How Just is Manifest Injustice?
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Background
The Washington State Juvenile Justice Act of 1977 has its foundations in accountability and rehabilitation. It allows for sentencing outside standard sentencing guidelines if the court concludes that the disposition would effectuate a Manifest Injustice.

Manifest Injustice (MI) Increase in sentence to protect the community ■ UPI: sentenced to a term longer than the standard sentencing range ■ IN: sentenced to institutionalization when guidelines did not previously Decrease the sentence when it is an injustice to the offender ■ DOWN: sentences to a term shorter than the standard sentencing range

Questions
Is the court is using MI to institutionalize youth for mental health treatment?

Is it appropriate for youth who do not otherwise meet the threshold for adjudication be institutionalized simply for mental health treatment?

Do the factors used in a finding of manifest injustice differ depending on whether or not the offender has sufficient points for commitment?

What factors contribute to youth being sentenced by Manifest Injustice?

What are the mental and behavioral health needs of youth in JRA?

Conclusions
- African Americans are most disproportionately represented in the Washington State juvenile justice system.
- Within JRA, white youth were at least twice as likely to have their sentence reduced than youth of African American descent
- In Washington State, youth of African American descent more than five times as likely to have their sentence intensified than their white peers
- They are also less likely to have their sentence reduced.

Clinical Implications
- Youth sentences are increased when judges determine that the standard sentencing guidelines are unsatisfactory.
- The use of MI is not used equally among different racial groups.
- Psychological needs contribute to the use of MI, which may be related to poor faith in community mental health resources.
- Investing in community-based services may decrease the rate youth are institutionalized with MI for mental health reasons.
- This would likely be more cost effective.

Future Directions
- Has the stated purpose of manifest injustice been realized? Is this cost effective?
- Are youth engaged in community mental health care more or less likely to be sentenced by manifest injustice compared to youth who are not in treatment?
- What types of services, including residential and substance use, have been provided to youth MI'd up/in versus no MI up/in?
- Has the use of manifest injustice reduced recidivism rates in juveniles within the justice system? Is the public safer?

Limitations
- Data does not account for the offense committed.
- No outcome data is available.

References
Factors Related to the use of Manifest Injustice in Juvenile Court Sentencing. Olympia, Washington: Office of Research and Data Analysis, Department of Social and Health Services

Juvenile Justice Act of 1977, RCW 10.60.050 (1) - Manifest Injustice


Future Directions
- Has the stated purpose of manifest injustice been realized? Is this cost effective? What are the trends over time?
- Are youth engaged in community mental health care more or less likely to be sentenced by manifest injustice compared to youth who are not in treatment?
- What types of services, including residential and substance use, have been provided to youth MI’d up/in versus no MI up/in?
- Has the use of manifest injustice reduced recidivism rates in juveniles within the justice system? Is the public safer?

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