast, strategies that attempt to engage parents as partners are demonstrating positive outcomes in other child-serving systems.

Parent Involvement Frameworks

The significance of parenting method and skill as a risk or protective factor on youth outcomes is widely acknowledged in multiple fields of inquiry including school achievement (Spera 2005), mental health (Horwitz et al. 2010; Zimmer-Gembeck et al. 2013), delinquency (Fagan et al. 2011) and medical health (Armstrong et al. 2011). As

youth age towards adolescence, developmental shifts towards autonomy for the youth requires shifts in parenting as well (Brauer and De Coster 2015); however, in contrast to a widespread belief that parenting matters less during this time, positive parenting continues to affect youth well-being through young adulthood in career choice and success (Gordon and Cui 2015), and substance use (Aquilino and Supple 2001; Coombs and Landsverk 1988). The influence of parenting on youth well-being, along with the legal responsibility parents and other guardians hold for youth development, has encouraged other child-serving systems to develop innovative strategies for more reciprocal collaboration. While we refer to parents as a primary focus in this paper, we also recognize the positive influence of other non-parental adults (e.g., adult mentors) in supporting youth well-being (Hurd and Zimmerman 2014; McDonald and Lambert 2014; Schwartz et al. 2013; Sterrett et al. 2011). Many of the principles applied in these systems, as well as the juvenile justice model we present here, can also be applied to the involvement of non-parental supportive adults.

Education

The education research literature is currently the most robust resource for theorizing about, and testing models of, parental participation (Epstein and Sheldon 2006; Houtenville and Conway 2008; Weiss and Stephen 2009). Epstein et al. (2002) developed a comprehensive family involvement framework for parent, school and community collaboration that draws from three decades of research on parent involvement and youth achievement. The framework was conceptualized and developed based on a theoretical understanding that there are overlapping spheres of influence (family, school, and community) that jointly influence children's learning and development. The model outlines six, non-hierarchical types of involvement. Three of the types are directed towards parents with the goal of increasing parenting behaviors associated with student success (*parenting, volunteering, learning at home*). An observational, matched control research study in Ohio comparing schools implementing these principles to those that were not (Sheldon 2007), found that parent-involvement schools had better school attendance despite having more students receiving free and reduced lunch. Further, the effect was strongest for those schools with the highest quality implementation which appeared to be specifically related to the effort schools expended to help families overcome challenges that made school involvement difficult (e.g., communicate clearly with all families of different primary languages, include diverse families on decision-making school committees). In contrast, a school's effort to set up a parenting action team or action

plan without these corresponding activities did not result in any significant attendance improvements (Sheldon 2007). This provides strong support for an approach, applicable to juvenile justice, in which a system makes proactive attempts to engage families into the system environment (e.g., volunteering) as well as promote parenting behaviors that align with the systems' goals (e.g., school achievement).

Children's Mental Health

The most conspicuous approaches to family involvement in children's mental health services emerged in 1986 with the early implementation of "System of Care" values and principles into the array of services and supports for children with complex mental health needs (Friesen and Koroloff 1990; Friesen et al. 2005; McCammon et al. 2001; Osher and Osher 2002; Osher et al. 2008). Within the system of care effort, parent participation has been stratified into three major areas, each with a variety of specific role possibilities for parents (Friesen and Koroloff 1990; Robbins et al. 2008; Stroul and Blau 2010). Two of these areas have clear analogies to parent involvement in the school system: (1) *Participation in planning and delivery of treatment and care* (Bruns et al. 2011; VanderStoop et al. 2001) and (2) *participation in system-level policies, procedures, and practices that govern care* (Pullmann 2009). A third strategy in mental health that extends beyond what is recognized in education is *participation in the delivery of care for other families*. This strategy includes activities such as consulting with mental health providers about other family's care, educating other families, leading support groups, and providing peer parent support and partnering (Hoagwood et al. 2008; Salzer et al. 2010; Wisdom et al. 2011).

While no direct tests of these various forms of involvement on youth outcomes exist, the literature on family involvement in mental health supports the general conclusion that family-centered policies have positive impacts on youth behavior (Suter and Bruns 2009; Kutash et al. 2011; Geurts et al. 2012). Additionally, this literature extends the model in education by introducing the benefits of parent participation in the care of other families as well.

Child Welfare

Existing research on family engagement and outcomes in child welfare demonstrates the feasibility of implementing family involvement strategies at multiple levels that are analogous to the three described in children's mental health in the system (Building Bridges Initiative 2012; Children's Bureau 2010; Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group

2008; Munson and Freundlich 2008), including the direct support of families and their engagement in their child's care (Yatchmenoff 2005), families serving as peer partners (Building Bridges Initiative, 2012) and system-level initiatives (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2010; Munson and Freundlich 2008; Williamson and Gray 2011). At the case level, efforts to increase parents' and foster parents' engagement and participation in direct service delivery and fulfillment of court orders have demonstrated that engagement strategies can increase service attendance and retention (Dorsey et al. 2014), resulting in improved behavioral and emotional health outcomes (Horwitz et al. 2010). Child welfare agencies' engagement of families to play a more active and collaborative role in the development and execution of their individual case plans is achieving positive outcomes (Building Bridges Initiative 2012; Child Welfare Information Gateway 2010; Children's Bureau 2010; Haight et al. 2014). Further, family members who have had previous involvement in the child welfare system have served as mentors, partners, or resource guides to help other parents navigate the system and meet their case plan goals (Building Bridges Initiative 2012). Families have also been successfully engaged at the systems level through recognition that they possess valuable, firsthand knowledge and often hold great personal incentives for investing in making the system better for others (Building Bridges Initiative 2012; Children's Bureau 2010). In a recent review of parent engagement efforts in child welfare, Platt (2012) suggests an integrated model of parent engagement which proposes that engagement is affected by characteristics of the parent, the service provider and the larger service system. Variation at each level is theorized to affect ultimate engagement, which Platt defines as "the mutual, purposeful, behavioural and interactional participation of parent(s) and/or caregivers in services..." (pg. 142). In all, ten determinants of engagement are proposed: cognitive, affective, behavioral, identity, volition/motivation, circumstances, resources, support, program, and worker/therapist.

Research and frameworks from other child-serving systems have some important lessons for juvenile justice. Firstly, parent engagement and youth behavior are affected by layers of personal/internal and system/external factors. Focusing on just internal features of parents, as early juvenile courts did, will be short sighted without attention to the role systems play in providing effective programs, attentive staff/therapists, and providing instrumental support (e.g., transportation). Further, internal attitudes and feelings towards systems are likely also influenced by previous system encounters or social stigma around involvement. For juvenile justice in particular, engagement is likely to be affected by the social views towards policing and justice and for whom these systems exist to serve.

Court Mistrust and Credibility

An issue of specific relevance to participation in the justice system is the degree to which the parent feels that the juvenile justice system is credible and that the process is legitimate. Perhaps even more so than other child-serving system, a theory of parent involvement in the juvenile justice system should be informed by research on perceptions of system credibility and trust. Research shows that when people are treated fairly by authorities they develop a social connection which provides the basis for the voluntary acceptance of regulation, leading to more self-regulatory behavior (Ayres and Braithwaite 1992; Stith and Cabranes 1998). Consequently, there are practical as well as ethical reasons for ensuring justice procedures are perceived as fair by any party the court is hoping will participate in conditions of release or probation.

Parents often play a central role in court conditions of release or probation, in many cases acting as de facto extensions of the court's surveillance and authority. Youth are often ordered to follow parental expectations (with the attendant implication that parents will participate with the court in monitoring this compliance) and parents are themselves involved in court orders by participation in family-based interventions. However, no legal policies govern how parents are to be treated throughout the court process, despite the justice system's dependence on them to be collaborators in improving youth behavior.

Parent's Perceptions of the Juvenile Justice System

A review of recent studies examining parents' perceptions of the justice system provides reason to be concerned that many parents are not experiencing the justice system as fair or credible. A recent national survey of parents conducted by Justice for Families (2012) revealed that many families feel blamed by the system and subsequently internalize a stigma of being a "bad parent." As this review states, "Where families try to participate, they are too often disrespected, disregarded, and blamed for their child's involvement in the system. These barriers frustrate parents and family members at every stage in the juvenile justice process" (pg. 21). This report, along with other regional or national surveys of parent experiences, consistently describe parent's experiences as "overwhelming," "paralyzing," "hopeless," "frustrated" and "scared" (Justice for Families 2012; MacKinnon-Lewis et al. 2002; Models for Change 2009; Osher and Shufelt 2006; Ravoir et al. 2012). Feelings of anxiety and stress often arise from not understanding the court system in addition to concerns for their child (Justice for Families 2012).

Mistrust of the system can clearly be influenced by feelings of frustration and anger due to system processes. Distinct from these emotions, is also the belief about the incompetency of the court in being able to achieve a useful, positive result for the youth and family, or in some cases, a belief that the justice system is intended to harm children and families. Families of color may be especially distrustful due to historical and systemic racism in the justice system (Mancini 1996) and extreme levels of disproportionality in rates of arrest, referral, opportunities for diversion, and secure confinement (Pullmann et al. 2013). A national poll found that 27 % of Whites, 40 % of Hispanics, and 68 % of African Americans believed that the courts treat African Americans less fairly than whites (Pew Research Center 2013). Previous experiences with other systems can influence mistrust, in addition to current system experiences. A study of justice-involved families in Pennsylvania (Models for Change 2009) revealed that a history of difficulty in accessing effective community services and supports can negatively affect the way families interact with the justice system. A historical sense of alienation and victimization can, understandably, affect the ways in which families may interact with juvenile justice staff. Mistrust is heightened when the justice system reciprocally interacts with families in a way that confirms their beliefs about the futility of working with public systems. Cook and Gordon (2012) found that parents who mistrust justice staff lack confidence in the administration of justice and doubt the integrity of the system.

In attempting to improve parent involvement in juvenile justice, the literature is clear that courts and other justice facilities will need to be thoughtful about how policies are contributing or have contributed to injustice and inequities in the community. With this as a guiding principle, other child-serving systems provide hope that models of family participation can have a beneficial impact on parent involvement, satisfaction and youth outcomes. While the evidence from education, mental health, and child welfare suggests that parent participation may serve to improve youth outcomes, there is little literature in the juvenile justice arena to empirically support this claim. Consequently, to inform hypotheses about what specific outcomes parental involvement in the juvenile justice could impact, we conducted a content analysis of the existing literature to identify practice-based assertions about the relationship between parent involvement and youth outcomes.

Method

The literature review for outcomes-based arguments related to parent involvement in juvenile justice covered the academic, policy and gray literature using academic search

engines (Academic Search Complete, Psycinfo), internet search engines, reference lists of manuscripts already in our possession, and relevant resources from juvenile justice listserv and newsletter subscriptions (e.g., Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; Child Welfare Information Gateway; Mental Health and Juvenile Justice Collaborative for Change). In search engines, we used terms such as “parent involvement” “parent responsibility” “family involvement” “family engagement” “parent engagement” “juvenile justice” “justice-involved” and “juvenile court.” We identified 47 initial sources from our search. Papers and reports were then selected in which the author(s) made assertions about or presented results that indicated some association between parent involvement and juvenile justice; ultimately, 15 texts, including academic journal articles, law and policy briefs, and technical reports, were used for the analysis (Table 1).

Although a number of recommendations for family involvement in juvenile justice processes exist, the theoretical justification and subsequent literature guiding the implementation of these recommendations is rather limited. Due to the lack of strong theoretical frameworks or research on parent involvement in juvenile justice, we adopted a conventional content analysis approach for our analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Conventional content analysis using an inductive, non-theoretical, approach to identifying themes. Accordingly, our initial classification of the documents was based on their relation to outcomes-based arguments for parental engagement in juvenile justice. In line with the conventional content coding approach, we refined our coding into more specific outcomes-based categories that better described unique arguments for family involvement across parent and youth domains. Units of data (i.e., sentences or paragraphs from the retrieved articles) were coded by one member of the research team, and then reviewed by the other two members in several team meetings to identify inconsistencies and arrive at final codes. This was an iterative process which went beyond simply counting codes to a more interpretive process of locating patterns and collapsing codes into themes (i.e., data reduction). This analytic procedure is similar to many elements of a consensus coding process (Hill et al. 2005), with a triangulation and peer debriefing technique used as a feasible alternative to inter-rater reliability that is consistent with qualitative components of “trustworthy” research, namely credibility and confirmability (Erlandson et al. 1993). By utilizing a content analysis approach, we were able to generate descriptive themes and refined codes that converged with the study objective of describing the current lack of empirical models to examine family involvement and related outcomes within juvenile justice systems.

Results

The arguments outlined in the sections below assert that greater family involvement will have beneficial outcomes at multiple levels. We classified these arguments into three categories: (1) Improved parental ability to provide instrumental and emotional support to youth; (2) Improvements in court functioning; and (3) Improvements in youth behavior. See Table 1.

Parent Instrumental and Emotional Support

One common argument in the literature is that family engagement can promote youth participation in services in both instrumental and emotional ways. Instrumentally, parents are often involved in transporting and helping youth navigate various systems, and increased parent engagement can lead to increased youth participation in court hearings and other services and activities (Lewis 2005). In a brief written by a former District Attorney and Juvenile Delinquency Judge, the Hon. Richard A. Lewis (2005) reported his firsthand experience observing families who took control of their youth's community service plans when invited into the planning process through Family Group Conferencing:

For example, instead of a judge ordering community service, the family might implement community service as part of its plan. In the case I observed, the family took it one step further and selected the location for the community service, a local food bank, and coordinated the schedule to ensure that an adult would be responsible on particular days to transport the juvenile... (pg. 2)

Additionally, parents can affect a youth's emotional participation in services. Vincent's (1977) early paper on family engagement was one of the first analyses of the relationship between parent involvement and youth treatment engagement. In it, he quotes from a statement issued by the judges of the Children' Court in New York in response to a state law that punished parents for youth infractions in 1952:

Treatment of the child requires parental sympathy and cooperation. Punishment of parents creates a barrier between them and their children which negatively affects treatment, and renders work with the parent impossible (pg. 525).

Additional support for the argument that parent involvement is important to supporting youth's emotional support come from papers which report that family relationships are critical for achieving rehabilitation goals

(Ravoiira et al. 2012; Shanahan 2010). A survey of staff working with incarcerated youth also reported that parents help to hold youth accountable for attitudes and behaviors (Shanahan 2010). Further, the Vera Institute found that youth in placement who were never visited by parents had significantly higher behavior problems compared to youth who were visited (Agudelo 2013) while Ryan and Yang (2005) found that family contact over a period of residential placement was associated with reduced recidivism. Osher and Hunt (2002) also assert that the "supportive involvement of family members can... reinforce treatment, and provide [the youth] with an advocate" (pg. 1). Institutional staff report that families provide youth emotional support and a sense of belonging (Shanahan 2010). In two studies surveying youth (one national, Ravoiira et al. 2012; and one among three residential facilities, Shanahan 2010), researchers found that the most common youth response to a question asking what would help them the most was more contact with their family. In a policy analysis and white paper on family involvement in juvenile justice, Pennell et al. (2011) summarizes the importance of the parents/child relationship by reminding us that maintaining connections to homes and families gives youth a sense of "belonging, competence, well-being and purpose" (pg. foreword). In addition to impacting youth behaviors, research demonstrates that involving families in transition planning and adequately preparing parents for this shift has a beneficial impact on youth community outcomes (Garfinkel et al. 1997; Trupin et al. 2011, 2004).

Parents appear to be in a position to reinforce the treatment gains youth may have made while in placement, but only if they are sufficiently prepared to do so. Parents in focus groups conducted by the National Girls Institute (Ravoiira et al. 2012) stated that they "felt challenged by a sense of lacking control. 'We are growing too—we need help with how to work with our daughters and to understand what life is like for them'" (pg. 2). It is implied that supporting parents to work more effectively with their children would be beneficial for both parents and youth. Further, parent support is likely to be attenuated with family resources are low and parents are limited by funds, time and motivation. As noted by Platt (2012), failures in parent engagement during times of severe resource limitations (for systems and families) raise questions about government organizational priorities and not simply about individual parent behavior.

Youth Behavior and Recidivism

The subtext for many of the arguments in support of increased parent engagement is that youth who are more highly engaged in treatment, more emotionally supported and have better treatment and transition planning will have

Table 1 Results from a content analysis on literature describing family involvement in the juvenile justice system

Theme		Sample references	Description
Outcomes-based arguments	Instrumental and emotional support (n = 9)	(Lewis 2005) (Vincent 1977) (Ravoira et al. 2012) (Shanahan 2010) (Agudelo 2013) (Ryan and Yang 2005) (Osher and Hunt 2002) (Pennell et al. 2011) (Garfinkel et al. 1997) (Trupin et al. 2011) (Trupin et al. 2004)	Parental involvement in their child's life during a period of court involvement or placement assists youth well-being through an improved sense of support. Because evidence suggests that positive family relations are critical for achieving youth rehabilitation goals, parental cooperation is necessary for a more efficient court system
	Youth behavior and recidivism (n = 6)	(Cook and Gordon 2012) (Garfinkel et al. 1997) (Justice for Families 2012 and DataCenter) (MacKinnon-Lewis et al. 2002) (Osher and Hunt 2002) (Shanahan 2010) (Pennell et al. 2011) (McGarrell and Hipple 2007) (Luke and Lind 2002) (Borduin 1999) (Henggeler et al. 1996) (Sexton et al. 2000) (Cunningham and Henggeler 1999)	Youth who are more engaged in treatment, better supported, and have better transition and treatment plans tend to have lower recidivism rates. Because family involvement assists in improving these outcomes, literature identifies a reduction in recidivism as a probable outcome of family engagement

lower rates of recidivism. The diverse mandates of the juvenile justice system regarding public safety policies and programming are highly focused on this goal. Accordingly, the promise of reduced recidivism is an explicit or implicit part of most of the arguments presented for family involvement (Cook and Gordon 2012; Garfinkel et al. 1997; Justice for Families 2012 and DataCenter; MacKinnon-Lewis et al. 2002; Osher and Hunt 2002; Shanahan 2010). The strongest support for family involvement's impact on youth recidivism comes from the Family Group Conferencing literature and the effectiveness of family-based models of intervention.

Family Group Conferencing is an approach to handling juvenile criminal matters, typically as a diversion process outside of formal court, which involves families in the planning process often with a restorative justice approach (Pennell et al. 2011). Restorative justice is defined by an

emphasis on making amends with the victim involved in the charges. Existing studies using this approach demonstrate promising results. An observational study of first time offenders involved with FGC found that youth had lower re-arrest rates than a comparison group (McGarrell and Hipple 2007). Another study similarly found small but stable effects on reduced reoffending over a year follow up for youth involved in FGC (Luke and Lind 2002). Despite promising effects, studies of FGC have not yet recorded the quality or involvement of families in these conferences and so direct effects are not known.

Similarly, family-based interventions are the most strongly supported approaches to reducing recidivism among justice-involved youth (Borduin 1999; Henggeler et al. 1996; Sexton et al. 2000). While specific elements of family engagement have not been formally tested in these models, an early paper (Cunningham and Henggeler 1999)

on achieving family engagement with clinical interventions for justice-involved youth highlighted the importance of therapist empathy, gift giving (providing some immediate, direct benefit to the family), credibility, and challenging negative stereotypes of families (in this paper's words "scientifically-minded"). As quoted in the paper:

A caregiver who is extremely angry and upset that she has had to take off work for the third straight day because of her son's misbehavior in school may be characterized (hypothesized) as having a hostile relationship with her son. An alternative hypothesis, however, could be that the caregiver's anger is more closely associated with threats from a supervisor who is unhappy with her frequent absences from work. pg. 270

For family-based programs, interventionists draw a line from parent engagement to high completion rates to improved youth outcomes. While the Cunningham and Henggeler (1999) paper focused on engagement for a particular clinical intervention with justice-involved families, the lessons for general parental involvement in the justice system are easily generalizable.

The available literature on family engagement contains arguments for improved instrumental and emotional support as well as youth outcomes. Despite compelling anecdotes and rigorous research on family-based interventions and outcomes, the direct effects of the justice system's effort to involve families on youth functioning (particularly in the court process) have not been tested and are unknown. The culminating purpose of the current paper is to bring these existing arguments into a testable framework for implementing and evaluating parent support and engagement programs within juvenile courts. The next stage of developing this framework involved reflection on the domain of parental involvement and how this could be best described. This domain is the foundation upon which the relationships among parent, youth and community outcomes are modeled.

Juvenile Justice Family Involvement Model

The Juvenile Justice Family Involvement Model (JJFIM; see Fig. 1) represents a testable framework informed by other family involvement models in child-serving system as well as practice-based evidence and theories illustrated through our content analysis. The outcomes and moderators of outcomes represent these hypothesized domains: parent negative experiences of shame, anxiety, and mistrust, or positive experiences of support, information, and invitations to participate (*Parent Experience*); parent ability to provide the youth support in attending hearings, provide transportation to youth on release, complete paperwork,

and generally assist in instrumental ways (*Parent Instrumental Support*); parent ability to provide reassurance, comfort, and support to the youth (*Parent Emotional Support*); the youth's experience of stress, discomfort, and anxiety (*Youth Experience*); the atmosphere in the court, the relevance and effectiveness of court decisions (*Court Climate and Function*); and, ultimately, youth behavior including aggression, criminality, school engagement and recidivism (*Youth Behavior and Recidivism*). The framework defines a family involvement domain as well as specifies the interrelationships among outcomes.

Family Involvement

Our development of the family involvement domain included a review of existing models for parent participation in health and social systems, as noted earlier. The education, mental health and child welfare systems identified areas of support that moved from information-giving to full participation in decision-making. However, the conceptualization of involvement in these areas viewed was horizontal, without a metric for characterizing increasing involvement. Consequently, in developing an ordinal model, we looked to Arnstein's (1969) widely cited and influential ladder of participation because of its ascending levels of involvement and participation within the context of a power hierarchy. This format aligned well with our effort to create a domain that was both observable and scalable. In Arnstein's model, eight domains are collapsed into three levels of participation: (1) Nonparticipation (Manipulation, Therapy); (2) Tokenism (Information, Consultation, Placation); and (3) Citizen Power (Partnership, Delegated Power, Citizen Control). The content analysis above suggests that family participation in juvenile justice can be characterized on a similar typology of exclusion (non-participation), informing, eliciting, and decision-making. Within these levels, we are able to place the various roles parents can play within the system that also reflects ascending levels of involvement. These roles are described below (see Fig. 1).

Exclusion

Exclusion or "locking out" parents occurs when no thought is given to informing or including families in justice processes. This could include being excluded from communication with the defense attorney about a child's case, or not being provided information about other critical functions such as how to communicate with detention centers about a child's critical medical health needs, providing information to judges, what will happen if their child is found guilty, being involved in their child's treatment

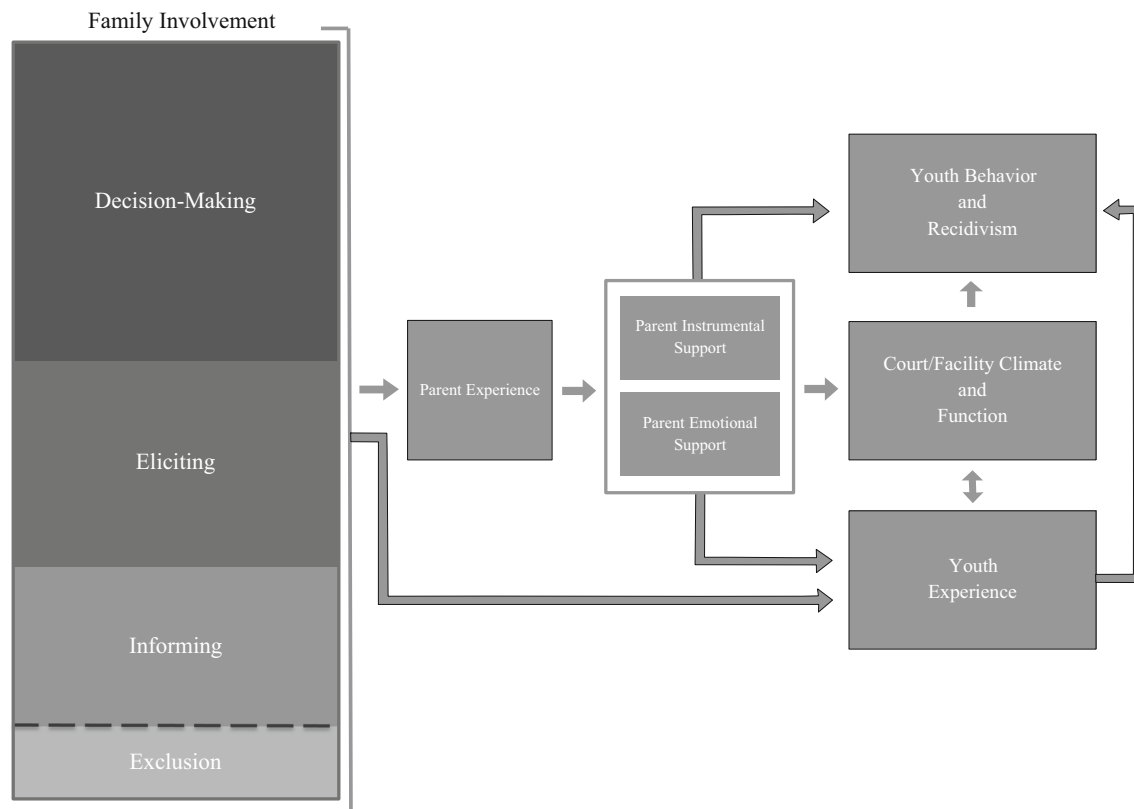


Fig. 1 The juvenile justice family involvement model (JJFIM): a testable framework

while in a correctional facility, and developing transition plans prior to their child's release from a correctional facility. Additionally, court policies and procedures that are not responsive to the needs of parents can be a de facto form of exclusion. For instance, parents may be excluded from court hearings due to a lack of flexibility in job hours and vacation time, difficulties in transportation, or late notification of court dates. In the JJFIM, exclusion of families is operationalized by a culture that does not value or is hostile to family involvement and input. Any efforts to include or inform families are tokenistic and are not developed with the input of family members. When compared to courts generally, many of which are beginning to implement family-informed policies, courts which exclude family involvement are expected to perform lower than other courts on desired outcomes.

Informing

Following exclusion, the next level involves *informing* parents about the justice process, hearing dates and procedures in a systematic way. Policies that value the importance of informed parents are represented by informational pamphlets and/or videos, trainings for staff on communicating with family members, online resources,

peer parent support and proactive outreach in the community to build community awareness of the justice system. Efforts to inform parents are guided by a belief that this is not only ethical but positively impacts parent, youth and system outcomes; consequently, effort is taken to reach out to parents during the creation of resources and policies around information and support so that materials are relevant and useful. Token efforts at information-provision that are not accessible, reader or viewer-friendly or informed by parent perspectives do not qualify as genuine informing. At this level, the court is the primary source of information towards parents with no bi-directional communication or input from other parents about outreach activities.

Eliciting

Eliciting information from parents to inform the justice process is the next step in the engagement framework. Eliciting information presupposes a foundation of good information strategies in which parents are already knowledgeable about the basics of court and justice system functioning and are, therefore, able to provide informed input in a variety of venues. This might include eliciting input regarding court or facility policies by including family members on an advisory or governance board. At

the client level, decision-making about a youth's case would involve parent input regarding disposition options such as release, court orders, court process, and treatment plans. Again, to provide informed input, the parent needs to be knowledgeable about how various options would have consequences for both short and long term outcomes. Strategies for ensuring parents are sufficiently knowledgeable would likely vary depending on the situation and might include the following: providing a family partner/peer parent to support and guide family members as they consider what to recommend or report to the court; training and/or manuals on court process; staff availability to answer questions for parents who participate on advisory or governance boards; clear resource materials; instructions from court staff on how decisions might impact youth criminal history, risk for incarceration, eligibility for treatment and so on. At this level, parents can play a role as a peer support provider, and may also participate in case-planning meetings regarding their own child's case.

Decision-Making

The highest form of engagement of families in this model involves parents at parity with judges and other court staff in decision-making. This could occur at both the client and system level. At the client level, the parent(s) would be given an equal say or vote in the direction of a youth's disposition, which has a precedent in approaches such as Family Group Conferencing (McGarrell and Hipple 2007). The court would have an equal opportunity to voice an opinion regarding the fairness and likely benefit of different disposition options. Consensus between the court and the family would drive decision-making. To fully participate as partners, families would need support in understanding the legal or substantive consequences of different decisions and the use of family partners or other supportive strategies could be an important element of this approach. Without this, imbalances in power due to the greater experience and understanding of court process by the court staff would likely have the effect of intimidating and/or silencing families.

At the system level, in alignment with the ladder of participation, parents could inform policies affecting court process as members of advisory groups or included in the governance system of the court or facility (a partnership model); parents could have complete control over certain aspects of system functioning such as peer support programs (a delegated model); or most radically, parents could serve as the primary drivers of the system in a parent-run court similar to juvenile peer courts (a citizen control model). In any of these scenarios, sufficient numbers of parents should be represented so that a family-informed perspective can be adequately represented.

Impact on Outcomes

Implementation of family involvement practices and policies from exclusion to decision-making are hypothesized to have a differential effect on outcomes through both direct and indirect pathways. Family involvement in the court will likely have the most direct effect on the parent's experience, including feelings of shame, anxiety and mistrust. Further, family involvement is proposed to also have a direct, positive effect on youth experience independent of the parents' experience. Increased communication and collaboration between parents and the court is expected to reduce the risk of youth receiving multiple, potentially contradictory messages, thereby improving youth's experience. Family involvement is expected to indirectly affect the level of support, both instrumental and emotional, parents can provide to youth. The literatures from mental health, child welfare and education all point to the increased capacity of parents to respond to youth needs when parents are strategically and adequately engaged in these systems (Brody et al. 2002; Epstein and Sheldon 2006; Geurts et al. 2012; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997; Houtenville and Conway 2008; Kutash et al. 2011; McKay et al. 2001; McWayne et al. 2004; Weiss and Stephen 2009; Williamson and Gray 2011). Support to youth is then expected to improve youth experience (anxiety, understanding of the process), youth behavior and court/facility climate. In contrast to early juvenile court assumptions about a unidirectional flow of influence from system to parent to youth, research in education, mental health, and child welfare suggest that family engagement policies are most beneficial when reciprocal; that is, when parents are invited to audit, comment on and improve system processes.

Conclusion

Recent focus on parents' experiences of the juvenile justice system as a touch-point marks a unique stage in the system's development. Previous involvement of parents in juvenile court was discussed in a framework of blame and accountability, and efforts to compel involvement through statute have been largely unsuccessful (e.g., Vincent 1977). In the JFIM, parents are viewed as untapped resources, or even casualties in a process that often disregards parents' experience of the system and does not always recognize the claim of parents to participate in decisions that will have long lasting consequences for their children. The moral dimension of this involvement is often paired with an assertion that involving parents will also lead to better outcomes. The literature in this area has grown

precipitously in the last 5 years and includes mostly policy-focused publications that include calls to action (Justice for Families 2012) summaries of the prevalence of the problem and innovative programs (Arya 2013; Models for Change 2009) and even guides to implementing family-focused systems (Arya 2013). However, prior to the current paper, there have been no taxonomies of family involvement in juvenile justice, no categorization of rationales for family involvement, and no research framework for understanding how family involvement might lead to specific outcomes. This is critical guidance for courts and juvenile facilities regarding where and how to start reform and for researchers in developing evaluation protocols for understanding the impact of reform on progress.

The JJFIM represents a blending of the literatures in parent participation and engagement for other child-serving systems as well as arguments for increased parent participation in the juvenile justice system. According to this model, a court or justice facility would do best to begin reform by first developing relationships with parents who have gone through the system to identify and develop strategies to support the understanding of parents' new to the system. Incorporating local parent voice will reduce the possibility that these efforts would become a token effort towards information-giving as parents will identify real gaps, and strengths, in current processes. From this, courts and facilities would move towards increasingly family-driven policies and programs including the representation of parents on advisory and decision-making bodies.

The incorporation of family-driven policies in juvenile court is a dynamic process that will require collaborative and mutually respectful relationship between family partners and justice agencies. For many agencies, this will require a paradigm shift regarding the role and boundaries of the justice system and parent determination. However, both the literatures from other child-serving systems and the growing juvenile justice literature provides confidence that such a shift would be richly rewarded by improved court, parent and youth outcomes.

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