

Is Child Saving Dead? Public Support for Juvenile Rehabilitation

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In recent years, the sustained criticism leveled at juvenile rehabilitation has raised the question of whether the public continues to endorse the correctional policy of saving youthful offenders. However, in a 1998 statewide survey of Tennessee residents, the respondents indicated that rehabilitation should be an integral goal of the juvenile correctional system. They also endorsed a range of community-based treatment interventions and favored early intervention programs over imprisonment as a response to crime. Taken together, these findings revealed that the public's belief in "child saving" remains firm, and that citizens do not support an exclusively punitive response to juvenile offenders.

At the close of the nineteenth century, the United States witnessed an unprecedented movement to save its children from physical and moral harm. The "child savers," as champions of this movement have come to be known, sought wide-reaching reforms and advocated for such diverse policies as child labor laws, compulsory schooling, the establishment of kindergartens and playgrounds, and the development of bureaus of child health and hygiene (Platt 1969; Rothman 1980). Among the most ambitious reforms that the progressive child savers supported, however, was the establishment of a system of juvenile justice. Now, a century after its creation, the juvenile court has experienced a period of sustained criticism. In this context, the question emerges as to whether the public continues to endorse the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders. The current study thus investigated whether child saving has indeed lost the public's faith or remains a policy that citizens believe

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should be an integral feature of the state's correctional response to juvenile offenders.

ATTACKING JUVENILE REHABILITATION

The juvenile court was based on the novel idea that a separate system of justice should be established for delinquent youths. The progressives argued that the punishment of juveniles in the adult criminal justice system was damaging and inappropriate. Compared with adult criminals, wayward youngsters were believed to be less responsible for their actions, less likely to benefit from punishment, and more amenable to change. Moreover, the progressives maintained that because delinquents were vulnerable, the state, acting as a kindly parent (*parens patriae*), should be given wide discretion to ensure the best interests of the youths under their supervision. Thus, the child savers proposed a system that would accomplish the dual goals of protecting the child and the community. The foundation of this system of justice was an overriding belief that juvenile delinquents could be saved; that is, it was thought that youthful offenders could be rehabilitated and brought back into the folds of society (Rothman 1980).

Beginning in the late 1960s, however, faith in the progressive system of juvenile justice began to erode, and the system, along with the rehabilitative ideal, was attacked on numerous grounds. The promise of rehabilitation had gone largely unrealized. The benevolent principles on which the system was based stood in stark and ironic contrast to the punitive reality of the juvenile justice system (Feld 1993). Among liberals, the juvenile justice system was looked on as a coercive instrument of social control and was attacked on the basis that the rehabilitative ideal, with its emphasis on individualized treatment, had resulted in the abuse of discretion and in the arbitrary, differential treatment of delinquent youths. Conservatives agreed that the juvenile justice system was flawed but viewed the system in a vastly different light: Child-saving, it was argued, had led to the lenient treatment of dangerous youths and to the victimization of the public (Cullen, Golden, and Cullen 1983).

In the 100-year anniversary of the juvenile court, serious concerns remain about the viability of this system. Under scrutiny from a diverse group of critics, the juvenile justice system has undergone several significant changes in the past 30 years. For instance, in Illinois (the home of the first juvenile court) the juvenile system has been altered to reflect a balanced and restorative model of justice. This model purports to give equal attention to the rights and needs of the juvenile, to the rights and needs of the victim, and to the protection of the community (see, e.g., Bazemore and Day 1996). Consistent with

this shift in philosophy, Illinois has enacted legislation that increases the length of time that juveniles may be held in custody and detention, has provided for more extensive fingerprinting of youths, has created a statewide database to track young offenders, has placed limits on the number of station adjustments allowed for delinquents who are not officially cited by the police, and has removed special protective language from the juvenile court process (e.g., an "adjudicatory hearing" will now be referred to as a trial) (Dighton 1999).

The changes initiated in Illinois are not unique or isolated. At the end of 1997, 17 states had redefined their juvenile court purpose clauses to emphasize public safety, certain sanctions, and/or offender accountability (Torbet and Szymanski 1998). Furthermore, between 1992 and 1995, 40 states modified their traditional juvenile court confidentiality provisions to open juvenile court records and to make proceedings more public (Sickmund, Snyder, and Poe-Yamagata 1997). Similarly, during this same time period, 40 states and the District of Columbia passed laws making it easier to transfer juveniles to adult court by lowering the minimum age at which a youth may be waived and by expanding the number of offenses that qualify for transfer (Torbet and Szymanski 1998). As a result, the United States experienced a 33 percent increase in the total number of juvenile cases waived to adult criminal courts between 1986 and 1995. During this same time period, waivers for personal crimes and drug offense cases increased 100 percent and 180 percent, respectively (Sickmund, Stahl, Finnegan, Snyder, Poole, and Butts 1998). Correctional programs for juveniles also are becoming more punitive in nature, focusing on public safety and offender accountability (Torbet and Szymanski 1998).

It is frequently suggested that the changes in the juvenile court have been precipitated by two factors: high rates of serious juvenile crime and a shift in public attitudes toward youthful offenders. Between 1988 and 1994, for example, the United States experienced more than a 100 percent increase in the number of murders committed by juveniles (Snyder 1998a). This trend, coupled with the commission of a number of disturbing and highly publicized crimes involving youths, seemed to signal that a new generation of highly violent, young "super-predators" was lurking in our future (see, e.g., DiIulio 1995; cf. Snyder 1998b).

Although juveniles accounted for only 12 percent of the total arrests for violent crimes in 1997, and although juvenile arrests for murder have declined by 39 percent since 1993 (Snyder 1998a), juvenile crime continues to evoke fear and concern among the public. For example, a 1998 survey found that Texans were nearly unanimous in the belief that juvenile crime is a serious problem today (Gonzalez 1998). Similar results have been obtained

in national surveys. A 1996 poll found that more than 80 percent of the public felt that “teenage violence is a big problem” in most of the country, although only 33 percent believed that teen violence was a “big problem” in their own communities (*The Public Perspective* 1997).

Contemporary discussions about youthful offenders also have taken on a decidedly punitive flavor in the past 10 years. Public reaction to the caning of teenager Michael Faye stands out as a stark example of the public’s recent punitiveness toward young offenders. After being found guilty of vandalism in Singapore, Faye was punished by caning. Rather than being outraged, however, the majority of the American public expressed support for the sanction, even when they were informed that the beating was likely to physically scar the youth for life (Pettinico 1994).

There also is evidence that the public supports getting tough with youthful offenders in this country (*The Public Perspective* 1997). A 1994 poll found, for example, that 52 percent of the public thought that society should deal with juvenile crime by giving juveniles the same punishment as adults. In contrast, only 31 percent supported placing less emphasis on punishment and more emphasis on trying to rehabilitate youths. In a comparable survey, more than 70 percent of a national sample reported that “toughening penalties for juvenile offenders so young people know there are severe consequences to crime” would make a major difference in the reduction of violent crime (only 6 percent of the sample felt that such a policy would make no difference). High levels of public support for the death penalty for juveniles are also regularly reported. A 1994 Gallup poll found, for example, that 72 percent of the public favored the death penalty for “a teenager who commits a murder and is found guilty by a jury” (Moore 1994).

Although it is apparent that the public is worried about juvenile crime and holds punitive attitudes toward youths, most discussions about reforming the juvenile justice system have failed to consider whether the public continues to view the rehabilitation of young offenders as a legitimate correctional goal. As is frequently the case in general discussions about public attitudes toward crime, it is assumed that increased support for punishing juveniles has also signaled a commensurate decline in support for treatment, but this may not be the case. Indeed, despite sweeping reforms aimed at altering the juvenile court to reflect retributive and punitive goals, it is uncertain that the public wants a juvenile justice system based exclusively, or even primarily, on punishment. This oversight is particularly notable given the centrality of the goal of rehabilitation to the traditional juvenile justice system. Again, the objective of our research was to explore these issues and to assess whether the public continues to support the rehabilitation of juveniles.

SUPPORT FOR JUVENILE REHABILITATION

As previously discussed, recent public opinion polls suggest that the public supports getting tough with youthful offenders (see also Roberts and Stalans 1997; Triplett 1996). A handful of polls and research findings, however, challenge the idea that citizens have relinquished their faith in child saving. Indeed, survey research suggests three conclusions. First, findings reveal that the public continues to believe that rehabilitation is a core goal of juvenile corrections. Second, existing research indicates that the public not only embraces the rehabilitation of juveniles, but also that it is more supportive of treating juveniles than adults. Third, juveniles are generally thought to be more amenable to change than are adults; and similarly, the public believes that the rehabilitation of juveniles is effective.

Two recent studies have specifically questioned the public about their views on the main purpose of the juvenile court. When respondents in a national survey were asked whether the main purpose of the juvenile court should be to "treat and rehabilitate" or "punish" young offenders, Schwartz, Kerbs, Hogston, and Guillean (1992) found that more than three out of four citizens—78.4 percent—said that the juvenile court should treat and rehabilitate juveniles, whereas fewer than 12 percent said punish; 10 percent reported that both goals should be pursued equally. Likewise, in a 1995 national poll, survey participants were asked "which goals should be the most important in sentencing juveniles." Half of the respondents answered rehabilitation, 31 percent selected retribution, 15 percent favored deterrence, and 4 percent supported incapacitation (Gerber and Engelhardt-Greer 1996). Thus, in both studies rehabilitation was the preferred goal of the juvenile court by a substantial margin.

Survey research also indicates that the public is more supportive of treating youthful offenders than they are of treating adults. A 1994 poll of Texans found, for instance, that although only 39 percent of the respondents endorsed trying to rehabilitate adult criminals, 70 percent favored rehabilitation for juveniles. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of the respondents in this poll were willing to pay for juvenile programs to keep kids out of trouble, and 81 percent strongly or "mostly" agreed that removing children from bad environments and teaching them moral values and skills could help them become law-abiding (Makeig 1994). Likewise, more Oregon residents in a 1995 poll reported that they preferred that money be spent to rehabilitate juvenile offenders (92 percent) than to rehabilitate adult offenders (73 percent) and to punish juvenile offenders (77 percent) (Doble Research Associates 1995). Applegate, Cullen, and Fisher (1997) report similar findings. In their 1996 survey of Ohio residents, more than 95 percent of survey participants agreed

that it is important to try to rehabilitate juveniles who have committed crimes and are now in the correctional system; for adult offenders, close to 86 percent agreed with a comparable question. Finally, 79 percent of San Francisco residents reported that they preferred that a 16-year-old boy convicted of selling crack cocaine, with a prior record, an abusive mother, and an absentee father, be placed in a residential treatment facility rather than be detained at the California Youth Authority (Moore 1996).

The public also believes that juveniles are promising candidates for treatment. A 1994 poll of Texas residents found that 76 percent of survey participants strongly or mostly agreed that juveniles have a better chance of being rehabilitated than adults (Makeig 1994). In a related line of inquiry, research has found that the public believes in the efficacy of juvenile treatment. Cullen et al. (1983) found, for instance, that although 20 percent of a sample from an Illinois community agreed that the rehabilitation of adults just does not work, only 10 percent felt that the treatment of juveniles is ineffective. A 1988 poll also found that more than two out of three Californians disagreed that youth who commit serious crime cannot be rehabilitated and should be locked up without any attempt at rehabilitation for as long as the law allows (Steinhart 1988). Similarly, a 1985 survey of Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio, residents found that three of four respondents believed that rehabilitation programs were very helpful or helpful for juveniles. The comparable figure for adults was about 6 of 10. A replication of this research conducted in 1995 found that 8 of 10 Cincinnati residents believed that juvenile rehabilitation was very helpful or helpful; in contrast, for adults the figure was again 6 of 10 respondents (Sundt, Cullen, Applegate, and Turner 1998).

Together these findings indicate that the public continues to support the correctional treatment of juveniles. It should be noted, however, that the public is less willing to support rehabilitation when this option is portrayed as a lenient response to crime or when it is suggested that an emphasis on rehabilitation will lessen the punishment given to youths (see, e.g., *The Public Perspective* 1997). Finally, support for rehabilitation declines when questions ask about treating chronic or violent offenders and when questions specifically use the word rehabilitation (Gerber and Engelhardt-Greer 1996).

Although illuminating, the existing research is limited in an important way. Most of the polls and studies reviewed above have asked respondents only one or two questions about the issue of juvenile rehabilitation. Accordingly, they stop short of providing a systematic investigation of whether the public continues to believe in the rehabilitative ideal. In contrast, in the present study, we advanced our understanding of the public's attitudes toward the treatment of youthful offenders by having assessed a broad range of attitudes toward juvenile rehabilitation.

*METHOD**Sample*

The data for this article were drawn from a larger survey conducted in 1998, which examined citizens' attitudes on various juvenile justice policy issues. Using a statewide database of residents' addresses, a questionnaire was mailed to a random sample of 1,500 people living in Tennessee. After the initial mailing, 217 surveys were returned as undeliverable. Subsequently, a replacement sample of 217 randomly selected residents were mailed a copy of the questionnaire.¹ Using an amended version of Dillman's (1978) Total Design Method, both groups were sent a reminder postcard, and two additional copies of the questionnaire were sent to increase the response rate.² A total of 539 usable surveys were returned, or a 40 percent response rate.

The modest response rate raises questions about the generalizability of the results. There are two reasons, however, why the findings reported here are unlikely to be affected by sample bias. First, to check for potential biases, a sample of 50 nonrespondents was contacted by telephone and asked a subsample of the questions from the survey. Their responses were then compared with those of sample participants to determine if any differences existed between these groups. Statistical analyses revealed no significant differences in the answers provided by the survey respondents as opposed to those provided by the nonrespondents polled by telephone. Accordingly, there was no evidence that respondents and nonrespondents varied in their attitudes toward juvenile justice policy issues.

Second, a major finding of this study was the public's consistent support for rehabilitation. This finding is unlikely to be an artifact of the sample's demographic composition because the study was conducted in a southern state and the respondents were primarily White and tended to be politically conservative. To the extent that these characteristics affect correctional attitudes, they should presumably increase expressions of punitiveness and decrease protreatment sentiments (see, e.g., Applegate 1997). Thus, if anything, the composition of our sample would likely slant the opinion data we report against finding support for rehabilitation.

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the sample. The sample consisted of 272 (51.4 percent) males and 257 females (48.6 percent). The respondents were predominately White (91.8 percent) and their average age was 53. Of the sample, 50 percent had postsecondary education, whereas more than one-third had received a high school diploma or GED. Only 10 percent of the sample did not have a high school education. The respondents were asked to rank their general political views and how religious they would describe

TABLE 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>
Gender		
Male	51.4	272
Female	48.6	257
Race		
White	91.8	482
Non-White	8.2	43
Age (\bar{x} = 53)		
18 to 24	3.2	18
25 to 44	31.3	177
45 to 64	37.7	213
65 and older	27.8	157
Education		
No high school diploma	10.3	54
GED	5.5	29
High school diploma	33.9	178
Technical/associates degree	15.4	81
Bachelors degree	21.1	111
Graduate degree	13.7	72
Income		
Less than \$15,000	12.5	59
\$15,001-\$25,000	15.0	71
\$25,001-\$35,000	18.4	87
\$35,001-\$45,000	14.2	67
\$45,001-\$50,000	11.6	55
More than \$50,000	28.3	134
Religion (\bar{x} = 4.73)		
Scale 1 to 6, where 1 = <i>not at all religious</i> and 6 = <i>very religious</i>		
Political (\bar{x} = 4.24)		
Scale 1 to 6, where 1 = <i>very liberal</i> and 6 = <i>very conservative</i>		

themselves using a Likert-type scale of 1 to 6, where 1 was *very liberal* (or *not very religious*) and 6 was *very conservative* (or *very religious*). The respondents' mean response for political views was 4.24, indicating a more conservative sample. With a mean of 4.73, the respondents also professed to be religious. The respondents were fairly evenly distributed over the income categories, although almost 30 percent reported an income above \$50,000.

Measures

This survey contained a number of measures that assessed the public's views on the goals of juvenile institutions, the justifications for intervening with juveniles, and what community-based treatment options should be available for juveniles. Following each question, respondents were provided

TABLE 2: Respondents' Views on What Is and What Should Be the Main Emphasis in Juvenile Prisons and the Amount of Importance Placed on Each (in percentages)

<i>A. Main Emphasis of Juvenile Prisons</i>				
<i>Goals of Imprisonment</i>	<i>Is</i>		<i>Should Be</i>	
Rehabilitation: Do you think the main emphasis in juvenile prison is [should be] to try and rehabilitate the adolescent so that he [sic] might return to society as a productive citizen?	29.4		63.3	
Punishment: Do you think the main emphasis in juvenile prison is [should be] to punish the adolescent convicted of a crime?	16.8		18.7	
Protection: Do you think the main emphasis in juvenile prison is [should be] to protect society from future crime he might commit?	17.6		11.2	
Not sure	36.1		6.7	
<i>B. Importance of Goals of Juvenile Institutions</i>				
<i>Goals of Imprisonment</i>	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>A Little Important</i>	<i>Not Very Important</i>
Rehabilitation	64.5	30.0	4.3	1.1
Punishment	42.5	52.1	4.3	1.1
Protection	43.2	47.0	8.4	1.3

either with a closed-ended set of choices or with a Likert-type scale that was used to express their level of agreement.

Previous research on correctional attitudes has most often focused on the goals of corrections (Cullen, Clark, and Wosniak 1985; Cullen, Skovron, Scott, and Burton 1990; Gottfredson and Taylor 1984; Gottfredson, Warner, and Taylor 1988; Harris 1968; Schwartz et al. 1992). Thus, for the first set of questions, we used the global questions posed by Harris (1968). The respondents were first asked what they thought was the main emphasis in juvenile prisons. This question was then repeated, except that the respondents were asked what should be the main emphasis of juvenile prisons. They were instructed to choose only one of the following four options: punish, rehabilitate, protect society, and not sure (see Table 2 for the wording of these choices). These questions were employed to determine the level of consistency between what citizens thought should be the main emphasis in juvenile prisons as opposed to and what goal they believed was actually being pursued by these institutions.

Using the same three goals—rehabilitation, punishment, and protection of society—the respondents were next asked to rank the level of importance

of each of these goals of juvenile prisons (Applegate 1997). A Likert-type scale was provided where 1 = *not important*, 2 = *a little important*, 3 = *important*, and 4 = *very important*. In the previous questions, the respondents were only asked to choose one option; in this question, however, they were instructed to rate the level of importance they placed on each of the goals presented.

Second, to investigate further the public's support for various justifications for intervening with juvenile offenders, we relied largely on a set of 10 items used previously by Applegate et al. (1997) and Cullen et al. (1985). These statements asked the sample members what they thought should be done with juvenile offenders. The respondents were provided with a Likert-type scale where 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *slightly disagree*, 4 = *slightly agree*, 5 = *agree*, and 6 = *agree strongly*. The responses to these items allowed us to assess the support given to rehabilitation as opposed to retribution, deterrence, and incapacitation. The actual statements for each of these categories are listed in Table 3.

Third, to explore what citizens believe is the most successful type of rehabilitation efforts, the respondents were asked to reply to three statements about what they thought was the best way to rehabilitate juvenile offenders. These measures were slightly modified from those used by Applegate et al. (1997). Using the 6-point, agree-disagree Likert-type scale previously discussed, the respondents were asked to report their level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements:

The best way to rehabilitate juvenile offenders is: (1) to teach them a skill that they can use to get a job when they are released from prison, (2) to try to help these offenders change their values and to help them with the emotional problems that caused them to break the law, and (3) to give them a good education.

Fourth, because many juvenile offenders are given sentences that include supervision by the courts in the community and that require participation in treatment programs, we wanted to determine which community-based options were most and least likely to be supported by the public. The sample members were asked to indicate whether they do not support at all, slightly support, moderately support, or fully support a variety of local programs and supervision options. These options fell into one of six main categories: counseling, drug/alcohol, education/vocational, restorative, "tough love," and monitor. To ensure that each program or supervision option was fully understood, a definition was provided for each option. The correctional options, including their definitions, are presented in Table 4.

Finally, we included two questions used previously in a telephone survey conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, & Associates (1998). First, we

TABLE 3: Respondents' Level of Agreement for Various Goals of Imprisonment (in percentages)

<i>Correctional Goal</i>	<i>Agree^a</i>	<i>Disagree^b</i>
<i>Rehabilitation</i>		
1. It is a good idea to provide treatment for juvenile offenders who are supervised by the courts and live in the community.	89.0	11.0
2. It is a good idea to provide treatment for juvenile offenders who are in prison.	94.8	5.4
3. It is important to try to rehabilitate juvenile offenders who have committed crimes and are now in the correctional system.	94.6	5.4
4. Rehabilitation programs should be available even for juvenile offenders who have been involved in a lot of crime in their lives.	76.4	23.6
<i>Retribution</i>		
5. Young offenders deserve to be punished because they have harmed society.	91.5	8.5
<i>Deterrence</i>		
6. Punishing juvenile offenders is the only way to stop them from engaging in more crimes in the future.	63.3	36.7
7. Putting young people in prison does not make much sense because it will only increase crime because prisons are schools of crime.	40.4	59.6
8. Sending young offenders to jail will not stop them from committing crimes.	57.6	42.4
<i>Incapacitation</i>		
9. We should put juvenile offenders in jail so that innocent citizens will be protected from people who victimize them—rob or hurt them—if given the chance.	13.7	86.3
10. Since most juvenile offenders will commit crimes over and over again, the only way to protect society is to put the offenders in jail when they are young and throw away the key.	20.8	79.2

a. Agree combines the responses of those who said they strongly agreed, agreed, and slightly agreed.

b. Disagree includes those who strongly disagreed, disagreed, and slightly disagree.

asked respondents to indicate which of the following two statements was closest to their opinion: (1) "Our main priority should be to build more prisons and youth facilities to lock-up as many juvenile offenders as possible," or (2) "our main priority should be to invest in ways to prevent kids from committing crimes and ending up in gangs or prison."³ These responses were employed to determine whether citizens believe that youths should be saved or that society should give up on youths and build more prisons where they can be locked away.

TABLE 4: Respondents' Levels of Support for Various Community Corrections Options (in percentages)

<i>Correctional Option</i>	<i>Fully Support</i>	<i>Moderately Support</i>	<i>Slightly Support</i>	<i>Do Not Support</i>
1. Counseling				
<i>Individual:</i> Having the youth meet with a counselor who would try to solve the emotional problems that caused the youth to get into trouble in the first place.	55.4	26.4	14.3	13.9
<i>Family:</i> Having a counselor meet with the entire family and the juvenile to attempt to uncover any issues within the family itself that could be affecting why the juvenile is committing crimes.	61.3	25.9	10.1	2.7
<i>Group:</i> Having a counselor meet with a group of delinquent youths to try to solve the emotional problems that caused them to get into trouble in the first place.	43.8	29.7	18.4	8.1
<i>Anger management:</i> A program designed to teach youths how to recognize and control their anger.	49.7	30.0	15.4	4.9
2. Drug/alcohol				
<i>Drug/alcohol treatment:</i> Having youths enter a program to eliminate their addiction to drugs and or alcohol	67.6	21.3	8.9	2.1
<i>Drug testing:</i> Having youths give a urine sample to test if they are using alcohol and drugs	80.3	11.8	5.4	2.5
3. Educational/vocational				
<i>Educational programs:</i> Having youths participate in a program to get their high school diploma if they have not finished high school.	71.9	18.4	7.0	2.7
<i>Vocational programs:</i> Teaching youths a skill (such as plumbing, air conditioning repair, or secretarial skills) so they can get a job.	64.9	23.5	9.2	2.3
4. Restorative				
<i>Victim restitution:</i> Having the youth work in order to pay back the victim for any damages that the youth caused.	82.9	12.6	3.3	1.2
<i>Community service:</i> Having the youth work in the community (without pay) on such projects as restoring or painting old houses, cleaning up trash on highways, or planting trees in public parks.	77.9	14.7	5.2	2.1

(continued)

TABLE 4 Continued

<i>Correctional Option</i>	<i>Fully Support</i>	<i>Moderately Support</i>	<i>Slightly Support</i>	<i>Do Not Support</i>
5. Tough love				
<i>Boot camp:</i> Having youths go through a program that is similar to basic training in the military.	54.8	24.1	14.5	6.6
<i>Scared straight:</i> Having youths visit an adult prison where inmates yell, insult, and scare youths to deter them from committing any future crimes.	41.5	20.3	23.1	15.1
6. Monitor				
<i>Electronic monitoring:</i> Requires that the juvenile wear a bracelet that tells the probation officer whether he or she is at home.	48.2	24.3	17.5	10.0
<i>Home incarceration:</i> Having youths stay in their homes rather than staying in prison. Youths on home incarceration would only be allowed to leave their houses for certain reasons, such as meeting with their probation officer, attending a treatment program, or going to the doctor.	22.7	23.2	31.1	23.0

The second question asked was whether "there is an age at which [they] believe it is too late to help a young person." A simple dichotomy of either yes or no was provided. If the respondent answered yes, he or she was asked to write down the specific age at which he or she estimated that youths could no longer be helped. Once again this question attempted to measure whether citizens believe that youths can be changed and at what age rehabilitative efforts will no longer be beneficial to these youths.

RESULTS

The Goals of Corrections

In public opinion research, one of the most common ways of exploring correctional ideology is to ask what citizens endorse as the goal of imprisonment. Consistent with this literature, Panel A in Table 2 presents the respondents' views on what is and should be the main emphasis in most juvenile prisons. When asked what is the purpose of imprisoning wayward youths,

more than one-third of the sample were not sure. Among the remaining goals, rehabilitation had the most support, with almost one in three citizens choosing this option. Taken together, the punish and protect society options were only slightly more often selected than offender treatment (34.4 percent to 29.4 percent).

The data on what should be the goal of juvenile incarceration is even more salient because they revealed the respondents' correctional preferences. Recall that this was a forced-choice question, and thus it measured which goal the citizens most strongly endorsed. It is noteworthy, therefore, that nearly two-thirds of Tennessee residents embraced rehabilitation as their preferred correctional goal. The support for treatment was 33.4 percentage points higher than for the protect society and punish responses combined. These findings suggest that the public wishes rehabilitation to remain an integral purpose of the juvenile justice system.

This conclusion received additional credence from the data presented in Panel B of Table 2. Consistent with previous research, the respondents believed that juvenile prisons should serve multiple correctional goals. Thus, more than 9 in 10 sample members stated that it was important or very important to use imprisonment to rehabilitate, punish, and incapacitate youthful offenders. Note, however, that in the "very important" category, the percentage of the sample selecting rehabilitation (64.5 percent) was more than 20 points higher than the comparable percentage for the punish and protect society options.

We also explored public support for the various goals of corrections through 10 statements that the respondents rated, using a 6-point, agree-disagree Likert-type scale. Table 3 presents these data, combining the agree responses (*strongly agree, agree, agree a little*) and the disagree responses (*strongly disagree, disagree, disagree a little*). Again, we see that the respondents endorsed multiple correctional goals but were especially supportive of juvenile treatment.

As seen in Table 3, almost 95 percent of the respondents agreed that it is important to rehabilitate juvenile offenders who have committed crimes and are now in the correctional system. Items 2 and 3 revealed that Tennessee citizens also supported rehabilitation both in the community and in prisons. Finally, three-fourths of the sample favored treating even juveniles who have been involved in a lot of crime in their lives (see Item 4).

Table 3 also shows that support for retribution or just deserts was strong; more than 9 in 10 respondents agreed that young offenders deserve to be punished because they have harmed society. A clear majority—nearly two-thirds—supported punishing juveniles as a specific deterrent (Item 6). Note, however, that 40.4 percent of the respondents believed that prisons might

increase crime because prisons are schools of crime, and 57.6 percent agreed that sending young offenders to jail will not stop them from committing crimes (Items 7 and 8). The sample's ambivalence about the utility of incarcerating youthful offenders was even more pronounced in the responses to Items 9 and 10 in Table 3. About 8 in 10 sample members disagreed that incapacitating juvenile delinquents—"throwing away the keys"—was a prudent correctional policy.

Support for Types of Correctional Intervention

The respondents were also asked how they wished juvenile lawbreakers to be dealt with when they are not sent to prison, but instead are placed back into the community under the supervision of the court. Table 4 presents the extent to which the sample supported various correctional options. Again, the Tennessee public appeared to endorse multiple approaches to intervening with youths under court supervision. Of the 14 options presented, 9 were fully supported by a majority of the sample, and all 14 were fully or moderately supported. Even so, some variations in responses warrant attention.

First, although the respondents supported all forms of counseling, the level of support was most pronounced for counseling that involved the entire family. Second, the sample endorsed drug treatment, but they especially favored drug testing. Third, both victim restitution and community service were highly embraced. This finding is noteworthy because these correctional interventions are integral to the emerging movement of restorative justice. Fourth, the approach of tough love—using boot camps and, particularly, "scared straight" programs to build character—were supported, although this support was lower than that given to most other correctional interventions. Fifth and relatedly, the approach of home incarceration was the least supported option. In fact, a majority of the sample either did not support or only slightly supported this option.

Taken together, these results suggest that the respondents did not believe that there is an inherent conflict between interventions that emphasize treatment and those that emphasize control. They did not see such approaches as incompatible but as complementary. Thus, Tennessee residents believed that youthful offenders should be monitored, drug tested, compelled to repair the harm they caused, and even subjected to some tough love—programs that used intrusive, if not harsh, measures to instill character. At the same time, the public was committed to exposing wayward youths to a range of traditional treatment interventions, including counseling, education, vocational training, and drug/alcohol treatment.

TABLE 5: Respondents' Perceptions on the Best Way to Rehabilitate Juvenile Offenders (in percentages)

<i>Method of Intervention</i>	<i>Agree^a Disagree^b</i>	
Values-problems The best way to rehabilitate juvenile offenders is to try to help these offenders change their values and to help them with the emotional problems that caused them to break the law.	92.9	10.7
Job skills The best way to rehabilitate juvenile offenders is to teach them a skill that they can use to get a job when they are released from prison.	89.3	10.7
Good education The best way to rehabilitate a juvenile is to give them a good education.	76.5	23.5

a. Agree combines the responses of those who said they strongly agreed, agreed, and slightly agreed.

b. Disagree includes those who strongly disagreed, disagreed, and slightly disagree.

The survey also contained three items, rated with an agree-disagree Likert-type scale that asked the respondents what would be the best way to rehabilitate juvenile offenders: a good education, teaching them a skill, and helping these offenders change their values and helping them with the emotional problems that caused them to break the law. A high percentage of the sample agreed with each item. Notably, however, the support for changing values and dealing with emotional problems was particularly pronounced. Thus, 93 percent of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement. This finding suggests that the public believes that rehabilitating youthful offenders involves more than equipping them with job and educational skills and must also seek to change the values they hold and to help them with the emotional struggles they experience.

Belief in Child Saving

Finally, the survey contained data that have implications for the degree to which the respondents embraced the goal of saving children from a life in crime. The results are presented in Table 5. First, we asked the sample members whether the main priority in the time ahead should be to build more prisons and youth facilities to lock up as many juvenile offenders as possible or to invest in ways to prevent kids from committing crimes and ending up in gangs or prisons. Most significant, Tennessee citizens not only favored the preven-

tion option over the imprisonment option but also did so by a wide margin: 93.5 percent chose prevention—a figure that is almost 14 times higher than the number who favored building more prisons.

Second, we asked the respondents if they thought there is an age at which it is too late to help a young person who has gotten involved in violence and crime. Again, the faith in the ability to turn around the lives of wayward youths was high. Three-fourths of the sample answered no to this question. Even among those who answered yes, most of them believed that it became too late to help a youthful offender only at age 16.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The data presented here do not mean that most Americans oppose punishing youthful offenders. As the attitudes of Tennessee citizens revealed, punishment and societal protection were seen as important goals of the correctional process. Furthermore, we should note that when questioned elsewhere on the survey as to whether the courts were dealing harshly enough with juvenile offenders, more than 70 percent of our sample chose the option of “not harshly enough.” It is likely as well that if asked to sentence juveniles who had committed particularly egregious crimes (e.g., murder, forcible rape, or a shooting) our respondents might well have tempered their enthusiasm for treatment and recommended transferring these violent juveniles to adult court where lengthy prison terms could be imposed. In this regard, although not uniformly supporting the transfer policy, previous research suggests that, under certain circumstances, the public will accept the waiver of violent offenders to adult court (Spratt 1998). In studies of public preferences for sentencing, moreover, youthfulness has been found to mitigate the severity of the sentences that respondents choose; however, this effect is limited and does not prevent respondents from prescribing prison terms to juveniles (Applegate et al. 1997; Jacoby and Cullen 1998).

Although it would be inadvisable to underestimate the pool of punitive sentiment that exists toward offenders of any age, it would be equally misguided to assume that juvenile rehabilitation is dead. The results from our survey show clearly that the public does not simply wish to warehouse juvenile offenders and throw away the keys. Consistent with previous research, the respondents were not convinced that sending youths to jail would stop their offending. Nearly two in five citizens also felt that juvenile institutions were schools of crime. Even home confinement was viewed skeptically by the sample members. In contrast, the Tennessee public displayed a strong preference that rehabilitation should be the purpose of juvenile institutions.

By substantial majorities, they also endorsed the rehabilitation of juveniles in the community and embraced attempting to treat even those who were repeat offenders. Although under court supervision in the community, the public supported—often fully—a multimodal approach to intervention that included counseling, drug treatment, skill building, restoration of harm done to the community, and some degree of monitoring. Finally, given the choice between spending money to build prisons or to fund prevention-oriented programs, more than 9 in 10 respondents chose prevention. Again, this finding is consistent with existing research (Cullen, Wright, Brown, Moon, Blankenship, and Applegate 1998; Fairbank et al. 1998).

Taken together, these findings lend support to the broad policy implication that the public wants the legal system to intervene in ways that save children from a life in crime.⁴ Previous research has shown that, in general, citizens favor retaining rehabilitation as a goal of the adult criminal justice system, but that this preference may be particularly pronounced for the juvenile system (Applegate et al. 1997; Sundt et al. 1998). Although we do not have comparative data on adults, the absolute level of support for juvenile treatment in our study reinforces this view. Furthermore, nearly three-fourths of the sample stated that it was never too late to attempt to help a young person turn away from crime. This perspective likely is based on subsidiary assumptions about youths: they are malleable, are not fully responsible for their decisions, and have enough of their life ahead of them that not to save them would be morally wrong. In any case, residents from Tennessee—hardly a bellwether state known for its liberal approach to social issues—are firm in their belief that criminal justice officials should make a concerted effort to reform wayward adolescents.

This finding in turn has three specific policy implications. First, it should give pause to commentators who are now arguing in favor not only of the abolition of the juvenile court but also of processing youths according to guidelines based on principles of just deserts and societal protection (Feld 1998; cf. Zimring 1998). Much like the progressive founders of the juvenile court a century ago, the respondents in our study believed that intervention with juveniles should do more than exact just deserts and impose punishment in hopes of preventing crime (Cullen and Gilbert 1982; Rothman 1980). Instead, they favored state interventions that seek to invest in, and positively influence the lives of, delinquents. They wanted these interventions not simply to do justice but also to do good.

Second, these public opinion results suggest that punitive thinking is not hegemonic. Although the penal harm movement—as Clear (1994) appropriately calls it—has dominated American corrections for nearly three decades, its influence is not complete. At times, the belief that the public is exclusively

punitive has helped to construct a reality that is self-fulfilling: There is no use to proposing liberal policies because citizens, and thus policy makers, will not support them. In contrast, our data indicated that policies that offer a balanced approach to dealing with juvenile offenders—that do not ignore just deserts and societal protection, but that do vigorously seek to rehabilitate youngsters—will not give rise to a hostile public reaction. Instead, it appears that the public will endorse an array of policies that are fairly progressive in orientation; given, it seems, that these initiatives do not irresponsibly endanger public safety.

The Reasoned and Equitable Community and Local Alternatives to the Incarceration of Minors (RECLAIM) Ohio initiative is one example of a juvenile justice initiative that seeks to balance public safety with the rehabilitation of offenders (Moon, Applegate, and Latessa 1997). This program distributes money to all counties based on the number of youths with felony adjudications. Counties can use these funds to pay to send any given youth to a state institution. However, to reduce institutional crowding and to encourage counties to send only serious offenders to state facilities, Ohio also allows counties that do not incarcerate youths to keep the funds so as to establish or contract for local community-based programs. In short, the state is giving counties an incentive not to send youthful offenders to prison but rather to treat them in the community. The collateral goal is to reduce the inmate population at state juvenile facilities. Imprisonment is to be used to incapacitate truly serious offenders and, at the same time, to provide these youths with special treatment services. It is noteworthy that this program was an initiative of a Republican governor.

Third, the public opinion data suggest that the empirical inroads now being made in showing what works in rehabilitating offenders may potentially find a receptive audience in the public. In an important way, citizens appear to want the correctional system to intervene effectively with youthful offenders. As our data show, they are not always certain that rehabilitation is the main goal of the system, but they clearly believe that it should be. It is noteworthy, therefore, that there is increasing empirical evidence that punishment-oriented interventions have virtually no effect on recidivism, but that treatment-oriented interventions diminish criminal participation (Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, and Cullen 1990; Gibbons 1999; Henggeler 1997; Lipsey 1992; Lipsey and Wilson 1998). These interventions, moreover, achieve substantial reductions in recidivism (25 percent or higher) when targeted on high-risk offenders and when employing cognitive-behavioral and skill-building treatment modalities. There is also a collateral literature outlining an array of early prevention programs that have proven effective in protecting children from staying on or entering a crimi-

nal life course (Farrington 1994; Loeber and Farrington 1998; Yoshikawa 1994). Contrary to outdated notions that nothing works, the empirical basis for building effective programming is growing markedly. Again, this message—that there are programs that work to save wayward children—is likely to be welcome news to most Tennesseans, if not to most of their fellow Americans.

Finally, we should take notice of the remarkable tenacity of the public's belief that rehabilitation should remain an integral goal of juvenile corrections. Although noteworthy exceptions exist (see, e.g., Currie 1998), many criminologists have argued that rehabilitation does not work, leads to net widening, fosters the exercise of discretion that is arbitrary, and ultimately is coercive. These efforts at delegitimizing treatment have reinforced the cry from conservative quarters that juvenile criminals are "super-predators" who may be beyond redemption. Despite this sustained attack on rehabilitation, the nation's citizens are not prepared to relinquish the hope that kids who get in trouble can be saved. To do so, perhaps, would be to accept a vision of our children and of our society that is inconsistent with what Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985, 1991) have called our habits of the heart and our vision of the good society. Anderson (1998) has captured this issue with words that are a fitting end to our work:

That suggests the ultimate reason for holding onto the rehabilitative ideal, and it is profoundly moral. America's founding fathers may have been naïve about the possibility of rehabilitating people in prison, but they were not naïve about the importance of rehabilitation. An ethical society can choose to use criminal justice for more than maintaining domestic peace and reinforcing values codified in law. It may also . . . use criminal justice to acknowledge a belief that good lurks in the hearts of people who act bad; that even the worst-seeming criminals have the capacity, in time and with help, to change for the better. The process is as imperfect and unpredictable as humanity itself: some are helped by programs; some find salvation on their own; and some never find it at all. But it is unenlightened in the extreme to deny the capacity for change or prohibit the chance to exercise it. . . . [Rehabilitation programs] send a powerful positive message about a society's deepest values, to criminals and to everyone else. (Pp. 16-17)

NOTES

1. During the remainder of the mailings, an additional 125 surveys were returned as undeliverable and were not replaced.

2. For the initial mailing, respondents were sent a second copy of the survey at three weeks and a third copy at seven and a half weeks. The replacement respondents were sent a second copy at three weeks and, due to time constraints, a third copy at five and a half weeks.

3. These statements were changed somewhat from the statements in the original survey conducted by Resources For Youth.

4. Notably, it appears that juvenile court judges and other juvenile justice personnel also continue to support the treatment of youthful offenders (see Bazemore and Feder 1997; Leiber, Roth, Streeter, and Federspiel 1997).

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