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TV or Not TV? The Impact of the Removal of Television on Assaultive Behavior in a Juvenile Detention Center

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of television upon the assaultive behaviors of adolescent offenders in a juvenile detention center. Because television has become such an integral part of juvenile institutions, this research sought to examine specifically how the removal of television, in part, affected assaultive behaviors by juvenile residents. The results of this study suggest that the removal of television, with the implementation of a structured program, significantly decreased the frequency of resident-on-resident assaultive behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The date when television was introduced in correctional institutions is uncertain, and the purpose of its introduction cannot be pinpointed.  

Special thanks to Superintendent Jim Woolsey and Assistant Superintendent Janice Catrel of the Duval County Regional Detention Center for their assistance on this project. We would also like to thank Marie A. Farren, MA, and Rose Ellen Westbury, MA, who assisted with earlier versions of this report.
Television may have been considered an important component of rehabilitative efforts, as a way of occupying residents' time, or it could have been perceived as providing a more homelike atmosphere in institutional settings. Television may have even satisfied court orders mandating the provision of leisure activities to inmates. Whatever the reason, the use of television has become deeply entrenched in residential placements. Yet, few studies have examined the function and impact of television viewing in correctional settings, including juvenile detention facilities.

Further, the literature on the utility and role of television in correctional facilities provides only limited insights into the impact television has as a behavioral tool. This study is an initial effort to address this important topic by examining the disciplinary behaviors of juveniles in a detention center before and after the removal of television sets, and the implementation of a structured program. The primary concern of this paper is the extent to which assaultive behaviors are affected by television viewing. In 1994, after several Florida sheriffs "pulled the television plug" in their county jails, the privilege of television viewing in correctional institutions became the focus of a heated public debate. For many, television viewing was considered to be inconsistent with a "get tough on lawbreakers" policy. A local newspaper quoted one sheriff as saying: "We’re running a jail, not a resort... when they leave jail I don’t want them to look forward to coming back" (Anderson, 1994, p. A1). Letters to the editor of the newspaper strongly endorsed the sheriff’s actions: "Your decision to remove the 19 inch peepholes into paradise from the cells will certainly leave more time for reflection... I certainly agree that a jail is for punishing a person and not to coddle him." (Anderson, 1994, p. A1)

While the removal of television placated some citizens, correctional personnel held different opinions about the value of television viewing. The predominant view held by correctional staff was that the presence of television had positive effects on inmates. Specifically, correctional staff noted that the frequency of behavioral problems declined when offenders were able to watch television. For example, they claimed that inmates spent time watching TV when they could otherwise be getting into fights or starting trouble (Halton, 1994 p. A1). Further, staff argued that without access to television, offenders became restless and bored, resulting in increased violence on their part. Clearly, it seems correctional staff believed television viewing to be an essential tool for population management.

During this same year, the superintendent of the Regional Juvenile Detention Center in Duval County, Florida, independently decided to remove television sets from his facility. Not surprisingly, the Center staff immediately responded with claims that television viewing was a necessary resource to control behavior and predicted that aggressive behavior would escalate as a result of its removal.

In contrast to the Detention Center staff’s view regarding the importance of television viewing were the claims made by youths incarcerated at the Juvenile Detention Center before the removal of television
sets and again incarcerated when television viewing was no longer available. These youths suggested that a more peaceful atmosphere existed at the Detention Center after the removal of television. Many stated that television privileges contributed to a more stressful and confrontational climate and without access to television, fewer fights and conflicts occurred. The contradictory viewpoints of Detention Center staff and youths raised a compelling question: “What impact does television viewing have on the assaultive behavior of juveniles incarcerated in a detention facility?”

Relatively little is known about the relationship between television viewing and juvenile assaultive (or other) behaviors in correctional institutions. The research that has been done has focused mainly on the utility of television as a diversionary, therapeutic or rehabilitative tool in adult correctional facilities (Gibbs, 1983; Useem, 1985; Lindlof, 1986; Aguilar and Asmussen, 1989). Gibbs (1983) suggested that television viewing is one method for reducing the anxiety of being locked up in jail. Additional evidence suggests that not only does television viewing help pass the time but that access to television may compensate for “institution-induced deprivations” (Lindlof, 1986, p. 353). Even further, Fisher’s (1989) research on the impact of media consumption on modern sex role attitudes suggests that television viewing could be used as a rehabilitative tool in the prison setting to influence and shape positive attitudes among inmates. According to Fisher (1989, p. 201), “television is not a mindless distraction but a tool to keep pace with the evolving social world outside the prison walls.”

Other studies have focused on prison administrators’ perceptions of the utility of television viewing as a tool for behavioral control. Daane Hamm, and Huckabee (1989) found that the use of television in maximum-security prisons, where staff exercised substantial control over viewing privileges, contributed to the maintenance of prison order. Useem (1995), in an examination of the “breakdown” that led to the 1980 New Mexico prison riot, suggested that levels of assaultive behavior and feelings of deprivation among inmates increased when recreational activities such as television viewing were withdrawn.

While not much is known about the impact of television on incarcerated juveniles, the literature examining the relationship between television viewing and adolescent behavior overall is impressive. A number of studies over the past two decades have found a link between the viewing of violent programs on television and aggressive behavior on the part of adolescents, especially those predisposed to aggression (Hepburn, 1995; Centerwall, 1992; Rubenstein and Sprafkin, 1982). Rubenstein and Sprafkin (1982) found that adolescents who viewed pro-social television programming for a period of two weeks exhibited less aggressive behaviors than those who typically viewed “violence-laden” programs. Thus, “television can [also] be used effectively to facilitate positive changes in the social behavior of institutionalized behaviorally disturbed children” (Rubenstein and Sprafkin, 1982, p. 328).
Given the apparent relationship between television programs and adolescent behavior, it seems clear that the effects of television on the behavior of youths held in juvenile detention centers should be addressed. Although this study does not allow us to make unequivocal statements about the effect of TV on adolescent behavior, it does serve as a starting point for additional research.

METHOD

Research Setting
Data for this study were collected from monthly logs for the Duval County Regional Juvenile Detention Center in Florida. Originally designed to accommodate 113 youths, the facility currently holds an average of 160 adolescents arrested and awaiting court disposition. The number of juveniles incarcerated from 1992 to 1996 in the facility ranged from a low average daily population of approximately 114 to a high of 150 residents. The average length of stay at the center was slightly longer than two weeks, and educational classes were mandatory for all residents during their incarceration. Residents were stratified into five groups depending upon age, alleged offense, and gender. Older, more aggressive 17 to 18 year old male residents were placed in the “Alpha” module; young men of the same age, but accused of lesser offenses, were placed in the “Bravo” module. Younger males between the ages of 14 and 16 were housed in the “Charlie” module, and 8 to 13 year old boys were placed in the “Delta” module. All female residents, despite age, were housed in module “H.” Each group stayed in a self-contained unit that consisted of bed space for 27 residents, a lounge area, a television set, and shower facilities. Two to three staff members were assigned to each module, and at least one member was present at all times.

Televisions Present
Prior to August 1994, television viewing was a primary activity, and the center of attention for many in the Detention Center. One television set was centrally located in each module. Televisions remained on from the time the residents were awakened at 6 a.m. until the lights were turned off at 9 p.m. In the event juveniles were suspended from an educational program, they were often returned to the module where television viewing could be continued. On weekends televisions remained on all day unless residents attended church services or received visitors. If they desired, residents were generally free to watch television the entire weekend.

During “television days,” television viewing was deemed by staff to be a positive feature. Residents remained occupied while the set was on. Some staff argued that television served a twofold purpose: (1) it functioned as a form of entertainment, in that if the juveniles were involved in television viewing, their attention usually remained focused on the programs, and (2) television viewing was employed as a behavioral management technique.
Staff frequently used television to motivate residents to follow facility rules. Some brought popular videotapes for the youths to watch on weekends, with the intention of controlling and entertaining residents. During the period when television sets were present in the center, staff members were not required to interact with the juveniles or to provide additional meaningful activities for them. Interviews with the staff also indicated that television viewing was not specifically used for therapeutic or educational purposes.

The staff acknowledged, however, that the televisions also led to problems. Conflicts between juveniles specifically relating to television viewing appeared to follow two patterns: modeling, and power and control over content. According to staff, youths frequently imitated or modeled violent acts seen on television, especially cartoons such as "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" and "Power Rangers." Modeling, or "acting out" violent behavior seen on television tended to escalate to assaults on other residents. In addition, behavior problems surfaced regarding power and control struggles. Control over television viewing seemed to represent power to juveniles, and peer resistance to program selection was often interpreted as a threat. Interviews conducted with the confined youths suggest that confrontations and assaults frequently originated over control and selection of television programs.

Additional discussions with the center's superintendent and staff members indicated that assaults and incidents resulting in room or disciplinary confinement often were caused by conflicts over television program content. The center houses youths from diverse backgrounds, and certain television programs appeared to generate tension between residents. According to staff, programs containing cultural, racial, and/or ethnic content often led to racial slurs and disparaging comments between individuals from different ethnic/racial backgrounds. Criticisms aimed specifically at a different style of dress or music provoked incidents of violence. However, interviews with staff and residents indicated that although many assaults between residents were related to conflicts regarding television, other instances of gang-related violence stemmed from conflicts between neighborhoods or schools.

Televisions Removed

In August 1994, all television sets were unceremoniously removed from the Center, except for a few portable ones to be used by teaching staff. The staff, fiercely opposed to the removal, expected juveniles to react negatively and anticipated an upsurge in rule violations. During this period, the Center introduced the "Juvenile Justice Connector Program," a 12-part project designed to involve juveniles in personal-growth experiences. The project was implemented during September 1994. Its primary objective was to involve residents in meaningful activities, improve their understanding of delinquent behavior, and encourage them to develop appropriate coping strategies and decision-making skills. The television sets that remained were
used with instructional videos that addressed such issues as self-esteem, dating, friendships, and alcohol and drug abuse.

The program included a series of videotapes viewed on portable television sets and two weeks of discussions that took place during the evenings and on weekends. Daily discussions with staff focused not only upon chapters from the text “The Consequences of Crime: You’re Under Arrest,” (Kelly, 1995) but also on the juveniles’ individual and group concerns. Included in the program were biweekly spelling bees and “Brain Brawl” competitions between residential modules designed to help residents understand the consequences of crime. Five contestants, selected by members of each module, answered questions from the text. The module answering the most questions correctly was allowed to watch a movie video on a portable television set. Movies were carefully selected for their lack of violent and/or controversial subject matter. Table 1 lists typical weekday and weekend schedules before and after television sets were removed.

Design

For this study, disciplinary behaviors that occurred over the course of a four-year period, January 1992 through December 1996, were examined in order to evaluate the impact of television viewing upon the aggressive behavior of juveniles in the Regional Juvenile Detention Center. The data covered a period of 60 months in order to determine whether there were significant differences in the number of incidents of assaultive behavior and other disciplinary problems before and after the removal of television sets. Of primary interest are incidents of resident-on-staff and resident-on-resident assault. The number of assaults within the facility during the period when television sets were present (January, 1992 – July, 1994) was compared to the number from the period following the removal of television sets (August, 1994 – December, 1996).

The Superintendent’s Monthly Reports provided the data to measure the number of assaultive behaviors of residents. The reports included the number of assaults on residents and staff requiring first aid and/or medical attention, as well as room and disciplinary incidents and confinements. The reports also contained information concerning personnel, escapes, use of mechanical restraints, jail transfers, suicide risk, and confirmed abuse or neglect by staff. The center staff recorded misconduct, and each staff member was authorized to report rule violations committed by juvenile residents. The date, nature of the offense, and consequence of each violation were then recorded in the monthly report that was forwarded to the State Department of Juvenile Justice office. Minor violations, such as cursing or refusing to cooperate, generally resulted in temporary room confinement or “time out.”
Table 1

Activity Schedule When Televisions Were Present and After Their Removal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Televisions Present [televisions turned on 6:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.]</th>
<th>Televisions Removed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekdays</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 a.m.</td>
<td>wake up</td>
<td>wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>clean up</td>
<td>clean up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>academic classes</td>
<td>academic classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>return to module</td>
<td>group discussion/counseling consequences of crime activities Spelling Bee/Brain Brawl (every other week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dinner</td>
<td>dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>return to module</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>recreation in module</td>
<td>Juvenile Justice Connector games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 p.m.</td>
<td>lights out</td>
<td>lights out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekends</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 a.m.</td>
<td>wake up</td>
<td>wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visitors</td>
<td>visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>church services (Sunday)</td>
<td>church services (Sunday) educational videos quiz testing comprehension of video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>lights out</td>
<td>lights out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Janice Cairel, Assistant Superintendent.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the overall means for the primary variables examined in this study, as well as the means for these measures during the period when televisions were present and for the period after their removal. As can be seen in Table 2, some disciplinary measures show a decrease between the two periods, while some measures indicate an increase in such behaviors.
Table 2

Average Assaults, Confinements, and Resident and Staff Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall Mean</th>
<th>TV Present</th>
<th>TV Removed</th>
<th>Pre/Post Change F (sig)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Assaults on Staff</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>.028 (.869)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assaults on Residents</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>7.07</td>
<td>.5381 (.024)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Room Confinement Incidents</td>
<td>52.83</td>
<td>60.72</td>
<td>43.82</td>
<td>8.232 (.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. # of Placements in Room Confinement</td>
<td>68.42</td>
<td>77.50</td>
<td>58.04</td>
<td>6.897 (.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. # of Youth in Room Confinement</td>
<td>54.28</td>
<td>70.75</td>
<td>35.46</td>
<td>23.399 (.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Disciplinary Confinement Incidents</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>7.821 (.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Residents in Disciplinary Confinement</td>
<td>6.55</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td>1.146 (.289)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Unwarranted DC Findings</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>98.457 (.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Positions Filled</td>
<td>77.35</td>
<td>80.75</td>
<td>73.46</td>
<td>44.184 (.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Average Daily Population</td>
<td>126.10</td>
<td>106.68</td>
<td>148.38</td>
<td>51.298 (.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Monthly Resident-Staff Ratio</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 98 months

Although this decrease is not statistically significant, an examination of the overall number of assaults reveals a slight decrease in the number of assaults on staff. Overall, an average of slightly more than one staff assault per month occurred in the Detention Center, regardless of the presence or absence of TV. For youth-on-youth assaults, however, when pre- and post- TV patterns are compared, there is a statistically significant reduction in the number of assaults on staff.
assaultive behaviors. For those months prior to removal of televisions, the Detention Center averaged more than 10 resident assaults per month, while non-TV months witnessed an average of slightly more than seven per month; a 32.3 percent reduction (F=5.38, p<.05).

In Figure 1, resident and staff assault totals are plotted for each month to gain a better picture of these behaviors. This figure shows assault incidents are quite variable over the period under examination, but a clear trend appears in the overall reduction of incidents after the removal of television sets (month 32). Indeed, with the exception of months 40 and 45 (April and September 1995), this trend holds for all post-TV months. In addition, for two periods after the removal of the televisions (December 1994 to February 1995 and September to December 1996) three or fewer assaults per month were reported.

In addition to measures of assaults, Table 2 presents a number of other measures that are important to understand the impact of television set removal. Three measures are included that indicate the number of “minor incidents” resulting in room confinements. As stated previously, room confinement served as a “time-out” period for the residents. Minor incidents resulting in room confinement (F=8.232, p<.01) and the number of actual placements in room confinement (F=6.897, p<.05) decreased significantly after removal of the televisions. In addition, the number of residents placed in room confinement was reduced by half, falling from an average of more than 70 per month to a little more than 35 (F=23.399, p<.01).

A very different pattern is found, however, when the number of more serious disciplinary incidents is examined. The number of serious (disciplinary) incidents and youth confined for these violations dramatically increased after the elimination of television. Indeed, the number of serious violations increased by an average of 167 percent for the period after the television sets were removed, with the number of youths confined for serious offenses increased by more than 140 percent. At first glance, one possible explanation was that staff used such confinement as a “tool” for control, even in cases where such sanctions were unwarranted. Further investigation, however, reveals that the number of disciplinary confinements deemed unwarranted by supervisors did not increase significantly.

Finally, it is important to examine the extent to which population changes may have had an impact on behaviors. As shown in Table 2, the detention center experienced significant staff reductions simultaneously with a large increase in the average monthly resident population. In all, the average number of staff working at the detention in post-TV months was almost 10 percent lower than the average staffing level for the earlier period. At the same time, the average daily resident levels increased almost 40 percent. Due to these developments, the resident to staff ratio increased more than 54 percent during this period. These staff reductions are presented graphically in Figure 2. While the staffing levels show a significant, noticeable decline, the average daily resident levels show a marked increase—starting only a few months after the removal of television sets. As discussed below,
TV and Assaultive Behavior

Figure 1: Number of Assaults on Staff and Residents

- ■ Assaults on Residents
- ● Assaults on Staff

Jan. 1992

Months

December 1996

Number of Assaults
TV and Assaultive Behavior

Figure 2: Total Staff and Average Resident Population

```
Number of Persons

- Avg. Resident Pop.
- Staff On Duty

Month:
- January 1992
- Months
- December 1996
```

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Table 3
Bivariate Correlation Matrix of Primary Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Number of Staff</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>-.53**</td>
<td>-.50**</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.79**</td>
<td>-.85**</td>
<td>-.78**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Assaults on Staff</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Assaults on Residents</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Confinement (RC) Incidents</td>
<td>.97**</td>
<td>.83**</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.35**</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Placements in RC</td>
<td>.85**</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>F. Residents in RC</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.57**</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>-.39**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Disciplinary (DC) Incidents</td>
<td>.95**</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>H. Residents in DC</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. Unwarranted DC Findings</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Presence of TV (0=yes, 1=no)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.69**</td>
<td>.66**</td>
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<td>K. Monthly Staff-Youth Ratio</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.99**</td>
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<tr>
<td>L. Average Daily Population</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

N= 98 months.
*p < .05
**p < .01
this finding may represent an intervening explanation, limiting the overall ability to understand the impact of televisions in the detention center.

**The Relationship Between Behavior and Population**

In an attempt to examine the impact of removing television sets from the Detention Center, the correlations between the outcome measures presented in Table 2 were examined. The correlation matrix is presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, after controlling for other influences, the number of assaults against staff is not significantly related to the presence of television. Indeed, staff assaults are not significantly related to any of the variables included in this analysis. However, the number of resident-on-resident assaults is significantly lower during the post-TV period than during TV days ($r = -0.29$, $p < .05$). Of particular interest is that, in addition to decreased assaults after the removal of television sets, resident assaults also decreased as the resident to staff ratio and the average daily population increased. A similar pattern was found when room confinement incidences and the number of residents cited for minor disruptions were examined. Thus, assaultive behaviors and minor disciplinary problems were found to be significantly lower during the post-TV period than the period prior to the removal of the televisions, despite an increase in the number of residents in the facility, and a lower number of staff on duty.

However, as indicated earlier, more severe disciplinary incidences that resulted in disciplinary confinement significantly increased with the increase in residents. While minor violations appeared to be on the decline, more serious (although not assaultive) behaviors increased dramatically after televisions were removed. Thus, it is possible, that without the availability of television viewing as a disciplinary tool, and with fewer staff on duty, Detention Center staff utilized the more serious disciplinary confinement in a way that averted escalation of incidents leading to serious assaultive behavior.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

In this study, the effect of television viewing and implementation of a more structured program upon the assaultive behaviors of adolescent offenders, and the number of disciplinary and confinement incidents in a juvenile detention center, were examined. Because television had become an integral part of juvenile institutions, this research sought to examine specifically how their removal and the implementation of a structured program involving personal-growth experiences affected assaultive behaviors by juvenile residents. The results suggest that the removal of televisions, along with the implementation of the structured program, significantly decreased the frequency of resident-on-resident assaultive behavior. Given that television viewing was apparently a major source of tension that generated conflicts between residents, this finding should not
be surprising. This outcome also corroborates juvenile residents’ observations that the facility seemed much calmer without television and with the addition of more treatment-focused programming.

Although the data suggest that the withdrawal of television may have had a beneficial impact by decreasing assaultive behavior, the study only partially addressed the more basic question: does the removal of television viewing privileges significantly improve overall behavior among detention center residents? On the one hand, assaultive behavior did decrease after television sets were removed, but the void created by the withdrawal was filled with the implementation of a structured program of activities to replace television viewing. In addition, minor rule violations (which resulted in room confinement or “time out”) also were significantly lower after televisions were removed. This was a post-hoc study, thus we were not able to take into account this alternative program.

The main concern regarding removal of television viewing for the Detention Center staff was that nothing would be available to occupy the residents’ time, and, therefore, they would become bored and begin acting out. Because only a month passed between the time television sets were removed and the initiation of structured programming, it is unclear from this study whether this was, or was not, an accurate prediction. It is possible that assaultive behavior could have decreased if the structured program designed to increase the self-esteem of residents had been introduced when television sets were available. This is a point for further exploration.

On the other hand, more serious incidences requiring disciplinary confinement significantly increased after televisions were removed. Again, the antecedents for this rise are not easily identified, given the increased resident population and the reduction in staff that occurred after television sets were removed. It does seem clear, however, that staff were responding in a different fashion to residents during the post-TV period.

While the decrease in assaultive behavior was the most important discovery of this study, it is not clear why disciplinary confinement incidents, as well as, interestingly, suicide-risk referrals increased. One possibility is that the new relationship between staff and residents created by the structured program, rather than an actual increase in rule violating behavior, prompted staff to submit more reports. If staff were more attentive to residents after televisions were removed, increased interaction might have contributed to the dramatic increase in the number of referrals. While televisions were still present, only minimal interaction occurred between staff and residents. When televisions were removed, however, it was necessary for staff members, by virtue of the new program design, to interact more with the residents. A comparison of typical weekday and weekend schedules before and after television sets were removed clearly indicated that the staff was forced to become more involved with the youth after the television sets were removed. It is also quite possible that as interaction between staff and residents increased, other areas of conflict were exposed. Ultimately, because staff were made responsible for providing programs
and forced to interact with the youth, they began to act as facilitators, guides, and directors. In these new roles staff may have reacted more strongly to negative behaviors. In addition, staff members who were directed not to take chances with residents may have felt that it was necessary to refer troubled youths for suicide evaluations rather than take the risk that they would harm themselves. These findings generate new questions that warrant further exploration of the factors that contribute to assaultive behavior among youths housed in detention centers.

The results of this study strongly suggest that if juvenile detention centers hope to make a successful transition from having televisions to their removal, a concerted effort to find creative ways of involving staff is needed. Increased personal interaction between concerned staff and residents, and the pursuit of meaningful activities by incarcerated youths can replace the impersonal, and frequently negative, imagery of television with positive images and opportunities. These measures offer promising opportunities for rehabilitative programming in juvenile detention centers.
REFERENCES


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The Northeast Florida Center for Community Initiatives (CCI) is dedicated to providing high quality research and evaluation support to community, local, state and federal programs affecting community life in Northeast Florida. Over the past several years, CCI research teams have been involved in a number of projects including evaluation of juvenile justice programs, prison reform, race relations, and other social program assessment and development.