

Researchers find incarcerated juveniles still optimistic about future

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Brae Young, FSU doctoral student in the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Credit: Florida State University

A new study by Florida State University researchers taps into the vastly unexplored area of incarcerated juvenile visitation, and their findings

might not be what most expect.

The research, published in the *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, found that nearly 75 percent of juveniles received at least one visit during their confinement in Florida facilities. The majority of youth were positive about their interactions with visitors and their future. Somewhat surprisingly, the researchers found those who didn't receive visits also had positive perceptions of their future success.

"Kids are generally optimistic, even the not visited ones," said Brae Young, FSU doctoral student and lead author. "The placement facilities in Florida do a great job at focusing on rehabilitation. A number of kids report a strong connection with staff workers. So, there may be this buffering effect. Although they're still in confinement, it's not always this terrible experience."

Researchers used data collected from more than 1,200 youth released from residential facilities in Florida. The state's Department of Juvenile Justice surveyed kids between August 2015 and March 2017.

"There's a growing body of research on adult prison visitation," Young said. "But because there's not a lot of research on juvenile visitations, it was important to us to give a landscape of what visitation looked like."

The survey included questions about the nature of the visits—the quality, frequency and who visited. Data revealed that 82 percent of the visits were by mothers. On average, juveniles rated the quality of their visits a 4.5 on a 5-point scale. Visit quality differed depending on who visited. For example, scores were higher when visits were received from grandmothers compared to guardians and child protective service workers.

Participants also were asked about the length of the visits and the time commitment families made to maintain contact.

On average, juveniles were incarcerated more than 150 miles from home—requiring their families to travel three or more hours to visit. Some families reported [travel times](#) of more than 24 hours, and nearly 90 percent needed overnight accommodations when they visited. Visits ranged from two to three hours.

Researchers also examined the barriers to visitation.

Most often, youth were not visited due to distance from home, transportation problems or [financial issues](#). A tenth of those surveyed reported they refused visits. Some juveniles expressed a desire to spare families the financial and emotional costs associated with confinement, writing survey responses such as, "I told my mother as long as I hear her on the phone, no need for her to waste gas to come see me."

"Some just wanted some form of contact," Young said. "For them, it wasn't necessarily that someone needed to be there, but that they had some sort of support network."

Less than 2 percent reported not receiving a visit because their families wanted to teach the juvenile a lesson through "tough love."

Based on the team's findings, Young said policymakers should continue to find ways to reduce the barriers to visitation. She said possible areas of improvement could be video visitation, reducing juveniles' distance from home or providing shuttle services like those currently being offered in Pennsylvania and New York.

More information: Brae Campion Young et al. Far From Home: An Examination of the Juvenile Visitation Experience and the Barriers to

Getting There, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0306624X18823444](https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X18823444)

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