

CHAPTER 10

SELF-REPORT RESEARCH

10.1 Introduction

The Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program (JJEPP) carries out multiple functions which are guided by ongoing “best education practices” evaluation research. Integral to this research is validating whether better education programs as measured by annual quality assurance (QA) scores are producing greater academic outcome gains, and if so, whether these gains translate into successful community reintegration outcomes.

Prior research conducted by JJEPP on best education practices has shown that those “promising education practices” identified in the research literature are more prevalent in juvenile justice educational programs with higher QA review scores. Consequently, a major function of the JJEPP is to conduct evaluation research to determine whether higher quality performing educational programs that produce positive academic outcome gains result in better community reintegration of youths who leave these programs and return to their respective home communities.

This chapter is comprised of five subsequent sections and provides a detailed description of the research methods involved in our current statewide study of educational program quality and official and self report community reintegration measures. Section 10.2 describes the project generally. Section 10.3 provides the methods involved in conducting the project, including the program selection process, program descriptions, student selection, developing and administering the survey instruments, and receiving necessary approval. Section 10.4 describes data entry and data analysis. Section 10.5 describes an additional aftercare component to the project. Section 10.6 concludes the chapter with a summary discussion.

10.2 Project Overview

Using annual QA scores, high-performing and low-performing programs were selected. Youths released from these programs in fiscal year 2000-2001 will be tracked to obtain outcome data for a period of one-year after their release. JJEPP will obtain official and self-reported follow-up data on the youths. The official data will be obtained from several different sources. From the JJEPP database, program data on the 22 programs will be gathered. The Florida Department of Education (DOE) statewide database in conjunction with the DOE district management information systems (MIS) will be used to obtain academic information on the youths, such as transcripts, grades, credits earned, days missed from school, number of suspensions, and diploma track. The Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS) of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) will be used to gather legal

variables, such as re-arrests, reconvictions, and recommitments. Finally, the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) will be used to obtain employment information, including type of job, hourly wage, and length of time on the job.

To obtain self-reported data, a telephone survey of approximately 1600 youths and their parents will be completed. Parents will be interviewed about their child's behavior since release from the facility, the child's school performance, peer groups, and involvement in community activities. Youths will then be interviewed about the educational services they received in the program and the aftercare services they received after release, and how each influenced or affected current school performance, job opportunities, and involvement in the community. Youths also will be asked about their perceptions of their school performance, their employment status and job descriptions, if relevant, relationships with family members and friends, and their involvement in community and delinquent activities. One half of the population will be interviewed at 6 months after release, and the full sample will be interviewed 12 months after release.

The data collected can be grouped into three main categories: pre-commitment, program-specific, and post-commitment. Pre-commitment data include demographic information, such as student name, address, date of birth, race, and sex. Prior school information includes last school attended, last completed grade level, number of high school credits earned, grade point average, exceptional student education (ESE) information, prior school behavior (e.g., suspensions and expulsions), and attendance record. Information on whether the student was previously employed, including length and type of employment, will also be collected. Legal information includes past DJJ commitments, current offense, and prior delinquent history. Program-specific information includes date of admission, date of exit, academic assessment pre- and post-test results, ESE program information, and academic gains, such as grade level increases, credits earned, diplomas granted, vocational training, and behavioral improvements. Post-commitment data will include, but not be limited to, recidivism measures, length and type of employment, return to school, grades, family relationship measures, self-reported delinquency, and involvement in community activities.

The official and self-report data collected will be used to determine if there is a relationship between quality juvenile justice education, measurable academic gains, and community reintegration and to determine differences in outcomes between high performing and low performing programs. Individual level and program level data will be used in these assessments.

10.3 Longitudinal Research Methods

Program Selection

In the current study, 12 pairs of programs were matched on several key criteria, including QA scores, security level/type of facility, provider status (public, private for-profit and private not-for profit), gender served by the program (male, female, or combined) and facility size. QA score was the primary focus because this project wanted to match a high scoring

program with a low scoring program to allow for greater quality differences between educational programs. Using this method, a reasonable representation of the different types of facilities throughout the state was obtained.

This project began with a list of each of the 175 long-term commitment programs reviewed by JJEPP in 2000. The most recent QA score for each program was used. This means that the study relied primarily upon scores from 2000 because the selection process began in March 2001, and the 2001 QA review cycle began in February. If, however, a 2001 review had already been conducted on a program, the 2001 score was used. If a program was deemed in 2000, the score from the most recent full review was located. The programs were arranged in descending order by QA score. A score of 5.00 was considered “average,” and programs with scores between 5.00 and 6.00 were eliminated so that “above average” and “below average” programs would remain.

The programs were then split into two lists – above average (scores greater than or equal to 6.00 included 68 programs) and below average (scores below 5.00 included 55 programs). Fifty-two (52) programs were cut from the original list. Within the two groups, the programs were ordered by level and information about provider status, gender, and facility size was included. An attempt was made to match a high scoring program with a low scoring program whose provider status, gender served, and facility size were the same or as closely matched as possible. From these lists 24 programs – 12 matched pairs were selected.

Program Information

The 2000 QA reports on the 24 programs were reviewed to examine the programs in full detail and to identify anomalies and other distinguishing information. Once the programs were contacted, it was discovered that several programs had closed or changed providers. Pinellas Juvenile Justice Day Treatment, Children and Adolescent Treatment Services (CATS), and Boy’s Ranch Group Treatment Home had closed, but they were open for the entire release period used; that is, fiscal year 2000-2001. Charter Pinellas Treatment Center Level Six and Level Eight changed providers at the beginning of fiscal year 2000-2001. All youths in these facilities were released or transferred by October 1, 2000; therefore, our list of students from those programs reflects students released between July 1, 2000 and October 1, 2000.

To have more comparable populations between Hastings Youth Academy, which houses Level Six and Level Eight (now called moderate risk and high risk, respectively) offenders, and Dozier School for Boys, which is only Level Eight and houses sex offenders, the Level Six youths from Hastings and the sex offenders from Dozier were removed from the sample. Table 10.3-1 provides an overview of the final 22 programs included in the study.

Table 10.3-1: Program Descriptions

JJEEP Program Name	QA score	Level	Education Provider Profit Status	Gender	Max. Capacity
Palm Beach Marine Institute	2.72	2	Not for Profit	Combined	30
Eckerd Leadership Program	6.67	2	Not for Profit	Combined	30
Children and Adolescent Treatment Services – CATS	3.72	4	Not for Profit	Female	12
Sheriffs Teach Adolescent Responsibility - STAR	6.78	4	Not for Profit	Female	24
Boys Ranch Group Treatment Home	4.78	4	Public	Male	8
ACTS Group Treatment Home I and II	6.94	4	Public	Male	16
NAFI Hendry Youth Development Academy	3.17	6	Not for Profit	Male	32
Crossroads Wilderness Institute	6.94	6	Not for Profit	Male	35
Blackwater Career Development Center	2.61	6	Public	Male	25
Pensacola Boy’s Base	6.78	6	Public	Male	28
Deborah’s Way	3.50	6	Public	Female	46
Charter Pinellas Treatment Center – Level 6	7.29	6	Public	Female	18
Bay Behavioral HOPE Program	2.72	6	For Profit	Female	17
Camp E-Nini-Hassee	6.11	6	Not for Profit	Female	60
Hastings Youth Academy	3.06	6&8	Public	Male	185
Dozier School for Boys	7.00	8	Public	Male	193
Vernon Place	4.89	8	Public	Female	40
Charter Pinellas Treatment Center – Level 8	6.72	8	Public	Female	96
Polk Youth Development Center	4.11	8	For Profit	Male	350
Eckerd Youth Development Center		8	Public	Male	143
Okeechobee Juvenile Offender Correction Center	4.83	8&10	Public	Male	96
Jackson Juvenile Offender Correction Center	6.06	8&10	Public	Male	96

Student Selection

The student sample was comprised of youths released between July 1, 2000, and June 30, 2001. Using this student sample enabled the start of our interviews in July 2001 for a one-year follow-up period for the full sample and a six-month follow-up for half the sample. The study did not want to use students released in fiscal year 1999-2000 because it was thought that recall would be difficult for the interviewees. Using fiscal year 2000-2001 would hopefully increase reliability and validity in that regard, but obtaining official information for 2000-2001 will be delayed because of lag time involved.

JJEEP began contacting the programs at the end of June 2001. Each of the 24 programs was contacted and asked to submit information on all students who exited the program between July 1, 2000 and June 30, 2001, including student name, entry date, exit date, social security number, date of birth, name of county prior to entering facility, named of county released to upon exit, home phone number, name(s) of parent(s) or legal guardian(s), successful completion of program (yes, no), and if no, the reason. Seven programs did not provide the, but JJEEP was able to obtain a list of students from the JJIS for five of those seven: STAR, Bay Behavioral, Charter Pinellas Level 6, Charter Pinellas Level 8, and CATS. JJEEP was not able to obtain information from Stewart Marchman Transitions Day Treatment and Pinellas Juvenile Justice Day Treatment from the program or the JJIS. Since they were paired, they were eliminated from the study.

As previously mentioned, once JJEEP began contacting the programs, it was discovered that several programs had closed or changed providers. Pinellas Juvenile Justice Day Treatment, Children and Adolescent Treatment Services (CATS), and Boy's Ranch Group Treatment Home had closed, but they were open for the entire release period used for the study, that is, fiscal year 2000-2001. Charter Pinellas Treatment Center Level Six and Level Eight changed providers. All youths in these facilities were released or transferred by October 1, 2000, resulting in a truncated release period for those programs. That is, the list of students consists of only those released between July 1, 2000 and October 1, 2000. As already mentioned, to have more comparable populations between Hastings Youth Academy, which houses Level Six and Level Eight offenders, and Dozier School for Boys, which is Level Eight and houses sex offenders, we removed the Level Six youth from Hastings and the sex offenders from Dozier from our sample. As a crosscheck on the lists obtained from the programs, JJEEP obtained a list of students released from the 22 programs from the JJIS.

In July 2001, JJEEP began selecting the sample of students. It was decided to include all of the students from programs with up to 30 students released in fiscal year 2000-2001. Using a random numbers table, 30 youths were selected from programs with 31 to 60 releases and half of the students were selected from programs with greater than 60 students released. A sample size of approximately 900 was anticipated. Once JJEEP began administering the survey at the end of July, however, it realized the difficulties involved in locating the youths. In August, it was decided that a larger pool of names from which to choose was needed; therefore, with the exception of two programs, all students released in fiscal year 2000-2001 from each of the 22 programs were used. This increased the sample size to approximately 1600. Because of the high number of releases from two of the large programs, a 50% random sample of students from Polk Youth Development Center and Eckerd Youth Development Center was used. The names of students were arranged in ascending order by social security number, and the first half of the list was selected.

The list of students provided by the program was compared to the list of students obtained from the JJIS. There were approximately 175 names that did not match, either because they were on the program list and not in the JJIS or vice versa. JJEEP began investigating the discrepancies. At the beginning of September, it was discovered that the list of names provided by Camp E-Nini-Hassee included some girls who were not DJJ students but were private placements. JJEEP sent this list back to the Camp and asked them to identify which

students were not DJJ placements. Subsequently, the approximately 40 names identified from the list were removed. Some of the names that were on the program list and not in the JJIS were later found in the JJIS but had been improperly entered in the JJIS by the program.

For all students released between January 1, 2001, and June 30, 2001, JJEEP will attempt to conduct an interview 6 months after their release date and 12 months after their release date. Students released between July 1, 2000, and December 31, 2000, will be interviewed 12 months after their release date.

Survey Development

JJEEP conducted a literature review of longitudinal evaluations of juvenile justice education programs and found little research in this area. Even when the search was broadened to include evaluation of juvenile justice programs, in general, not much was found that was useful for purposes of the study. JJEEP had consulted with Dr. Delbert Elliott, an expert in this area, on a prior longitudinal project and used his suggestions to develop our current survey instruments. During February through May, JJEEP developed and revised the survey instruments. JJEEP pre-tested the instruments in-house; that is, the research staff administered the survey to each other. Then JJEEP pre-tested the instruments on students released from a local juvenile justice facility (Tallahassee Marine Institute) and their parents.

After making numerous rounds of revisions based on the pretests and more thought, JJEEP established a final survey April 27, 2001. The survey and informed consent forms, to be discussed below, were submitted to the Florida State University Human Subjects Committee (HSC) and approved in May 2001. After receiving approval, the survey was further reviewed and it was decided that a section of delinquency questions would be added to the student survey, which required re-review by the HSC. JJEEP received approval on the changes in June 2001. This information is discussed in more detail in this chapter in the “Human Subjects Committee” subsection.

As the survey was administered, JJEEP encountered issues that needed to be resolved. As parents were interviewed, it was discovered that many students had been committed to another juvenile justice facility since release from the program in the study. To address this, JJEEP began using a revised survey on September 13, 2001, which included six additional questions added to the beginning of the parent survey and five questions added to the beginning of the student survey to determine if the student had been in any other commitment programs and to determine how long they had been in the community. JJEEP will use this information to determine a minimum amount of time a student must be in the community to be included in the analysis.

Another issue that needed to be addressed was the degree of integrity of the answers given to the self-reported delinquency questions. Interviewers expressed the concern that students were not honestly answering these questions, perhaps, because the students thought their delinquent behavior would be reported, despite JJEEP’s assurances of confidentiality. In response, JJEEP altered the wording of the questions on the original survey in a way that might elicit more honest responses. The new questions were edited in such a way that

responses from the old questions and the new questions would be coded the same. October 10, 2001 JJEEP began administering this revised student survey. The final survey instruments can be found in Appendix G1 and Appendix G2.

Human Subjects Committee

Before administering the survey, JJEEP needed the project approved by the HSC. The HSC required the development of informed consent forms, which were intended to be read to the participants in the project before beginning a telephone interview. JJEEP developed an informed consent form for parents and an assent form for the youths. The HSC application was completed and submitted along with copies of the informed consent/assent forms and the parent and student surveys. Because JJEEP was using minors and delinquents in the project, the project required full-committee review by the HSC. The project was reviewed at the May 10, 2001, HSC meeting and officially approved June 01, 2001. After the project was approved, JJEEP decided to add a section of questions to the student survey regarding involvement in delinquent activities. This required submitting a memo to the HSC committee detailing the changes made to the research protocol. This was submitted May 31, 2001, and the HSC reviewed the changes and officially approved them on June 12, 2001.

Cooperative Agreement

To obtain information from the juvenile justice facilities, JJEEP needed approval from the DJJ. On June 25, 2001, JJEEP received an official letter from DOE Commissioner Charlie Crist and DJJ Secretary William “Bill” Bankhead regarding the commitment between DOE and DJJ for providing mutual assistance in several areas. One of the areas specified in the letter was conducting research. This letter gave JJEEP permission to receive information on the youths in the project from the programs and through the JJIS. JJEEP composed a letter explaining the longitudinal research project, which was sent to the programs.

Administering the Survey

JJEEP began administering the survey at the end of July 2001 rather than the anticipated start date of July 1. Because of the late start and the shortage of interviewers, it was decided not to make any of the planned July calls to students who exited from Charter Pinellas Level Eight, Eckerd Youth Development Center, Hastings Youth Academy, and Polk Youth Development Center. These four programs had a large number of students released in fiscal year 2000-2001, and JJEEP assumed it would have a sufficient number of interview completions even without the students released in July.

The need for additional interviewers was immediately apparent, and JJEEP hired four part-time interviewers in the beginning of October. A calling protocol was developed to increase consistency among the callers, and several forms and databases were created to aid in the calling and tracking process. A “Daily Call Log” tally sheet is used by the callers to keep track of the calls they make and the outcome of each attempted call as successful or unsuccessful and, if unsuccessful, why it was unsuccessful. A “Contact Log” is placed in

each student file and used to keep track of each attempt at contacting the parent/student. The date and time of the call, the caller's name, and detailed comments of what happened on that attempt are recorded. A "Weekly Progress Report" is filled out by each caller with a list of the names of interviews they completed in a particular week. A "Monthly Contact Log" is electronically maintained to keep track of the information received on each student. The contact log contains student names arranged according to the month they should be contacted. It allows JJEEP to enter the date it completes a parent interview and a student interview and the dates it receives DOE, DJJ, and FETPIP data on each student.

As previously mentioned, JJEEP encountered several concerns as it administered the survey. Resolution of two of the concerns discussed above involved revising the survey instrument itself. Other concerns centered on locating and interviewing the youths. Review of contact logs revealed that numerous unsuccessful calls were made on a substantial number of student files. One remedy was to leave a message for respondents after 15 unsuccessful attempts to reach them, which was started the end of October. Another solution was to stop trying to contact youths for a six-month follow-up after two months of unsuccessful attempts. In other words, it was decided that JJEEP would try to contact youths for a "six-month" follow-up between six and eight months after their release date. JJEEP decided on a 4-month calling period beyond the 12-month release dates. This system was started on December 4, 2001. A third solution was to implement a system for obtaining the most current phone numbers for the youths, whereby JJEEP would begin contacting juvenile probation officers (JPOs). It was decided that, after a phone number is clearly identified as a dead end (disconnected, person answers and says it is the wrong number, number not in service, etc.), JJEEP would remove the file from circulation among the interviewers and try to contact the student's JPO.

As surveys are completed, student folders are filed according to program and whether or not it was a 6-month interview or a 12-month interview. Interviews continue until one-year follow-ups have been completed on the June 30, 2001, releases or until November 01, 2002, whichever comes first.

10.4 Data Entry and Analysis

Based on the survey responses and relevant demographic and program information, JJEEP developed an SPSS database and corresponding codebook. The codebook provides the variable name as it appears in the SPSS database, the variable description as defined in SPSS, values to be entered into SPSS and their corresponding labels, and the location of the variable information on the surveys. Close-ended survey questions are coded according to the provided response categories. The open-ended survey questions are coded with close-ended categories as well. By examining open-ended responses from approximately 40 completed surveys, one from each program for 6-month completions and one from each program for 12-month completions, JJEEP develops broader categories into which the responses will fall. For ease of data entry, JJEEP has developed a coding sheet to be filled out for each completed survey. Each survey question is numerically coded and those numbers are entered into the SPSS database.

In this project, JJEEP staff intend to measure whether youths successfully reintegrate into the community. This raises two important questions. First, how is “successful community reintegration” measured? Second, do the indicators representing this concept actually capture “success?” While it is imperative that characteristics of incarcerated youths, such as learning, emotional, and behavioral disabilities, and academic performance levels, be further established, it is likewise important to integrate our current understanding of these characteristics into the ways in which JJEEP evaluates correctional education programs. Very little research has been done in the area of juvenile justice program evaluation, and virtually no research has been conducted on the educational programs of these institutions. The research that has been conducted primarily uses recidivism as the basic outcome to evaluate the program. JJEEP seeks to move beyond the traditional measure of recidivism and incorporate assessments of grade retention, job acquisition, emotional and behavioral change, disciplinary infractions, improved relationships, and other measures that reflect reconnection with mainstream institutions.

The nature and extent of the youths’ successes will be examined in several different areas: education, employment, relationships, community activities, and delinquent activities. Each of these outcomes will be measured in numerous ways. Because of the higher prevalence of learning disabilities and academic deficiencies among juvenile justice populations, conventional standards of success may not be appropriate. Since juveniles who are involved in delinquent activities are more likely than peers their age to be absent from school and disconnected with the academic process, simply returning to school upon release from a juvenile justice facility may be considered a success. Fewer absences, less frequent disciplinary infractions, and lower grade retention may also be signs of success. Successes in the area of employment could include obtaining a job, retaining a job, and receiving vocational training. Improved relationships with family members, spending less time with delinquent friends, and greater involvement in community activities are also indicators of success. Additionally, less involvement in delinquent activities is considered a success. Some of these indicators may not be considered signs of success from a conventional standpoint, but may be appropriate given the special needs of the population under consideration. To elaborate, many youths experience some behavior and related adjustment problems shortly after institutional release, but then adjust and maintain non-criminal lifestyles. If the only measurement of community reintegration were mere recidivism (official or self-report), then such youths would be judged to have not successfully reintegrated back into their communities. As such, multiple indicators are needed and must be measured over time if more accurate assessments of community reintegration are to be determined.

To date, JJEEP has completed approximately 500 interviews with parents and 300 interviews with students. The data presented in Table 10.4-1 are based on 235 student interviews and provide a preliminary overview of the successes that the students as a whole are achieving.

Table 10.4-1: Percentages of Successful Community Outcomes

Community Outcomes	Percentage
Enrolled in school	67%
Obtained a job	75%
Have not used alcohol	57%
Have not used marijuana	69%
Have not used other drugs	87%
Have not taken property	90%
Have not damaged property	90%
Have not physically harmed someone	80%
Have not been involved in gang activity	97%
Have not been in trouble with the police	67%
Have not been involved in activities that could have gotten them in trouble with the police	83%

As mentioned above, conventional measures of success may not be adequate for this population, and JJEEP has chosen to use broader measures of successful community reintegration. The measures presented in Table 10.4-1 are a select few of the indicators measured by the surveys and the results are preliminary in that they are not based on the entire sample. The data indicate that 67% have reported being enrolled in school at some point since release from one of the 22 programs in the study. The overwhelming majority of students, that is 75%, reported that they had obtained at least one job. The next three indicators were based on survey questions that inquired about alcohol, marijuana, and other drug use and the results show that most youths have reported not using alcohol or drugs since release. Nearly all students have reported not taking property that did not belong to them or damaging property, and most have reported not physically harming someone. Virtually no students reported involvement in gang activities. Finally, 67% have reported not getting in trouble with the police, and 83% reported not doing something that could have gotten them in trouble with the police. Overall, these data indicate that youths are reporting several measures of success upon return to their communities.

To date, too few interviews have been completed to analyze the results according to programs, but future analyses will examine the data at the program level. Additionally, a larger number of outcomes will be examined within each of the areas presented above as well as in the areas of family, friends, and community involvement.

10.5 Aftercare Study

An extension of the longitudinal research study will include a comparative study of aftercare programs in the State of Florida. Most of the aftercare literature has focused on high-risk youths. In fact, all the empirical studies have addressed the need for intensive aftercare services for high-risk youths, those typically characterized by habitual and serious offending (Altschuler & Armstrong, 1998; Fagan, 1990; Goodstein & Sontheimer, 1997; Greenwood, et al., 1993), and often with a history of substance abuse (Catalano et al., 1989; Sealock, et

al., 1997). Results have been mixed, however, and it is still unknown what type of aftercare programming is effective in producing positive outcomes for these youths reentering their communities. In Florida, there are a variety of aftercare programs available, ranging from low levels of monitoring to intensive day treatment programs with night and weekend surveillance. Further, within each general aftercare category, the level of supervision and services the students receive varies. Aftercare services will be an intervening variable in the larger longitudinal study and this comparative case study will provide us better knowledge of the aftercare services provided to Florida's youths.

Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys (Dozier) and Jackson Juvenile Offender Corrections Center (JJOCC) are residential facilities that serve high-risk male offenders. Dozier has been in operation since 1899 and was the first juvenile facility in the State of Florida. JJOC is located very near Dozier and has been in operation for three years. The educational programs for both facilities are operated by the Washington County School District, while the facilities are operated by the DJJ. Both residential programs serve juveniles with long histories of delinquency. These youths often have histories of drug offenses and violent offenses. In addition, the programs serve a large population of sexual offenders. The youths exiting Dozier and JJOC come from all over Florida, but are concentrated in a northern tri-regional area, extending from Orlando to Pensacola to Jacksonville.

Since the inception of QA reviews for the juvenile justice educational programs, Dozier has been recognized for its extensive treatment programs and continuous high quality academic and vocational training. JJOC began operation in 1998, and the educational program has received high satisfactory ratings for the past two years. Table 10.5-1 provides brief program descriptions of youths exiting Dozier and JJOC.

Table 10.5 -1: Program Descriptions of Youths Exiting Dozier and JJOCC for Case Study

Program Descriptions	Dozier	JJOCC	Combined
Sample Size	137	76	213
Range of Stay	1-35 mo.	3 –17 mo.	1-35 mo.
Average Length of Stay	13.3 mo.	11.3 mo.	12.6 mo.
Age Range	14.8-19.0	16-18.9	14.8-19
Average Age	17.6	17.4	17.5
Range of Total Number of Offenses	1-88	1-34	1-88
Average Number of Charges	16	16	16
1998 QA Rating	Deemed	NA	NA
1999 QA Rating	Deemed	5.67	NA
2000 QA Rating	7.00	6.06	6.53

Due to the full range of aftercare services youths receive upon return to their communities, this would be a useful comparative study. The types of aftercare services these youths receive will range in type, from minimal community-based monitoring services to intensive day treatment services. The intensity and duration of aftercare services will vary, along with the quality of service delivery. Program variables, such as educational, vocational, and treatment gains can be controlled. Individual variables, such as age, race, and educational

achievement, and legal variables, such as offense seriousness, prior offense history, and judicial jurisdiction, can be controlled. Additionally, various community, family, and peer group variables can be controlled, such as socioeconomic status, parental abuse or neglect, family conflict, and association with delinquent peers.

Comparative analyses will provide answers to several research questions regarding the effectiveness of aftercare services and the continuum of care for high-risk youth offenders in the State of Florida. Community reintegration variables can be analyzed, such as continuing education and gainful employment, in addition to variables such as self-esteem, family and peer relations, community involvement, and delinquent activity.

10.6 Summary Discussion

One of the major functions of JJEEP is to conduct evaluation research to determine whether higher QA performing educational programs produce better academic performance outcomes in comparison to lower QA performing programs. The ultimate goal of the longitudinal research study is to determine how quality education relates to various community reintegration outcomes. Preliminary findings demonstrate that the youths in this study are experiencing success in the areas of education and employment and in terms of decreased involvement in delinquent activities. Our current research and subsequent findings will be able to demonstrate whether better quality educational programs that produce greater academic gains result in success upon return to the community among juvenile justice youths. As a result, these statewide evaluation findings should have a direct impact on policies for youths in juvenile justice facilities. Improving educational opportunities through quality educational programs could emerge as a salient component in the continuing effort to reduce criminal behavior among youths.