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**CHARACTERISTICS OF JUVENILES CHARGED WITH
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE JEFFERSON COUNTY FAMILY
COURT AND THE EFFECT OF PRIOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
CONVICTION ON CASE DISPOSITION**

by

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A THESIS

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2011

CHARACTERISTICS OF JUVENILES CHARGED WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN
THE JEFFERSON COUNTY FAMILY COURT AND THE EFFECT OF DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE CONVICTION ON CASE DISPOSITION

OMOBOLANLE ENE-KORUBO

JUSTICE SCIENCES

ABSTRACT

Juvenile violence has received considerable attention both in criminological literature and policy circles, but this attention has largely ignored juvenile domestic violence offending, which is a growing problem in the Jefferson County Family Court. This study identifies the characteristics of juvenile domestic violence offenders in the Jefferson County Family Court and examines the effect of prior domestic violence conviction on case disposition. Results indicate that these juveniles are black, males, in school and the most likely victim of the violence is the juvenile's mother. Prior domestic violence offending has no statistically significant effect on case disposition.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my father in Heaven and to my jewel of inestimable value- Enefaa Korubo, my cheerleader for the past 17 years, who has stuck with me through it all and has sacrificed so much for me and our children. It's been a privilege to be a part of you!

Thanks, thanks, and thank you so much.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful to Dr Kay Morgan for her invaluable support, patience and understanding all through graduate school. I am also grateful to the following:

Drs Suzanne Perumean-Chaney and Cathy McElderry, for agreeing to serve on my thesis committee, and offering their wealth of knowledge in seeing this project through.

Tiffany Large, Galen Hale, Beverly Aldridge, and Christina Smith are just a few of the staff of the Jefferson County Family Court, who granted me access into the court, help with data collection, and answered my many questions in the course of the project. To them I offer my appreciation.

My professors at the Criminal Justice department- Drs Kerley, Copes, McGrath, Sloan- thanks for being there for me at different times.

To Dr. Michael Falola, who is my unofficial academic advisor-God will remember your sacrifice and reward you accordingly.

Last but definitely not the least, I am grateful to two beautiful gifts God gave me, my children, Tonte and Boma, who constantly challenged and demanded that I do my best during this program. It's a privilege to be your mom.

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CHAPTER 1

1 INTRODUCTION

Studies on juvenile violence typically focus on school violence (Lockwood, 1997), gangs (Bellair & McNulty), sub-cultural violence (Anderson, 1990), neighborhood disorganization (Schreck et al), street crimes (Baron & Hartnagel, 1998), and the impact of violence in the home (Fagan, 2005). Although juvenile crime rates are decreasing, juvenile violence remains a source of considerable concern and discourse both in criminological research, criminal justice policy, and society. The 2008 Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) study found that 70% of adolescents from households with parental conflict self reported violent behavior compared to 49% from household without this conflict.

Typically, research on domestic violence focuses on women and children as victims of abuse (Brezina, 1998) and there is a surfeit of programs and resources available to deal with the effects of exposure to domestic violence. There is the National Centre for Children Exposed to Violence (NCCEV) at Yale University, the Violence Against Women Office (VAWO) in Washington, DC and in Alabama: the YWCA and the University of Alabama, among others, have established a safe house, and a Domestic Violence Law Centre respectively, to aid victims of domestic violence. However, the issue of juvenile domestic violence and its attendant consequences has received very little attention both in criminological literature and among policy makers, due largely to its peculiarity (Brezina; 1998, 1999; Ulman & Straus, 2003; Pagani, et al, 2004; Patterson et al, 2002). Brezina (1999) further opined that the relative lack of attention paid to juvenile domestic violence offending is largely due to the fact it is largely unreported because the

victim is almost always the offender's mother, who is understandably reluctant to turn over her juvenile son to law enforcement.

1.1 Domestic Violence

Section 30-5-2 of the Alabama code defines domestic violence as the deliberate intimidation, assault, battery or other abusive behavior by one family member, or intimate partner against another; it can be physical, emotional, and psychological. The Center for Disease Control (CDC; 2006) defines it as “abuse that happen between two people in a close relationship”, while the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) claims it is the “willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault and/or other abusive behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner against another. It is curious that none of these definitions of domestic violence specifically addresses juvenile domestic violence.

The 2007 domestic violence report for the state of Alabama shows that out of 19,808 violent offenses in the year, 10% were domestic violence offenses and 74% of victims were female, while in 2008, out of 29,042 violent offenses, 10% were domestic violent offenses and 10% of victims were female. Curiously, the report does not include juvenile domestic violent offenders; in fact, none of the statistics on domestic violence reviewed for this study included any statistics on the increasing rate of domestic violent offending by juveniles in the state.

Domestic violence is treated differently from other crimes because it has distinguishing features; it involves people in relationships of affinity (Robinson & Chandek, 2000), occurs in environments that are traditionally secure- the home-, it may

or may not result in injury, and when it involves a juvenile and the parent, it raises very fundamental issues in the society; hence the need for this study.

The American Institute on domestic violence claims that domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women in the United States causing injury to 5.3 million women annually. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (DV Facts, 2004), the state of Alabama has one of the highest domestic violence rates in the country and among the state counties, Jefferson County has highest rate of domestic violence. The Alabama Domestic Violence as a Criminal Act Law (2000), defines domestic violence as involving a victim and perpetrator with one of the following relationships; “current or former spouse, parent, child, any person with whom the defendant has a child in common, a present or former household member, or a person who has or had a dating or engagement relationship with the defendant”. Apart from identifying domestic violence as a separate crime, this legislation distinguishes between misdemeanor and felony domestic violence crimes, and prescribes mandatory sentences for repeated offenders.

1.2 The Juvenile Justice System

Unlike the adult criminal justice system, the juvenile justice system was founded on the twin concepts of rehabilitation and individualized justice. This was based on the prevailing concept in the 18th century that juveniles were incapable of forming criminal intent and needed the courts merciful intervention, the system was therefore mandated to act in the best interest of the child. The first juvenile court was established in the Cook County Illinois in 1899 with the passing of “The Juvenile Court Act of 1899”. The Act

specifically created a separate court system for juveniles and separated juvenile offenders from adult offenders in the criminal system. Juveniles were not to be treated as criminals but were to be taught not to be a threat to society and education was to be a part of the punishment meted out to a juvenile. It is worth noting that under the Act, juveniles were separated from adult offenders and juvenile courts were governed by a different set of largely informal procedures.

However, due to the high rate of juvenile offending, coupled with the seriousness of the offenses committed by some juveniles, legislation was passed at the federal and the state levels increasing penalties for juvenile offenses and the sentencing rules of the 1990's provided for transfer of violent juvenile offenders to adult courts to be tried as adults. In *Thompson vs Oklahoma* (1988), the Supreme Court however held that in deciding whether to impose the death penalty, courts should consider the juveniles age as a mitigating factor. The court therefore set the minimum age for the court to impose the death penalty at 16.

The Juvenile justice system in the state of Alabama is premised upon Title 12-15 of the Code of Alabama, and the juvenile rules of procedure. It is based upon the principles of individualized justice with the aim of meeting the underlying needs of the juvenile. The Jefferson County Family Court (JCFC) handles juvenile cases in the county including; Delinquency case, Children in Need of Supervision (CHINS), Termination of Parental Rights, protection from abuse, mental health commitments, child support, domestic violence and many more.

1.3 The Jefferson County Family Court

In the Jefferson County Family Court (JCFC), the intake process for all cases are similar; an incident is reported to the police who then refer the report and the juvenile offender to the court. A parent or victim may also initiate proceedings either by reporting the incident to the police or filing a complaint in the court. In the rare occasion that a juvenile is taken into pre-adjudication detention, a hearing must be held within 72 hours of detention.

The JCFC is structured to address the individual needs of juveniles who are in the system. For first time referrals in the system, the complaint is usually handled through the Informal Adjustment Program (IAP). This is a process whereby an officer interviews the juvenile and the parents and tries to understand the underlying cause(s) of the juvenile's behavior and offers solutions to whatever problems or issues that are discerned in the conversations. The officer may refer the juvenile and/or the parents to counseling or any program that can address the issues that are presented, or the office may bind the juvenile to good behavior for 6 months after which he is "discharged" from the system if there is no further incident.

For domestic violence offenders, the court has officers known as domestic violence screeners who screen individual cases, and where it is determined that the issues can be handled informally, the parties are referred to programs in-house or outside of the court system. These programs include, but are not limited to counseling, project dad, big

brothers and big sisters of America, project GATE, and the mental health evaluation program.

In the Jefferson County Family Court, domestic violence cases come in several forms. Firstly, it comes as the underlying reason for the delinquent behavior for which a juvenile is in court: research has shown that juveniles who have been, or are being abused, are more likely to be delinquents (Browne & Hamilton, 1998). Secondly, domestic violence is sometimes present in dependency cases, where the abuser is either the parent or someone in loco parentis. The juvenile court system is equipped to handle these kinds of cases, as it may place the juvenile in foster care and also recommend programs that help victims of abuse. The third form in which the court handles domestic abuse cases, and which is the crux of this study, is when the perpetrator of the abuse, is the juvenile himself.

1.4 Juvenile Domestic Violence

In 2001, juveniles were responsible for 17% of all arrests, and 15% of all violent crime arrests, representing approximately 2.3 million young people below the age of 18 (Snyder, 2003). According to the 2004 Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) report, among victims of simple assault by juveniles, more than half of those older than 30, were the offenders parent or step-parent while the November 2008 OJJDP bulletin reported that one-fourth of all juvenile assaults were domestic violence and one in every four assaults committed by a juvenile is against a family member or an intimate partner. The report further claimed that 67% of victims of juvenile domestic assaults were female, and when the assault is against a parent, it was most likely the mother.

The 2007 domestic violence report for the state of Alabama shows that out of 19,808 violent offences in the year, 10% were domestic violence offences and 74% of victims were female, while in 2008, of 29,042 violent offences, 10% were domestic violence offences and 10% of them were female. Curiously, the report does not include juvenile domestic violent offenders; in fact, none of the statistics on domestic violence reviewed for this study included any statistics on the increasing rate of domestic violent offending by juveniles in the state.

Generally, adjudication at the juvenile justice system involves procedural decisions made at different levels and all the decisions made, ultimately affect the disposition of the case. The JCFC is no exception: most cases that come into the system are handled at the intake level, and majority of the cases are resolved at that point. At intake, the juvenile is interviewed by a probation officer, who has the discretion to suggest extra-judicial means of resolving the issues presented. Referrals available include parenting classes, Adolescent Substance Abuse Program (ASAP), mental health unit at the family court, and if that fails, the officer may enter into another informal adjustment process or refer the matter to a judge. The judge reviews the informal process(es) in the case and makes a ruling after reviewing the file and the input of the probation/intake officer. In all the cases presented in the court, due diligence is done to ensure that the decision made balances the best interest of the child with public safety.

Juvenile domestic violence is different from other types of domestic violence. In the case of spousal abuse, the abused spouse can leave either temporarily or permanently; but in the case of child to parent domestic abuse, the parent has legal responsibilities towards the child; and moreover, parental instincts and love make it difficult, if not

impossible to sever the relationship. The reality is that most parents (mothers) will not give up an abusive juvenile, and in the situation where this mother is also being abused by a spouse, it places considerable burden on her. It is therefore imperative for the juvenile justice system to provide a way to help these victims, and also make available, targeted help for the needs of the juvenile offenders.

The previous research and statistics have very troubling implications for the criminal justice system and the society at large. Juveniles are a protected category of citizens and parents and guardians have both moral and legal obligations to them until they reach maturity. However, current data show that some of these juveniles attack those on whom they are dependent for provision and sustenance. This study therefore seeks to identify the characteristics of these juveniles who commit domestic violence. Who are the victims? Do the statistics in Jefferson County reflect national statistics? In understanding their characteristics, it is also important to determine the criminal justice reaction to their crime. Does the Jefferson County Family Court treat domestic violent offenders harshly or does it adhere to its rehabilitative ideal in the disposition of domestic violence cases especially those involving juveniles with prior domestic violence convictions?

The importance of this study cannot be over-emphasized because isolating the characteristics of these juveniles lifts the veil, and eases the process of identifying and developing targeted programs and treatments both for the offenders and the victims of juvenile domestic violence offending. This study is the first to look specifically at the juvenile domestic violence offenders in Jefferson County. The results will show the effectiveness of JCFC domestic violence programs in place at the court and offer suggestions on future research.

CHAPTER 2

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Review of the Literature

Much of the literature on violent offending by juveniles focuses on interpersonal violence. The literature on domestic violence offending by juveniles deals primarily with dating violence (Arias et al, 1987), leaving the prevalent incidence of violent offending by juveniles in familial relationships under researched in criminological literature. Ulman & Straus (2003) suggest that family dynamics dictate it be swept under the carpet, while Patterson et al (2002) suggest that there exists a veil of secrecy around issues of family violence. Understandably, there is no agreement on the rate of parental abuse due to the underreporting of its occurrence (Buel, 2002), but there is an acceptance of the fact that it exists, and it is widespread (Patterson et al 2002; Browne & Hamilton (1998). Ulman & Straus (2003) claims that this issue is underreported due to the fact that mothers who are usually the victims would rather hide this fact to avoid societal label or the stigma that could attach to their kids if this becomes general knowledge.

Agnew & Huguley (1989) claim that juveniles who encounter violence in the home and at the hands of their parents typically manifest such violence in the home-where it was first encountered. Brezina (1999) argues on the other hand, that juveniles, who are violent to their parents, do so due to lack of parental attachment. Browne & Hamilton, in its 1998 study of 469 undergraduates in the University of Birmingham in England, found that among middle class students, childhood physical maltreatment and

the use of violent conflict resolution methods by their parents are related to the youth's violent behavior towards their parent during arguments. Green et al (2008) identified parent's marital status and mother's education as significant risk factors; while Kelvin & Hamilton (1998) link it to a history of child maltreatment.

Farrington and Loeber (2000) identified individual characteristics (high impulsiveness and low intelligence), family demographics (poor supervision, physical abuse, large family size and broken family), neighborhood characteristics (gun, drugs and gangs) and peer delinquency, as risk factors for violent juveniles. In 1992, the United States Congress directed the OJJDP to conduct a study on the rising incidence of violence committed by or against juveniles in urban and rural area. One of the objectives of the study was to "identify characteristics and patterns of at-risk juveniles and factors that contribute to violence committed by or against juveniles". In fulfillment of this mandate, the OJJDP commissioned four studies which found that; violence offenses were mostly committed by males, juveniles are more likely to get involved in violent behavior from the age of 15; African-American males are disproportionately involved as both offenders and victims of violence, and most violent offenders live in impoverished neighborhoods.

Domestic violence presents some interesting set of dynamics. While most violent crimes involves strangers, domestic violence involves people in familial relationships; and in the case of juveniles, studies show that the victim is most likely to be a parent or step-parent(Ulman & Straus, 2003; OJJDP, November 2008).

The November 2008 OJJDP bulletin reported that one-fourth of juvenile assaults were domestic violence and one in every four assaults committed by a juvenile is against

a family member or an intimate partner. The report further revealed that 67% of the victims of juvenile domestic assaults were female; and when the domestic assault is against a parent, it was most likely to be the mother. Though the report claims that victims of juvenile domestic assaults were least likely to be injured, there is the need to protect these mothers from their abusive children.

Case adjudication at the juvenile justice system involves procedural decisions made at different levels and all the decisions made ultimately affect the disposition of the case. The intake, petition, informal adjustment, counseling and detention, decisions ultimately influence directly or indirectly, the case outcome. Burruss & Kempf-Leonard (2002) found that juveniles with legal representation are treated more harshly in sentencing than those without legal representation. Others (OJJDP June 2000; Buel, 2002) found that race and ethnicity of the juvenile affects case outcome, while Mears & Field (2000) found that in Texas County Juvenile court, there is a “culture of proceduralism” which mandates determinate sentence in all eligible cases. The OJJDP reports that approximately 50% of juvenile cases are handled informally.

It has been argued that one of the reasons for minority overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system is due to their processing at intake, which ensures that they are racially profiled at every stage of the process. Some scholars have argued that the system became more punitive (Feld, 1991); while others opined that the system was responding to the needs of the times.

The June 2010 OJJDP fact sheet for 2007, showed that 78% of juveniles tried in the juvenile justice system were not detained and that offences against person was most

likely to invoke detention (28%), followed by public order offences (23%). In the Prince William County of Virginia, factors affecting case disposition in the juvenile court include prior record, social history, physical and mental condition of the juvenile and the seriousness of the offence; a jail term is imposed only for juvenile offenders 14 years and older.

In their study of individual and contextual factors that affect pre-adjudication of juveniles in 65 counties in a northeastern state, Armstrong & Rodriguez (2005) found that both individual and contextual factors predict pre-adjudication detention of the delinquent juveniles in the state. The study found that both race and ethnicity also affects pre-adjudication detention for the juveniles. The finding of this study is consistent with earlier studies (Frazier & Bishop, 1985; Bridges & Crutchfield, 1988).

In the same vein, Ulmer and Johnson (2004) found that legal factors- offense severity and prior record- were strongly related to both the likelihood of imprisonment and the length of the sentence; and that individual characteristics of the offender-(being black, male, Hispanic, and young age offenders) predicted the likelihood of severe sentencing.

In his analysis of juvenile justice system in a North Eastern state, Gebo (2007) found a disparity in the sentencing observed for juveniles charged for domestic violence and the other offenders. He noted that most of the domestic violence offenders are released to community dispositions and are treated more leniently by the court than all other offenders. It is unclear whether this observed disparity is due to victim's culpability in the offence or some extra-judicial factors. In their examination of how the adult

criminal justice system treats domestic violence and sexual assault offenders, Felson & Pare (2007) suggest that domestic and sexual assault offenders were less likely to be incarcerated if they assaulted someone they knew than those who assaulted total strangers.

Building on previous research, this study is a descriptive study on the individual level variables of these juveniles in the Jefferson County family court system. Hopefully, the distribution of the cases will provide a clear, albeit, narrow view into the characteristics of these juveniles. By examining the disposition of the cases and the factors that may affect such disposition, this study will determine how the Jefferson County family court compares with previous research on the issue.

2.2 Hypotheses

1. Juveniles with prior domestic violence convictions will be sentenced harshly than those without.
2. Juveniles who live in West Birmingham will commit serious domestic violence offences and will be sentenced harshly.
3. Younger juveniles will engage in more domestic violence offending and taper off with age, and sentencing outcome for older juveniles will be more severe than younger ones.
4. Juveniles who enter the system as status offenders are more likely to commit domestic violence offences.
5. Most of the victims of the offense will be the juvenile's mother.

CHAPTER 3

3. METHODS

This purpose of this study is to examine the characteristics of juvenile domestic violence offenders in the Jefferson County Family Court and to discover the effect of prior domestic violence conviction on case disposition.

Data was taken from the 2010 record of juveniles charged with domestic violence offense in the Jefferson County Family Court. There is some obvious selection bias in this data because cases chosen were those for which information relevant to this study was readily available and accessible; Consequently, while the court handled 258 domestic violence cases in 2010, only 181 met the criteria for this study. Moreover, since the sample consists of juveniles, data was stripped of all identifiers and the researcher was limited to those that had been processed by the data analyst of the Family Court. Available data includes information on legal factors such as current charge, prior criminal history, concurrent charges and detention history. Demographic information includes race, age, sex, juvenile zip code, school information, and social information, includes juveniles custodial parent, and relationship with the victim.

Juveniles included in the study have domestic violence charges that falls in one of three categories; menacing, harassment, and assault. Menacing is the act of threatening; Harassment includes offensive and malicious behavior, while assault refers to physical attack which can be with or without any injuries to the victim.

There are 181 juveniles in this study ranging in age from 11-17 and residing in Jefferson County. The Family Court in Jefferson County has two divisions-Birmingham and Bessemer, and juveniles had their cases adjudicated in either place depending on where the alleged incident occurred. There was little variability in the demographics of the juveniles in the sample, as the juveniles were 67% male and 79% African American.

3.1 Source of Information

Data were extracted from the SPSS file kept by the Jefferson County Family Court analyst, which contained demographic information, prior criminal history, victim-offender relationship, juvenile's zip code, custodial parent, and the disposition of the case.

3.2 Variables

The dependent variable of interest in this study is case disposition. Case disposition is operationalized as harsh or lenient; harsh sentencing is sentence to probation, probation with hit (boot camp), detention, referral to the Directorate of Youth Services, and electronic monitoring, while lenient sentencing includes counseling, informal adjustment, dismissal, consent decree and case expiration. Informal adjustment, counseling, consent decree are informal sessions by magistrates and other officers in the family court in lieu of the juvenile appearing before a judge. This is done informally with the juveniles parents and in situations where the juvenile follows through with the process and does not re-offend, this process dispenses with the need for a formal adjudication. With consent decree on the other hand, the matter is adjudicated by the court and a finding of guilty is made further upon which the juvenile and the victim

agrees to adhere to some conditions which then becomes the ruling of the court.

Probation and probation with hit are both findings of guilt, but probation with hit includes sentence to boot camp. Detention is usually at the detention centre at the premises of the family court, usually for a couple of days to enable tempers cool down before the juvenile is returned home; but a D.Y.S ruling is a finding of guilt with detention at a juvenile institution in the state. Electronic monitoring follows a guilty plea and subjects the juvenile to around the clock monitoring by the police and any breach will result in commitment to a juvenile prison.

The independent variable is Prior Domestic violence charge, which is also measured using the number of prior referrals for domestic violence but was also recoded as a binary variable with 0 for none, and 1 for one or more since the range of prior referrals was 0-4.

The control variables include prior criminal history variables; prior delinquency, prior chins, prior dependency, and individual level variables like; victim-offender relationship, custodial parent, School attendance, and the neighborhood the juvenile lives- north, east, south or west Birmingham. The prior CHINS is measured by looking at official data to see if the juvenile had ever been charged; prior delinquency was coded by recording the number of prior delinquent charges juvenile had, but was recoded into yes/no due to the small numbers in the different categories. Victim/offender relationship was measured by recording the relationship between the juvenile and the victim. It was subsequently recoded into Mother, Yes/No, based on previous research that shows 57% of victims assaulted by juveniles are their mothers. Juvenile zip code was coded according to their location from downtown Birmingham, into North, East, South and

West and due to our small sample size, it was further recoded into 1= West, 0= All else, 1 = South, 0= All else, 1= East, 0= all else, 1= North, 0= all else. Data was unavailable for other possible control variables like family structure, socio-economic status of the offender.

Age, sex, race and venue were measured using self-reported data given at intake. 159 of the juveniles were between 14-17 years old and only 22 were under age 14, age was therefore dichotomized into 0 for juveniles aged 11-13 while those 14-17 were coded 1; sex was coded 0 for male, 1 for female, while race was recoded into two dichotomous variables with 1 for black and 0 for All Else, 1 for white and 0 for All Else.

Table 1: Showing a list of the variables and descriptions for ease of reference.

<i>Variable Name</i>	<i>Variable Definition and Codes</i>
SEX	Sex of offender. 1 =male, 2 = female
RACE	Race of offender. Black (0=no, 1= yes), White 0=no, 1=yes).
VENUE	Venue of trial. 1-Birmingham, 2- Bessemer
TRUANCY	Did juvenile have truancy charges? 0 =no, 1 = yes
DETAINED	Was juvenile detained? 0- No, 1- Yes
PRIORDEP	Did juvenile have prior dependency?0- No, 1-Yes
PRIORCHINS	Did juvenile have prior CHINS? 0- No, 1- Yes
PRIORDEL	Did Juvenile have prior delinquency? 0- No, 1- Yes
PRIORDVCASE	Did juvenile have prior domestic violence conviction? 0- No, 1- Yes
CHARGE	Current Charge. Minor- 0, Serious- 1
DISPOSITION	Disposition of case. Lenient- 0, Harsh- 1
VICTIM	Who is the victim of the DV? Not mother- 0, Mother- 1
LIVESWITH	Who does juvenile live with? Non-parent=0, parent = 1
INSCHOOL	Is juvenile in school? No- 0, 1- Yes
SUBDEP	Does juvenile have any subsequent dependency? N0- 0, Yes- 1
NOSUBCHDEL	Number of subsequent CHINS, and Delinquencies.
CCHARGE	Does juvenile have any concurrent charges? No- 0, Yes- 1
HOWMANY	How many concurrent charges?
AGE	How old was juvenile at the time of the charge? 11-13= 0, 14-17= 1
NORTHBIRMI- NGHAM	Does juvenile live in North Birmingham? North Birmingham= 1, All Else= 0
EASTBIRMING -HAM	Does juvenile live in East Birmingham? East Birmingham= 1, All Else= 0
SOUTHBIRMIN -GHAM	Does juvenile live in South Birmingham? South Birmingham= 1, All Else= 0
WESTBIRMIN- GHAM	Does juvenile live in West Birmingham? West Birmingham = 1, All Else= 0

3.3 Data Analysis

Analytic strategies employed in this study are in three stages. The descriptive statistics and frequencies give a clear picture of the data set by displaying the joint frequencies of both the dependent and the independent variables. Bivariate analysis was employed to show significant relationships and/or associations between the variables. Finally, the dependent, independent and control variables were combined in the multivariate analysis, to examine their influence on the dependent variable. Two other regression models were run; one includes the dependent variable and the legal variables – prior domestic violence, prior delinquency, prior CHINS, prior dependency, truancy, and detained- and the other model includes the extra legal variables, -sex, age, race, victim-offender relationship, in school, and living in West Birmingham. Since the dependent variable in the study was dichotomized, binary logistic regression was employed to predict the effect of prior domestic violence offending on case disposition.

CHAPTER 4

4. FINDINGS

4.1 General Findings

The 181 juveniles in our sample ranged in age from 11 to 17 years with a mean age of 15 (SD= 1.4). 55 (30.2%) had prior domestic violence charge, 94 (51.6%) had prior delinquency charges, 143 (78.6%) are black, and 120 (66.5%) of the sample are male. 86 (47.3%) of them had prior CHINS charge, and though 121 (67%) of the domestic violence charges were minor, in 90 (49.5%) of the cases, the victim was the mother. It is important to note that 146 (80.8%) were not detained, 136 (75.3%) are in school, 145 (80.2%) had lenient sentences and 146 (80%) of the juveniles reside in a one parent household with their mother. To ascertain the contextual or neighborhood level effect on the offence, the juvenile's residential Zip codes were divided into four; North, East, South and West Birmingham. The juveniles are almost evenly distributed in the county; 42 (23.6%), 50 (27.5%), 40 (22%), and 49 (26.9%) living in the North, East South and West Birmingham respectively.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Sex		
Male	120	66.5
Female	61	33.5
Race		
Black	143	78.6
White	38	20.9
Venue		
Birmingham	150	83.0
Bessemer	31	17.0
Detained		
Yes	35	19.2
No	146	80.8
Prior Truancy		
Yes	67	36.8
No	114	62.6
Prior Dependency		
Yes	58	31.9
No	123	67.6
Prior CHINS		
Yes	86	47.3
No	95	52.7
Prior Delinquency		
Yes	94	51.6
No	87	48.4
Prior Domestic Violence		
One Or More	55	30.2
None	126	69.8
Current domestic violence Charge		
Minor	121	67.0
Serious	60	33.0
Disposition		
Harsh	36	19.8
Lenient	145	80.2
Victim		
Mother	89	49.5
Not Mother	77	42.3

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics (continued)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Lives-with		
Parent	163	89.6
Non-Parent	18	10.4
Age (in years)		
11-13	22	12.1
14-17	159	87.9
Subsequent Dependencies		
Yes	10	5.5
No	171	94.5
Subsequent Chins/Dep		
Yes	28	15.4
No	153	84.6
Concurrent Charge		
Yes	24	13.2
No	157	86.8
How Many?		
1 Or More	25	13.7
None	156	86.3

4.2 Result of Analysis

The first hypothesis was that juveniles with prior domestic violence conviction will be sentenced harshly than those without. Results in Table 2 indicate that, 55 (30.2%) had one or more prior domestic violence conviction, 30% of them were sentenced harshly, as against 15% of those without prior domestic violence conviction. This relationship appeared significant at the bivariate level ($p = .01$), multivariate analysis however shows that the relationship is not statistically significant ($p = .4$). This is further confirmed in the second model that included only the legal variables; it is surprising that while other legal variables show statistical significance, prior domestic violence conviction remains insignificant at $p = .2$. So even if the analysis was conducted at the 10% significance level, prior domestic violence conviction is still not a significant determinant of case disposition in the Jefferson County Family Court.

Table 3: Effect of Prior Domestic Violence on Case Disposition

Disposition	<i>None</i>	<i>1 or more</i>	Total
Lenient	107	38	145
% within Disposition	74.0%	26.0%	100%
% within prior-DV	85.0%	69.1%	80.2%
Harsh	19	17	36
% within Disposition	52.8%	47.2%	100%
% within prior-DV	15.0%	30.9%	19.8%
Total	226	55	181

$$X^2 = 6.15, df = 1, P = .01$$

While the result presented in Table 3 is significant in the hypothesized direction in the bivariate analysis, this effect shows no significance in the regression analysis.

The second hypothesis states that juveniles who live in west Birmingham will commit serious domestic violence offenses and will be sentenced harshly. The juveniles in this study were almost evenly distributed in the county with 49 (26.9%) living in West Birmingham, but those juveniles in West Birmingham committed 38.3% of the serious offences and accounted for 14 (28.6%) of the harsh sentencing. Accounting for all the other variables, multivariate analysis shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between living in West Birmingham and harsh sentencing ($p = .04$). This relationship is further affirmed in the model involving all the extra-legal variables to the exclusion of the legal ones which shows that the only statistically significant variable with case disposition is living in west Birmingham ($p = .018$).

The third hypothesis states that younger juveniles will engage in more domestic violence offending and taper off with age, and sentencing outcome for older juveniles will be more severe. The juveniles in the sample range from age 11-17, with the mean age of 15, $SD = 1.4$; of the 181 juveniles in the sample, 22 of them were under the age of 14 and all of them received lenient sentencing for their offences. While an association between age of the juvenile and case disposition was shown in the bivariate analysis ($p = .01$), this association disappeared in the multivariate analysis. In the multivariate analysis, the age of the juvenile was shown to have no statistically significant effect on both the offence and case disposition ($p = .2$); it is worth noting that even when the legal variables were removed from the analysis, age was still shown not to be significant ($p = .9$). The association seen in the bivariate analysis must be due to something else; this hypothesis is therefore unsupported by the analysis.

The fourth hypothesis was that juveniles who enter the system as status offenders are more likely to commit domestic violence offences. Status offences are deemed offences when committed by a minor only because of their age and among the variables in the sample, CHINS, and Truancy are status offences; 86 (47.3%) of the juveniles had prior CHINS charges, and 67 (36.8%) had prior truancy charges. Both variables are shown not to be statistically significant with the domestic violence offences, with $p = .4$ for both variables. Status offences are not predictive of committing domestic violence offences. While both were not significant in the bivariate analysis, multivariate analysis shows a statistically significant relationship ($p = .01$ for CHINS, and $p=.03$ for truancy). The significance of this variable is further affirmed in the second model including only the legal variables which shows CHINS with a significance level of .01 and truancy at .03.

The fifth hypothesis was that most of the victims of the crime will be the offender's mother. Data shows that 89 (49.5%) of the cases, the victim of the crime is indeed the offender's mother. It is however instructive that at no level was the victim-offender relationship predictive of case disposition for the juvenile offender. The bivariate analysis showed a P value of .4 while the regression analysis shows $p = .8$, even when the model was run excluding the legal variables, the victim-offender relationship remained not significant at $p =.6$.

Table 4 shows the bivariate relationships (or lack of it) between the variables. The result indicates that the variables that were statistically significant in the bivariate

analysis were prior domestic violence conviction, prior delinquency and prior dependency and detained.

An examination of the bivariate relationship between the individual characteristics of the juveniles and case disposition shows that only the age of the juvenile had any statistically significant relationship to disposition; race, sex, and school attendance were found to have no statistically significant relationship with case disposition in the JCFC.

Table 4: Bivariate associations between case disposition and independent and control variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>P value</i>
Prior domestic violence	6.2 (df = 1)	0.01*
Prior delinquency	9.8 (df=1)	0.002*
Prior CHINS	0.0 (df = 1)	0.9
Truancy	4.7 (df = 1)	0.09
Detained	11.2 (df = 1)	0.001*
Prior Dependency	11.7 (df = 1)	0.003*
Charge	0.118 (df = 1)	0.7
Victim-offender Relationship	0.5 (df = 1)	0.4
Sex	2.6 (df = 1)	0.1
Black	0.5 (df = 1)	0.5
White	0.6 (df= 1)	0.4
In School	1.8 (df = 1)	0.1
Age	6.2 (df = 1)	0.01*
Living in West Birmingham	3.3 (df = 1)	0.07

*Statistically significant at 5% level of significance

4.3 Logistic Regression

In the multivariate regression analysis, in addition to the independent variable, we included control variables to see what effect they have on the dependent variable. Legal variables included in the regression include, prior domestic violence, prior delinquency, prior dependency, prior CHINS, truancy, detained and the current domestic violence charge; while the extra legal variables are victim-offender relationship, sex, race, age, in-school and living in West Birmingham. In the bivariate analysis, prior domestic violence, prior delinquency, prior dependency, detained and age were all statistically significant with case disposition. However, in the multivariate analysis, after controlling for the effect of the control variables the relationship we reported in the bivariate analysis disappeared; the statistically significant variables were, prior CHINS, truancy, prior dependency and living in West Birmingham. This suggests that the effect of prior domestic violence on case disposition seen in the bivariate analysis had been confounded by any of the control variables. Multivariate analysis is therefore conclusive that prior domestic violence offending has no statistically significant effect on case disposition in the Jefferson County Family Court.

In the full model regression analysis, the overall model was significant ($p < .000$) and in this model, we accounted for between 22% and 36% of the error in predicting if prior domestic violence conviction affects case disposition in the court. The partial model including the legal variables only, was also significant in the overall model ($p < .0001$) accounting for just between 16% and 25% of the error of prediction, while the

second partial model including the extra legal *variables had an overall significance of .004.*

Table 5: Multivariate regression analysis (Full model) $R^2 = 0.36$

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>P Value</i>
Prior Domestic violence	1.6	0.5	0.4
Prior Delinquency	2.6	0.6	0.09
Prior Dependency	3.8	0.5	0.008*
Truancy	7.2	0.9	0.03*
Prior CHINS	0.1	0.9	0.018*
Detained	3.1	0.6	0.057
Charge	1.0	0.6	0.9
Victim-offender Relationship	0.9	0.5	0.8
Sex	0.7	0.5	0.4
Black	0.4	0.5	0.07
Age	2.599E8	8104.9	0.1
In School	2.0	0.6	0.2
Living in West Birmingham	3.0	0.5	0.04*

*Statistically significant at 5% level of significance

Table 6: Multivariate regression with legal variables only (Partial model I)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>P Value</i>
Prior Domestic Violence	1.6	0.5	0.2
Prior Delinquency	2.7	0.5	0.04*
Prior Dependency	3.3	0.4	0.01*
Prior CHINS	0.1	0.9	0.01*
Truancy	5.7	0.9	0.03*
Detained	3.2	0.5	0.01*
Charge	1.2	0.5	0.6

*Statistically significant at 5% level of significance

Table 7: Multivariate regression with extra-legal variables only (Partial model II)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>P Value</i>
Sex	0.6	0.5	0.3
Black	0.5	.488	0.2
In School	0.7	0.5	0.4
Victim-Offender Relationship	0.8	0.4	0.6
Age	4.567E8	8286.262	0.9
Living in West Birmingham	2.9	0.4	0.018*

*Statistically significant at 5% level of significance

CHAPTER 5

5 DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Discussion.

This study shows that in the JCFC, prior domestic violence conviction is not predictive of case disposition. Though bivariate analysis shows an association between case disposition and prior domestic violence, multivariate analysis diffuses whatever association we noticed in the bivariate association. In the second model for the study where only legal variables –prior delinquency, prior CHINS, prior dependency, truancy, current charge were analyzed independent of extra-legal variables, prior domestic violence was still not statistically significant ($p = .4$).

Ordinarily, the thought of a juvenile being violent towards the parent is shameful and the impression is that of a child totally out of control and who needs some reality check. The sample in this study however presents some interesting characteristics; contrary to expectation, 146 (75%) of the juveniles in this sample are in school, 121 (67%) of them committed minor domestic violence offences while for 126 (69%) of them, this was their first domestic violence charge. While 94 (51%) had prior delinquency charges, 114 (62.6%) had no prior truancy charge; they appear like a group of normal juveniles. It is also important to note that the older juveniles committed most of the crimes reported and about 146 (80%) of them live in single parent home with their mother.

While prior domestic violence conviction remained statistically insignificant, the result presents some very interesting results which compel discussion. In the logistic

regression involving all the variables as shown in table 2, Prior CHINS, truancy, prior dependency, and living in West Birmingham were statistically significant, and the direction of the relationship bears some explanation. Bivariate result shows that while the percentage of juveniles with prior CHINS who were sentenced harshly was the same as those who did not, those who had prior CHINS were 5% less in number than those who had, in the sample. Also for the 19.2 % that had prior detention, 40% of them were sentenced harshly compared with 15% of those who had not been detained. Same for those who had truancy charges, 23.5% of them had harsh sentence compared to 17.5% of those who did not. This statistic is particularly instructive because it confirms the position of the court that harsh sentencing is a last resort.

Moreover, it is important to note that while prior CHINS remained insignificant in the bivariate analysis, it was statistically significant in both the partial and the full logistic regression ($p=.018$). Juveniles who had prior CHINS, truancy and Prior dependency are presumed to have gone through counseling, early intervention programs and had been exposed to much of the internal and external programs and resources the court has to offer at risk juveniles. These prior charges pre-suppose the fact that the system had given almost all of what is available to the particular juvenile to ensure rehabilitation. It is therefore not surprising that when all these fails the court is left with no option but to hand down a harsh sentence on the juvenile as a last resort.

It is however surprising to note that in the absence of extralegal variables of race sex, age, school attendance, juvenile residence and victim-offender relationship, that all the legal variables with the exception of prior domestic violence offending are statistically significant. It would appear that the court factors all these legal variables in

the decision whether or not to sentence the juvenile harshly. It is worth noting however that, all the prior convictions in this sample are those for which the court does not hand out any sentencing in the first instant. Prior to court referrals, the probation officials and magistrate considers a whole gamut of services available to the juvenile and it is when all else fails that the juvenile is formally charged.

It is comforting that none of the extra legal variable of sex, race, age that has been touted in previous studies as high predictors of juvenile sentencing is significant in this study. This finding confirms adherence to the rehabilitative and individualized justice concept of this court in the adjudication and disposition of the cases before it.

It is important to mention though that in both the full regression model and in model 2, living in West Birmingham is statistically significant. As consistent as this result is, we must note that some of the areas designated as West Birmingham- West end, Bessemer, Ensley, Wylam, Midfield, Fairfield, Hueytown, Five points West, and Pleasant Groove are mostly poor neighborhoods where a lot of the criminal activities in the city occur. So while it will be far-fetched to claim that the juvenile justice system singles out juveniles from this neighborhood for disproportionate sentencing, it is reasonable to assume that juveniles in this neighborhood show up in the system more often and so the system after exhausting available rehabilitative resources, sentence them harshly.

Is it therefore possible that these juveniles are being sent into the system for normal teenage misbehavior? Is the criminal justice system dealing with the effect of children being brought up in single parent homes, and in this instance, majority of them being boys living with their mother? The characteristics of these juveniles may explain

why majority of them got lenient sentencing from the criminal justice system. It is conceivable that a juvenile judge will be reluctant to dole out harsh sentencing to juveniles who have a stake in conformity (school attendance), are not ordinarily violent (minor domestic violent charges), and appear to be on the way to being productive members of society.

While it would seem inconsistent that 25 of the 36 juveniles that were sentenced harshly committed only minor domestic violence offences, it is important to view the sentencing against the backdrop of the individualized justice model of this court. Court officials are insistent that while some juveniles go through informal adjustment process several times, some get referred to court if they have been to informal process once before. In making this decision, the court examines the dangers that the juvenile pose both to himself and the society, and where it is determined that the juvenile constitutes danger either to himself, or to society, due diligence is done to ensure that a potential danger is averted regardless of whether the juvenile is a first time offender or not. The JCFC does not lock its juvenile patrons into categories but officers treat each case on its merit, based on the facts presented and gleaned from interviews with the juvenile and the parents/guardian.

Findings in this study are consistent with the rehabilitative/welfare model of juvenile justice administration; the court does not operate under the law and order juvenile justice system model, findings are conclusive that the Jefferson County Jefferson Court has as its governing principle, the best interest of the child. In the discussions with the court officials and probation officers, it was clear that punishment is not the aim of the court. The court believes that formal adjudication process unfairly labels the juvenile

and has a negative influence on the juvenile's ability to compete in society. The court's effort is therefore geared towards an informal disposition of cases without attaching any label to the juvenile.

5.2 Policy Implications

The Jefferson County Family Court needs to evaluate its rehabilitation programs and ensure that it meets the needs of the juveniles appearing before it in. Though this study shows that while prior domestic violence conviction is not significantly related to case disposition, 47.3% of juveniles with domestic violence charges had prior CHINS Charges; this calls for a re-evaluation of the early intervention programs available for these juveniles.

Similarly, the West Birmingham area should be investigated to ascertain the criminogenic feature of the area is that predisposes or exposes juveniles living in that neighborhood to violence. This finding therefore behooves policy makers to concentrate resources and services in the West Birmingham areas to address the causes of juvenile violence in general and domestic violence in particular. Schools in the neighborhood may be co-opted as partners by providing resources for them to add relationship and anger management courses in their curriculum.

The finding consistent with previous research that majority of the victims of juvenile domestic violence offending has serious implications in the society. The importance of parenting classes and anger management classes for parents and juveniles respectively cannot be over-emphasized. These classes should be mandatory for both the victims and offenders.

Finally, adequate financial and human resources should be made available for the court to further its aim of rehabilitating erring juveniles in Jefferson County.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The sample size is the first limitation in this study. While it would have been desirable to have a large sample, the population in the JCFC is limited to the 258 juveniles out of which only 181 were selected for the study. This small sample size therefore restricts our ability to find statistically significant relationships while our sample selection affects our ability to generalize our findings to other counties and states.

A somewhat related limitation is that there was no comparison group. It would have been instructive to compare the characteristics of this juvenile domestic violence offenders to juveniles convicted of other offences and also examine the court's disposition towards both categories of offenders.

Moreover, the quantitative nature of this study restricts the ability to capture all the dynamics that would have made for a more robust finding. Research has shown that legal, extra-judicial, social, contextual, and court ideology are some of the factors that affect case disposition. A qualitative study would have been ideal in capturing these dynamics through semi-structured interviews with both the juvenile and court officials.

The data is secondary data which was collected by the Jefferson County Family Court for its own use and purposes which of course are different from the purposes of this study. While the data served a purpose, conclusions cannot be made about the juveniles solely from the data; researcher did not collect the data personally and can only assume that the information is correct.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The sample for this study comprised of majority male and African American; future study should consider a county that is racially diverse and examine whether the intake process at the court is skewed to ensure minority over representation or minorities just commit a disproportionate number of crimes.

A qualitative study will be more ideal for a study of this nature. It will be instructive to interview both the victim and the offender of this juvenile crime, to determine their sense of the events that led to the incident and how it could have been averted. This would answer the question if the decision to be violent in the circumstance was rational or emotional, thereby helping in the search for a solution. It will also help us determine if as Farrington & Loeber (2000) claim that it is the personality dimension of impulsiveness, hyperactivity and poor behavioral control that is predictive of juvenile offending. Qualitative study will also reveal something about the characteristic of the victim and what the victim contributed to the escalation of the crisis.

The current sample did not include some variables which could have explained the crime. Future research should include variables like the presence of drugs, alcohol and weapons, juvenile's mental history, and whether the juvenile was a victim of abuse and some information about the parents or the juvenile's custodian.

Future study of juvenile domestic violence offending should examine all facets of the juvenile's life in order to clarify issues such as the onset of domestic violence in juveniles, intergenerational violence link, and the passivity or otherwise of the victim and how that contributes to the violence.

Table 8: Showing Exp (Beta Co-efficient) of full model and the p values of the three models

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Model with extra-legal variables only P</i>	<i>Model with legal variables only p</i>	<i>Full model P</i>
Prior domestic violence	1.6		0.2	0.4
Prior delinquency	2.6		0.04*	0.09
Prior CHINS	0.1		0.01*	0.018*
Truancy	7.2		0.03*	0.03*
Detained	3.1		0.01*	0.057
Prior Dependency	3.8		0.01*	0.008*
Charge	1.0		0.6	0.9
Victim-offender Relationship	0.9	0.8	-	0.6
Sex	0.7	0.4	-	0.6
Black	0.4	0.07	-	0.2
In School	2.0	0.2	-	0.4
Age	2.599E8	0.9	-	0.9
Living in West Birmingham	3.0	0.04*	-	0.018*

*Statistically significant at 5% level of significance

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