

# **SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL MODERATORS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING FOR REPEAT JUVENILE OFFENDERS**

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## **1. SUMMARY**

This report describes an evaluation of the effectiveness of the WorksYde employment and training programme in reducing the criminal behaviour, improving the work attitudes and increasing the levels of psychological health among the participants. The primary aims of this project were to assess the effects of the programme and to identify those variables that influence the relationship between participation in the programme and a reduction in criminal behaviour.

Interviews were conducted with male juvenile delinquents who were involved in the WorksYde programme and who therefore would, as required, be aged between 14 and 18 years with at least 6 court sanctions. A longitudinal design was utilised in which we attempted to interview subjects twice with approximately 3 to 6 months between interviews. Subjects were interviewed while they were incarcerated (Longmore Remand, Longmore Training or Riverbank), were on the Community Based Offenders Programme (CBOP), or were Unemployed or Employed. Female subjects were omitted from the study due to circumstances beyond the control of the current project.

Subjects were individually interviewed using a structured interview schedule. This technique was used rather than group testing as it was found to be the most reliable method by which to obtain data from this subject population. The interviews were utilised to discover information about the subjects' general labour market attitudes, levels of general psychological well being, social support network, and criminal activities.

The results suggested that the WorksYde programme had been generally successful. Clients who had obtained employment engaged in more constructive leisure and other positive activities, while their counterparts who had not found employment showed little change in their patterns of activity.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background Information About WorksYde**

WorksYde is a primary rehabilitation programme in Western Australia which assists young criminal offenders in finding employment. The programme is currently being run by the YMCA, with funding being provided by the Department of Community Services. The major aim of the programme is to reduce recidivism among repeat juvenile offenders by providing them with regular employment/training upon their release from secure institutions.

The WorksYde programme came about as a result of an initiative by the Hon. Kay Hallahan, MLC, Minister for Community Services, when she announced a range of pilot projects to be funded from new expenditure proposals on a non-recurrent basis in 1988. The projects were to focus on:

1. Preventing children from being involved in offending behaviour.
2. Reducing the potential for those who start to offend from becoming repeat offenders.

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3. Reducing the re-offending rate of repeat offenders.

As a result of the success of the Employment and Training Support Programme, the Department for Community Services proposed an extension to it in October 1988. It was proposed that the employment and training programme should be provided by a non-government agency with financial assistance coming from the Department for Community Services. Following tenders, the YMCA was appointed to the position and the programme became known as "WorksYde".

Approximately 70% of the young people accepted into the WorksYde programme are referred by the juvenile institutions in and around Perth. Other referrals come from the Department for Community Services Division, the Community Based Offenders Programme, Welfare Agencies and Casual referrals. Interestingly the majority of casual referrals come from long term offenders who are either currently in, or who have been in, stable employment.

## **1.2 Sample Population Distribution**

At June 1990, midway through the data collection stage, there were approximately 100 juveniles actively "enrolled" on the WorksYde books. This is only an estimate as it is virtually impossible to keep an accurate record of the whereabouts of individuals in this subject population. This problem was encountered time and time again throughout the current project with a drop-out rate in excess of 50%. The total size of the final sample was 66 subjects. This sample included 17 Aboriginals, 27 non-Aboriginal Australians and 22 non-Australians. Another problem continually encountered in the current project was that of unreliable reporting of information. 33 Questionnaires in total were disregarded due to the unreliability of the data.

## **1.3 Some Methodological Considerations**

Prior to presenting analyses a few qualifications must be made in regard first to the particular sample population and second to the measurement instruments used in the study.

Although the sample size is small, it is considered that the results obtained and the information collected are representative of the general population of WorksYde clientele. Participants in the current research were found to represent all of the major and several of the minor characteristics of the "Street Kids" sub-culture. These included: types of crimes committed, gang membership, living arrangements (e.g. squatting, parks, refuge homes, with families or friends, etc.), location in or around Perth, and so on. However, despite this, some caution should be taken in extending interpretations of the following results to cover all Juvenile Delinquents.

Many of the measures used in this survey are derived from studies of literate, well educated people who have a sound knowledge of basic everyday concepts. The researchers acknowledge that some of the measures used may not be appropriate to some of the young people who participated in the survey, as research has not yet been conducted to test the reliability or validity of these measurement instruments when used with incarcerated youth or repeat offenders. This is an area which needs to be addressed, as

many of the coping strategies developed by these young people to deal with everyday life result in their acquiring unrealistic concepts of reality, time, goal setting, and so on. Subsequently, due to the uncertainty of the accuracy of the measurement instruments we cannot make confident interpretations of some of the data.

## 2.0 RESULTS

In determining the effectiveness of the WorksYde programme a comparison was made between several measures at time 1 and time 2. These measures included attitudes towards the general labour market, psychological well being, and criminal activities. In order to further test the effectiveness of the programme the subject population was divided into three groups. Group membership was determined by their status (i.e. institutionalised, employed or unemployed) at the time of their second interview (See Table 1). Subjects who were not able to be interviewed a second time were omitted from the analysis.

	Time 1 interview	Time 2 Interview
Group 1	Institutionalised	Institutionalised
Group 2	Institutionalised	Employed
Group 3	Institutionalised	Unemployed

TABLE: Table denoting group membership

### 2.1 Attitude Towards The General Labour Market

Two measurement scales were used in examining the attitudes of juveniles towards the general labour market. These looked at the subject's commitment towards employment and the subject's job search attitude. When examining the commitment of the groups towards employment, a significant positive change in the level of commitment occurred for Group 2 respondents between their first and second interviews ( $t=3.78$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p<0.005$ ). However, there was no significant change in the level of employment commitment for either Group 1 or Group 3 subjects. A one way analysis of variance on this scale then revealed that while there was no significant difference between the groups at the time 1 interview, at the time 2 interview there was a highly significant difference in the attitudes of Group 2 subjects compared to those of both Group 1 and Group 3 subjects ( $F=18.9$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.0001$ ).

A similar outcome was also found when examining attitudes towards looking for employment. There was no significant difference between the attitudes of any of the groups at the time of the first interview, while by the second interview Group 2 members portrayed a significantly different attitude towards looking for employment compared with that of the Group 1 and Group 3 subjects ( $F=7.8$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.005$ ). Further examination of the data

revealed that this difference had arisen due to a significant positive change in the attitude of Group 2 subjects ( $t=4.23$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p<0.005$ ).

The outcome of both of these scales indicates that the juveniles who were engaged in employment on a regular basis improved their attitudes towards the general labour market, while those who are either still institutionalised or unemployed did not alter their attitudes. This outcome therefore suggests that the WorksYde programme has a positive effect on its clients in regard to their attitude towards employment.

## 2.2 Psychological Well-Being

Individuals participating in the WorksYde programme tended to have achieved very few successes in their lives and possessed both poorly developed and negative self-concepts. Their main source of positive self-esteem is most likely to be the alternative sub-culture to which they belong, with a favourable self-image being derived from successfully avoiding the police. It is therefore important to determine whether the WorksYde programme provides them with an alternative source of self-esteem, and is effective in improving their self-concepts. The beneficial effects of employment and training which have been found for other groups of young people however, (e.g. Tiggermann & Winefield, 1984; Stafford, 1982; Banks & Ullah, 1988) may not be the same for repeat juvenile offenders.

Three measures of psychological well being were used in the present study. These were the twelve item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), an eight item measure of self esteem, and a measure of internal/external locus of control. The latter instrument indicates whether respondents generally feel they are in control of their lives (internal locus of control) or whether their lives are largely determined by factors over which they have little influence (external locus of control). An internal locus of control is generally considered to be an indication of good psychological health.

For the GHQ-12, respondents were asked to use a four point rating scale to compare statements regarding how they felt in the past four weeks to how they had felt in the past few years. A low score on the GHQ-12 indicated a good general psychological health and a high score indicated poor general psychological health. For all respondents at time 1 a generally low level of psychological health was observed with an average score of 10.67 ( $s.d.= 6.56$ ). Similarly, self-esteem was low with a mean score of 18.41 ( $s.d.= 5.312$ ) and a similarly low level of internal locus of control was apparent (Mean= 2.88;  $s.d.= 1.64$ ). When looking at the difference between the subject groups at the time of the first interview, there was no significant difference on any of the above measures.

Subject responses were further examined on these measures by comparing the data obtained in both interviews. This comparison revealed a significant change in the levels of self esteem, but no significant change on either of the other two scales. The self esteem of Group 1 subjects were observed to drop significantly ( $t=3.67$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) while the self esteem of Group 2 subjects increased significantly ( $t= 4.04$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p<0.005$ ). Group 3 respondents showed no significant change in their levels of self esteem.

In our opinion, however, several extraneous variables were influencing the outcomes of these measures and therefore a confident account of any changes in the general psychological well being of subjects is not possible. Most importantly, it was noted throughout the research that the subject population being dealt with had little concept of time. It was found that one of the many

coping strategies adopted by this unique sub-culture was to live day-by-day and simply forget the past and ignore the future. This consequently greatly influences the results obtained on the psychological health scales because of the requirement to compare the last few weeks with the last few months or years. The results obtained therefore should be treated with reservations and future researchers should be aware that a more appropriate measure of general psychological health and well being need to be developed for use with delinquent or incarcerated populations.

Informally, however, we agreed that the general well being of those subjects who secured employment notably increased between their first and second interviews. These observations were often made easier by the fact that the researchers stayed in contact with subjects on a regular basis throughout the research period. It is considered by the present researchers that the general increase in self esteem, as revealed by the data analysis, experienced by subjects in Group 2 was at least in part due to subjects gaining employment. The opinions of WorksYde workers also supported the observations of the researchers in regard to the general improvement in attitude shown by these subjects. They indicated that they felt it was due to their clients finally beginning to develop a sense of belonging and importance along with a feeling that they did have something to offer and that they were needed.

### **2.3 Leisure Activities and Criminal Behaviour**

A nine item scale was used to assess the extent to which subjects engaged in positive and negative leisure activities. Positive activities were defined as activities which were legal, would not attract the attention of police and did not hurt or harm other persons or property (e.g. playing sport) while negative activities were defined as those which would attract the attention of police (e.g. getting into fights). Analysis revealed that while there was no significant change in the number of positive activities engaged in by subjects between the first and second interview, there was a significant change in the number of negative activities engaged in ( $t=4.36$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p<0.005$ ). This significant change was due to a significant reduction in the number of negative leisure activities engaged in by Group 2 subjects.

When comparing the number of negative activities engaged in by the different groups of subjects it was found that there was a significant difference between Groups 1 and 2 at the time of the second interview ( $F=4.69$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). When examining the number of criminal activities engaged in by subjects a significant difference was found to exist between Group 2 and Group 1 as well as between Group 1 and Group 3 ( $F=16.44$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.005$ ). The only group to change their criminal activities significantly between the time of the first and second interviews was Group 2 ( $t=5.18$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p<0.001$ ).

Both of these sets of results further support the success of the WorksYde programme with those clients obtaining employment engaging in more positive activities and less criminal activities, while their counterparts altered their activity patterns very little.

### **2.4 Identification of Moderator Variables**

In addition to testing the success of the WorksYde programme, the current study also examined the relationship between several criteria by adopting a "contingency" approach. This approach assumes that the relationship between two variables is dependent upon the effects of a third variable, which acts as a moderator. Within the bounds of the current research it was

proposed that the effects of the WorksYde programme in reducing re-offending would be dependent on certain moderator variables.

An overall model was proposed, with self-reported delinquency as the main outcome variable. It was proposed that this would be determined by measures of participation in employment and/or training (i.e. those who regularly attend work/training will be less likely to engage in criminal behaviour than those who do not remain in employment/training). This in turn would be dependent on both the initial work attitudes and commitment of the offenders, as well as subsequent changes in these variables (i.e. those with positive work attitudes/commitment, and those whose attitudes change in this direction as a result of the programme will be more likely to remain in regular employment/training). The outcome of the analysis revealed that this interaction actually did occur. However, there was also an additional variable which interacted in this model. This related to the subjects' social support network. It was found that even respondents who possessed high levels of commitment to employment, and good attitudes and low or non-existent rates of criminal activities, often reverted to participating in criminal activities and dropping out of their employment position because of the high levels of antagonism and ridicule which they were subjected to by co-offenders and, often, family members.

Further analysis revealed that subjects who were incarcerated at the time of both interviews actually possessed the best social networks. They were found to differ significantly from the other two groups of subjects at both the first ( $F=5.35$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) and the second ( $F= 18.28$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p<0.0001$ ) interviews.

The proposition that the model would also be dependent upon the "fit" between the employment/training needs of the offenders and the employment/training provided was found not to be significant. It was observed however that the closer this "fit", the higher the levels of contentment and therefore the more successful the programme.

### **3. DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Successes**

The outcome of this research work indicates that the WorksYde programme can be considered a success in reducing the recidivism among repeat juvenile offenders. It can be seen that the engagement of these young people in employment or training not only helps to improve their general attitudes towards the labour market but also assists in improving their general well being and in lowering their criminal activities. Observations of the WorksYde clientele by the current researchers further revealed that the general demeanour of those individuals who gained employment or training improved greatly.

#### **3.2 Remaining problems**

Besides the lack of funding, staffing, and resources two major areas of concern still remain for the WorksYde team if they are to achieve even better results than they do at present. These are the problems of accommodation and outstanding bench warrants.

### 3.2.1 The problem of accommodation

Possibly the more influence of these is the problem of accommodation. Contrary to many reports of an abundance of accommodation in the Perth Metropolitan area, most juveniles listed with WorksYde find it difficult if not impossible to find suitable, stable and supportive accommodation. This problem has arisen chiefly because the accommodation network will not accept them due to past histories of disruptive behaviour.

Unfortunately, this causes a great many difficulties for the WorksYde staff, as in order for the programme to be as effective as possible, suitable accommodation is essential. Without it WorksYde staff work at cross purposes with the individuals' home environment nullifying much of the good which is being achieved through the attainment of employment/training. What is actually needed is for an accommodation programme to be established to run in conjunction with the WorksYde programme. This would therefore be able not only to provide suitable accommodation but also to allow for the opportunity of providing additional support in the way of budgeting, general life skills, planning, life management skills, independent living skills and so on.

### 3.2.2 The problem of outstanding bench warrants

The problem associated with outstanding bench warrants relates to the present Juvenile Justice system. Currently the system does not allow for warrants, other than the arresting offence, to be dealt with at any one time. Even during detention additional offences are not dealt with. The problem here for the WorksYde staff and their clients is the probability of the client being rearrested either just prior to or just after they commence employment/training. This means not only that one of the hard fought-for jobs is lost but also, and more importantly, the individuals involved become even more dejected within themselves, especially if they have made a conscious decision and commitment to go "straight". For the most part WorksYde staff now consider it more beneficial in the long run if juveniles turn themselves in for any outstanding warrants they may have. This however, does not solve the problem that the Juvenile Justice system appears to be working against one of the very programmes they should be getting behind and supporting.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

The WorksYde programme is unique in what it sets out to achieve with juvenile delinquents. So far, it appears capable of achieving its goals. With further funding and support the programme can only get better and thereby reduce the number of repeat juvenile offenders in the Perth Metropolitan area.

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