

JUVENILE SENTENCING ADVOCACY PROJECT

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE

Evaluation Report

Craig A. Mason, Ph.D.

University of Miami

July 1, 2000

JUVENILE SENTENCING ADVOCACY PROJECT

Evaluation Report

Research shows that youth who enter the adult justice system are at greater risk for recidivism than are those who remain within the juvenile justice system. Unfortunately, high numbers of youth in Miami-Dade County have been regularly transferred to adult court, without adequate attention to their developmental status, the contextual basis for their behavior or their potential for rehabilitation. Consequently, few of these youth receive juvenile sanctions.

The Juvenile Sentencing Advocacy Project (JSAP) is a program operated by the Miami-Dade County Public Defender's Office serving children ages 12 to 18 years, who have been transferred to adult court. JSAP incorporates a variety of activities aimed at (1) enhancing assessments and evaluations, (2) preparing and presenting mitigation reports, and (3) educating defense lawyers, social workers, judges, prosecutors, police and other concerned individuals regarding the importance of considering developmental factors when sentencing youth or making sentencing recommendations. The ultimate goal is to increase the number of juvenile sanctions among transferred youth and consequently reduce the number of adult sentences.

As this suggests, JSAP involves structural, procedural and conceptual changes within the Public Defenders office. It also attempts to impact community organizations that also interact with children. In order to reach these goals, JSAP has spearheaded

several activities and initiatives. As outlined in this report, these activities and initiatives fall into five broad areas:

- I. Increase the number of transferred youth receiving juvenile sanctions.
- II. Offer professional training in adolescent development and sentencing options for juveniles.
- III. Sponsor a formal conference aimed at increasing understanding of development and sentencing options.
- IV. Develop detailed sentencing plans for 50 youth.
- V. Create a new developmental assessment instrument, which was to be used to assess 100 transferred youth.

The purpose of this report is to review the degree to which the goals of JSAP were met, as well as summarize findings that have emerged from the various activities associated with the program. Each is discussed in order below, starting with the overall impact of JSAP on sentencing.

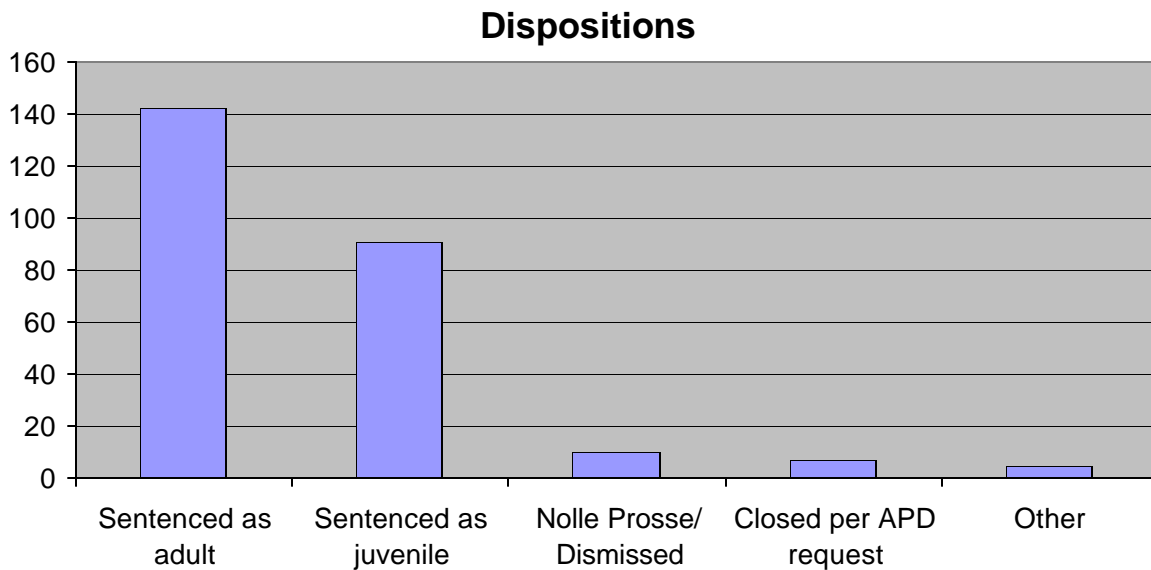
Overall Impact on Sentencing. As noted above, the ultimate goals of the Juvenile Sentencing Alternatives Project (JSAP) were to reduce the number of prosecutorial juvenile transfers (direct files) to the Adult Court system, increase the number of juvenile sanctions among transferred youth, and help youth and families receive the support and services they require. As described in the following analyses, JSAP has clearly been extremely successful in this regard.

In order to evaluate the impact of JSAP on sentencing, it must first be determined which JSAP cases are appropriate for inclusion in analyses. Specifically, during the

period of this report, 357 cases received JSAP services. However, 102 of these cases were ultimately transferred outside of the Public Defender's Office, due to either a conflict or private attorney being hired. The 102 cases were not included when examining the impact of JSAP on sentencing decisions as the ultimate sentencing decisions were made after cases were no longer assigned to the Public Defender's Office, and thus outside of their direct influence. The 102 cases transferred out of the Public Defender's Office are not included in any subsequent analyses, unless otherwise noted. Removing these 102 cases results in 255 cases for which the impact of JSAP can be appropriately evaluated. As presented in Figure One, of the 255 cases, 91 or 36% received juvenile sanctions. In contrast, in 1998 only 20 similarly transferred cases received juvenile sanctions, which translates to a rate of 25 cases over a similar 15-month period. This reflects a **350% increase** in the number of juvenile sanctions among targeted youth.

A detailed breakdown of the dispositions for these 255 cases is presented in Figure One. In addition to the 91 cases involving juvenile sanctions, 142 cases (56%) were sentenced as adults, 10 cases (4%) were Nolle Prose/Dismissed, 7 cases (3%) were closed per APD request and other dispositions, such as no action or closed by supervisor represented the remaining 2% of cases.

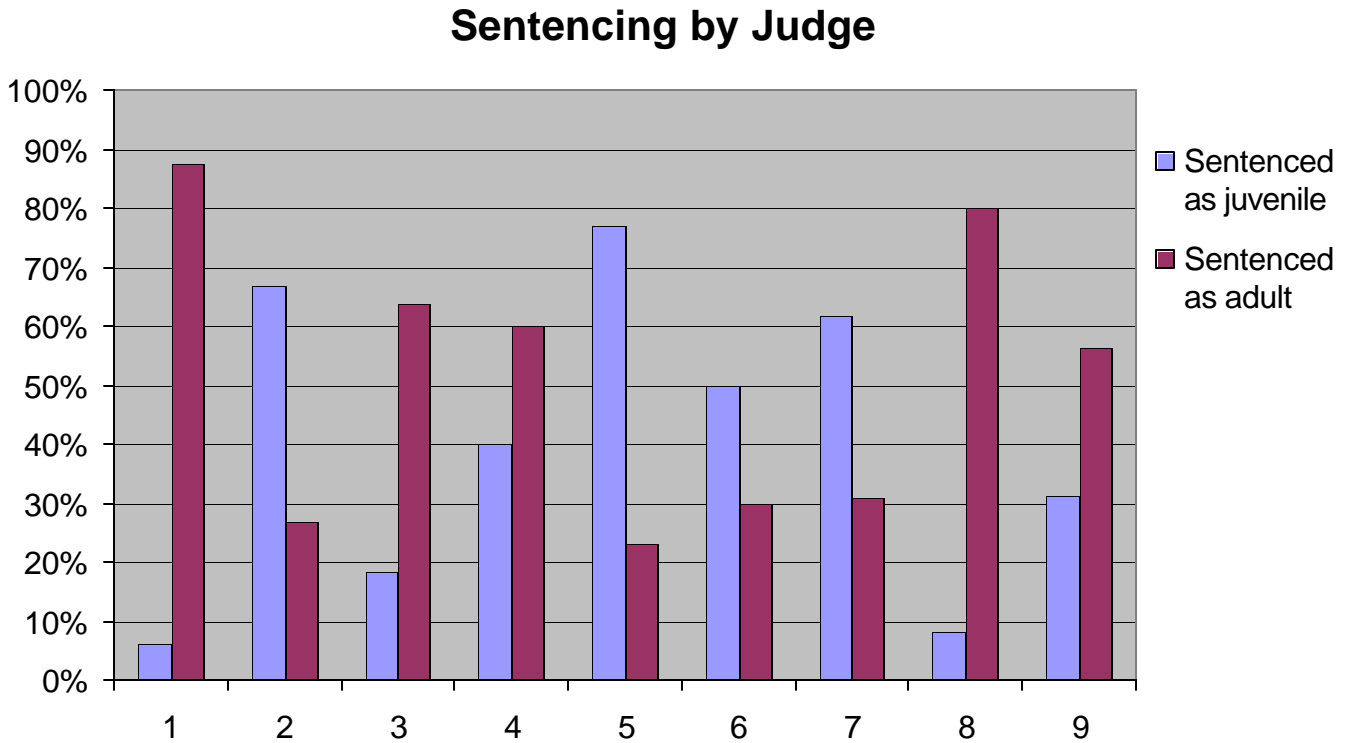
Figure One. Dispositions for 255 youth who were not conflict/private attorney cases.



While the dramatic increase in cases receiving juvenile sanctions points to the impact of JSAP, it should be noted that considerable variation exists across judges. Figure Two contrasts the number of cases receiving adult sentences versus juvenile sanctions for those judges who had at least 10 JSAP cases. It should be noted that this is based on only 203 of the total of 255 cases, as information regarding the specific judge associated with each case is not currently available on all JSAP youth. However, it does appear that cases for which such information is available reflects a representative sample of cases. In addition, it should be noted that for the purposes of this evaluation judges are not identified by name.

As is evident in Figure Two, among judges with at least 10 JSAP cases, considerable variability exists. For example, 77% of JSAP cases administered by Judge #5 received juvenile sanctions. In contrast, only 6% of JSAP cases administered by Judge #1 received juvenile sanctions, whereas 88% were sentenced as adults.

Figure Two. Sentencing for judges with 10+ cases



As noted previously, JSAP aimed at providing a variety of services and programs, including professional training, hosting a professional conference, providing enhanced sentencing plans for cases and creating a new developmental assessment tool.

Professional training in child development and sentencing options for juveniles.

As part of the Juvenile Sentencing Project, the Miami-Dade County Public Defenders Office has offered and promoted a variety of professional training experiences for both their own staff and other professionals in the community. Training experiences have included staff training, hosting a conference on Special Education Issues, on-site visits to local juvenile programs and hosting a large conference on youth in the juvenile justice system.

Staff training. A total of 51 staff training sessions occurred between April 1, 1999 and April 30, 2000. These typically lasted one and one half hours. Involved were the Director of Social Services, the JSAP Grant Manager, 3 to 4 social workers within the Public Defenders Office and the JSAP Project Attorney from the Public Defender's Office. These 51 training sessions translate into 355 person-hours of training for staff in the Public Defender's Office.

Special Education Conference/Workshops. On June 14 and 15, 1999, the Public Defender's Office hosted a working conference on special issues related to youth with identified special education exceptionalities. Attendees included child advocates, attorneys, social workers and others over a two-day period. Exact level of attendance varied, as different individuals attended different workshops and discussions based upon their own particular needs or position. However, the conference resulted in 295 person-hours of training for local professionals over two days.

Site Visits to Area Programs. During September and October 1999, staff from the Public Defenders Office visited 13 different programs across South Florida serving youth in the justice system. Staff involved in these program visits consisted of social workers, the Project Attorney, and the JSAP Grant Manager. The 13 site-visits occurred as part of 10 different trips, with several site-visits occurring as part of a single trip. Site-visits resulted in a total of 312 person-hours of training for social workers and attorneys in the Public Defenders Office as to the availability, nature and present state of services for youth in the justice system.

“Our Children, Our Future” Conference. As part of the Juvenile Sentencing Advocacy Project, the Miami-Dade County Public Defender’s Office also hosted a two-day conference titled “Our Children, Our Future”. This was a major event, featuring local and national policy makers, researchers, advocates and experts presenting on a wide range of topics including sentencing procedures, special education issues, adolescent development, research on the role of community and familial risk factors, as well as an update on the latest treatments and interventions. Officially, 257 people registered for this two-day conference, with at least 46 attendees coming from areas outside of South Florida. Together, this resulted in approximately 4112 person-hours of training. Attendees were from a variety of agencies and backgrounds, as summarized in Table One below.

As part of this conference, participants completed pre- and post-test measures of their knowledge and attitudes towards children and child-issues in the justice system. Results of these surveys are discussed in a separate section below.

Table One. “Our Children, Our Future” Attendee Demographics

<u>Background</u>	<u>Number</u>
Assistant Public Defender	79
DJJ/DOC/DOJ	57
Other Attorney/Paralegal	37
Social Worker	24
Other/Unknown	13
Police Officers	12
Child Advocate	11
DHS/DCF	9
Service Provider	8
Judge/Court Administrator	7
TOTAL	257

Other JSAP Activities. Finally, JSAP included a range of additional educational and training activities that do not directly correspond to one of the previous categories. This included organized meetings and training on the new developmental assessment, meetings with various community leaders on violence prevention, training on family therapy techniques, instruction on school system procedures and issues, as well as formal training on special education rights and responsibilities. These activities often involved social workers and attorneys from the Public Defender’s Office, defense attorneys, representatives from the courts, DJJ, Miami-Dade County Public Schools and other

agencies. As reflected in Table Two, this resulted in a total of 619 person-hours of additional training.

Table Two. Additional Training Activities

Topic	Total Person-Hours
Violence Prevention	95
Family Therapy	18
Case Management Issues	21
School System Issues	12
JSAP Education/ Public Relations	25
Developmental Assessment	247
Other	201
<hr/>	
Total	619

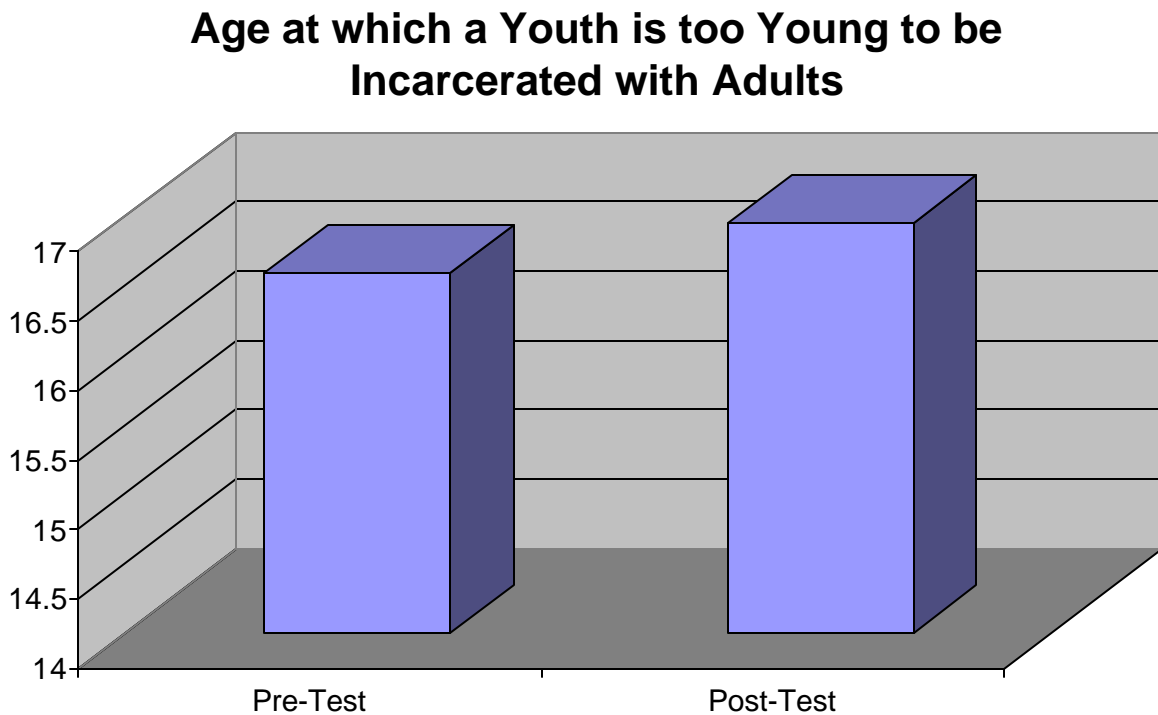
"Our Children Our Future" Conference

As noted above, the Miami-Dade Public Defender's Office sponsored a two-day conference and workshop series titled "Our Children Our Future". The conference featured local and national policy makers, researchers, advocates and experts presenting on a wide range of topics including sentencing procedures, special education issues, adolescent development, research on the role of community and familial risk factors, as well as treatments and interventions. The goal of the conference was to increase sensitivity and awareness of these issues and needs among professionals involved in the justice system.

In order to assess the degree to which this goal was met, pre- and post-test surveys were included as part of attendees registration materials packet. Attendees were encouraged to complete the respective surveys during opening and closing plenary sessions. All surveys were pre-numbered, allowing pre- and post-tests to be paired without requiring attendees to identify themselves. It was hoped that this degree of anonymity would increase attendees' willingness to provide honest answers to the survey questions. Of the 257 people registered for this two-day conference, a total of 62 completed both a pre- and post-test. This response rate is in fact not atypical for this type of format and setting. Attendees were of varied backgrounds, however, for analysis of the surveys, attendees were placed into three groups: (1) Justice/law enforcement, for example DOJ or a police department official (2) Defense attorney—public or private—and social workers, many of whom were affiliated with defense services, (3) Other/unknown, for example child advocates.

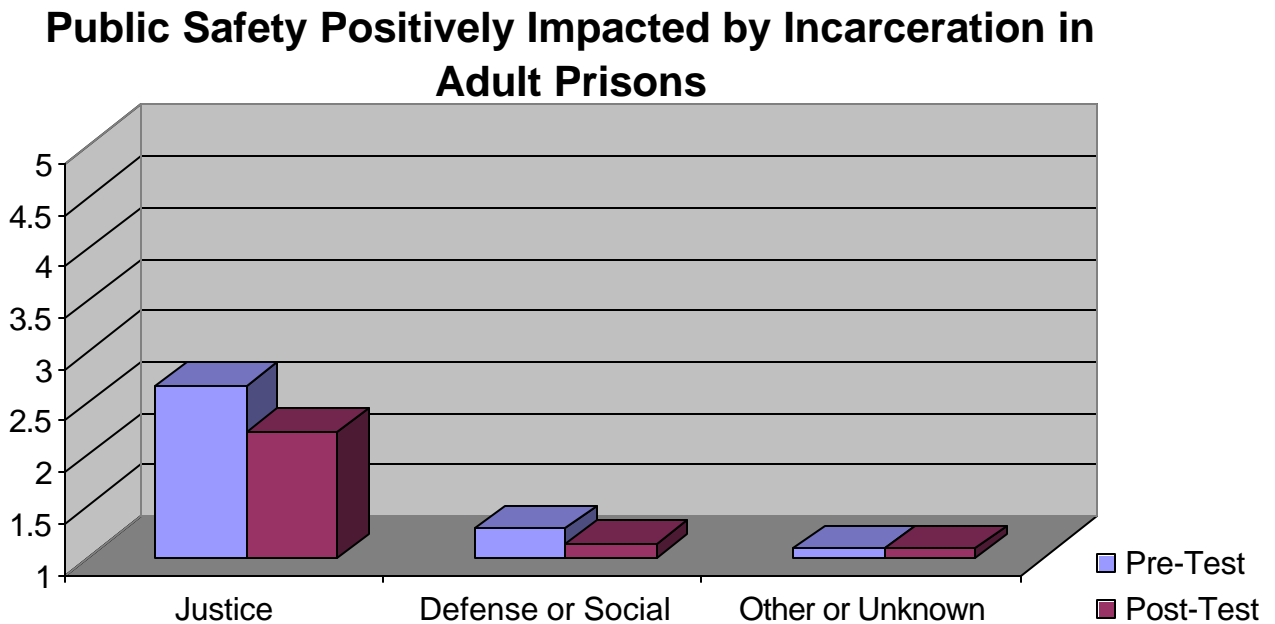
Analysis of the pre and post surveys suggested that the conference resulted in a variety of changes in attitudes and perceptions—some anticipated, others not anticipated. One of the anticipated impacts of the conference was an increase in the age at which attendees felt a juvenile should be incarcerated with adults. As illustrated in Figure Three attendees initially reported that youth should not be incarcerated with adults prior to the age of 16 years, 7 months. Following the conference, attendees felt that youth were too young to be incarcerated with adults prior to the age of 16 years and nearly 11 ½ months.

Figure Three.



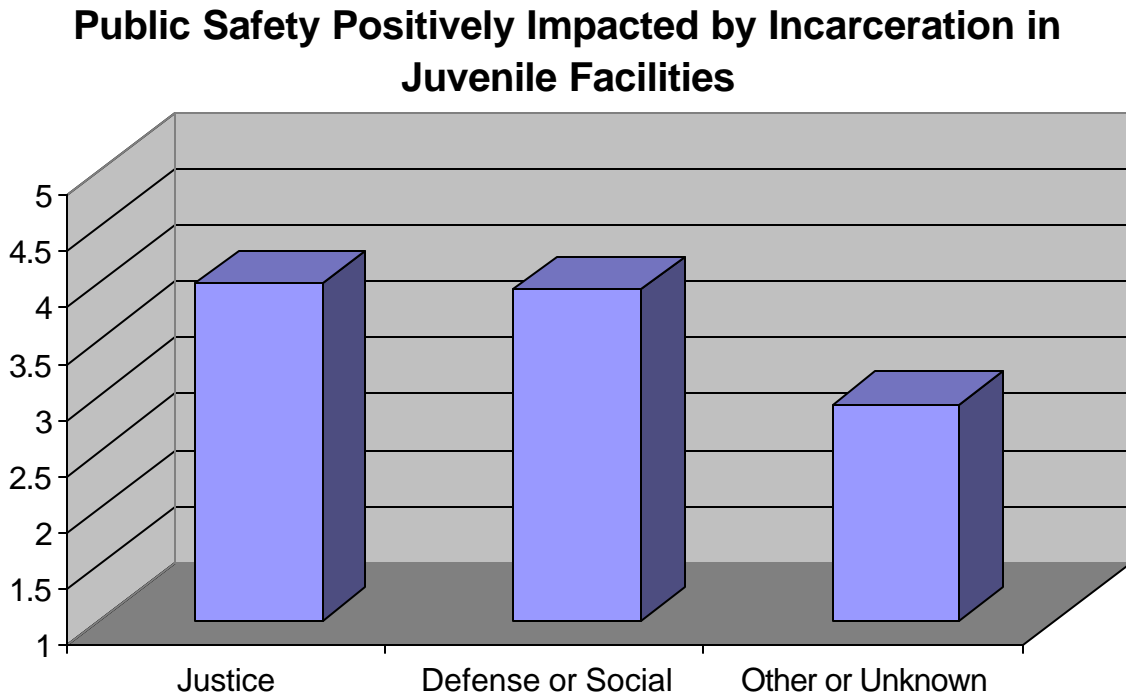
Attendees also were asked to rate the degree to which they believed that public safety was more positively impacted by incarcerating juveniles in adult prisons when it has been found that they have committed a serious violation of the law. Ratings were made on a Likert scale of 1="Strongly disagree" to 5="Strongly agree". Although the complex, the anticipated changes were observed. Specifically, attendees with "other" or "unknown" backgrounds reported very strong disagreement with this perspective (mean=1.08 for both pre- and post-tests). Defense/social work attendees reported similar levels of disagreement (pre-test mean=1.28, post-test mean=1.14). In contrast, justice/law enforcement attendees initially reported less strong aversion to this position (mean=2.67), but also reported the greatest change following the conference (post-test mean=2.22). These changes are presented visually in Figure Four.

Figure Four.



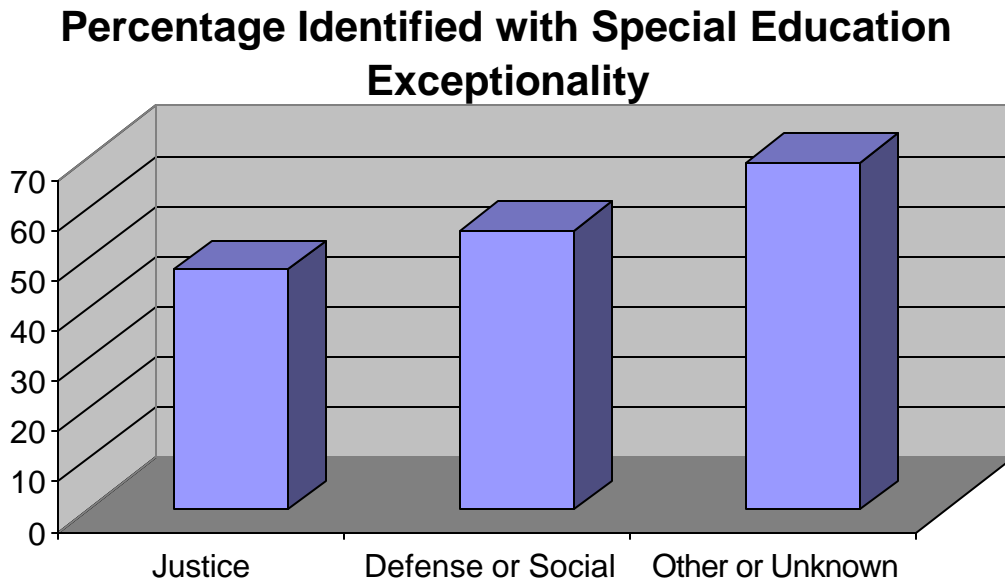
In contrast, no changes were observed in perceptions that public safety was best served by the placement of such youth in juvenile facilities, although mean group differences did emerge. Using the same Likert scale, justice/law enforcement attendees and defense/social work attendees reported similar attitudes (means of 4.00 and 3.95, respectively—with no significant change over time). This reflected agreement with the position that public safety is best served by placing these youth in juvenile facilities. In contrast, attendees of “other” or unknown background felt neutral about this statement (mean of 2.92). It should be remembered that attendees of “other” or unknown background also had the strongest reservations about incarcerating such youth in adult facilities. Thus one interpretation is that this group felt that these youth are best served in some other type of setting. These differences are reflected in Figure Five.

Figure Five.



A series of questions also examined perceptions and attitudes towards the needs of youth with identified special education exceptionalities. While no change was observed in attendees' beliefs regarding the number of such children in the justice system, significant overall differences were found based on attendee's background. On average, attendees with "other" or unknown backgrounds reported believing that 70% of cases involved children with identified special education exceptionalities (again, with no significant change over time). In contrast, defense/social workers reported believing that 55% of cases involved youth with identified special education exceptionalities, while justice/law enforcement attendees reported believing that 48% of cases involved such youth. These differences are reflected in Figure Six.

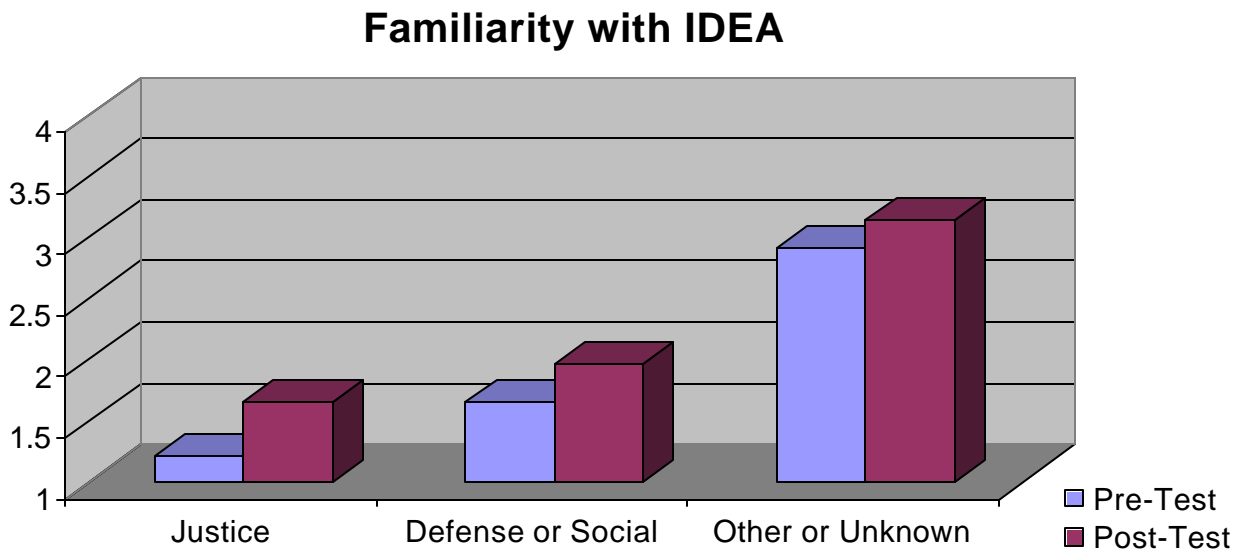
Figure Six.



While exact data as to the accuracy of these impressions is currently unavailable (a recent estimate by the Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention was 33% to 50%), given the accepted high rate of youth with special education exceptionalities, attendees were also asked to rate the degree to which they were familiar with IDEA. Ratings were on a Likert scale of 1="Never Heard of It" to 4="Understand it Very Well". As anticipated, following the conference, attendees—particularly those in justice/law enforcement, reported greater understanding of IDEA (from 1.22 to 1.67). Defense/social work attendees reported slightly less of an increase in knowledge (from 1.66 to 1.97). The smallest increase was observed among attendees of "other" or unknown background; however, these already reported the greatest initial familiarity with IDEA (mean pre-test=2.92, mean post-test=3.15). Nevertheless, while an increase in knowledge was reported by attendees, it should be noted that even after the conference, few in either the justice/law enforcement or defense/social work groups reported a good understanding of

IDEA. For example, a rating of 2.00—higher than the post-test mean for both of these groups—corresponds to a rating indicating “Heard of IDEA, but not familiar with it”. These changes are presented visually in Figure Seven below..

Figure Seven.

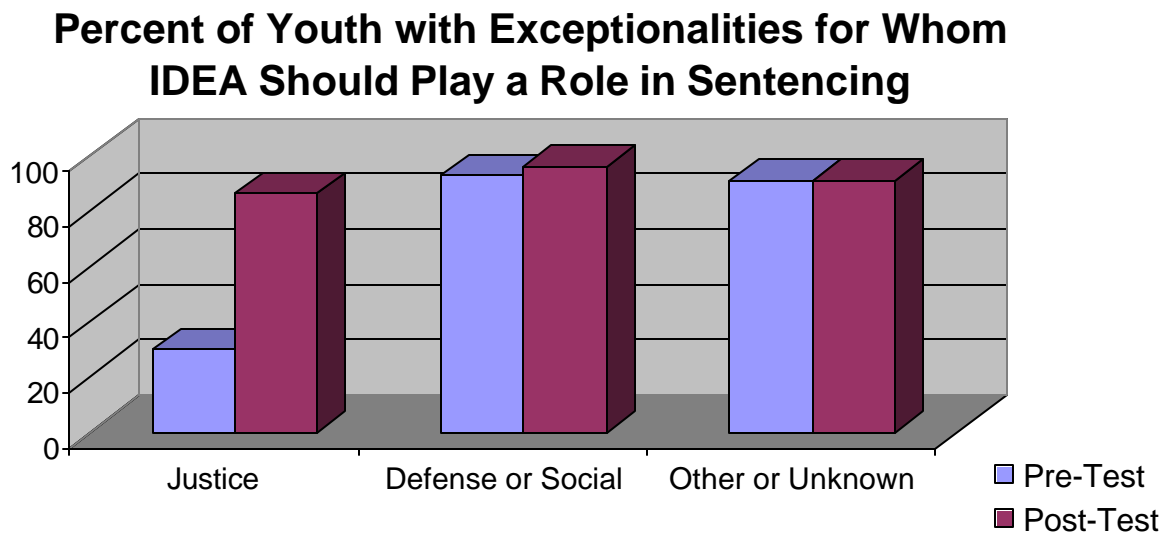


Finally, and most importantly, when it comes to sentences for youth with identified exceptionalities, attendees reported an increase in the proportion of court cases for which they believe IDEA should play a role in sentencing. Consistent with the above findings, this effect was most dramatic—quite dramatic in fact—for those in the justice/law enforcement group. Prior to the conference, justice/law enforcement attendees reported feeling that IDEA should only play a role in sentencing for approximately 30% of the cases involving youth in special education. After attending the conference, these same individuals reported that IDEA should play a role in sentencing for approximately 86% of cases involving youth in special education. Defense/social work attendees reported high

ratings both pre- and post-conference (93% and 96%, respectively), as did attendees of “other” or unknown background (91% both pre- and post).

This finding is particularly significant in that it suggests that PDO social workers and attorneys may want to specifically use IDEA when making sentencing recommendations. It may serve as an effective mechanism for helping youth receive services for which they are entitled. These changes are presented visually in Figure Eight.

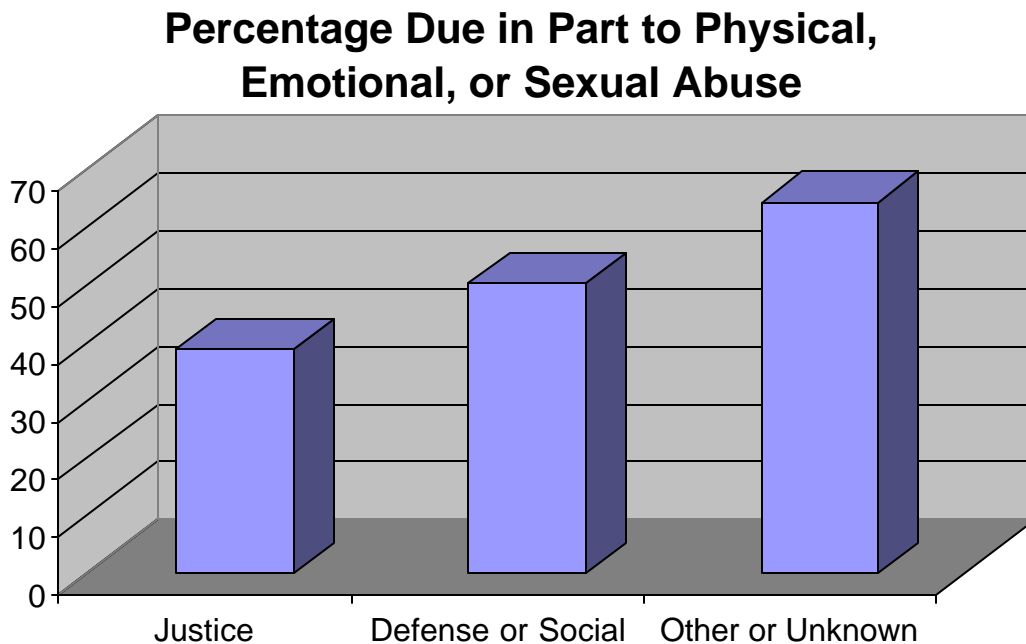
Figure Eight.



Finally, attendees were asked a variety of questions assessing their perception of the impact of various risk factors on youth in the justice system. In this regard, less change was observed and at times change occurred in an unanticipated direction. Nevertheless, important group differences were generally noted among attendees.

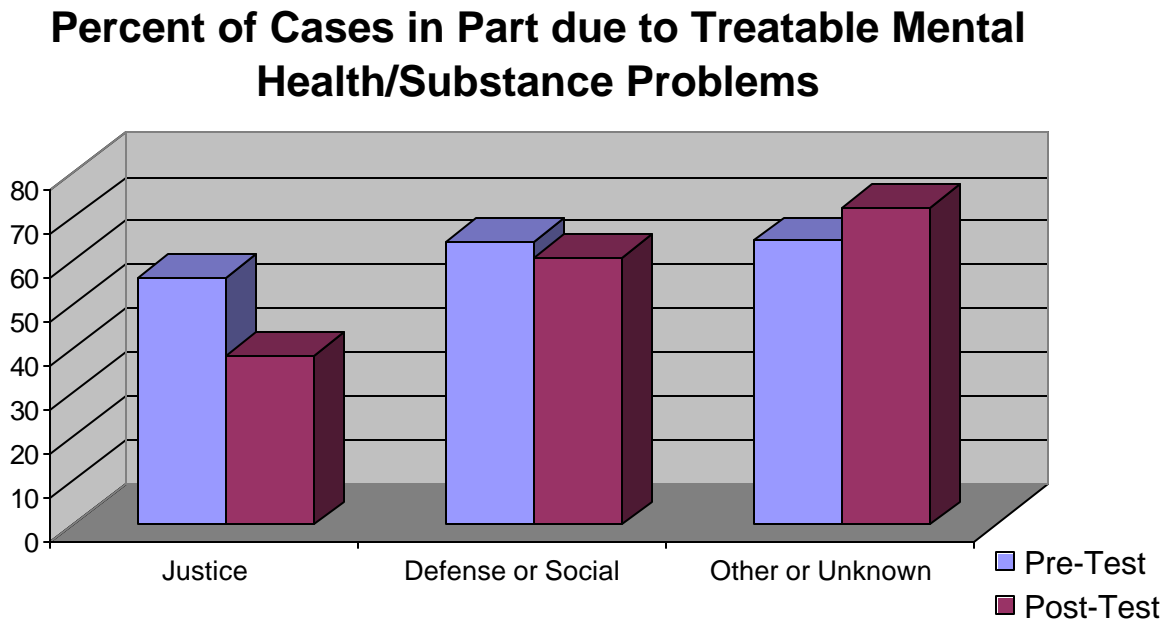
For example, no change was observed in attendees' perceptions as to the percentage of cases that are at least partly due to physical, emotional or sexual abuse. However, significant mean differences did exist between attendees as to the degree of this problem. Attendees of "other" or unknown background reported the highest number of cases in which they felt physical, sexual or emotional abuse of the child played a role—64%. This was followed by defense/social workers, who reported the perception that such abuse played a role in 50% of cases. Finally, justice/law enforcement reported the perception that physical, emotional or sexual abuse played a role in only 39% of cases. These differences are represented in Figure Nine.

Figure Nine.



On the other hand, results did suggest a complex change in views on the percentage of cases that are at least partly due to treatable mental health/substance problems. Specifically, there was relatively little change observed among defense/social workers, from 65% of cases pre-conference to 61% of cases post-conference. In contrast, a slight increase was observed among attendees of “other” and unknown backgrounds (from 65% to 72%). However, justice/law enforcement attendees reported a considerable decrease in perceptions as to the number of cases at least partly due to treatable health/substance abuse problems (from 56% to 38%). This is represented in Figure Ten.

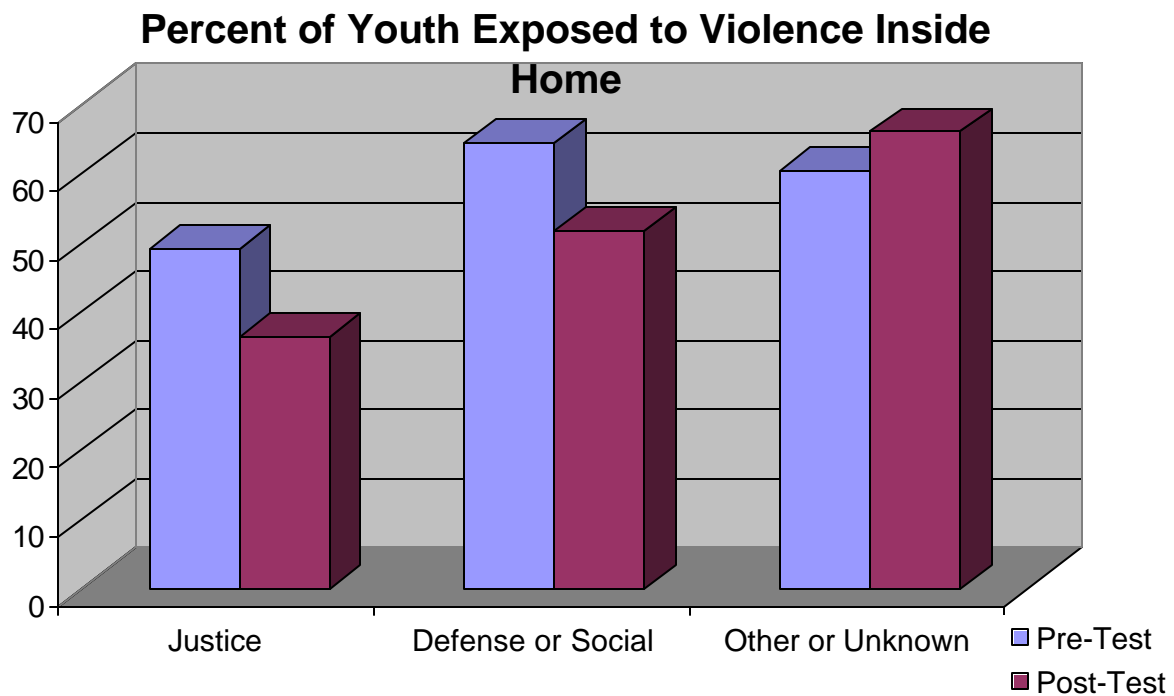
Figure Ten.



Similar complex patterns were observed when assessing perceptions of the role that exposure to violence might have upon youth cases. As represented in Figure Eleven, the number of cases perceived as involving exposure to violence inside the home

decreased for both defense/social workers (from 65% to 52% of cases) and justice/law enforcement (from 49% to 37% of cases) following the conference. Attendees of other or unknown backgrounds reported a slight increase in the perceived number of cases in which the child had been exposed to violence in the home (from 60% of cases to 66%).

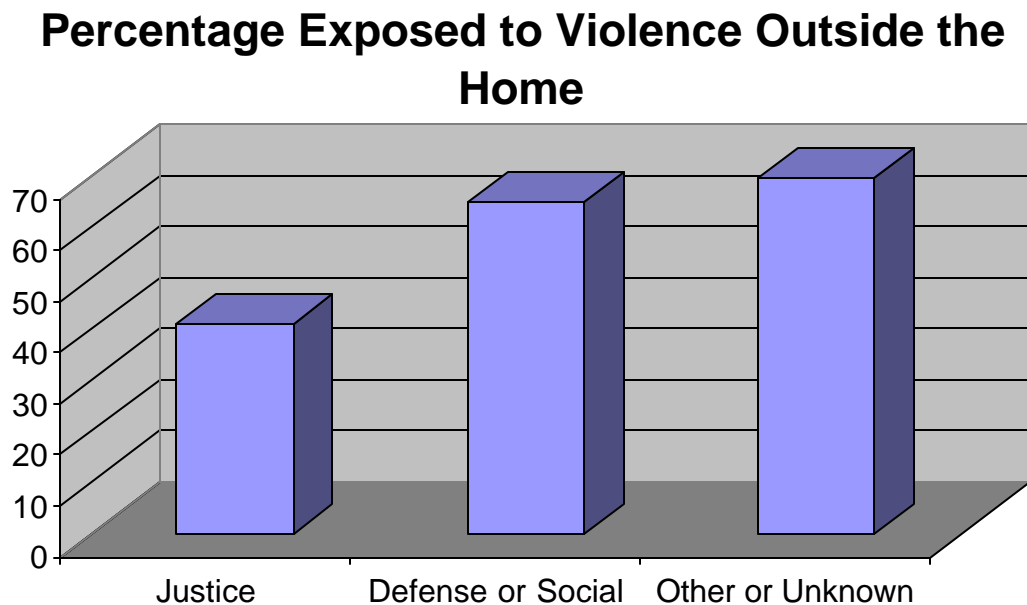
Figure Eleven.



In contrast, no changes were observed in the perceived number of cases involving exposure to violence outside the home, although group differences continued to be apparent. As seen in Figure Twelve, defense/social work attendees, as well as those of “other” or unknown background reported the highest percentage of cases in which they felt youth had experienced violence outside of the home, 65% and 70% respectively. In

contrast, justice/law enforcement reported the feeling that only 41% of youth in the justice system had experienced violence outside of the home.

Figure Twelve.



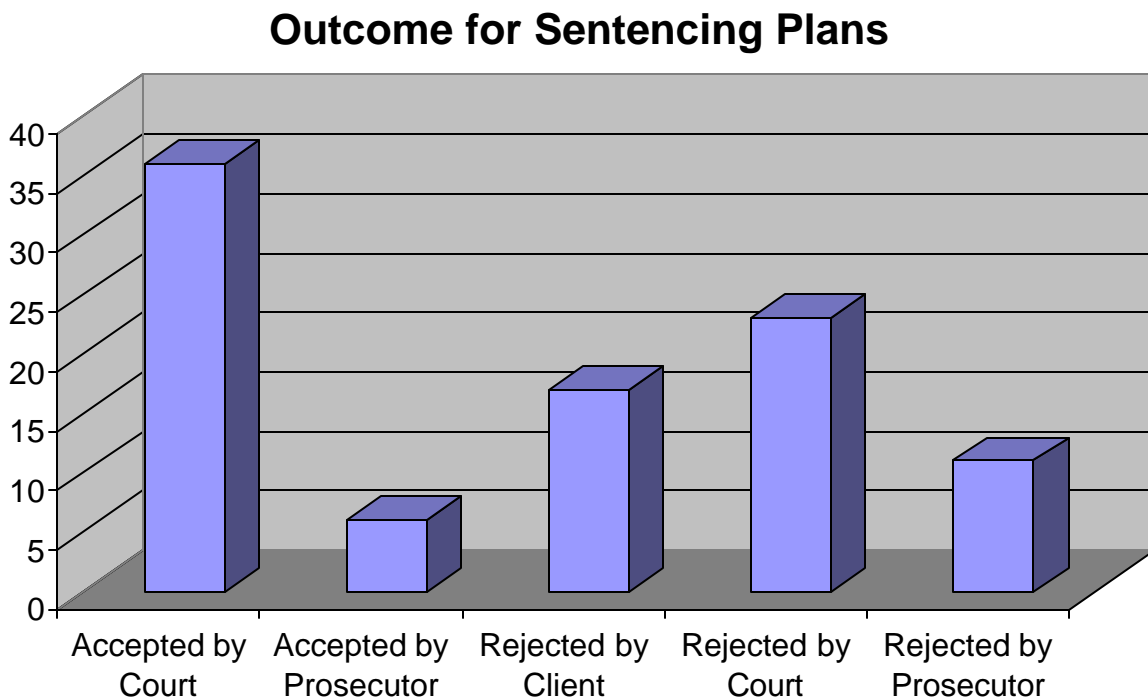
Sentencing Plans

In their original proposal, the Miami-Dade Public Defender's Office initially intended to develop sentencing plans for 50 youth transferred to adult court. The objective of the sentencing plans was to clearly articulate to judges the information gathered by social workers, attorneys, psychologists and others. Sentencing plans are designed to include a detailed description of what has been learned through developmental and psychological assessments, the services that are needed by the child, the agencies that offer such

services and the potential impact and benefit of such services for the youth, the family and the broader community.

In fact, between January 1, 1999, and March 31, 2000, a total of 93 sentencing plans were developed—**186%** of the anticipated number. As reflected in Figure Thirteen, 36 of the 93 plans were accepted by the court, Twenty-Two were rejected by the court and 11 were rejected by the prosecutor. Seventeen sentencing plans were rejected by the client, which is particularly surprising given that all seventeen youth who rejected the sentencing plan were ultimately sentenced as adults.

Figure Thirteen. Sentencing Plans



As might be expected, considerable variability existed among judges in their response to the sentencing plans. Figure Fourteen presents the number of sentencing plans accepted or rejected by various judges. Only judges who received more than 5 sentencing plans are included. As before, judges are not identified by name, however we should note that the numbers used to identify judges do not correspond to the same numbers used in Figure Two. As presented in Figure Fourteen, Judge 2 accepted more than 80% of the proposed sentencing plans, while Judge #7 rejected nearly 80% of sentencing plans. In fact, of the 23 sentencing plans rejected by the court, nearly half (48%) were rejected by a single judge—Judge #7. A detailed listing for all judges who received any sentencing plans is presented in Table Three.

Figure Fourteen. Court Accepted/Rejected Sentencing Plans by Judge.

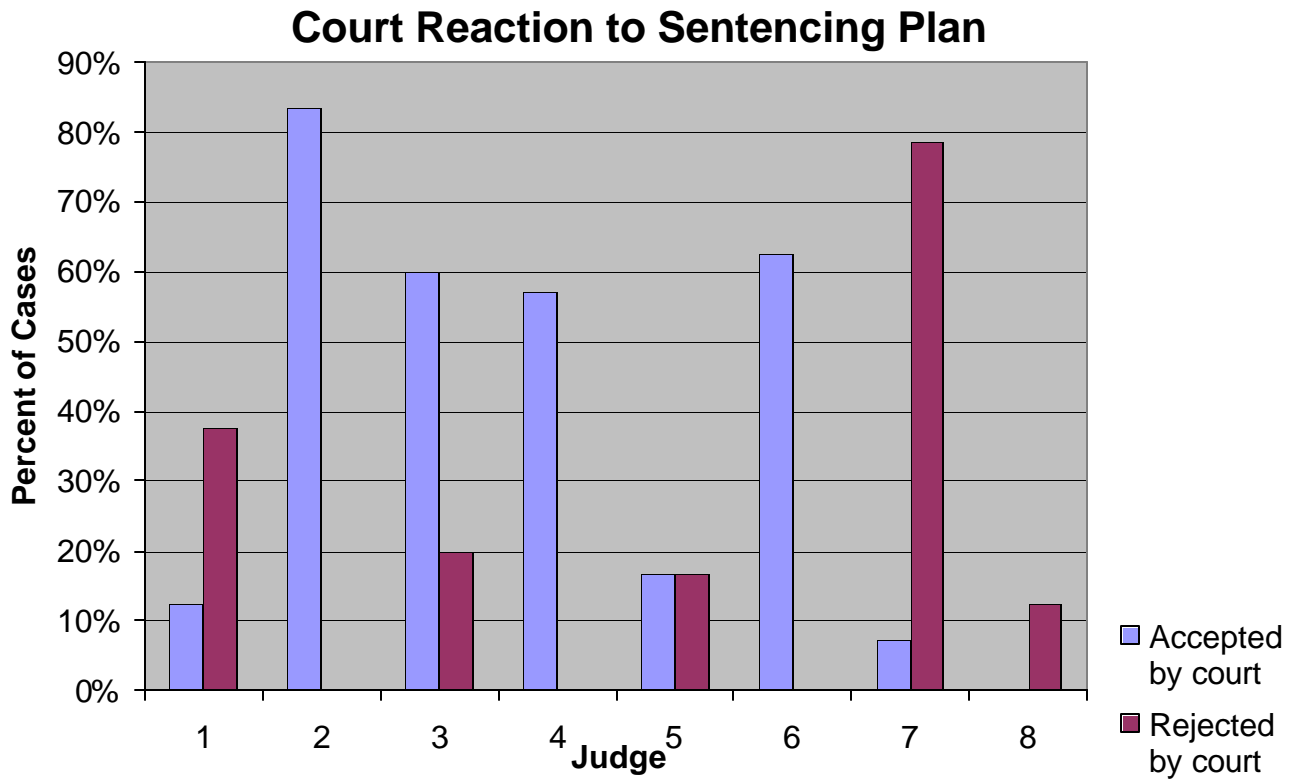


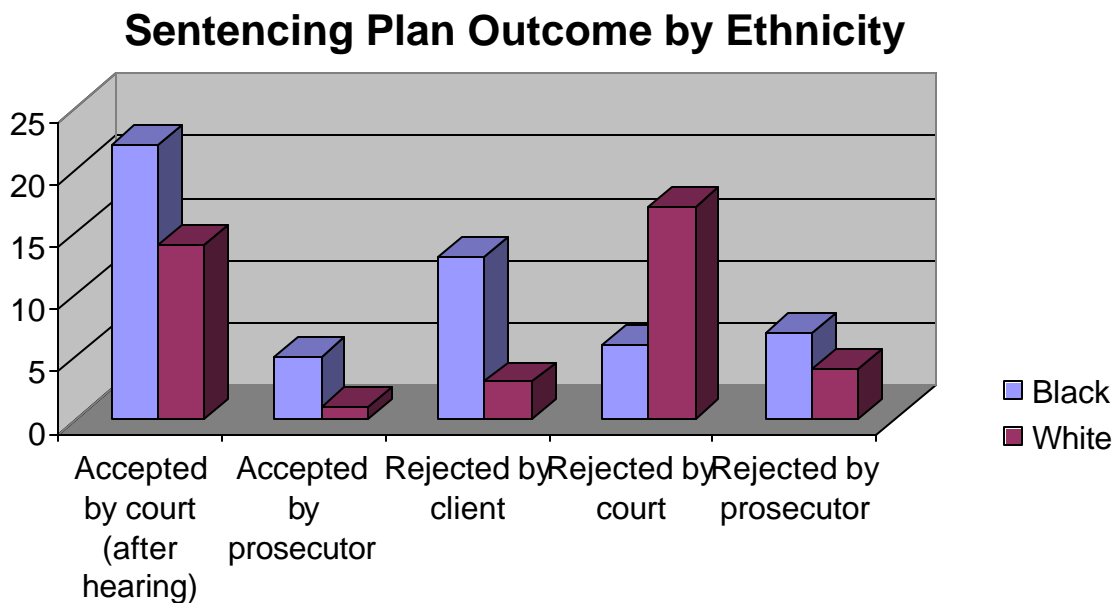
Table Three. Sentencing Plan Breakdown by Judge

Judge	Accepted by court (after hearing)	Accepted by prosecutor	Rejected by client	Rejected by court	Rejected by prosecutor	TOTAL
A	1					1
B	1		1	3	3	8
C	10		1		1	12
D				3		3
E	3		1	1		5
F	2				1	3
G		2				2
H	1			1		2
I	4		3			7
J	1	1		1	3	6
K	5	1	2			8
L				1		1
M	1					1
N	2		1	1		4
O	1	1		11	1	14
P		1	6	1		8
Q	2				2	4
R	1		1			2
S			1			1
T	1					1
TOTAL	35	6	16	23	11	93

In addition, whether sentencing plans were accepted or rejected also varied by the ethnicity of the youth in the case ($X^2(4)=14.99, p<.001$). Overall, as reflected in Figure Fifteen below, this relationship was complex and a result of several factors. First, courts were more likely to reject sentencing plans for White youth, than they were for Black youth ($X^2(1)=6.90, p<.01$). However, this was at least in part confounded by the fact that it is likely Black/African American youth rejected their own sentencing plans in disproportional numbers ($B(3,16), p=.055$). It is possible that plans that were rejected by youth were also

more likely to have been rejected by the courts. Consequently, the removal of these plans from consideration would result in relatively fewer court rejections of sentencing plans for Black/African American youth.

Figure Fifteen. Sentencing Plan Breakdown by Youth Ethnicity



Finally, a set of analyses examined the overall impact of sentencing plans upon the disposition of cases. Specifically, the dispositions for the 93 cases where sentencing plans were developed were compared to those cases where no sentencing plan was developed. As before, conflict/alternative attorney cases were excluded. Results of these analyses are presented in Figures Sixteen and Seventeen.

Figure Sixteen. Disposition by Sentencing Plan, Version A

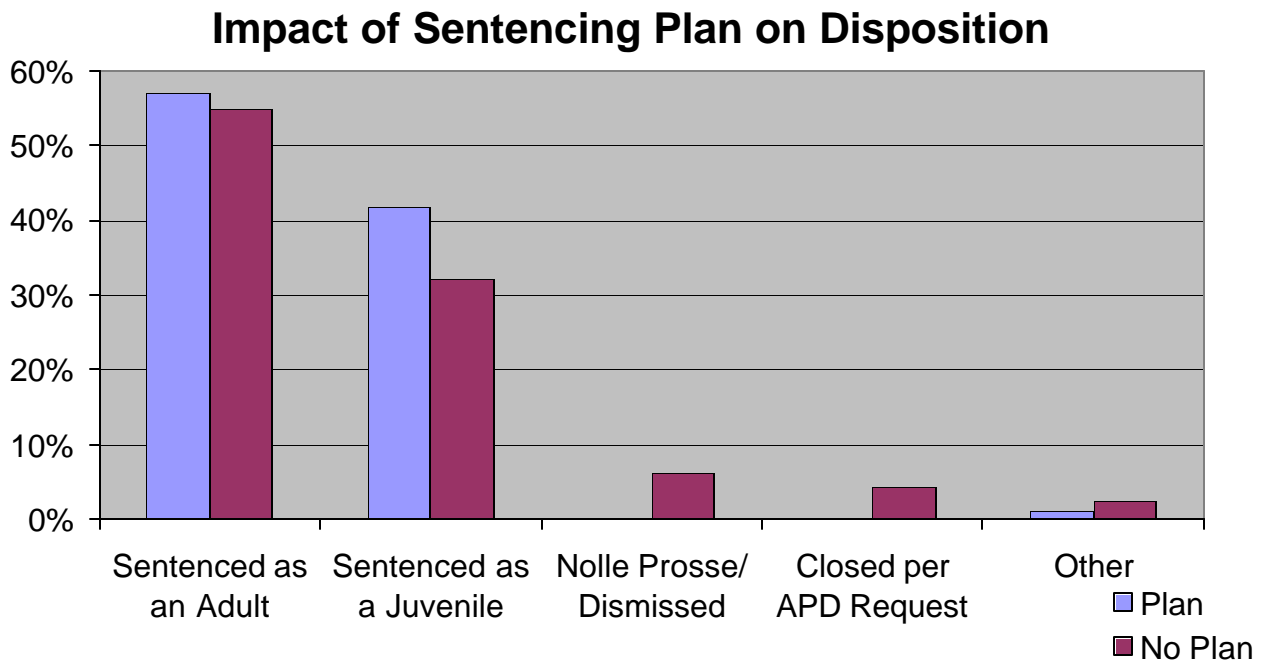
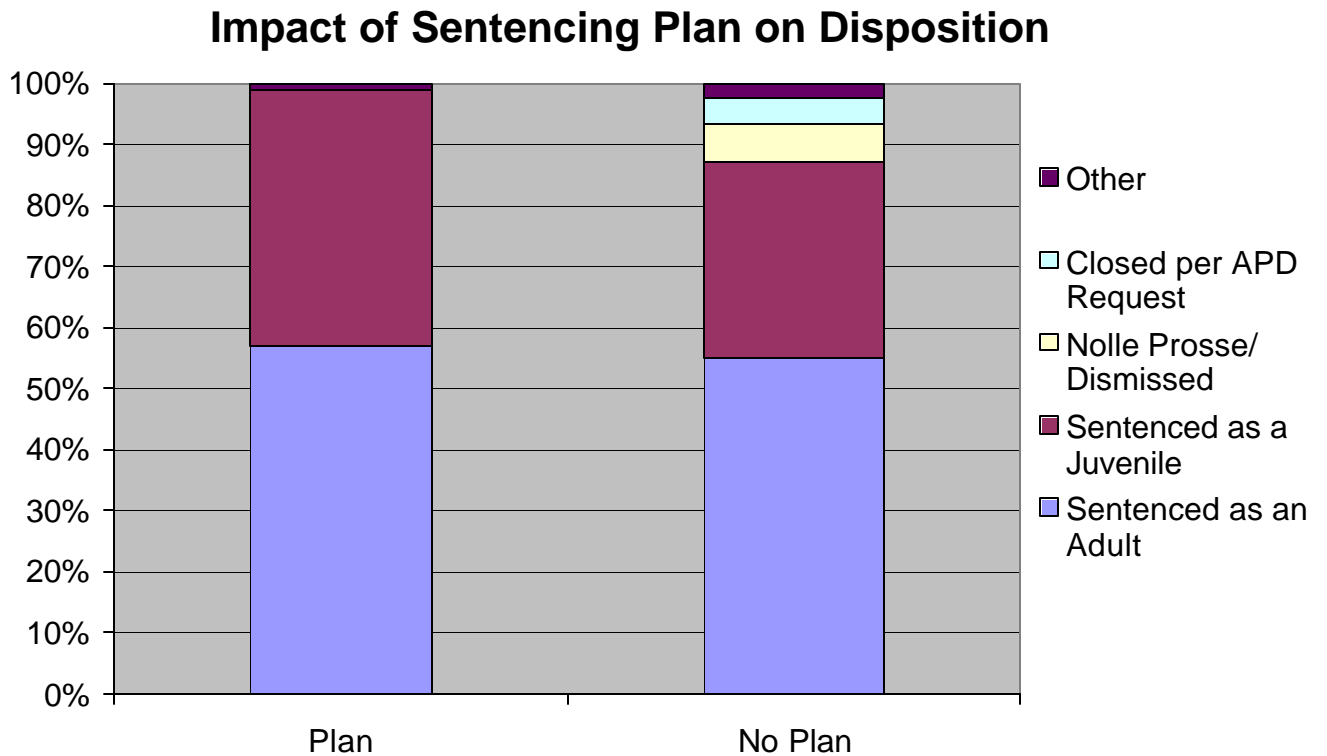


Figure Sixteen presents the percentage of cases which received various sentences based on whether or not a sentencing plan was developed. For example, among youth without sentencing plans, 55% were sentenced as an adult and 32% were sentenced as a juvenile. In contrast, among youth with sentencing plans, a comparable number (57%) were sentenced as adults but 42% were sentenced as juveniles.

One surprising observation that emerges from Figure Sixteen is that the relatively high proportion of cases with juvenile sanctions does not result from a reduction in the proportion of cases sentenced as adults. Instead, the increase in the number of youth with juvenile sanctions is gained from a reduction in the number of youth receiving other types of dispositions. This is presented more clearly in Figure Seventeen below.

Figure Seventeen. Disposition by Sentencing Plan, Version B



Use new assessment instrument to assess 100 youth transferred to adult court

One objective in which JSAP did not meet or exceed expectations was in the design and use of a new developmental assessment instrument. This new assessment instrument was intended to (1) appropriately determine the level of cognitive, moral, and emotional development of a youth, rather than focus narrowly on the existence/non-existence of mental disorders, (2) highlight the individual strengths a youth possesses in order to better prescribe specific treatment alternatives, as well as better understand the potential benefits of such treatment to the youth, the family and society as a whole, and (3) provide a personal, historical context for their behavior in order to articulate possible bases

for their actions and more importantly, specific areas to be targeted as part of an effective intervention.

Originally, the goal was to conduct 300 assessments using the new developmental assessment tool; however, early in the project, such a high volume was recognized as overly ambitious. Consequently, the goal was reduced to 100 assessments. In fact, as of May 1, 2000, a total of 12 assessments were conducted using the new instrument.

Given the modest number of assessments conducted, it is essentially impossible to conduct a reliable evaluation at this time. The process is further complicated due to the fact that developmental assessments have been largely conducted on the very latest cases, with the final disposition of these cases currently unknown. As such, it is impossible to determine to what degree the developmental assessment impacts a judge's decision. Furthermore, a review of these assessments suggests that only one in four clearly follow the new protocol. The majority essentially appear to be standard psychiatric evaluations, with possibly a few comments on "strengths" and/or a slightly enhanced family history included in the report.

It should be noted that a variety of factors are responsible for the low number of developmental assessments conducted. First, designing any new developmental instrument is itself a complicated and elaborate process—if one wishes to increase the likelihood that the final product is in fact reliable and valid. In this regard, the Public Defenders Office has done an exceptional job. Specifically, they brought together a team representing community-based experts on youth in the judicial system, academic researchers specializing in juvenile crime, lawyers and social workers to serve as the core

group designing the new instrument. This resulted in a final instrument which is theoretically based, supported by research and seen as valuable by social workers, attorneys and community-based experts. Unfortunately, while bringing together such expertise enhances the final product, it also inevitably slows down the process of development. In hindsight, it would have been more realistic for the original proposal to focus on the creation and initial application of a new developmental instrument with the evaluation of its use and impact on the judicial system conducted as a follow-up study.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Public Defender's Office has met resistance by some of the local psychologists who customarily conduct psychological assessments for their clients. As with change in any forum, centering an evaluation on a new developmental assessment instrument will require considerable additional time and effort for those conducting the evaluation. This is likely to be particularly true in the early stages of its use. Consequently, more than a few psychologists are hesitant—either directly or passively—to adopt the new protocol. Unfortunately, the high number of cases requiring assessments combined with the limited pool of professionals willing to conduct assessments, makes it impossible for the Public Defender's Office to force the issue at this time. In this regard, the Public Defender's Office is involved in an ongoing effort to increase the pool of available and interested to conduct evaluations. An increased number of psychologists conducting assessments will provide increased selectivity on the part of the Public Defender's Office.

Summary and Future Directions

In sum, evidence to date clearly points to the Juvenile Sentencing Advocacy Project as being a highly successful endeavor: (1) The number of cases receiving juvenile sanctions is up dramatically, (2) there is evidence that through education and outreach, attitudes regarding issues such as age at which youth should be incarcerated with adults, (3) the role of IDEA in sentencing have significantly improved and (4) considerable training has been provided to professionals both inside and outside the Public Defender's Office

At the same time, it is unclear to what degree the use of the new sentencing plans has impacted sentences. Ideally, while there was an overall increase in the number of youth receiving juvenile sanctions, it was anticipated that the highest rate of juvenile sanctions would be seen among those cases that included a sentencing plan. While sentencing plans did appear to increase the likelihood of juvenile sanctions, they did not decrease the likelihood of receiving an adult sentence.

This is not to say that sentencing plans are not valuable—clearly they do have some weight as is evident in the increased proportion of cases receiving juvenile sanctions. Furthermore, most judges appear to view the sentencing plans favorably, with several judges accepting a high percentage of plans. On the other hand, these results do suggest that a small subset of judges reject nearly all sentencing plans presented to the court and in fact nearly always sentence youth as adults. Efforts to specifically target these judges may prove valuable, in that even modest changes in their behavior may lead to considerable changes in the proportion of sentencing plans accepted and/or the rates of youth sentenced as adults. Continued work and evaluation of the impact of sentencing plans should be considered. For example, judges could be asked to complete anonymous

evaluations regarding their view of the importance and impact of sentencing plans on their decisions.

Similarly, while it is currently impossible to adequately evaluate the new developmental assessment designed as part of the JSAP program, continued work should be done in this area. For example, the outcome of cases using the developmental assessment should be compared to those of cases either with no assessment, or using other more traditional assessment approaches. Alternatively as additional psychologists adopt the new assessment, changes in the frequency of different dispositions can be examined over time. In addition, and probably most importantly, defense lawyers and judges could complete anonymous surveys regarding their view of the validity, importance and impact of the developmental assessments.