

**AN INITIAL EVALUATION OF
THE CHOICESTM ANGER MANAGEMENT
PROGRAM FOR YOUTH
EVIDENCE OF IMPACT IN THE 11TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**

Conducted by System Wide Solutions, Inc.
Columbia, SC
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the study was to compare the program completion and recidivism rates for youth who were referred to the Juvenile Arbitration (JA) Program in the 11th Judicial Circuit in South Carolina program and who participated in the Choices Anger Management classes compared to youth who were referred to the JA program and who did not participate in Choices.

By far the most common offenses committed by youth in both groups were Disturbing Schools and Assault Offenses, infractions that are often linked to anger and lack of impulse control. However, assault charges, which were more prevalent among the Choices group members, are more serious than the Disturbing School charges and are brought when someone actually verbally or physically assaults someone. Disturbing School is defined as interfering with or disturbing the students or teachers such as acting in an obnoxious manner or loitering in the hall. The Choices group was also older on the average than the comparison group. Since the Choices group members were more likely to be older and to have more serious charges than the comparison group, one could predict that the Choices group would be more likely to reoffend.

Contrary to that prediction, youth in the Comparison group were 1.6 times more likely to re-offend than the youth in the Choices group. Moreover, the single re-offense in the Choices group occurred more than 250 days after program completion, whereas re-offenses in the comparison group occurred in a shorter time after program completion.

This data suggests that the Choices Anger Management Program is an effective intervention for youth who commit relatively minor offenses that involve problems with fighting and anger.

It should be noted that these findings are preliminary. Given the small number of members of the Choices group, further research should be done to verify these findings.

CHOICES™ ANGER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

This study was conducted using data from the Juvenile Arbitration (JA) Program in the 11th Judicial Circuit in South Carolina. The circuit comprises the counties of Lexington, Edgefield, McCormick and Saluda. The purpose of the study was to compare the program completion and recidivism rates for youth who were referred to the JA program and who participated in the Choices Anger Management classes compared to youth who were referred to the JA program and who did not participate in Choices.

After a youth has been accepted into the JA program, trained volunteer arbitrators conduct a hearing and assign sanctions to each youth. One of the possible sanctions is attendance at Choices™ Anger Management classes. The Choices Program consists of six hours of group instruction by trained adult facilitators. The curriculum, based on cognitive-behavioral principles, includes calming techniques and conflict management skills.

JA staff maintain data on referrals, offenses, sanctions and program completion. Recidivism data is recorded by JA staff when notified by local DJJ staff that a youth has re-offended. Data for the study was collected on June 8, 2007 and May 5, 2008 from the JA Program archives.

Methodology

The study was retrospective. Data for the evaluation was obtained from JA program archives after all services had been completed. For analysis, youth were designated as being in the “Choices group” or the “Comparison group” solely based on whether they had been assigned the Choices Anger Management classes as a sanction. There was no effort to influence which sanctions were given to youth. Arbitrators followed normal guidelines in making assignments.

Youth Included in the Study

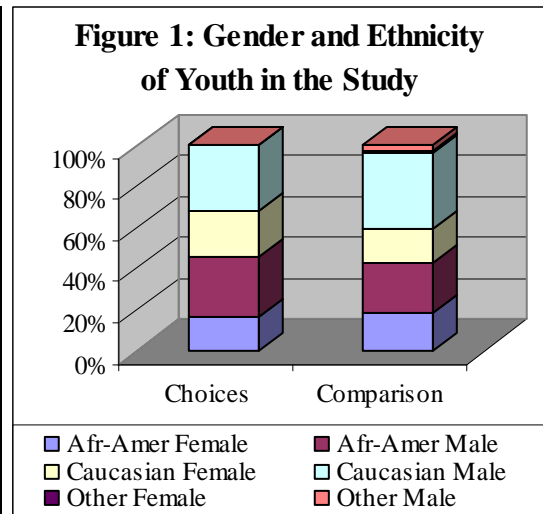
The evaluation study consists of 198 youth whose cases were referred to the JA program between April 15, 2005 and January 31, 2007 and were closed between September 15, 2005 and April 31, 2007. The study includes only those youth who were accepted into the program. This means that the youth in the study include only those who successfully completed the program or those who attended an arbitration hearing but whose cases were closed due to the youth’s failure to comply with the sanctions, refusal to admit guilt, committing a re-offense during their participation in the program, or similar condition. The study includes only those youth who were referred for offenses such as Simple Assault, Assault and Battery, Simple Assault and Battery, Disturbing Schools, Weapon on School Grounds, and Unlawful Use of the Telephone. These actions were taken so that the comparison group would be characteristically similar to the group of youth who participated in the Choices classes.

For purposes of this study, the youth who participated in the Choices Anger Management classes are referred to as “Choices Youth” and the youth who were referred to the Juvenile Arbitration program and who did not participate in the Choices Anger Management classes are referred to as “Comparison Youth”.

Description of the Youth in the Study

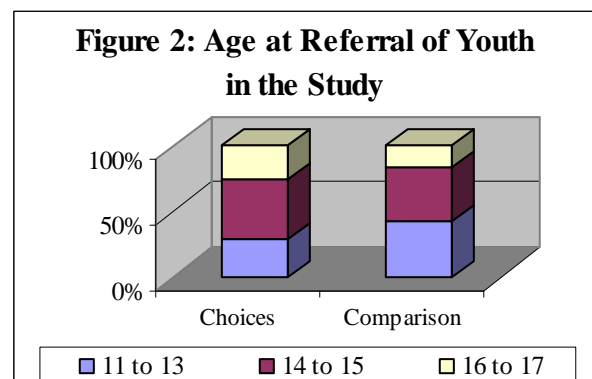
The youth who participated in the Choices Anger Management classes were split between being African American (45.1%) and Caucasian (54.9%), as was the Comparison group (42.6% were African American and 53.9% were Caucasian). Of the Choices Youth, five (16.1%) were African American females, nine (29%) were African American males, seven (22.6%) were Caucasian females, and ten (32.3%) were Caucasian males. Of the Comparison Youth, 31 (18.6%) were African American females, 40 (24%) were African American males, 28 (16.8%) were Caucasian females, 62 (37.1%) were Caucasian males, one (0.6%) was a female of other ethnicity, and five (3%) were males of other ethnicities. (See Table 1 and Figure 1.)

	Choices Youth		Comparison Youth	
	#	%	#	%
African American Female	5	16.1%	31	18.6%
African American Male	9	29.0%	40	24.0%
Caucasian Female	7	22.6%	28	16.8%
Caucasian Male	10	32.3%	62	37.1%
Other Female	0	0.0%	1	0.6%
Other Male	0	0.0%	5	3.0%
Total	31	100%	167	100%



The proportion of Choices Youth who were in each age grouping at the time they were referred to the Juvenile Arbitration program was slightly different from the proportion of Comparison Youth who were in each age grouping at the time they were referred to the JA program. The Choices group was almost twice (1.8 times) more likely to have older (14 to 17 years old) members than the comparison group ($\chi^2=1.97$, $df=1$, $p<0.25$). Of the Choices Youth, nine (29%) were between the ages of 11 and 13, 14 (45.2%) were 14 or 15 years old, and eight (25.8%) were 16 or 17 years old. Of the Comparison Youth, 71 (42.5%) were between the ages of 11 and 13, 69 (41.3%) were 14 or 15 years old, and 27 (16.2%) were 16 or 17 years old. (See Table 2 and Figure 2.)

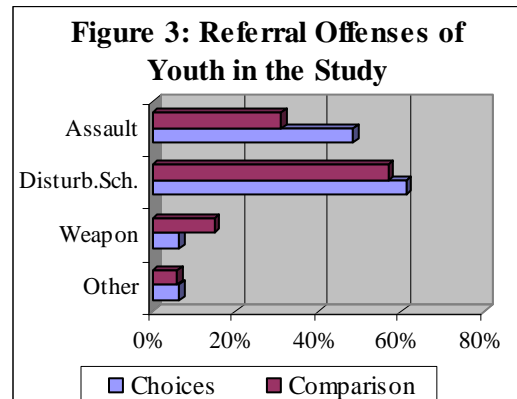
	Choices Youth		Comparison Youth	
	#	%	#	%
Ages 11 to 13	9	29.0%	71	42.5%
Ages 14 to 15	14	45.2%	69	41.3%
Ages 16 to 17	8	25.8%	27	16.2%
Total	31	100%	167	100%



A comparison of the offenses committed by the Choices and comparison group reveals that youth who were charged with assault and accepted into the arbitration program were 2.07 times more likely to be assigned to the Choices alternative than not. The difference is not statistically significant ($\chi^2=3.47$, $df=1$, $p<0.1$). Conversely, youth who were charged with having a weapon on school property were 2.55 times more likely to not be assigned to the Choices alternative. The difference is not statistically significant ($\chi^2=1.61$, $df=1$, $p<0.25$).

Of the 31 youth in the Choices group, 15 (48.4%) were charged with simple assault, simple assault and battery, or simple assault (Assault Charges), 19 (61.3%) were charged with Disturbing Schools, two (6.5%) were charged with Weapon on School Grounds, and two (6.5%) were charged with other crimes (in addition to one or more of those previously mentioned). Of the 167 youth in the Comparison group, 52 (31.1%) were charged with simple assault, simple assault and battery, or simple assault (Assault Charges), 95 (56.9%) were charged with Disturbing Schools, 25 (15%) were charged with Weapon on School Grounds, and ten (6%) were charged with other crimes (in addition to one or more of those previously mentioned). (See Table 3 and Figure 3.)

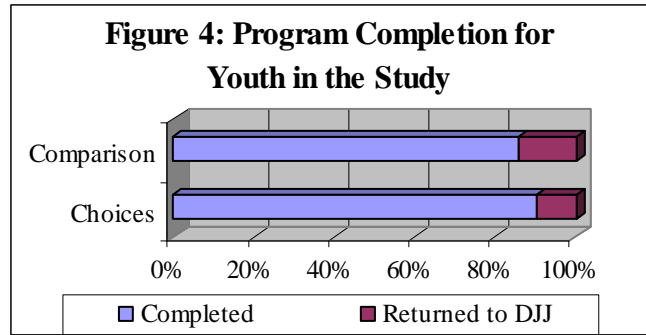
	Choices Youth N=31		Comparison Youth N=167	
	#	%	#	%
Assault Charges	15	48.4%	52	31.1%
Disturbing Schools	19	61.3%	95	56.9%
Weapon on School Property	2	6.5%	25	15.0%
Other	2	6.5%	10	6.0%



Comparison of Outcomes

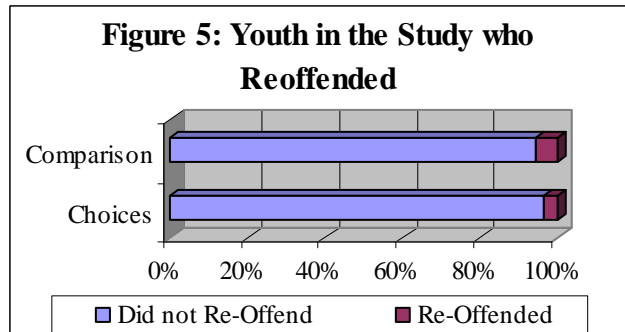
A youth is considered to have successfully completed the juvenile arbitration program when the youth completes all of the assigned sanctions. The cases for youth who do not successfully complete their sanctions are returned to DJJ. The cases included in this study were returned to DJJ when the youth or parent denied guilt after attending a hearing, the youth did not comply with the sanctions, and the youth re-offended while in the arbitration program. Of the 31 Choices Youth, 28 (90.3%) successfully completed their sanctions and the arbitration program. Of the 167 Comparison Youth, 143 (85.6%) successfully completed their sanctions and the arbitration program. Therefore, the percentage of Choices Youth who successfully completed the program was slightly higher than the percentage of Comparison Youth who successfully completed the program. Furthermore, Choices Youth were 1.57 times more likely to complete the arbitration program than were members of the Comparison group. The difference is not statistically significant ($\chi^2=0.489$, $df=1$, $p=0.484$). (See Table 4 and Figure 4.)

Table 4: Program Completion for Youth in the Study				
	Choices Youth		Comparison Youth	
	#	%	#	%
Completed	28	90.3%	143	85.6%
Returned to DJJ	3	9.7%	24	14.4%
Total	31	100%	167	100%



Of the 28 Choices Youth who successfully completed the arbitration program, only one (3.6%) re-offended after their case was closed. Of the 143 Comparison Youth who successfully completed the program, eight (5.6%) re-offended after their case was closed. Therefore, the percentage of Choices Youth who re-offended was 35% lower than the percentage of Comparison Youth who successfully completed the program. Furthermore, youth in the Comparison group were 1.6 times more likely to re-offend than youth in the Choices group. The difference is not statistically significant ($\chi^2=0.192$, $df=1$, $p=0.661$). (See Table 5 and Figure 5.) It must be noted that the youth in the Choices group who re-offended did so more than 250 days after the youth had successfully completed the program; whereas the youth in the Comparison group who re-offended did so from one to 141 days after they had successfully completed the program.

Table 5: Youth in the Study Who Re-Offended				
	Choices Youth		Comparison Youth	
	#	%	#	%
Did not Re-Offend	27	96.4%	135	94.4%
Re-Offended	1	3.6%	8	5.6%
Total	28	100%	143	100%



Implications of the Study

By far the most common offenses committed by youth in both groups were Disturbing Schools and Assault Offenses, infractions that are often linked to anger and lack of impulse control. However, assault charges, which were more prevalent among the Choices group members, are more serious than the Disturbing School charges and are brought when someone actually verbally or physically assaults someone else. Disturbing School is defined as interfering with or disturbing the students or teachers such as acting in an obnoxious manner or loitering in the hall. The Choices group was also more likely to be older than the comparison group. Since the Choices group members were more likely to be older and to have more serious charges than the comparison group, one could predict that the Choices group would be more likely to reoffend.

In point of fact, youth in the Comparison group were 1.6 times more likely to re-offend than the youth in the Choices group. Moreover, the single re-offense in the Choices group occurred more than 250 days after program completion, whereas re-offenses in the comparison group occurred in a shorter time after program completion.

This data suggests that the Choices Anger Management Program is an effective intervention for youth who commit relatively minor offenses that involve problems with fighting and anger. It should be noted that these findings are preliminary. Given the small number of members of the Choices group, further research should be done to verify these findings.