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Forensic mental health treatment in juvenile justice secure care facilities for juvenile fire setters and bomb makers: Clinical and forensic public safety recommendations

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Juvenile fire setting or “juvenile arson” has been identified as the fastest growing fire public safety threat in the United States today. It is responsible for more than 50% of arson arrests which are juveniles. These individuals are responsible for 80,000 structure fires, including 300 deaths and 1.2 billion dollars in property damage. Responding to the needs of juvenile offenders with co-occurring psychological issues constitute a legitimate public safety decision making concern for correctional administrators and mental health providers. Youth arrested for arson and other fire-related crimes are often remanded into the juvenile justice system (i.e., through juvenile court). A prudent public safety course of action involves finding ways to deal with the myriad of challenges posed by Juvenile Fire Setters and Bomb makers (JFSB). These efforts warrant relying upon both empirically based findings that provide guidance towards developing a best-practice model. Forensic mental health providers can play a key role in improving the care of youth and their families while they are in these secure facilities. As an intervention philosophy, therapeutic jurisprudence may be of great assistance. These intervention efforts are largely implemented through the partnerships between juvenile justice care facilities and forensic mental health providers. The primary goal is to have a reasonable public safety impact that assists both the youth and the community. This presentation examines clinical forensic issues associated with delivering JFSB services in secure facilities. Some attention is devoted to exploring the need for a strong interdisciplinary relationship (e.g., fire service, forensic mental health providers, and juvenile justice). Clinical and forensic recommendations that serve as treatment guidelines for incarcerated youth are also discussed.

Biography

Ronn Johnson is licensed and board certified clinical psychologist with extensive experience in academic and clinical settings. He is a Diplomate of the American Board of Professional Psychology. He has served as a staff psychologist in community mental health clinics, hospitals, schools and university counseling centers. The University of Iowa, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Central Oklahoma, and San Diego State University are among the sites of his previous academic appointments. His forensic, scholarship, and teaching interests include: ethical-legal issues, police psychology, women death penalty, and contra-terrorism.

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