Unit II: The Relationship Between Police Officers and Juveniles
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• In Unit I of BCJ 2201, Juvenile Delinquency, we examined and discussed the historical aspects, terms, and definitions used in the study of juvenile delinquency.

• We also began our introduction to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) as it relates to the prevention and deterrence of juvenile delinquency in the United States.

• In Unit II, we will analyze one of the most important relationships when learning about juvenile delinquency—the relationship between law enforcement, specifically local police officers, and juveniles.
Little John: A Juvenile’s Story

Throughout this course, you will have the opportunity to view short scenarios about a juvenile and his interactions with law enforcement and, consequently, the juvenile justice system.

• Watch the video about interactions between Officer McDonald and Little John, a juvenile: https://online.columbiasouthern.edu/csucoursecontent/courses/emergency_services/bcj/bcj2201/15K/video/unitii_video.mp4

• Click here to access the transcript for this video.

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Relationship Between Police Officers and Juveniles

- The relationship between police officers and juveniles is especially critical because oftentimes, the juvenile’s first contact with the criminal justice system is the encounter with police officers.

- One of the main factors why the relationship between police officers and juveniles is critical—as it relates to juvenile delinquency—is the ability of the police officer to make decisions based upon the his or her discretion.
What is Discretion?

• First, we need to understand and define the term *discretion* as it relates to law enforcement officers.
  • Police discretion is the ability of the police officers to have leeway and/or choices in how they should handle and/or respond to the current encounter with a citizen who has committed a criminal act, and as it relates to juveniles, how to respond to status offenses.
• The police department rules can often influence the discretion ability of the police officer.
• The fewer rules there are, the more discretion is available, especially at the street level of decision-making scenarios.
What is Discretion (Cont.)?

• Police officer discretion allows law enforcement officers to have various choices and intervention techniques when encountering juvenile delinquents.
• Oftentimes, discretion is based upon the individual situation and the juvenile.

Can you think of some possible alternatives to arrest if you were working with juveniles?
Factors that Influence Discretion

According to Bartollas and Miller (2011), factors that influence discretion include the following aspects:

- Nature of the Offense
- Citizen Complaints
- Gender
- Departmental Policy
- Socioeconomic Status
- Race
- External Community Pressure
- Nature of the Interaction
- Individual Characteristics
If the offense is severe, there is a higher likelihood that the juvenile may be arrested.
A juvenile is more likely to be arrested if the complaint was initiated by a citizen who wants the juvenile to be arrested and is present at the scene.
A female juvenile is less likely to be arrested than a male juvenile.
An African American juvenile is more likely to be arrested than a White juvenile.
Socioeconomic Status

• Research indicates that juveniles from lower-income families receive a different justice than juveniles from higher-income families.
More professional departments have been shown to refer more juveniles to court, essentially abiding by policy and utilizing less discretion.
External Community Pressure

The status of the victim or complainant is a factor in deciding the juvenile’s disposition.
Nature of Interaction

- If the interaction between the officer and the juvenile is hostile, he or she is more likely to be referred to court.
Individual Characteristics

- These could include prior offenses, peer relationships, and the conduct of parents.
Discrimination of a Segment

- Law enforcement should make choices based upon the needs of the juvenile.
- However, this is not always the case, and we must understand that discretion may lead to discrimination of a segment and/or group in America, and discretion may also lead to abuse of power.
- Criminalizing status offense conduct has compromised public safety and disproportionately affects the most vulnerable populations (Blitzman, 2015).
- Vulnerable populations include African American and Hispanic youth.
Community Policing

Now, let’s move on and examine how community policing influences the relationship between police officers and juveniles.

- We must first understand the term *community policing* as it relates to the criminal justice system overall.
- Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime. (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services [COPS], 2014)
The U.S. Department of Justice has established the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) to advance “the practice of community policing by the nation’s state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources” (COPS, n.d., para. 1).

- Community policing is an important concept, and not just for the criminal justice system overall. The community policing philosophy holds much merit in the juvenile justice system as well, and it can be a critical strategy in reducing and preventing juvenile delinquency within American communities.
Community Policing

• Again, the encounter between the juvenile delinquent and the police officer is a critical timeframe because the discretion of the police officer can be a pivotal part of the juvenile’s future.

• Community policing allows police officers to protect the general public, while at the same time serve the public, by creating or becoming an influential individual for the juvenile.

• Police officers should be approachable and accessible to the public, and this includes juveniles.
Community Policing

- In some jurisdictions, police officers are routinely placed in the schools.
- This not only shows presence, but also provides an opportunity for breaking down the communication barrier often witnessed between police officers and juveniles.
- The ability to work with juveniles is not always a talent demonstrated in every law enforcement officer.
- Police officers who specifically wish to work with juveniles have skills and talents that are uniquely important for communicating with the juvenile population.
Juvenile Aggression

• “When police officers come into contact with an aggressive juvenile, their goal should be to de-escalate the juvenile's aggression quickly and safely” (Golden, 2004, para. 4).
• Police officers will need to learn the best techniques to help break down the communication barrier and attempt to establish trust.
  • Juveniles are unlike adults physically, psychologically, and socially, and the aggression they display toward authority figures is significantly different from the aggression displayed by adults. Consequently, effective techniques used to de-escalate juvenile aggression are different from those used to de-escalate adults. (Golden, 2004, para. 3)
Juvenile Aggression

- Police officers must utilize “a form of communication that is youth-specific and that can quickly and safely de-escalate interactions with angry and aggressive youth” (Golden, 2015, para. 2).

- Officers should be knowledgeable of the research that explains why youth become angry and the tactics that will calm them.

- When a youth/police interaction is poor, it could have disastrous effects for both the community and the agency.
Specialized Juvenile Units

- In some jurisdictions and municipalities, especially higher-populated areas, there are specific police units designated to work only with juvenile delinquents.

- These units can include, but are not limited to, juvenile officers, juvenile specialists (e.g., social workers, sociologists, and psychologists) and juvenile gang units.

- Each of these specialized police units plays a key role in preventing and deterring juvenile delinquency.
Juvenile Specialist

• The previous slide mentioned juvenile specialists.

• These individuals are often charged with “providing direct care and supervision to youthful offenders in a state operated facility of the juvenile justice system” (State of Oklahoma, n.d., para. 1).

• Additionally, they offer professional supervision and counseling to juveniles in an attempt to regulate aggressive behaviors (State of Oklahoma, n.d.). In addition to the rehabilitative aspect, this also assists with maintaining facility order.

• Furthermore, they also are required to document behaviors and activities.

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Juvenile Correctional Officer

- In addition to a juvenile specialist, a juvenile correctional officer works with juveniles who are remanded to a secure facility.

- The primary duty of a juvenile correctional officer “is to ensure the safety and security of the youth and staff assigned to the halfway house and the public through responsible direct supervision and care of the youth” (Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 2016, para. 1).

- Also, the officer will play a significant part in the rehabilitation process by applying designated behavioral modification and counseling strategies.
Juvenile Gang Units

- Juvenile gang units are of particular importance within higher-populated cities in the United States.
- Juvenile gang units were, and are, initiated to deal directly with gang activity and problems.
- Two of the major concerns with juvenile gang activity are the increase of violence and drug trafficking within the local community.
- Street gangs are typically associated with violence.
- The younger the juvenile is when he or she is exposed to gang activity, the more likely that juvenile will live a life of violence, and he or she is more likely to migrate to adult violent behavior.
National Gang Intelligence Center

• In an attempt to monitor and share information about gangs gathered by federal, state, and local law enforcement, in 2005 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was directed by Congress to create the National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC).

• The NGIC is a repository for gang intelligence in that it tracks the “growth, migration, criminal activity, and association of gangs that pose a significant threat to the U.S.” (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d., para. 1).
National Youth Gang Survey

- Similar to the NGIC, the National Gang Center (NGC), which is a joint effort of the Department of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, publishes data from the National Youth Gang Survey.

- This survey gathers information from “a nationally representative sample of more than 2,500 law enforcement agencies serving larger cities, suburban counties, smaller cities, and rural counties” (National Gang Center, n.d.-a, para. 4).

- Most agencies, more than 95%, have indicated gang-related activity at least once in the three previous survey cycles (National Gang Center, n.d.-a).
National Youth Gang Survey (Cont.)

What information does the survey provide?

- First, it provides the estimated number of gangs.
- See published information at right.
- Has the number of gangs increased or decreased since 2006?

Figure 1: Estimated Number of Gangs, 1996-2012
(National Gang Center, n.d-d)
National Youth Gang Survey (Cont.)

• Second, it provides the distribution of gangs by type of area (e.g., rural or suburban).
• See published information at right.
• Why do you think gangs are more prevalent in smaller and larger cities as compared to rural and suburban locations?

Figure 2: Distribution of Gangs by Area Type (National Gang Center, n.d.-d)
National Youth Gang Survey (Cont.)

- Third, it provides the race/ethnicity of gang members.
- See published information at right.
- Looking at the graph, what can you conclude about current gang members?

Figure 3: Race/Ethnicity of Gang Members, 1996-2011
(National Gang Center, n.d.-b)
National Youth Gang Survey (Cont.)

- Fourth, it provides information about gang-related crime.
- See published information at right.
- Are you surprised to see that gangs are more likely to be involved in violent crimes as compared to drug sales?

Figure 4: Gang-Related Crime, 2011-2012
(National Gang Center, n.d.-c)
National Youth Gang Survey (Cont.)

• Fifth, it provides the factors that influence gang violence.
• See published information at right.
• How would return from confinement influence gang violence?

Figure 5: Factors Influencing Local Gang Violence 
(National Gang Center, n.d.-c)
Youth Gang Units

- Due to the increase of youth gang involvement, youth gang units have been established by many departments to help change the path of potentially or already violent youth behavior.

- Again, the communication tools and the discretion of the police officer play an integral part in the future of the juvenile delinquent.
References


References


