COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF MULTISYSTEMIC THERAPY FOR SERIOUS AND VIOLENT JUVENILE OFFENDERS AND THEIR SIBLINGS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the economic benefits of an intensive family-based treatment (multisystemic therapy, MST) versus individual therapy (IT) using arrest data from 25-year follow-ups of referred serious and violent juvenile offenders ($n = 176$) and their closest-in-age siblings ($n = 110$). Three categories of benefits were evaluated: (1) taxpayer benefits (i.e., avoided criminal justice system costs), (2) tangible benefits to crime victims (i.e., avoided tangible losses), and (3) intangible benefits to crime victims (i.e., avoided pain and suffering). Results indicated that reductions in criminality for juvenile offenders and siblings in the MST versus IT conditions were associated with substantial benefits to both taxpayers and crime victims. Cumulative benefits of MST over IT ranged up to $34,955 per referred youth and up to $37,433 per family (i.e., when siblings were included). Overall, it was estimated that every dollar spent on MST recovered up to $4.98 in the years ahead by preventing future crimes. Sensitivity analyses also indicated that estimates of savings were robust to variations in crime victim intangible benefits, sibling juvenile arrest rates, and discount rates. The economic benefits of MST are important for administrators and policymakers to consider when allocating scarce financial resources to interventions for serious juvenile offenders.