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Making Time for Youth: Delay and Timely Case Processing in the Juvenile Court

William A. Chernoff, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice
Southeastern Louisiana University

W. Richard Goe, Ph.D.
Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work
Kansas State University

It is through timely case processing that the juvenile court is better primed to achieve its goals, whether these goals pertain to crime-control, treatment, legal or restorative justice, or some combination thereof. Drawing a random sample of cases (N=394) from a large Midwestern juvenile court filed between 2012 and 2016, the present study identifies factors that influence timeliness in the juvenile court. Controlling for diagnostic evaluations, failure to appear, offense severity, prior involvement, and judge idiosyncrasies, statistically significant relationships were observed between timely case processing and factors measuring caseload, judge placements, lawyer placements, pleading guilty, detention, and method of filing. Keywords: timeliness; delay; timely case processing; case flow management

INTRODUCTION

The processing of cases by the juvenile court involves a complex organizational effort that brings together judges, police, schools, families, and community members, not to mention the youth being charged. Each juvenile court case consists of a series of events, and a procession of conflicts and resolutions, leading up to a definitive action by the court (Butts, Cusick, & Benjamin, 2010, p. 55; Kringlie, 2010, p. 28; Mahoney, 1985, p. 41; Steelman, Durkin, Myers, Kirven, Murphy, & Hall, 2007, p. 22). While the juvenile court can order participation and sanction delays in case processing (Mahoney et al., 1988, pp. 38-39), these powers do not necessarily ensure the compliance of the social actors involved with the court (Fleming, 1973, p. 23). Moreover, sanctions (e.g. detention for failure to appear) are not necessarily without their own complications (Henry, 1999). Given the diverse interests of those involved (Kringlie, 2010, p. 56; Luskin, 1978; Sarat, 1978) it is not surprising that, from start to finish, some cases take a substantial amount of time to resolve (Levin, 1975; Posner, 1973).

Over the past several decades, there has been a growing body of research on the "timeliness" of juvenile case processing (see, for example, Boyd, Huss, & Myers, 2008; Butts and Halemba, 1996; Butts et al., 2010, p. 17; Grossman and Portley, 2005; Mahoney, 1987). Generally speaking, timeliness refers to the length of time involved in case processing. One reason the timeliness of case processing is important is because it affects the level of efficiency by which the scarce public resources allocated to courts are used. The juvenile court is a financially intensive operation. Courts employ judges, lawyers, court officers, administrators, and staff and courthouses, courtroom facilities, offices, testing centers, and secure detention spaces that require security and maintenance (Hurst and Torbet, 1993). Given finite budgets, juvenile courts are limited in the number and type of services they can provide. Few juvenile court officials would dispute this claim (Butts and Halemba, 1994, p. 38; Henry, 1999, pp. 16, 25; Marksberry, 2011, p. 40). The day-to-day costs and practices (e.g. use of information technology, logistics, wages) and limitations in service availability (e.g. drug screening, mental health evaluation, bed space) serve to affect the overall time taken to process a case. All things being equal, untimely juvenile case processing wastes valuable tax dollars.

It has also been argued that timely case processing is a powerful strategy that the juvenile court can employ to protect and serve the community in which it is located (IJA/ABA, 1980a, p. 11). Butts et al. (2010, p. 1) recognized that some youth recidivate before the court as had time to impose sanctions or deliver court-ordered services. These additional harms to community members can be avoided, they argue, by more aggressively addressing processing delays. More than just protecting community members from the acts of young people, the IJA/ABA (1980a, p. 21) commission regarded the "public interest in [the] prompt disposition of such disputes" as a core value of the community, one the court can safeguard by actively pursuing the timely processing of juvenile court cases.

Additionally, unnecessary delays in case processing can be harmful to youth offenders and other persons involved in the form of opportunity costs (Butts, 1995, p. 6; Butts, 1997; Butts et al., 2010 pp. 8-9; IJA/ABA, 1980a, p. 11; Kringlie, 2010, p. 80). In this context, opportunity costs refer to benefits foregone as a result of spending additional time in juvenile court (e.g. lawyers service fewer clients, parents miss more work, youth offenders miss more school, etc.). "Within the span of an ever ticking clock, each day of processing time," Mahoney (1985, p. 39) argued "takes away opportunity for potential treatment." In other words, the sooner youth receive court-ordered services (rehabilitative or deterrent), the sooner they can avoid future illegal behavior and, importantly, take pride in and benefit from the life of a law abiding citizen.

In addition, taking a proactive approach to timeliness "effectuate[s]," according to the IJA/ABA commission, "the right of juveniles to a speedy resolution of disputes involving them" (1980a, p. 21). As Kringlie (2010, p. 80) argues, violations of this right injure the trust youth have in the justice system, not to mention their sense of self-worth.

Despite the noted significance of this issue, surprisingly little is known about the factors which promote or detract from the timely processing of juvenile court cases (Butts, 1995, p. 11; Butts et al., 2010, p. 17; Mahoney, 1985, p. 37). The present study aims to contribute toward filling this lacuna by employing multivariate statistical methods to empirically identify factors that affect the timeliness of case processing by a juvenile court. The second section of the paper reviews changes in the timeliness of juvenile case processing over the past several decades in the United States. The third section identifies factors that influence the timeliness of case processing and presents the study hypotheses. The fourth section describes the research methodology that was used to test the hypotheses. The fifth section presents the research findings. Finally, the implications of this study's findings for policy and future research are discussed.

Recent Trends in Juvenile Case Processing in the U.S.

Efforts to "Get Tough" on delinquency, popular in the late 1980s and 1990s, coincided with a surge in cases processed by the juvenile court (Butts, 1994, p. 1). One major outcome coinciding with this increase was the knowledge that changes in the numbers of youth involved with the court can impact how efficiently cases are processed (Butts and Halemba, 1996, p. 113; Butts et al., 2010, p. 56). Butts and Halemba (1996, p. 134), in a National Center for Juvenile Justice study, showed that between 1985 and 1994, the amount of time required for the juvenile court to process youth increased across the United States. Over this ten-year period, the median number of days required to process youth increased from 64 to 72 days, or 12.5% (Butts and Halemba, 1996, p. 134).

As a growing number of juvenile courts across the country started to experience this escalation in cases, it became quickly apparent that the associated delays were not unproblematic. National legal organizations and commissions, recognizing the harms due to delay, took action to develop and advocate for new minimum standards on the timely processing of youth (IJA/ABA, 1980b; OJJDP, 1980, p. 311). Among the standards developed by the IJA/ABA, juvenile courts were advised that cases should take no longer than sixty days to reach disposition from initial referral. For detained youth, the IJA/ABA recommended an even faster processing times of within thirty days.

While not federally mandated (Sanborn, 1992, p. 232), many states over this period likewise acknowledged the need to address timely juvenile case processing and took it upon themselves to reduce the amount of time required to process their cases (Szymanski 1994). As of 2008, over forty states plus the District of Columbia, established timeliness benchmarks for the processing of juvenile court cases (Butts et al. 2010, p. 42).

It has been shown that direct inducements, legal mandates or professional standards for processing goals (Butts, 1995, p. 7), can reduce delays and achieve more timely case processing within the juvenile court—as evident by the rate at which cases are processed when the youth involved are detained (Butts, 1995, p. 5; Butts, 1997, pp. 5, 10, 77; Butts et al., 2010, p. 3; Marksberry, 2011, p. 29).

In addition to formally stated timeliness goals and mandates, juvenile courts partnered with researchers during these years to root out further causes of court delay. Butts and Halemba (1996, p. 45) argued that management inducements[1], such as reassigning judges and lawyers to cases, could do much to reduce delay in the juvenile court (see also Humes 2015, p. 46). Graham and Howley (1992, p. 3), taking a more digital approach, argued that delays could be reduced through greater automation of the juvenile court process.

Research also highlighted the importance of the more negotiated aspects leading to delay in the juvenile court, such as the effects of private counsel (Borowski, and Ajzenstadt, 2005, p. 194), plea decisions (Butts and Halemba, 1996, p. 83; Butts et al., 2010, p. 92; Mahoney, 1985, p. 48), and even caseload size itself (Butts and Halemba, 1996, p. 113; Butts et al., 2010, p. 56; Mahoney, 1985, pp. 48-49).

The turn of the century witnessed a dramatic decline in the overall number of cases processed by the juvenile court (Stahl, Puzzanchera, Finnegan, Tierney, & Snyder, 2007). Coinciding with this decrease, Butts et al. (2010, p. 74) reported that the median case processing time has changed, dropping between 1995 and 2004 by ten percent.

The "Get Tough" era exposed, in some ways paradoxically, several challenges related to delay in the legal processing of juveniles. While the threat of ever increasing caseloads has waned, many juvenile courts clearly recognize the case-by-case need for timelier case processing—and rigorously tested starting points for making it happen (Butts, Cusick, & Benjamin, 2010, p. 55; Kringlie, 2010, p. 28; Steelman, Durkin, Myers, Kirven, Murphy, & Hall, 2007, p. 22). Prior research has done much to suggest promising factors for tackling delay. However, research studies that empirically test alternative factors that could influence the timeliness of case processing are few and far between. The present study fills these gaps by testing a multivariate model of timely juvenile case processing and providing practitioners with more rigorously tested insights into delay, its causes, and what to do about it.

Factors Influencing the Timeliness of Juvenile Court Processing & Statement of Hypotheses

Previous research on case processing by juvenile courts points to a number of factors that determine why some cases are processed in a more or less timely fashion than others.

Caseload

Examining delay within the juvenile court process, Mahoney (1985) observed that "[c]rowded dockets resulted in appearances being scheduled far into the future" (pp. 48-49). During the late 1980s to mid 1990s, efforts to "Get Tough" on delinquency coincided with increased caseloads and slower processing times (Butts and Halemba, 1996, p. 113; Butts et al., 2010, p. 56). Based on these trends, Butts and Halemba (1996; Butts et al., 2010, p. 75) concluded "[c]aseload pressures… do contribute to increased processing

[1] Solomon and Somerlot (1987) defined caseflow management as the "supervision or management of the time and events involved in the movement of a case through the court system from the point of initiation to disposition, regardless of the type of disposition" (p. 3).

delays" (p. 134). The juvenile court is limited in the number of cases it can process in a day. When caseloads are higher, the demand for court resources is also higher, yielding greater pressure and lengthier periods of time until the next court date. This leads to the following hypothesis:

> H1: Cases with more co-occurring cases are associated with less timely case processing.

Plea Status

Youth offenders facing trial in juvenile court are given the option to plead guilty or not guilty to the charges that have been levied against them. Research on case processing indicates that cases where youth plead not guilty increase the time needed to reach a definite decision (Butts and Halemba, 1996, p. 83; Butts et al., 2010, p. 92; Mahoney, 1985, p. 48). Failing to plead guilty requires additional court procedures and requires the court to defer reaching a definite action until a later date. This implies the following hypothesis:

> H2: Cases where youth plead guilty are associated with more timely case processing.

Direct Inducements

Direct inducements involve the use of legal mandates or professional standards to reduce delays and achieve more timely case processing within the juvenile court. These inducements are developed as part of efforts to reform court procedures and promote timely case processing (Butts 1995, p. 7). With legal mandates, it is assumed that punishments, whether experienced or anticipated, will compel court officials and staff to work more efficiently.

In some cases youth who enter the juvenile court are quickly placed in secure detention. In other cases, youth are detained after failing to appear as expected (Henry, 1999, p. 16). Regardless of the reason, research shows that cases where youth are detained prior to a definite court action proceed more quickly than those that do not (Butts, 1995, p. 5; Butts, 1997, pp. 5, 10, 77; Butts et al., 2010, p. 3; Marksberry, 2011, p. 29). Therefore:

> H3: Cases where youth are detained prior to a definite action are associated with more timely case processing.

Management Inducements

Management inducements involve reducing delays and improving timeliness in court processing through reorganizing how cases are processed, particularly through the use of effective "caseflow management" (Butts et al., 2010, p. 34).

Original Judge

Previous research has shown that judges who manage their cases from start to finish (i.e. who employ an "individual calendar" system), may take greater "responsibility and ownership" for their caseload (Butts and Halemba, 1996, p. 45). In addition, it has been argued that these judges are more likely to "work harder," "increase productivity," and,

subsequently, increase the efficiency of the court (Church, Carlson, Lee, & Tan, 1978, p. 72). This implies the following hypothesis:

> H4: Cases assigned one judge, as opposed to cases involving the reassignment of judges, are associated with more timely case processing.

Original Lawyers

Changing the lawyers involved in a case can greatly affect how quickly a case is processed (Humes 2015, p. 46). As a case proceeds toward a definite action, the lawyers involved tend to better understand the facts of a case. They (the lawyers) learn the facts and develop an expertise of the case at hand. Furthermore, when lawyers are reassigned, the new appointments necessarily require additional time to acclimate to the case. By retaining the original lawyers summoned, cases can build momentum and proceed more efficiently. Therefore:

> H5: Cases that retain their original lawyers, as opposed to those assigned new lawyers, are associated with more timely case processing.

Use of Electronic Case Filing

Research on caseflow management has shown that technological innovations can improve how quickly cases are processed by the juvenile court (Butts, 1995, p. 9; Church et al., 1978). After an internal investigation showed excessive case processing times (approximately 226 days, on average), the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court (Cleveland, Ohio) revised their caseflow management system (Graham and Howley, 1992, pp. 1, 2). After consulting with experts and court personnel, a new system was devised that tracked case processing times at key processing stages (Graham and Howley, 1992, pp. 2-3). Compared to their initial findings, the new caseflow management system decreased the average number of days until disposition by sixty-one days—and that was only after being implemented for six months (Graham and Howley, 1992, p. 3).

New automated court management systems promise several advantages[2] over manually-oriented approaches (Butts et al., 2010, pp. 84, 97). According to the system director of a large Midwestern juvenile court[3], automation has made it so that "a judge can electronically sign an order and an attorney on that case can see it on his mobile device in real-time." Just as immediately, "a sheriff's deputy can," according to the director, "make an arrest, enter the information from their patrol car, and the subject's probation officer can instantly see what happened."

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2 It is worth noting that advanced computer aided case management systems are not a panacea to delays in juvenile court processing. There is much variation among these systems (Butts et al., 2010, p. 78). Furthermore, resistance to these systems (Butts et al., 2010, p. 85) or poor training can make using them cumbersome at best (Webster et al., 2013, p. 4).

3 To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the court and those involved with it, citations are not provided for quotes provided by the system director.

While computer-assisted caseflow management promises more efficient case processing, surprisingly few studies have examined its effects (Butts et al., 2010, p. 11). What limited research that has been conducted suggests new caseflow technologies can improve the timely processing of court cases. In a study of case processing times, Graham and Howley (1992) concluded that manual transcription and "data entry" was a major cause of delay in court processing. Similarly, Butts et al. (2010, pp. 81, 84), reported that electronic records, entered directly, as opposed to those that are transcribed, not only reduces error, but also reduces delay in case processing. The present study addresses this gap, hypothesizing that the use of electronic filing of case records will improve court efficiency and speed up the juvenile court process:

> H6: Cases that are filed electronically, as opposed to manually, are associated with more timely case processing.

Defense Type

In the adult court, Wice (1978) showed that cases represented by private counsel were processed more slowly than those represented by public defenders. Wice (1978) argued public defenders are employees of the court and given such, are subject to managerial demands to process cases more quickly. Alternatively, Borowski, and Ajzenstadt (2005, p. 194) noted that financial incentives can affect timely case processing, arguing that private attorneys stand to profit from less timely case processing. Following this logic:

> H7: Cases represented by a public defender are associated with more timely case processing.

METHOD

To better understand timely case processing within the juvenile court, the current study drew a random sample of 394 court cases from a large Midwestern juvenile court in Harrison County[4] filed between January 1st, 2012 and December 31st, 2016. Data analyzed consisted solely of delinquency cases that were not diverted from the formal court process. Diversion cases were omitted due to inconsistencies in court reporting practices.

Court processing and records in Harrison County are maintained through the use of a state of the art computer automated system. Known as the Justice Information Leveraging System (or JILS), this system provides access across the county's justice system to juvenile court records. Not only does this system provide access to case level information, but it also expedites and tracks various court actions and decisions throughout the court process. According to the system director[5], "a judge can electronically sign an order and an attorney on that case can see it on his mobile device in real-time." Through systems such as JILS, a

[4] "Harrison County" is a pseudonym. This name was chosen to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the particular juvenile court studied.

[5] In the interest of anonymity and confidentiality, citations are not provided for quotes regarding the JILS system.

wealth of data on what courts do are available (Butts et al., 2010, p. 85). As such, court records available through JILS provide a unique opportunity to investigate, in detail, the ways in which juvenile case processing has been accomplished.

Measurement of Dependent Variables/Operationalizing Timeliness

Two measures of timeliness in case processing were used as dependent variables. The first measure was the time by session rate, which was computed by dividing (a) the number of days from the initial filing of a case to a definite court action by (b) the number of court sessions (i.e. days where the court met to address a case). The second was the number of sessions between the initial filing of a case and a definite action taken by the court (Butts and Halemba, 1996; Steelman et al., 2007).

It is worth highlighting that this research contributes a new operational definition of timeliness -- the time by session rate. Juvenile cases vary in terms of the number of court sessions required to resolve them. As such, this new indicator provides a standardized measure of time efficiency in processing cases that involve different numbers of court sessions and reflects the "urgency" shown by the court in trying to mitigate delay.

Measurement of Independent Variables

Caseload. The court simply might not have the resources to dispose every case it processes. Bed or programming space is limited, especially during periods of higher case volume. Resources get scarce and social control is either doled out less liberally, or doled out differently.

Caseload is determined among the cases relative to each individual case. At any given period, multiple cases are occurring at the same time. Notably, however, these cases do not all receive the same amount of time and attention from the court. Some cases meet more frequently. Others less. For each case, caseload is thus calculated as the number of times co-occurring cases met with the court between its (the case in question's) initial filing and definite action. For each case, co-occurring case met a total of zero or more times.

Original Judge. Court officials documented whether the original judge was withdrawn and a new judge was assigned to a case. Cases assigned a new judge one or more times were given a value of 0. Cases that did not involve a new judge assignment were given a value of 1.

Original Lawyers. The court history records identifies whether lawyers were removed or added to a case. Lawyers in any given case could be withdrawn and replaced one or more times. Cases where lawyers were withdrawn one or more times were assigned a value of 0. Cases where no lawyers were withdrawn were assigned a value of 1.

Plead Guilty. Youth involved with the juvenile court were provided the option to plead guilty or not guilty to the charges against them. While the plea purports to be a "deal" negotiated between attorneys and judges, the plea bargain ultimately requires youth involved to admit fault, whether they were actually guilty or not. In the juvenile court,

youth can plead guilty or not guilty. Cases that involve youth who plead guilty were assigned a value of 1, while youth who failed to plead guilty were assigned a value 0.

Detained. Case records were used to determine whether the youth involved in a case was detained prior to a definite court action. Detention status was determined by the comments detailed in the case record. A case was considered detained if a juvenile was placed in a secure facility before she/he was disposed by the court. A single dummy variable was used to indicate detention status. Cases where the youth involved was detained prior to a definite court action were assigned a value of 1, while cases whose youth were not detained were assigned a value of 0.

Filed Electronically. Court case records identified the way cases were filed. Cases that were filed electronically were assigned a value of 1, while cases that were not were assigned a value of 0.

Defense Type. Cases represented by public defenders were determined based on whether the youth and their family were charged for court services. Cases where a financial affidavit was filed and approved were assigned a value of 1. Cases that either did not file a financial affidavit or were denied approval were assigned a value of 0.

Measurement of Control Variables

In addition to the study variables, additional "control" variables were added to the statistical models to provide better evidence that the relationships identified were valid and nonspurious. In the timely case processing standards suggested by the National Advisory Committee for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, a number of events were identified that, while contributing to the overall timeliness of a case, were not regarded as contributing to delay. Two of these events consisted of youth who failed to appear and youth who were ordered to undergo diagnostic examinations (OJJDP, 1980, p. 311). Furthermore, offense severity and prior court record were identified as factors affecting timely case processing, but not necessarily causes of delay itself (OJJDP, 1980, p. 311). Additionally, Mahoney et al. (1988) and Butts et al. (2010, p. 85) reported that differences exist between judges, such that those with "strong [judicial] leadership" skills (pp. 197-205) could reduce delay within the juvenile court.

Dummy variables were introduced to measure the effects of variables Youth Evaluated, Failure to Appear, Offense Severity, Prior Involvement, and Judge Idiosyncrasies. For these variables, a value of 1 was used to indicate the presence of the event or greater severity or frequency of the situation. Zero values were used to indicate the lack of the event. Two dummy variables were used to account for the judge idiosyncrasies. While there were a total of 5 judges, two presided over the majority of the cases. The presence of Judges Frick and Martin were each indicated by a 1 value. Cases involving the remaining three judges were assigned a value of 0. It is hypothesized that cases involving youth who were evaluated, failed to appear, charged with more severe offenses, and who had prior experience with the court would be processed in a less timely manner (Butts and Halemba,

1996, p. 129; Butts, 1997, p. 10; Henry, 1999, p. 22; Kringlie, 2010, p. 73; Merry, Peters, Goerge, Osuch, Minor, & Budde, 1997, p. 27; OJJDP, 1980, p. 311). While the importance placed on timeliness by judges observed was not known in each case, research suggests that differences are likely (Butts et al., 2010, p. 85; Mahoney et al., 1988; pp. 197-205).

Method of Data Analysis

To test the research hypotheses, each dependent variable was regressed on the set of the independent variables using multivariate regression analysis. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used for the model employing the time by session rate as the dependent variable. Likewise, OLS regression was used to model the relationship between the number of court sessions and the independent variables

OLS regression diagnostics were used to assess the extent to which key assumptions of the models were reasonable. The assumption of linearity was tested by the examination of partial regression residual plots and component plus residual plots. The presence of multicollinearity among the independent variables was assessed through the computation of variance inflation factor (VIF) coefficients. The assumption of constant error variance was examined by generating a plot of studentized residuals against the predicted values of the dependent variable and conducting the Breusch-Pagan test. Finally, a normal probability plot and histogram of the studentized residuals were constructed and the Shapiro-Wilkes test was used to assess the normality of the error term (see Berry & Feldman, 1985; Fox, 1991).

Regression diagnostics revealed that the error terms for both the time by session rate and session count models were highly skewed and did not approximate a normal distribution. In response, natural log transformations were applied to the time by session rate as well as the session count in order to better meet this assumption. Similarly, a natural log transformation was applied to the variable measuring caseload. With both measures of timelines, the log transformed caseload better satisfied the regression assumption of linearity.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the variables considered in the present study. Among these cases (N=394), the average time-session rate was 9.79 days per session (SD=6.88). In some cases, this rate was as low as 2 days per session. In other cases, this rate was as high as 73.91 days per session. Similarly, cases met before the court on average 9.26 (SD=5.28) times. While the most frequently processed case met 51 times, the least frequently processed case met only twice. Notably, the distributions of these timeliness measures were both positively skewed; suggesting the number of days per session and the total number of court sessions were, for many cases, relatively low.

On average, each case was accompanied by a substantial caseload. Over the lifetimes of the cases sampled, co-occurring cases met with the court on average 5419.36 (SD=5935.09)

times. While 76% of the cases were filed electronically, a sizeable minority was filed manually (24%).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Juvenile Court Case Records (N=394).

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Time by Session Rate	2	73.91	9.79	6.88
Session Count	2	51	9.26	5.28
Caseload	547	64947	5419.36	5935.09
Original Judge	0	1	.95	.22
Original Lawyers	0	1	.91	.29
Plead Guilty	0	1	.31	.46
Detained	0	1	.4	.49
Filed Electronically	0	1	.76	.43
Defense Type	0	1	.1	.3
Youth Evaluated	0	1	.25	.44
Failure to Appear	0	1	.1	.3
Offense Severity	0	1	.23	.42
Prior Involvement	0	1	.81	.4
Judge (Frick vs Other)	0	1	.49	.5
Judge (Martin vs Other)	0	1	.38	.49

95% of the time, the judge originally assigned was involved with the case throughout its duration. Only a few cases were assigned two or more judges over their (the cases') lifetime (5%). Similarly, 91% of the lawyers summoned were involved in their cases from beginning to end. Only 9% of the cases withdrew a lawyer one or more times. Of these cases sampled, 49% were presided over by Judge Frick. An additional 38% of the cases were presided over by Judge Martin. The remaining 13% of cases were presided over by one of four other judges.

Public counsel was employed in only 10% of the cases. Trained specialists were brought in to evaluate youth in approximately a quarter of all cases.

Cases involving felony charges were less common than misdemeanor cases (23% vs 77%). While most youth were involved with the court on minor charges, more than a third, approximately 40%, of all cases involved a youth who had been securely detained prior to a definite case decision. In 31% of the cases, the youth involved pleaded guilty to one or more of the charges against them. Most youth, approximately 81%, had been previously involved with the court one or more times in the past, though only 10% failed to appear in court as expected.

Table 2 shows bivariate correlation estimates between the independent and dependent variables used to examine timely case processing. Of the variables considered, caseload and failure to appear had the largest correlations with timely case processing. The estimated Pearson correlation coefficients between caseload and the timeliness measures time by

session rate and session count equaled .63 and .39, respectively. Notably, both of these associations were statistically significant (p-value < .05). These correlations suggest that greater caseload is associated with less case processing efficiency and greater frequency in court session occurrences.

Similarly, the estimated Pearson correlation coefficients between failure to appear and processing efficiency and session count respectively equaled .24 and .41. As with caseload, both of these relationships were statistically significant (p-value < .05). These coefficients suggest that cases involving youth who failed to appear as expected coincided with less case processing efficiency and more case processing sessions.

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations for Juvenile Court Case Records (N=394).

	Time by Session Rate	Session Count
Caseload	.6271*	.3865*
Original Judge	-.0154	-.2516*
Original Lawyers	-.1072*	-.2214*
Plead Guilty	-.0833	.1193*
Detained	-.0037	.2255*
Filed Electronically	.0891	-.0422
Defense Type	-.0137	.0039
Youth Evaluated	-.0378	.1524*
Failure to Appear	.2409*	.4125*
Offense Severity	.0546	.2503*
Prior Involvement	-.1726*	.0889
Judge (Frick vs Other)	.0052	.0282
Judge (Martin vs Other)	-.0206	-.0547

*p-value < .05

Notably, Table 2 shows there were some differences between how the independent variables correlated with the dependent variables. Significant, negative correlations were observed between the time by session rate and the independent variables original lawyers and prior involvement (-.11 and -.17, respectively). All other correlations involving the time by session rate, however, were not statistically significant (alpha = .05).

Unlike the time by session rate, more moderate correlations were observed between session count and the independent variables. Of the independent variables considered, insufficient evidence of an association was observed for filed electronically, defense type, prior involvement, and judge idiosyncrasies. All other associations involving session count, however, were statistically significant (p-value < .05). To examine these effects simultaneously, multivariate methods were employed.

Results for multivariate models examining the study hypotheses (with statistical control variables) are presented in Table 3. The observed F-Statistics and adjusted coefficient of determinations showed that all the models constructed did a fair job at representing these

data. For each model, the F-Statistic showed there was sufficient evidence (p-value < .05) to conclude that the effect of one or more of the independent variables on the measure of timely case processing considered was not equal to zero. Notably, the adjusted R-squared observed was at least .58 across all the models, showing that the independent variables accounted for a sizeable proportion of the total variation in the measures of timely case processing.

Table 3. OLS Regression Results with Control Variables for Juvenile Court Case Records (N=394).

	Time by Session Rate *b* (Standard Error)	Session Count *b* (Standard Error)
Intercept	-2.9532 (.2295)*	-.7829 (.2272)*
log(Caseload)	.6083 (.0234)*	.3763 (.0231)*
Original Judge	.1459 (.0710)*	-.1515 (.0703)*
Original Lawyers	.1377 (.0532)*	-.1474 (.0527)*
Plead Guilty	-.0746 (.0353)*	.0902 (.0349)*
Detained	-.1085 (.0337)*	.0806 (.0333)*
Filed Electronically	-.0486 (.0364)	-.1987 (.0361)*
Defense Type	-.1020 (.0522)	.0880 (.0517)
Youth Evaluated	-.0691 (.0358)	.0535 (.0354)
Failure to Appear	-.1452 (.0566)*	.1816 (.0561)*
Offense Severity	-.0565 (.0385)	.0774 (.0381)*
Prior Involvement	-.0890 (.0387)*	.0783 (.0383)*
Judge (Frick vs Other)	.0256 (.0482)	.0133 (.0477)
Judge (Martin vs Other)	-.0060 (.0500)	.0494 (.0495)
R^2	.6778	.5911
Adj. R^2	.6668	.5771
F-Statistic	61.5032	42.2549
RMSE	.2969	.2939

* p-value < .05

Most of the relationships observed, significant or otherwise, were in the directions expected. Positive estimated coefficients were observed for caseload (log transformed) across all models. Similarly, the estimated coefficients for electronic filling were, for each model, in the same direction, albeit negative ones. Notable exceptions to these expectations were observed for the variables original judge, original lawyers, plead guilty, detention status, and defense type. With the time by session rate models, the estimated effects of original judge and lawyers were positive rather than negative. Similarly, the estimated effects of plea, detention, and defense status were, for the session count model, positive instead of negative.

DISCUSSION

Statistically significant effects (p-value < .05) were observed for the variables caseload (log transformed) (H1), plead guilty (H2), detained (H3), original judge (H4), original lawyers (H5), and filed electronically (H6). No statistically significant effects, however, were observed for either model of timeliness for the variable defense type (H7). Combined these findings pinpoint several actionable strategies and promising directions for practitioners looking to reduce delay in the juvenile court.

As hypothesized (H1), a statistically significant effect was observed between the court's caseload and its ability to process cases in a timely manner. Similar to prior research that examined the effect of changing caseloads on timely case processing, we observed a positive effect (Butts & Halemba, 1996, p. 113; Butts et al., 2010, pp. 56, 74). That is to say, after controlling for other factors, having larger caseloads does result in less timely case processing.

Research supports the relationship between caseload and how quickly the juvenile court can process its cases (Butts & Halemba, 1996, p. 113; Butts et al., 2010, p. 56). Consistent with Siegal and Halemba, we recommend that courts looking to address cases with greater urgency should consider reducing their total number of active cases on file (2006, p. 5). Siegal and Halemba (2006, p. 5) suggested that, as means for reducing processing times overall, an "infusion" of resources, such as hiring additional judges on a temporary basis, could do much to decrease caseloads and improve case processing efficiency.

Sufficient evidence was also found, as hypothesized (H4), of a relationship between original judge retention and timely case processing. Notably, however, the direction of the effect observed differed between the measures of timely case processing. Contrary to expectation, cases involving the same judge from beginning to end were processed less efficiently than cases where one or more judges were replaced. One possible reason for this would be if the change in judge resulted in a new judge being assigned that had a better skill set and could therefore process the case more efficiently.

In a study of timely case processing within the Cuyahoga County juvenile court, Butts and Halemba (1996, p. 79) reported the court was organized so that more experienced officials were assigned cases that best matched their skill sets. This organizational arrangement was thought to improve court efficiency. Determining the best judge for a case, while initially time consuming, can, if done correctly, greatly improve how timely cases are processed.

With respect to the number of court sessions, however, sufficient evidence was found of a negative original judge effect. As expected (H4), retaining judges appeared to decrease how frequently the court met to determine the outcome of a case. Trends in juvenile court practice suggest a "one judge/one family" policy can greatly improve the court process (Steelman et al., 2007, p. 6).

One immediate actionable insight from this finding is that cases involving different judges are less a source of delay than those involving the same judge. Juvenile courts can hence improve efficiency by reallocating resources from cases that require new judges to those involving the same judge. Not only can this strategy reduce case processing delays, but it can also support the wise management of court resources, since only some and not all judges require special supports.

Similar to judge retention, the findings observed support the hypothesis (H5) that cases proceed in a less efficient manner when the original lawyers appointed are retained. Siegal and Halemba (2006, p. 5) argued that courts seeking to address a backlog of cases could improve their timeliness by temporarily or permanently reallocating staff. Regarding the number of sessions, the lawyer effect was, again, similar to the judge effect. The findings observed support the hypothesis (H5) that cases require fewer sessions to process when the original lawyers appointed are retained.

Combined these findings suggest that cases involving the same lawyers meet less often and less frequently. Practitioners interested can at once reduce delays in juvenile case processing and achieve these reductions in an efficient manner by focusing their attention more on cases involving the same lawyers than those involving several different lawyers.

What research exists suggests cases where youth plead guilty reach a definite decision in a more timely manner (Butts & Halemba, 1996, p. 83; Butts et al., 2010, p. 92; Mahoney, 1985, p. 48). Consistent with these findings, plea status was observed to negatively correlate with the time by session rate. As hypothesized (H2), fewer days elapsed between session dates among cases involving youth who plead guilty. However, the opposite effect was observed between pleading guilty and the number of sessions. That is to say, cases involving youth who plead guilty coincided with higher court session frequencies.

Taken together, these findings on the effect of pleading guilty suggest that providing more plea deals and making them more enticing to youth and their families can hasten the processing rate of within the juvenile court. Recognizing the rapidity of cases where youth plead guilty, case managers can more efficiently make use of their court's limited resources by focusing their attention on cases where youth do not plead guilty.

Consistent with prior research, a negative effect was observed between detention status and efficient timely case processing (Butts, 1995, p. 5; Butts & Halemba, 1996, p. 37; Butts, 1997, pp. 5, 10, 77; Butts et al., 2010, p. 3; Marksberry, 2011, p. 29). This finding is consistent with Butts and Halemba's (1996, p. 37) assertion that state laws or mandates can motivate juvenile courts to resolve detained cases more promptly.

Contrary to expectation, however, a positive effect was observed between detention status and the number of case processing sessions. Cases where youth were detained had more meetings, on average, than cases where youth resided in the community. It stands to reason

that, once detained, youth are more accessible to the court, making it easier for the court to meet, and, hence, increasing the total court session count.

Notably, the reasons connecting detention status to timely case processing are not entirely clear. Are state mandates or local rules truly effective at inducing faster case processing? If so, how is this relationship achieved? What are the challenges of moving cases through the system at a faster rate? More importantly, what lessons are learned from processing cases more quickly? While the present study does not advocate for greater detention of youth, there is much policy-makers and practitioners can learn from the detention process, both from the case records as well as practitioners themselves.

Managerial inducements, especially in the form of new caseflow technologies, were hypothesized (H6) to improve juvenile court efficiency and speed up case processing (Graham and Howley, 1992; 2010, pp. 81, 84). Consistent with this perspective, sufficient evidence was found showing a negative relationship between filing cases electronically and timely case processing, specifically regarding the total number of sessions. Courts looking to reduce the number of unnecessary meetings, saving them for more important court matters, should invest in electronic filing systems.

Notably, a significant effect was not observed between filing a case electronically and the time by session rate. It could be that once a case is filled with the court, whether manually or electronically, there is no appreciable difference in how it is treated. That is to say, manually filed cases receive the same "urgency" as cases filed electronically.

While the present study focused on "data entry," (in the form of electronic filing) computer automated systems promise to improve the efficiency of numerous court practices. Research suggests that scheduling systems (Butts, 2010, p. 25), prompt notices (Merry et al., 1997, p. 24), and other caseflow technologies can greatly improve court efficiency. The effects of caseflow innovations such as these should be further explored.

Previous research suggests that cases represented by private counsel are processed differently than cases represented by public counsel (Borowski & Ajzenstadt, 2005, p. 194; Wice, 1978). However, the present study suggests that, whatever effect defense type appears to have on case processing, it is in fact explained by one or more other variables. After controlling for diagnostic evaluations, failure to appear, offense severity, prior involvement, and judge idiosyncrasies, no appreciable effect was observed between defense type and timely case processing.

While not of primary interest, it is worth noting that some of the control variables considered were statistically significant in some of the models of timely case processing. Failure to appear and prior involvement were observed to affect the time by session rate, while failure to appear, offense severity, and prior involvement were observed to affect the number of sessions needed for case processing. Notably, no effect was observed regarding

whether youth were evaluated during their case or the idiosyncrasies of the judge presiding.

CONCLUSION

Every year, thousands of hours are devoted in the United States to the process of youth justice. While some of this time is spent delivering justice, a substantial portion of it is lost to unnecessary delays. Delays enter case processing in many ways. They range from shifts in the political climate, as seen through policies that increase caseloads, to more mundane tasks, such as issuing orders or notifying parents that their children were referred to the court (Butts et al., 2010, p. 83; Merry et al., 1997, p. 24). While it is difficult to "specify which delays are unnecessary" (Posner, 1973, p. 445), the present study has identified key factors affecting timely case processing, such as crowded dockets, plea status, retaining original judges, retaining original lawyers, detention status, and reliance on automation, and develop policy recommendations so as to improve efficiency.

It has been over thirty years since Anne Mahoney (1985, p. 51) recognized that too much attention was placed on establishing time standards and not enough was placed on developing our empirical understanding of timeliness in juvenile case processing. Since this time, new evidence has emerged that has expanded what is known and how people think about timeliness within the juvenile court. However, "many of the factors [that] cause case-processing delay… have not been verified," as noted by Boyd et al. (2008), "through empirical research" (p. 213). We agree with Boyd et al. (2008) that the current state of timely case processing research in the juvenile court needs further conceptual and empirical development. By knowing what delays a case, what does not, and why, the juvenile court can achieve its goals and better serve youth, families, victims, and the greater community.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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William A. Chernoff, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice
Southeastern Louisiana University
356A Fayard Hall
Hammond, LA 70402

W. Richard Goe, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work
Kansas State University
210 Waters Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506

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