

Trends & Policies in Criminal Justice

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Juvenile Justice Agencies' Response to COVID-19

Introduction

- Guidance and education by juvenile justice agencies are essential for improving delinquent juveniles' behavior and preventing repeated crimes. Most programs for such purposes have been provided face-to-face.
- Since the government began enforcing social distancing measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, face-to-face guidance, education, and programs provided by juvenile justice agencies have been changed to non-face-to-face, partially operated, or suspended services.
- At present, juvenile correctional facilities do not allow face-to-face family visits except in limited cases. External programs, such as family retreats and community service, as well as religious events, have been completely canceled or postponed. In the case of probation offices, pre-decision investigations have been changed from face-to-face to non-face-to-face, and the orders to attend an educational program or to do community service have been limitedly executed.
- Juvenile justice agencies must seek more effective measures to respond to future global medical crises, such as the current COVID-19.
- This study aimed to grasp the status of countermeasures taken by juvenile justice agencies (probation offices and juvenile correctional facilities) against COVID-19 and the impact of such countermeasures on the personnel of juvenile justice agencies, juveniles, and their guardians to seek effective measures to respond to a crisis brought about by an infectious disease like COVID-19 in the future.

Keywords

※ COVID-19, juvenile justice agencies, juvenile correctional facilities, probation offices, diagnostic centers

Research Methods

Literature Review

- Changes in the government's policy on disinfection in response to the spread of COVID-19 based on press releases of the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters
- The status of countermeasures of foreign juvenile justice agencies

Data Analysis

- The operating guidelines issued by the Minister of Justice to juvenile justice agencies for responding to COVID-19
- Internal statistical data regarding juvenile correctional facilities and juvenile probation (for the period between January 2019 and September 2020)

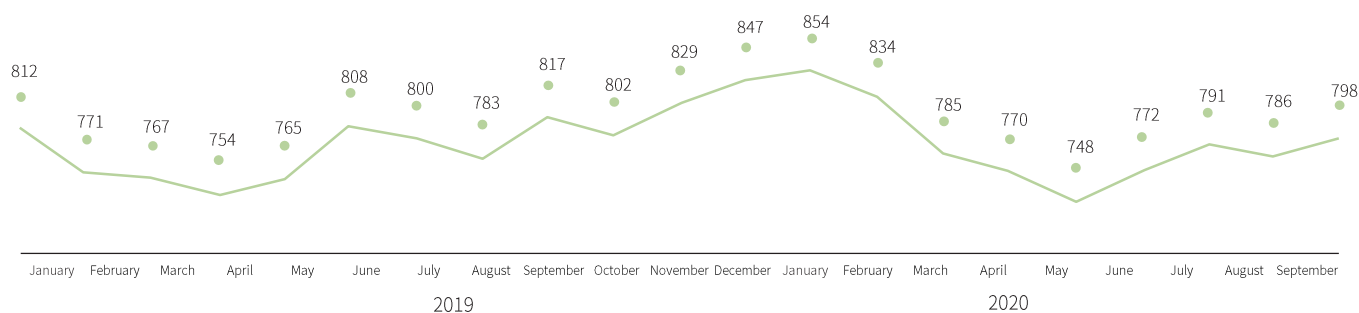
In-depth Interviews

- Examination of the impact of COVID-19 on the operation of juvenile justice agencies and the awareness and attitude of juveniles and their guardians through in-depth interviews with personnel of juvenile justice agencies (juvenile correctional facilities and probation offices), inmates of juvenile correctional facilities, juveniles on probation, and guardians of such juveniles

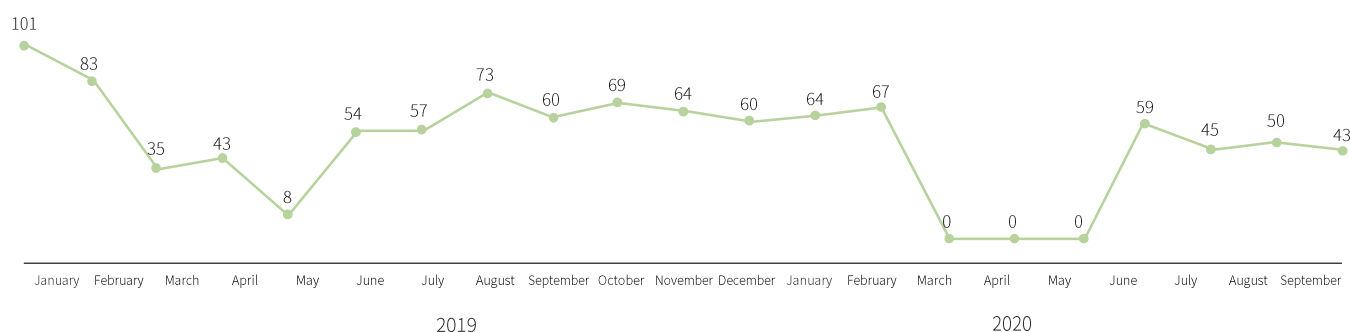
Highlights of the Study

Status of Countermeasures of Juvenile Correctional Facilities against COVID-19

- In the case of juveniles under the disposition rendered pursuant to Article 32(1)9 or 10 of the Juvenile Act, there is no significant change in the total number of inmates, the number of discharged inmates, and the number of temporarily discharged inmates before and after the outbreak of COVID-19. However, the number of new inmates has slightly decreased since the outbreak of COVID-19.



[Figure 1] Number of inmates at juvenile correctional facilities (the subparagraph 9 or 10 disposition)



[Figure 2] Number of inmates under the subparagraph 8 disposition

- In the case of juveniles under the disposition rendered pursuant to Article 32(1)8 of the Juvenile Act, there was no new inmate from March till May 2020, during which COVID-19 spread. However, the number of inmates under the same disposition has decreased since then, as compared to pre-outbreak in 2019.
- As a consequence of the decrease in the number of juveniles absent from ordinary school without leave because of COVID-19, the number of juveniles expelled from school has decreased. Conversely, the number of juveniles who attended the regular education program in juvenile correctional facilities has increased, while the number of juveniles who attended the vocational training program has decreased.
- Although a similar character program from the last year was implemented, external specialists have been prohibited from entering juvenile correctional facilities. Thus, the education program has been provided by staff members of each juvenile correctional facility or replaced with other programs.
- Most programs in which contacts with the outside and outsiders used to be frequent, such as programs for guardians, religious events, and open treatment, have been canceled or significantly reduced. Visits with inmates have been changed to closed visits or completely prohibited. Telephone calls have increased doubled compared to before the outbreak of COVID-19.

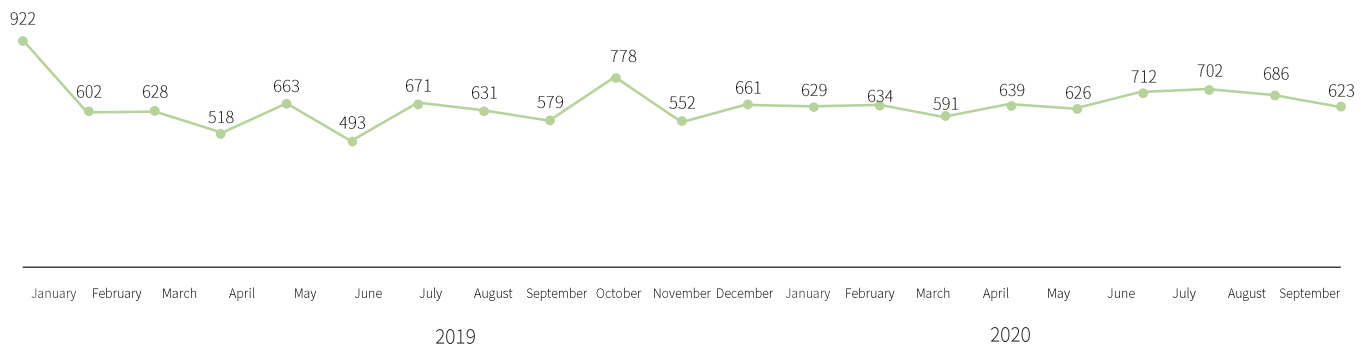
<Table 1> Number of inmates who participated in open treatment and skills competitions

	Number of inmates who participated in open treatment	Number of inmates who participated in service activities	Number of inmates who participated in skills competitions
January 2019	147	53	0
February	209	81	0
March	233	67	0
April	252	105	14
May	189	79	12
June	366	100	21
July	219	95	1
August	210	95	0
September	136	64	7
October	248	116	31
November	304	107	44
December	98	45	3
January 2020	75	31	0
February	1	0	0
March	0	0	0
April	0	0	0
May	0	0	0
June	0	0	26
July	24	24	27
August	79	79	0
September	0	0	10

*The statistics of open treatment include service activities, field trips, outings, weekend home learning, etc.; the statistics of skills competitions were calculated separately.

Status of Countermeasures of Juvenile Probation Offices against COVID-19

- Although there is no significant change in the number of pre-decision investigations filed after the outbreak of COVID-19, compared to before the outbreak of COVID-19, investigations conducted face-to-face in the past are now conducted non-face-to-face.



[Figure 3] Number of juveniles filed for pre-decision investigation

- The number of guidance and supervision cases has decreased, as compared to before the outbreak of COVID-19, and the ratio of face-to-face guidance and supervision cases has considerably decreased.

<Table 2> Status of cases of guidance and supervision

	All cases of guidance and supervision	Face-to-face guidance and supervision	Non-face-to-face guidance and supervision	Face-to-face guidance and supervision Ratio (%)
January 2019	1973	1380	593	70
February	1774	1192	582	67
March	1825	1208	617	66
April	1918	1255	663	65
May	1910	1234	676	65
June	1740	1154	586	66
July	1832	1172	660	64
August	1989	1262	727	63
September	1899	1242	657	65
October	1914	1260	654	66
November	1817	1203	614	66
December	1795	1213	582	68
January 2020	1836	1158	678	63
February	1746	858	888	49
March	1364	61	1303	4
April	1437	211	1226	15
May	1643	874	769	53
June	1718	982	736	57
July	1727	969	758	56
August	1719	932	787	54
September	1579	708	871	45

- In total, the number of dispositions of ordering the attendance of an educational program and community service has increased in general since the outbreak of COVID-19, but the number

of juveniles who performed the orders to attend an educational program and do community service and the ratio of execution have rapidly decreased.

<Table 3> Status of order executions to attend educational programs and do community service

	Order of education			Order of community service		
	Number of juveniles filed for performance	Number of juveniles who performed	Ratio of execution	Number of juveniles filed for performance	Number of juveniles who performed	Ratio of execution
Jan-19	434	379	87.3	647	578	89.3
February	231	203	87.9	378	326	86.2
March	298	266	89.3	409	356	87
April	267	229	85.8	362	315	87
May	324	284	87.7	380	335	88.2
June	284	253	89.1	384	338	88
July	297	263	88.6	370	336	90.8
August	315	266	84.4	457	401	87.7
September	399	358	89.7	409	367	89.7
October	448	405	90.4	431	395	91.6
November	416	359	86.3	400	365	91.3
December	445	380	85.4	432	373	86.3
Jan-20	467	285	61	496	390	78.6
February	339	194	57.2	383	236	61.6
March	217	112	51.6	216	86	39.8
April	453	223	49.2	405	166	41
May	373	142	38.1	419	136	32.5
June	526	164	31.2	475	111	23.4
July	514	110	21.4	416	70	16.8
August	387	21	5.4	297	21	7.1
September	461	7	1.5	349	8	2.3

- The number of arrest has decreased since the outbreak of COVID-19,

whereas the number of cases of release after arrest has increased.

<Table 4> Status of arrest and release after arrest

	Number of arrest	Number of cases of release after arrest	Ratio of release after arrest
January 2019	55	0	0
February	47	0	0
March	66	0	0
April	72	7	9.7
May	67	2	3.0
June	72	1	1.4
July	80	15	18.8
August	60	2	3.3
September	47	0	0.0
October	51	0	0.0
November	48	2	4.2
December	40	1	2.5
January 2020	48	2	4.2
February	54	6	11.1
March	38	17	44.7
April	50	9	18.0
May	80	16	20.0
June	57	1	1.8
July	50	0	0.0
August	33	1	3.0
September	39	3	7.7

In-Depth Interviews with Personnel of Juvenile Justice Agencies, Juveniles, and Guardians

- The following problems were identified through interviewing juvenile correctional facility's personnel: limitations in conducting educational programs, following COVID-19 guidelines; measures to be taken in cases where a juvenile was entrusted to a juvenile correctional facility straight from society; lack of disinfection facilities, isolation space, appropriate protection for personnel; demoralization of inmates; and ambiguous response toward unavoidable external activities, such as the Scholastic Ability Test or family events
- Through interviews with inmates of juvenile correctional facilities and their guardians, it was found that they were generally satisfied with the thorough countermeasures taken by juvenile correctional facilities against COVID-19. However, the inmates felt bored, got tired of the tediousness, and missed the activities they used to engage in. In addition, both juveniles and their guardians agreed that the prohibition against eating and staying together for longer periods of time during visits was the most unbearable and difficult.
- Juvenile probation officers identified problems in terms of increased stress caused by the difficulty in executing orders, the prevention of space rearrangement, and the necessity of guidelines, manual preparedness with regard to regional situations, the suspension of execution, etc.

- Interviews with juveniles on probation show that phone conversations were convenient and provided a replacement for face-to-face probation yet remained lacking in effectivity. Additionally, the status of execution of orders to attend an educational program or do community service varied from region to region, depending upon the regional tendency of COVID-19. Guardians generally accepted changes in probation service following COVID-19.
- During the interviews with personnel of juvenile diagnostic centers, it was found that the biggest problem they faced was preparing an isolation space. It was difficult to entrust the inmates for a certain period and secure materials for disinfection (including masks and examination kits) because most juveniles entrusted to juvenile diagnostic centers came directly from communities.

Policy Proposals

For Prevention of the Spread of Infectious Diseases

- Secure or rearrange spaces for isolating persons infected with an infectious disease, persons with symptoms, and new inmates and conduct educational and other programs to the minimum extent
- Formulate a scheme to reduce juvenile inmates at correctional facilities and a plan to secure materials for epidemic prevention (including masks, examination kits, and vaccination)
- Develop a detailed manual for responding to infectious diseases and conduct virtual exercises continuously

For Work-related Issues

- Prepare a scheme to reduce the excessive workload of personnel of juvenile justice agencies, to be imposed by adding disinfection work to their existing duties
- Select and develop non-face-to-face educational and other programs as alternatives to existing programs of juvenile justice agencies
- Establish an organized system for evaluating countermeasures taken by juvenile justice agencies in response to COVID-19.

Expected Effects of Policies

- Secure spaces for isolation within facilities, reducing the number of inmates of juvenile correctional facilities, securing materials for disinfection, developing a detailed manual for responding to infectious diseases, and conducting virtual exercises are expected to contribute to preventing the spread of infectious diseases and mass infection.
- This study proposes a scheme to carry out primary services of juvenile justice agencies even in an emergency caused by an infectious disease by reducing the workload excessively imposed upon personnel for epidemic prevention, developing non-face-to-face educational and other programs, and preparing a system for evaluating countermeasures taken to respond to COVID-19.



Change

Human Behaviors
Community Response
Social System