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# Juvenile Justice Issues in Major Connecticut Newspapers



*Report to the New England Juvenile  
Defender Center*

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# Memo

To: Lisa Thureau-Gray,  
New England Juvenile Defender Center

From: Dr. James Simon

Date: Oct. 1, 2002

Hi Lisa. I am pleased to present you with “Juvenile Justice Issues in Major Connecticut Newspapers.”

The report is based on a content analysis of The Hartford Courant, the New Haven Register and The (Bridgeport) Connecticut Post from Jan. 1, 2002 through March 31, 2002.

Sincerely,

James Simon, Ph.D.

Sean Hayes

*Overview of results*  
*Juvenile Justice Issues in Major Connecticut Newspapers*

▶ Juvenile justice issues are a major source of news for Connecticut's three largest newspapers. In the 90 day period, there were 179 stories that met the criteria for the study, or almost exactly two a day. (Those stories also generated additional editorials, columns and letters to the editor which are not under evaluation here, but contributed to the overall public discussion of the issues.)

▶ The Courant of Hartford dominated the coverage among the three newspaper covered. The state's largest newspaper ran 103 stories on juvenile justice issues in the three month period (58% of the total), compared to 49 stories in The Connecticut Post (27%) and 27 stories in the New Haven Register (15%). The Courant had a beat reporter, Colin Poitras, assigned to juvenile justice issues, which resulted in greater coverage. The Courant's domination also may be a result of its heavier coverage of the Legislature, where some of these issues were debated, and because the state's main juvenile justice facility, the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, is located within its circulation area in Middletown.

▶ Juvenile justice stories received prominent play. Almost half (47%) were in the first section of the newspaper, while 52% were in the B section. Some 13% of the stories received front page or break page play, and another 51% were on page 2. (The page distribution also was due in part to the Connecticut Post running its police roundup on page 2 of the newspaper.)

▶ The average story was seven paragraphs in length. Forty-three percent were five paragraphs or less, reflecting the heavy use of short, police blotter type stories, especially in Hartford (for its town news briefings and police log roundups) and in the Post on page 2. But more than a quarter of the stories (29.6%) were 10 paragraphs or longer, a length that allows reporters to provide more context and to quote a greater variety of sources.

▶ The overwhelming majority of stories (83%) were episodic: they told the story of a single incident, often involving the arrest of someone 18 or younger. Only 15% were trend stories or thematic stories that took a broader look at public policy issues. Some 2% were a combination or could not be judged. Due to the short timeframe of the study, there were virtually no follow-up stories on youths charged with crimes.

- ▶ Due to the frequent focus on a single crime episode, 81% of the stories focused on a youth charged in a delinquency matter. In contrast, 11% of the stories focused on institutions serving the youths, 5% were on the criminal justice system as a whole and 3% were a mix or could not be judged.
  
- ▶ About half of the stories (49.7%) included the name of at least one juvenile suspect. Their ages ranged from 9 to 18.
  
- ▶ A defendant's race was never mentioned in any of the 179 stories.
  
- ▶ While the majority of the juvenile justice stories focused on a single episode of a youth or youths in trouble, this study also examined 17 ways a reporter could "frame" or broaden interest in stories. None of the frames was used to a great extent; the most common, focusing a story on school violence issues, was used in 14 of the 179 stories, or only 8%.

Here is a list of the frames examined and the number of stories where the frame was seen:

School violence issues		14 stories
Drugs	12	
Other institutions serving teens		10
CT Juvenile Training School for Boys		8
Mental health issues		4
Long Lane girls' juvenile detention center		3
Alleged misconduct by guards/workers		3
Efforts to rehabilitate youthful offenders		2
Statistical analysis of courts		2
School suspension/expulsion of student(s)		2
Community efforts to work with teens on violence issues		1
Gangs	1	
Trying juvenile as adult		0
Crime rate from local, state or national sources		0
Alleged police misconduct toward youth		0
"Too lenient" judge stories		0
"Too harsh" judge stories	0	

► The study also focused on what types of sources reporters used in juvenile justice stories. Police were the overwhelming top choice; 80% of the stories examined included police comment, more than six times more than any other category.

The lack of comment from accused juveniles, their lawyers and families is striking.

Type of source	Frequency
Police	144 stories
Academic or non-academic expert, advocacy group or other outside source	21
Judge	17
Dept of Children and Families	16
Legislators	11
School officials	10
Victim	8
Relatives of victim	8
State Child Advocate	8
Prosecutors/state's attorney	7
Other state crim. justice admin	7
Accused/convicted juvenile	6
Employees of state institution serving juvenile offenders	6
Attorney general	6
Other youths quoted in story	4
Governor/ governor's office	4
Family members of accused juvenile	4
Lawyer/defender for juvenile	2



## Methodology

The study focused on stories published in Connecticut's three largest newspapers – the Hartford Courant, the New Haven Register and the (Bridgeport) Connecticut Post – between Jan. 1, 2002 and March 31, 2002. The Courant was analyzed through the newspaper's on-line database and accessed through the Connecticut Digital Library system. The stories were cross-checked against incomplete listings in the Nexis on-line database. The Register stories were analyzed through the newspaper's on-line database, included in its web site. The Post granted permission to the researchers to go into the newspaper office and use its electronic archives to analyze the coverage; the newspaper has incomplete listings in Nexis and its web page only offers stories for the past 60 days. In all three cases, hard copies of the newspaper were checked at random to ensure the computerized listings were complete.

The study focused on two types of news stories: 1) stories in which a youth (defined here as someone age 18 or younger) was in trouble with the law, or 2) stories about institutions that serve or treat such youths. Therefore the researchers focused on stories that contained at least one keyword from each of two different lists.

List 1: youth, teen, juvenile

List 2: crime, police, judge (See Footnote 1)

The first list helped isolate stories that featured a young person. In the second list, the first two keywords isolated stories that generally dealt with charges brought against a youthful defendant, while the use of the keyword "judge" helped identify stories that dealt with such defendants when they reached court.

Given the desire to also look at stories about institutions that serve or treat such youths, an additional list of keywords was added. They were:

List 3: Department of Children and Families (and DCF), Long Lane (girls' juvenile detention center), Connecticut Juvenile Training Center.

Like its counterpart in other states, the DCF has received intense media coverage whenever one of its cases was not handled well or one of its institutions (Long Lane and the Connecticut Juvenile Training School) was seen as poorly managed. (See Footnote 2)

The study design was complicated by local stories grouped together in certain regional zoned editions of the newspapers but not carried in other editions. One a given day, the Courant might include six different "Town News

Briefings” in its archives. The researchers have read through all the different versions of such briefings; if a story met the study qualifications, it was included only once in the results even though it may have run in multiple editions of the paper on the same day.

Using this technique, 301 raw stories were isolated from the three newspapers. After duplicate stories and stories that failed to meet the study criteria were eliminated, the study focused on a remaining 179 stories.

The study focused only on news stories. The Register used some AP stories, which were included in the study. Editorials, columns and letters to the editor were collected and noted, but they were not used in the analysis. The resulting stories were analyzed in the aggregate and also broken down by individual newspapers.

This study was funded by a grant from the New England Juvenile Defender Center and was conducted from June—September, 2002.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. This was operationalized by searching for keywords (youth or teen or juvenile) AND (crime or police or judge)
  2. This study's primary focus on stories concerned troubled youth forced the researchers to make a series of judgment calls:
    - The study did not include stories on adults who had a troubled life as a juvenile. Likewise, stories on adults arrested on child pornography charges are not included. Stories on the "hockey dad" arrested for killing another father at a game does not meet the study criteria, even though it had elements of youth and violence in it. The study took note of stories about Michael Skakel, a Kennedy cousin who faced legal proceedings in this period as an adult due to crimes he allegedly committed as a juvenile. But such stories were not included in the findings.
    - Stories on youths who are victimized by adults are not included; stories on youths victimized by youths are included. As a result, the many stories on "pedophile priests" who as adults took advantage of youths are not included. A story on a teen injured in an automobile accident involving another, adult driver was not included.
    - Given the study's interest in institutions serving troubled youths, stories on such topics as the DARE anti-drug program are included. General discussions on youth and crime are included, along with legislative efforts to combat the problem. Gang-related problems involving youths are included.
- ~~✍~~ Stories on police attempts to crack down on sales of cigarettes to underage customers required careful handling. If such stories focus on adults being arrested for the sales, they were not included. If the focus is on youths illegally buying cigarettes on their own, such stories would be included.

Story ID# \_\_\_\_\_

# paragraphs \_\_\_\_\_

Q1 PAPER: 1. Hartford 2. New Haven 3. Bridgeport

Q2 DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
(follow format of two digits for monthdayyear with no hyphens. So Jan. 1, 2002 is 010102)

Q3 Story starts on section 1. a 2. b 3. c 4. d

Q4 Story starts on page \_\_\_\_\_

Q5. Is story 1. news 2. analysis 3 editorial 4. letter/editor 5 NA

Q5a. Number of paragraphs \_\_\_\_\_

Q6. Byline (If any) \_\_\_\_\_

Q7 Is story primarily: 1.episodic/ single incident 2. thematic/ trend 3 combo or unclear

Q8a Does story predominantly focus on (CIRCLE ONE):

a. youthful offender(s) b. institution serving/treating youth c. crim. justice system d) unclear, mixture

q8b Age of defendants. Def 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Def 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Def 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Def 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Def 5 \_\_\_\_\_

99. no ages given

q8c Q12 Does story mention race of any defendant 1. yes 2. no

IF YES AND ONLY ONE DEFENDANT Is race 1.. white 2. black 3. other 4. not applicable

8d. Does story mention name of juvenile(s) 1. yes 2. no

If yes, give name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

### **Does the story focus on**

Q9a Long Lane girls' juvenile detention center 1. yes 2. no

Q9b CT Juvenile Training School for Boys 1. yes 2. no

Q9c Other institutions serving teens 1. yes 2. no

Q9d Trying juvenile as adult 1. yes 2. no

Q9e Efforts to rehabilitate youthful offenders 1. yes 2. no

Q9f alleged misconduct by guards/workers 1. yes 2. no

Q9g Crime rate from local, state or national (FBI) sources 1. yes 2. no

Q9h Alleged police misconduct toward youth 1. yes 2. no

Q9i "Too lenient" judge stories 1. yes 2. no

Q9j	"Too harsh" judge stories	1. yes 2. no
Q9k	Statistical analysis of courts	1. yes 2. no
Q9l	School violence issues	1. yes 2. no
Q9m	School suspension/expulsion of student(s)	1. yes 2. no
Q9n	Mental health issues	1. yes 2. no
Q9o	Community efforts to work with teens on violence issues	1. yes 2. no
Q9p	Gangs	1. yes 2. no
Q9q	Drugs	1. yes 2. no

**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE USED AS SOURCES.**

Just circle if yes and leave blank if no; when computerizing, 1. yes 2. no

Q10a	police	1. yes 2. no
Q10b	prosecutors/state's attorney	1. yes 2. no
Q10c	judge(s)	1. yes 2. no
Q10d	Accused/convicted juvenile	1. yes 2. no
Q10e	family members of juvenile	1. yes 2. no
Q10f	lawyer/defender for juvenile	1. yes 2. no
Q10g	academic expert	1. yes 2. no
Q10h	non-academic expert or outside source	1. yes 2. no
Q10h	advocacy groups	1. yes 2. no
Q10i	victim	1. yes 2. no
Q10j	Relatives of victim	1. yes 2. no
Q10k	legislators	1. yes 2. no
Q10l	governor	1. yes 2. no
Q10m	attorney general	1. yes 2. no
Q10n	other state crim. justice admin	1. yes 2. no
Q10o	State Child Advocate	1. yes 2. no
Q10p	Dept of Children and Families	1. yes 2. no
Q10q	employees of state institution serving juvenile offenders	1. yes 2. no
Q10r	Other youths quoted in story	1. yes 2. no
Q10rr	school officials	1. yes 2. no

***Follow-up coverage.***

IF ANSWER TO Q7 IS 1:

Q11. Search for name of defendant again in that newspaper's database. Are there any follow-up stories? 1. yes 2. no

IF ANSWER TO Q11 IS YES: Q12 provide some detail on story(ies): \_\_\_\_\_

Other comments on this story; how might we highlight it in final report (open-ended):