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### A Project to Promote Juvenile Pretrial Diversion among Justice-Involved Youths in Thailand: An Evaluation

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#### Abstract:

This research aimed to evaluate the Thai Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection (DJOP)'s Project to Promote Juvenile Pretrial Diversion among Justice-Involved Youths in Thailand, specifically in the utilization and application of the project's outputs and any impact it had on areas such as staff training, stakeholders' awareness, operational standards, and shifts in policy. Qualitative data was acquired through documentary research, in-depth interviews with 20 informants, and focus group interviews with 18 youth justice practitioners. The data was validated and analyzed using investigator and data source triangulation. Findings suggested that arrested juveniles acquired several benefits by participating in the DJOP's diversion program. Apart from giving young offenders second chances and preserving the court's resources, advantages of the diversion program included an increase in parents' or guardians' involvement, more opportunities for victim participation and restitution, and a reduction in recidivism. In addition, participating in family and community group conferencing (FCGC), a core activity in the diversion process, decreased conflict among community members, promoted reintegration, and strengthened the sense of responsibility and agency of young offenders and their parents. We identified three key factors for successful diversion and reintegration: parents/caretakers' capability and willingness to supervise their children, a cooperative community, and the youth's readiness and eagerness to abide by rehabilitative plans developed during FCGC. Our study indicated that offender readiness was particularly crucial; most diversion attempts failed due to the juveniles' lack of self-motivation. This research contributed to the ongoing discussion about juvenile diversion and restorative practices by providing the field with contextual findings specific to Thailand, much-needed evidence, and recommendations regarding program integrity and real-world implementation of restorative concepts. Suggestions on future project management and program evaluation were also discussed.

**Keywords:** program evaluation, young offender, juvenile justice, pretrial diversion, Thai youth justice system.

## 泰国参与司法的青少年促进青少年审前分流的项目：评估

### 摘要：

本研究旨在评估泰国少年观察和保护部 (DJOP) 的项目，该项目旨在促进泰国参与司法的青少年的少年审前分流，特别是在项目产出的利用和应用方面以及它对此类领域的任何影响。员工培训、利益相关者的意识、运营标准和政策转变。定性数据是通过文献研究、对 20 名线人的深入访谈以及对 18 名青年司法从业者的焦点小组访谈获得的。使用调查人员和数据源三角测量验证和分析数据。调查结果表明，被捕的青少年通过参与 DJOP 的转移计划获得了多项好处。除了给年轻罪犯第二次机会和保留法院资源外，转移计划的优势还包括增加父母或监护人的参与、更多的受害者参与和赔偿机会，以及减少累犯。此外，参与家庭和社区小组会议 (FCGC) 这一转移过程中的核心活动，减少了社区成员之间的冲突，促进了重新融合，增强了少年犯及其父母的责任感和能动性。我们确定了成功转移和重新融入的三个关键因素：父母/看护人监督孩子的能力和意愿、合作社区，以及青少年愿意和渴望遵守 FCGC 期间制定的康复计划。我们的研究表明，犯罪者的准备状态尤其重要；由于青少年缺乏自我激励，大多数转移尝试都失败了。这项研究通过为该领域提供特定于泰国的背景调查结果、急需的证据以及有关项目完整性和恢复性概念的实际实施的建议，为正在进行的关于青少年转移和恢复性实践的讨论做出了贡献。还讨论了对未来项目管理和项目评估的建议。

**关键词：**项目评估、少年犯、少年司法、审前分流、泰国青年司法系统。

### 1. Introduction

In the Thai juvenile justice system, diversion laws and other alternatives to prosecution have been around for almost seven decades. Section 29 of Youth Justice Procedures Act B.E. 2494 (1951) granted the power to divert young offenders accused of an offense punishable by a maximum of 5 years of imprisonment from traditional prosecution. However, due to the staff's unfamiliarity with the concept and unclear instructions, the juvenile diversion was left practically untouched until the Thai Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection (DJOP), working under the similar Section 63 of the Establishment and Procedure of Juvenile and Family Court B.E. 2534 (1991), noticed the legislation's potential and explored means by which diversionary measures could be implemented within the Thai juvenile justice system (Research and Development Institute, 2018). The DJOP eventually studied New Zealand's Family Group Conferencing (FGC), made it a mandatory procedure for pretrial diversion, and began training its staff and practitioners to facilitate successful FGCs (Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection, 2019). The DJOP is currently working under Section 86 of the new Juvenile and Family Court and Procedures Act of B.E. 2553 (2010), essentially inheriting the same diversionary principles and introducing extra steps to add more clarification regarding the objectives and procedures of pretrial diversion, ensuring transparent and inclusive decision-making. As a result, the pretrial diversion program is now an important part of the Thai youth justice system. However, despite official statistics confirming the program's effectiveness in reducing re-offense rates and the agency's commitment to promoting the program, the overall referral rate was low due to its complex and

labor-intensive nature (Research and Development Institute, 2018).

This article presents findings from a 2021 study commissioned by the DJOP to evaluate one of the agency's projects aiming to address the problem mentioned above. The DJOP is the nation's major youth justice organization overseeing all of the country's juvenile detention centers, including 77 provincial JOPCs serving young offenders awaiting trial and 21 juvenile training centers (JTCs) where juveniles with residential disposition reside. The department is also responsible for all rehabilitative and educational services provided within these facilities (Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection, 2020a). As a result, the department commissioned several studies and research projects to explore new interventions and evaluate ongoing programs and policies to implement promising practices to improve the Thai youth justice system. Among the agency-sponsored projects was the Project to Promote Juvenile Pretrial Diversion among Justice-Involved Youths in Thailand, whose main objective was to promote diversion and minimize custodial measures for young offenders who met Section 86's referral criteria. After the project came to a close, the DJOP saw a need for a follow-up study and appointed the authors to evaluate the project's impact on the agency's main missions and identify challenges or points of concern about juvenile diversion.

#### *1.1. Thai Juvenile Justice System, Diversion, and Restorative Justice*

The principles of the Thai criminal justice system are heavily influenced by the trial and punishment of offenders (Junlakarn et al., 2013). Emphases on arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment put a heavy burden on

justice workers and the court, leading to many problems, including long waiting time for defendants, crowded prisons, and ineffective rehabilitation (Yampracha, 2016). Over-incarceration, especially that of drug-related offenders, also leads to substandard living conditions, disease transmission, and victimization of other inmates (Montasevee, 2017; Sawasdiapanich et al., 2018). Despite its inclination towards rehabilitation and reintegration, Thailand's juvenile justice system faces less prominent but similar challenges. Critics of youth incarceration have been asking whether keeping young offenders isolated from the community during their periods of development is a plausible option despite the majority of the evidence pointing in the opposite direction (Cox, 2011). As a result, youth justice workers and researchers have been exploring ways to make Thai juvenile justice more inclusive and tend to the needs of society and those who come in contact with it. Meanwhile, attempts at keeping correctional policies in compliance with research evidence and international guidelines eventually led to exploring and adopting diversionary measures and their closely related concept of restorative justice (RJ) (Wong et al., 2016).

Diversion and alternatives to formal prosecution and detention play a crucial role in youth justice systems worldwide. Apart from lessening the justice system's burden by diverting less serious cases, diversionary measures provide justice officials with tools to facilitate community correction and rehabilitation, whose effectiveness is strongly supported by evidence (Thongyai, 2020). In addition, detention centers' rehabilitative and educational services are considered counterintuitive. Despite being treated with the best programs available, detained juveniles are deprived of real-world social interactions and life experiences needed for their age-appropriate development (Koyama, 2012). Moreover, most rehabilitative programs have a rather low rate of program integrity, rendering them ineffective in reducing recidivism (Farringer et al., 2021). Therefore, most of the world's justice systems have incorporated mechanisms that allow officials to divert juvenile offenders at different stages throughout their journeys within the justice system. For Thailand, examples of such legislation are Section 73<sup>1</sup> of Thai Penal Code, and Section 90<sup>2</sup> and 132<sup>3</sup> of the Juvenile and Family Court and Procedures Act of B.E. 2553 (2010) (Kanarak et al., 2019). For the DJOP, the diversionary power is granted by Section 86 of the Juvenile and Family Court Act.

Unlike retributive justice, which deals with the

punishment of offenders, RJ shifts the criminal justice system's paradigm toward relationships among community members and damages resulting from lawbreaking (Umbreit & Armour, 2010; Zehr, 2015). According to Zehr (2015), the RJ process encourages participants/stakeholders to ask three questions:

1. Who has been hurt, and how have they been hurt?
2. What are their needs?
3. Who will participate in the restoration and reconciliation and how?

RJ interventions primarily rely on conversations among stakeholders of criminal offenses: the offender, the victim, both parties' families, community members, and representatives from government agencies. The confrontation between victims and offenders, dialogues, and agreements made during restorative conferences or mediating sessions not only motivate the offenders to change their behavior (Livingstone et al., 2013; Sherman et al., 2015) but also tend to the victim's mental, physical, and financial needs (Choi et al., 2012). Family and Community Group Conference, an RJ model that originated in New Zealand and was adopted by the DJOP due to its applicability and practicality among the juvenile population, also involves families and community members in addressing young offenders' behaviors (Children's Commissioner, 2017). Successful conferences and promising rehabilitative results help alleviate the criminal justice system's burden; they also empower the community, strengthen social bonds, and promote restorative culture and attitude.

### ***1.2. The DJOP's Pretrial Diversion Program***

Unlike in New Zealand, where all youths who contact the justice system are automatically eligible for an FGC, diversion opportunities in the Thai youth justice system are more limited. This is because Section 86 grants Directors of JOPCs the discretionary power to divert young offenders on the condition that they meet the following criteria:

1. The offense of which the juvenile is accused must be punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment not exceeding five years, except for offenses committed through negligence or petty offenses;
2. The juvenile has never been sentenced to imprisonment unless the sentence was due to a misdemeanor or confinement instead of a fine;
3. The juvenile must show a sense of remorse before prosecution;
4. After the juvenile's age, past record, behavior, intellect, education and training, health and mental conditions, occupation, socio-economic status, and other reasons related to the offense are taken into consideration, the Directors of the JOPCs believe that the juvenile might reform themselves without the need for criminal prosecution.

When a juvenile accused of a criminal offense is taken into custody, he will be assigned a probation officer as his case manager. The probation officer will conduct a social inquiry interview and prepare a pre-

<sup>1</sup> Section 73 allows police officers to give warnings to young offenders and their parents/guardians without formal prosecution.

<sup>2</sup> Section 90 of the Juvenile and Family Court Act allows the court to divert young offenders accused of committing an offense punishable by a maximum of 20-year imprisonment.

<sup>3</sup> Section 132 is essentially a pre-adjudication diversion and consists of 2 clauses. The first clause allows the court to order conditional releases similar to probation. The second clause grants the court power to issue detention orders to keep young offenders in detention until they are aged 20.

sentence report if needed. The youth's eligibility for diversion will then be considered. Once the young offender meets the referral criteria, their case will be presented to the JOPC's Multidisciplinary Committee and the JOPC's director, who will then give final approval. A qualified facilitator will then start arranging an FCGC by contacting prospective FCGC participants, including the offender, victims if available, and both parties' friends or family members. Invitations may also extend to community members, police representatives, and local criminal prosecutors if the facilitator sees fit (Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection, 2020b).

On the day of the conference, participants take a turn telling their side of the story, starting with the young offender, who will describe the incident in detail. The conference ends with participants creating a rehabilitative plan containing conditions with which the young offender and their family must comply. The conditions may include community service hours, restitution payment, curfews, or simply going back to school without committing any more offense. When the juvenile completes the agreed-upon plan without committing another offense or significant technical violations, the facilitator will notify the local Prosecutor's office to drop the charge (Krunghanjana, 2017). Otherwise, their case will be re-opened, and they will then move through normal juvenile justice proceedings.

### 1.3. The Project

The Project to Promote Juvenile Pretrial Diversion among Justice-Involved Youths in Thailand aimed to raise awareness and promote the use of pretrial diversion through RJ and FCGC among DJOP's staff members and stakeholders in the community. Other objectives included developing tools, manuals, and guidelines to assist front-line workers in referring and facilitating restorative justice conferences for young offenders. The project, which took place from June to December of 2016 and consists of 3 phases, initiated the development and commencement of multiple tools, policies, and initiatives. Among the project's most important achievements were developing and publishing the DJOP's Manual on Pre-Trial Diversion. The DJOP's revised strategies also demonstrated the agency's attempt to promote pretrial diversion by including community corrections, victim protection and reconciliation, and alternatives to detention in their 2 out of 4 Core Strategies (Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection, 2020a). To further encourage referral, the DJOP introduced a new Key Performance Index (KPI) for JOPCs to monitor the ratio of young offenders who pass referral criteria to those who participate in FCGCs. Despite some challenges, the policy was considered successful as the referral rate for pretrial diversion rose significantly compared to the previous period. Meanwhile, the statistics collected from the policy, including the re-

offense rate and characteristics of diverted young offenders, were very insightful and valuable for academic and administrative purposes.

The project's first phase consisted mainly of statistical evaluation regarding the number and success rate of DJOP's pretrial diversion scheme. As mentioned in the previous section, juvenile diversionary laws were present since the Act of 1991, though its procedures were not clarified until the 2010 Act came into effect. Unclear directions and unfamiliarity with the concepts of diversion and RJ among practitioners resulted in fluctuations in referral rates during the years. During the fiscal year 2006-2011, 16,668 young offenders went through DJOP's diversion program. A sharp decline quickly followed; only 3,224 juveniles were diverted during the fiscal year 2010-2016<sup>4</sup>. The 'great decrease' was often attributed to shifting priorities and policies of different DJOP executives, who were required to transfer to a new agency once every few years (Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection, 2019).

Initial evaluation of the project during the second phase revealed quite promising results. During the fiscal year 2016, only 2.03 percent of eligible young offenders proceeded through the diversionary scheme. The percentage rose to 13.03, 33.76, and 35.05 in the fiscal years 2017, 2018, and 2019, respectively. Meanwhile, the number of young offenders who complied with the conditions in their rehabilitative plans reduced, along with the percentage of charges dropped by public prosecutors. In 2016, around 95 percent of juveniles successfully complied with their conditional agreements, and all of them got their charges dropped. On the other hand, during the following year (2017), when the project's impacts were being realized, only 80 percent of referred young offenders completed their agreed-upon terms, and only 97.79 percent of them received non-prosecution orders.

During the third phase, a comprehensive, nationwide evaluation was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the DJOP's work on pretrial diversion and the project's ability to fulfill its objectives. The agency's statistics revealed that from a total of 5,997 young offenders who were given the opportunities to participate in the diversion program, 98.93 percent were able to successfully create a rehabilitative plan and obtain agreements from all stakeholders, including victims and their families. When the plans were presented to public prosecutors, they approved almost all (99.56 percent) of the plans. However, of that number, only 77.84 percent of young offenders successfully complied with the terms in their individual plans, and the public prosecutors issued non-prosecution orders to only 81.62 percent of those who abided by the terms. The data shows that the project impacted the diversion program's referral rate; however,

<sup>4</sup> The overlap was due to the transition from the 1991 Act to the revised 2010 Act.

quantitative data provides us with only one side of the picture. During the agency's evaluation of the 3 phases, it was unclear which factors played a major role in the project's success in boosting the referral rate. Meanwhile, there are still investigations to be made regarding the inverse relationships between the rates of referral and the successful completion of the rehabilitative plan. Still, the number of diverted cases was notably higher than before the project, and the overall recidivism rate fell. A study commissioned by the DJOP to compare the recidivism rates among juveniles who went through three diversionary measures, the DJOP's pretrial diversion, a pretrial alternative under the Juvenile and Family Court's discretion, and the court's pre-adjudication diversion, revealed that only 9.52 percent of juveniles who went through the DJOP's diversion program recidivated three years after their respective non-prosecution order was given. After the project's three phases came to a close, the DJOP wanted to conduct an overall evaluation to determine the extent to which the results and knowledge acquired during the project were utilized and their impact on the agency's mission.

## 2. Methodology

This study used multiple qualitative data collection methods to capture the multifaceted nature of the project's outcomes and their implementation, especially the perspectives of practitioners and any challenges they might have faced during the project. The methods include documentary research and in-depth and focus group interviews. The data was then validated using investigator and data source triangulation to ensure accuracy and develop a more comprehensive picture of the project's impact. Official documents, policy papers, project reports, and statistics published during each project phase were collected and analyzed. After a few meetings and consultations with the DJOP's executives, experts, project coordinators, and staff involved in the original project, an evaluative framework for the project and a data collection plan were developed. After the approval of subjects of study and sites, interviewees were separately contacted to make arrangements for interview sessions.

For in-depth interviews, we identified key stakeholders who were either directly involved with the project's operation or responsible for implementing and monitoring policies and guidelines created during the project. The group consisted of Directors of JOPCs, representatives from DJOP's Litigation and Investigation Development Division, ex-offenders, and their parents or guardians. Twenty interviewees were selected using multistage sampling; we initially set a representative quota from each type of interview subjects and purposively selected the samples by considering their availability and relevance to our research questions.

For focus groups, 6 JOPCs are selected through multistage sampling. With recommendations from the department, we picked one site that was in the project's

pilot study, another within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region that was not in the pilot phase, and one site from each of Thailand's four regions: the North, the South, the Northeast, and the East. For each site, three interviewees were selected. Each group comprised the JOPC's Head Probation Officer, one of the JOPC's probation officers, and an FCGC facilitator. A 16-person focus group interview was conducted remotely via Zoom due to limitations from government-issued COVID-19 prevention measures. The interviews were recorded on Zoom's cloud.

To aid the data collection and ensure consistency among investigators, we created three sets of tools: a set of guiding questions for an in-depth interview with DJOP's officers, executives, practitioners, and staff who implemented the project's findings; a set of questions for ex-offenders, parents, and guardians; and a guideline for a focus group interview. Research design and tools had been officially approved by DJOP's Research and Development Committee and reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of Mahachulalongkorn University for their adherence to proper research ethics.

## 3. Findings

The data from interviews and documentary review provided us with findings in four different areas, namely in the steps and processes of the project, the utilization of the project's outputs, the impact of the project on the department, and challenges or obstacles against the project's impacts and outcomes. Regarding the project's processes and protocols, the study suggested that the list of FCGCs participants designated by the DJOP was appropriate and contributed to successful conferences and completion of each young offender's individual rehabilitation plan. The list of viable FCGC participants included young offenders and their victims; both parties' parents, guardians, or supporters; facilitators; social workers or clinical psychologists; probation officers/case managers; representatives from the local police force; representatives from the local Prosecutor's Offices; and community leaders or representatives from related agencies/organizations.

Regarding utilizing the project's results and outputs, which include a handbook on juvenile pretrial diversion, subject-related media including videos and prints, and collaboration among related agencies, we found that the project's products were adopted and used widely and effectively. The handbook provided clear and concise objectives, history, instructions, criteria, and tips on diversion procedures to practitioners, who, through multiple interviews, enthusiastically expressed their satisfaction with the handbook. Some staff assured that the handbook contributed to their better understanding of the concept and increased their young offender assessment and referral capabilities. Conversations with DJOP's officers also revealed that the project performed well in raising awareness among practitioners; when asked, most respondents could tell key objectives of diversion, which are to conserve the

court's resources while giving second chances to young offenders. The diversion process, especially the FCGC, also increased parents' or caregivers' involvement and sense of responsibility. For victims, it was apparent that after the completion of conferences and individual rehabilitative plans, the victims usually get compensations, apologies, or any other requests deemed appropriate by the participants of the conferences. The involvement of young offenders' and victims' communities also made them acknowledge the youth's intention to reform, resulting in less conflict and smoother reintegration.

The project also has a far-reaching impact on the agency as a whole. As reflected in official statistics, more young offenders were referred to the department's diversion program following the completion of the project's phases. The recidivism rate of this particular cohort was significantly lower compared to other types of intervention. This undoubtedly improved the DJOP's image in the eyes of the public, reassuring the agency's capability to transform delinquent youths and eventually led to several collaborations among related agencies with similar objectives. Public recognition also boosted staff morale; many interviewees showed clear signs of joy during recollections of their success stories, taking pride in their services to young offenders, victims, and the community. One of DJOP Headquarters' members of staff even pointed out that the diversion program, with FCGC at its core, has the potential to thwart conflicts, improve harmony among community members, and eventually transform the Thai youth justice system. Based on the project's findings, one of the department's efforts to keep this favorable momentum included adopting diversion-related tasks as its KPI to ensure that its practitioners properly and enthusiastically refer deserving young offenders to the pretrial measure.

Despite promising results, our study revealed certain challenges in optimal utilization of the project's findings and outputs. The rise in case number proves to be a heavy burden on JOPCs' resources, especially with the time-intensive and complex nature of FCGC. Facilitators, usually one officer per JOPC, need to contact multiple individuals to ensure that all participants can attend the conference on a designated date. A shift towards online conferences, the major aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, might make meetings more convenient; however, several practitioners expressed their concerns about the effectiveness and reliability of virtual encounters. In FCGC, face-to-face interactions were already proven to have significant emotional and transformative effects on young offenders and victims. Despite these challenges, our informants were still confident about the diversion program, pointing out that giving young offenders opportunities to reform is always worthwhile.

#### 4. Discussion

The evaluation of DJOP's project, conducted using

qualitative data from documents, focus groups, and in-depth interviews, provided us with valuable insight, particularly into utilizing the project's outputs and their impacts on the DJOP. Findings, tools, and procedures developed under the project were properly utilized and fulfilled the project's objectives. The evidence can be observed from coherence in work procedures, practitioners, the projects' target groups, benefits, findings, and challenges, along with policy recommendations and development guidelines. Our findings also suggested that the project's outputs and impact can be extended and utilized as a springboard to encourage community involvement in the reintegration, rehabilitation, and development of juveniles in conflict with the law. Our discovery was consistent with Bertrand et al.'s (2009) definition of program or project evaluation that it refers to the assessment using the project's premises, such as its scope of work, basic procedures, and monitoring, along with its activities to determine the project's effectiveness, benefits, and guidelines for improvement. Rutgers and IPPF (2013) also argue that research is a crucial part of any project's monitoring and evaluation due to its ability to shed light on factors contributing to the project's success or failure.

In addition to the benefits of adhering to research principles to ensure the project's success and effectiveness, Sriarunsawang and Chua-Hom (2015) also pointed out that project management is another key to the best project outcomes. According to Kaejornnanda (2008), project management is a process in which the project's goal-oriented activities are set along with monitoring methods to ensure steady progress, adherence to the plan, and proper allocation of monetary and human resources. With this in mind, project evaluators can assess three aspects of a project: its efficiency, effectiveness, and impact (Sriarunsawang & Chua-Hom, 2015).

Regarding the evaluation of the DJOP's project, the findings suggested that it was conducted using proper research ethics and guidelines, and its findings and outputs created the desired impacts listed within the project's objectives. As a result, the community has received numerous benefits from DJOP's work. After participating in the agency's diversionary measures, young offenders received the second chances they deserved and stopped reoffending. The years after the project completion also showed an increase in diversion referrals and a fall in recidivism among diverted juveniles. This result was well-received by the public and, apart from providing local communities with similar guidelines on conflict resolution, had led to collaborations with several related agencies from the public and private sectors. Positive outcomes also extended to the department's staff; officers who worked closely with diverted juveniles reported being more confident and happier about their work. Results from this follow-up study were consistent with Bertrand et al.'s (2009) definition of a follow-up study, which stated

that follow-ups or evaluation is a basic management tool to ensure that any outcomes or impacts observed truly resulted from the project's activities. Project evaluation is also a key to determining the project's fulfillment of its initial objectives and efficient use of its resources, with the ultimate goal of improving its overall integrity and any subsequent projects of similar nature. Our findings also conformed to Klaisuban's (2018) study on the development of educational supporting networks for Southern youths, which argues that four factors lead to a project's impacts: an experienced researcher who regularly exchanges knowledge and best practices with stakeholders, an executive who values and encourages self-development of staff, a motivated front-line practitioner, and a supportive collaborative network with private organizations. A study on the successful execution of the LLEN study proposed the fifth factor: effective management within the Thailand Research Fund (TRF), specifically in the establishment of a steering committee and an effective knowledge management system. The TRF is a government agency in charge of financial support to Thai researchers.

## 5. Conclusion

Diversion and RJ are among the most studied topics in juvenile justice, with numerous program evaluations using various methodologies. This study adds to the expanding body of literature by providing research findings in the Thai context. In Thailand, despite diversion and RJ's long legal history and conceptual understanding, their application and implementation in youth justice were considerably more recent. The DJOP has noticed fluctuations in the referral and recidivism rates of young offenders who went through their pretrial diversion program and has been allocating a significant number of resources for it through multiple projects during the past few years. Our study was among the first government-sponsored evaluations that attempted to measure the impacts and outcomes of the pretrial diversion projects using project management frameworks.

Through the data collection and analyses, we concluded that the DJOP's Project to Promote Juvenile Pretrial Diversion among Justice-Involved Youths in Thailand was properly conducted. Utilizing the project's findings and outcomes provided the community and the department with multiple benefits as intended. However, despite successful implementation and positive impacts, further steps can be taken to improve the procedure's integrity, effectiveness, and swiftness, from referral until the young offender completes their customized conditional rehabilitative plan.

Regarding project management, steps can be taken to ensure proper knowledge management so that both positive and negative insights learned during different phases of the project can be transferred to future activities. In addition, involvement from different parties should be encouraged, especially from the agency's clients and target population, including young

offenders and their parents or guardians.

For the DJOP's pretrial diversion program, staff training and knowledge sharing are among the most important means to ensure program integrity and effectiveness. Front-line practitioners, especially facilitators, should receive regular training and be equipped with skills and knowledge that are up-to-date and based on evidence. Apart from proper procedures and theoretical knowledge about FCGC and restorative justice, facilitators should also be trained in conflict resolution and persuasion techniques, which are crucial, especially in encounters like FCGCs. In addition, due to the diverse nature of each community's culture and attitude on conflicts and wrongdoing, constant exchange of knowledge and best practices among staff and across jurisdictions should be able to provide facilitators and practitioners with contextual knowledge necessary for successful conferences. Community outreach projects and stakeholder information sessions should also be emphasized; since FCGC and RJ require high understanding and cooperation from communities, it is in local JOPCs' interests to provide stakeholders and community members with relevant information regarding the pretrial diversion opportunity. The spread of COVID-19 has also introduced new challenges, especially for FCGC relying on interactions among participants as agents of behavioral changes. For example, practitioners have been more reluctant to refer eligible cases due to health concerns, and facilitators have expressed worries about using remote conference technologies in place of face-to-face meetings. Therefore, the DJOP has to explore alternatives and create COVID-relevant guidelines for its pretrial diversion program so that the agency can keep providing young offenders with chances to reform.

## 6. Limitations and Further Studies

Major challenges of the present study include time; the project itself was completed almost five years ago, making the identification of stakeholders for data collection and recollection of events for participants significantly harder. Another limitation is the study design: the data gathered in this study are narrative and descriptive. Therefore, despite being able to make qualitative implications of the project's impacts and outcomes, study results regarding the proper budget allocation and its financial value are still lacking. Further studies might aim to complete the picture by utilizing quantitative research designs. Regarding improving the agency's project management and evaluation, similar frameworks can be applied to more recent projects in a timelier manner to establish a cause-and-effect relationship and reflect actual project impact and outcomes.

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## Authors' Contributions

Pornpen Traiphong is the lead researcher responsible for developing the thematic framework, conducting data analysis, writing reports, and general management of the project. Amphorn Sriprasertsuk is responsible for the literature review, and Yutthapong Leelakitpaisarn - for conducting focus group and in-depth interviews.

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