

COOK COUNTY  
COMMUNITY SURVEY

# Cook County Community Survey: Gender and Restorative Justice



Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives

Student Researcher: Madeline Grace  
Faculty Mentor: Dr. David Doherty

## Abstract

This presentation explores the connections between gender and public opinion on restorative justice practices. In particular, it looks at how opinions about restorative justice practices may vary based on the gender of the respondent and the gender of the perpetrator. During the Fall 2023 semester, I worked with my advisor to craft questions on these issues for the CCCS, which was fielded this January. Through this experience, I was able to deepen my knowledge of a variety of factors that may influence broader opinions about criminal justice issues.

## Introduction

Restorative justice can be defined as an alternative to more punitive criminal justice measures, and often includes mediation and accepting responsibility for harm done. Starting in 2017, Cook County began to implement Restorative Justice Community Courts. Currently, there are three of these courts in the county, in the neighborhoods of North Lawndale, Avondale, and Englewood. In order for a person to be eligible for the court, they must be between the ages of 18 and 26, have been charged with a nonviolent offense, have a nonviolent criminal history, and be a member of a community with one of these courts (Cook County Court). Through the Cook County Community Survey, we investigate factors influencing support for restorative justice practices. In particular, we are exploring how gender influences support for restorative justice.

## Methods

The Cook County Community Survey (CCCS) is a survey created by Loyola students and faculty that is fielded annually each winter. Through data collected from the CCCS, we analyze responses from about 2,500 Cook County residents.

The survey provides a description of Restorative Justice Community Courts:

"Some communities in Cook County use Restorative Justice Community Courts as an alternative to traditional criminal courts for young people charged with non-violent crimes.

These Courts bring together the person charged, the person harmed, and relevant community members to write and agree upon a document that describes what the person charged with the crime must do to repair the harm from the crime. It may require the person to do things like write a letter of apology, complete community service, or set educational or employment goals.

If the person accused of the crime fulfills the requirements of the agreement, the case is dismissed. If they do not, they are tried in a traditional court."

The survey then provides respondents with a scenario to respond to:

"Imagine that a [18/21/26] year-old [man/woman] is arrested for [stealing three smartphones (valued at a total of \$1,500) from a local store/ illegally carrying a loaded gun/possession of heroin/spray-painting graffiti on the outside of several local businesses, causing \$1,000 worth of damage]. [He/She] does not have a prior criminal record.

Please tell us whether you think this case should be handled by traditional criminal courts or a Restorative Justice Community Court."

The age of the defendant listed on the survey varied, being either 18, 21, or 26 years old. The survey then described if the defendant was a man or a woman. Finally, the survey listed the type of crime. The possible variation of type of crime included a crime involving an illegal gun, heroin, graffiti, or stealing phones.

The respondents answered on an opinion scale ranging from "Definitely should be handled by traditional courts (1)" to "Definitely should be handled by a Restorative Justice Community Court (4)."

## Results

As seen in Figure 1, across all of the situations, the overall distribution of support for Restorative Justice Community Courts is fairly divided. The most frequent response was that the defendant's case "Probably should be handled by a Restorative Justice Community Court." Because the percentage of responses in the middle of the scale were somewhat higher than the responses at both ends of the scale, we can infer that the majority of respondents do not have strong opinions about restorative justice in the cases we presented them with.

Figure 2 looks at how the gender, race, and other demographic information about the respondent are associated with support for restorative justice. The gender of the respondent had an influence on support for restorative justice, as female respondents were around 0.22 points more supportive of these practices on the 1-4 point outcome measure, compared to male respondents. Additionally, the race of the respondent was associated with some variation in opinion about restorative justice. For Hispanic respondents and Asian respondents, race did not have a statistically significant impact on support. On the other hand, for Black respondents, race did have a statistically significant impact on support. Black respondents had the highest level of support and were around 0.22 points more likely to support restorative justice practices, compared to White respondents. Further, looking at other demographic information, neither age nor family income had a statistically significant impact on support. Lastly, an increase in the respondent's level of education was associated with a 0.22-point increase in support for restorative justice.

Figure 3 looks at how the randomly assigned gender, age, and crime of the defendant in the provided scenario affect support for restorative justice. First, there was not a statistically significant impact between the gender of the defendant and support for restorative justice. Additionally, the age of the defendant was not statistically significant. Finally, the type of crime had the largest impact on support for restorative justice. Respondents were the least likely to support using restorative justice practices when the defendant was charged with illegally carrying a loaded gun. There was not a statistically significant difference in support between when the crime involved an illegal gun and when the crime involved stealing phones. Support for restorative justice practices increased by about 0.19 points when the defendant was charged with heroin possession, compared to defendants charged with illegally carrying a loaded gun. Lastly, crimes involving graffiti were associated with the highest amount of support for restorative justice practices. Respondents were about 0.42 points more supportive of restorative justice practices when the defendant in the provided scenario was charged with spray painting graffiti, compared to defendants with a gun-related charge.

Figure 1.

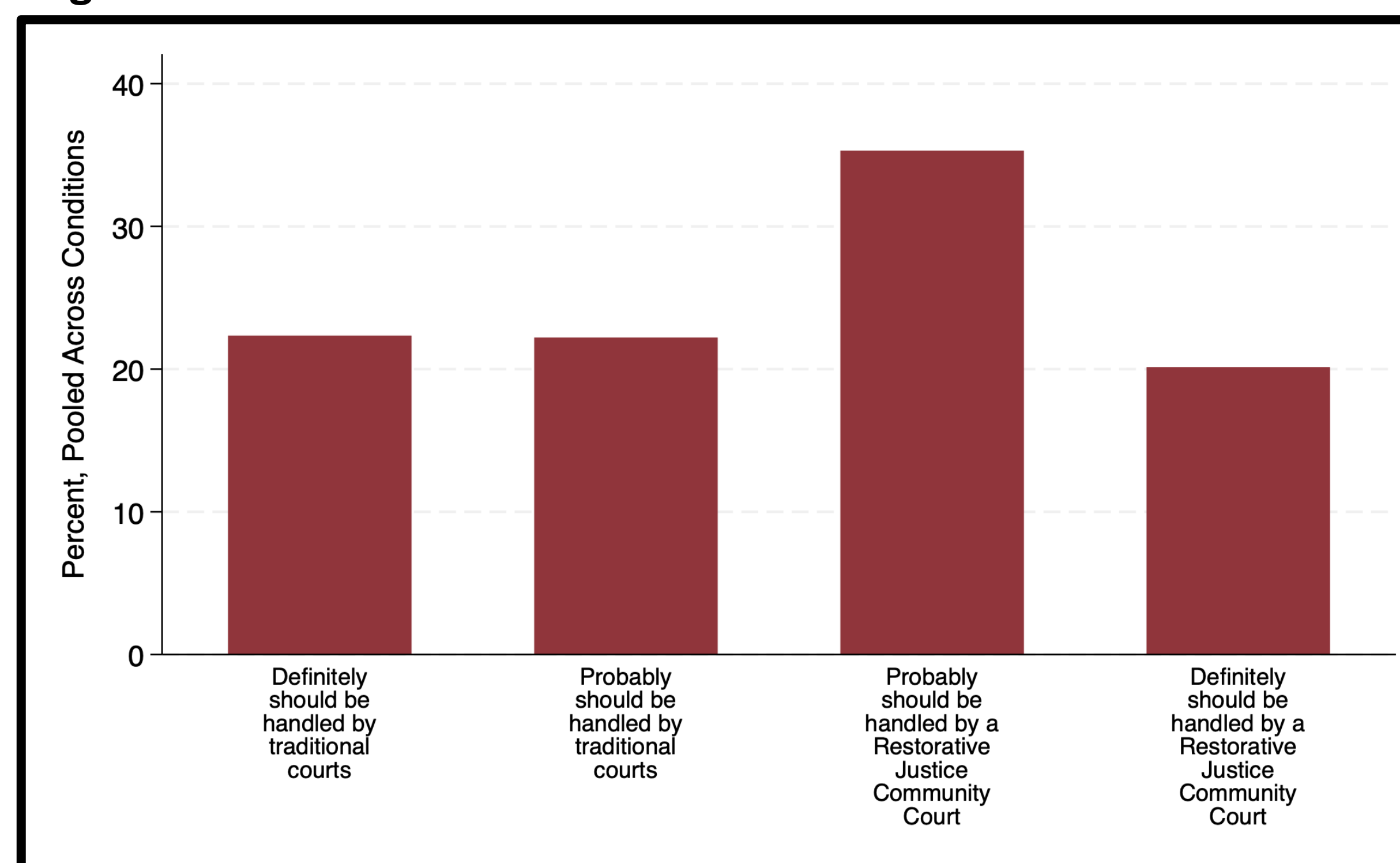


Figure 2.

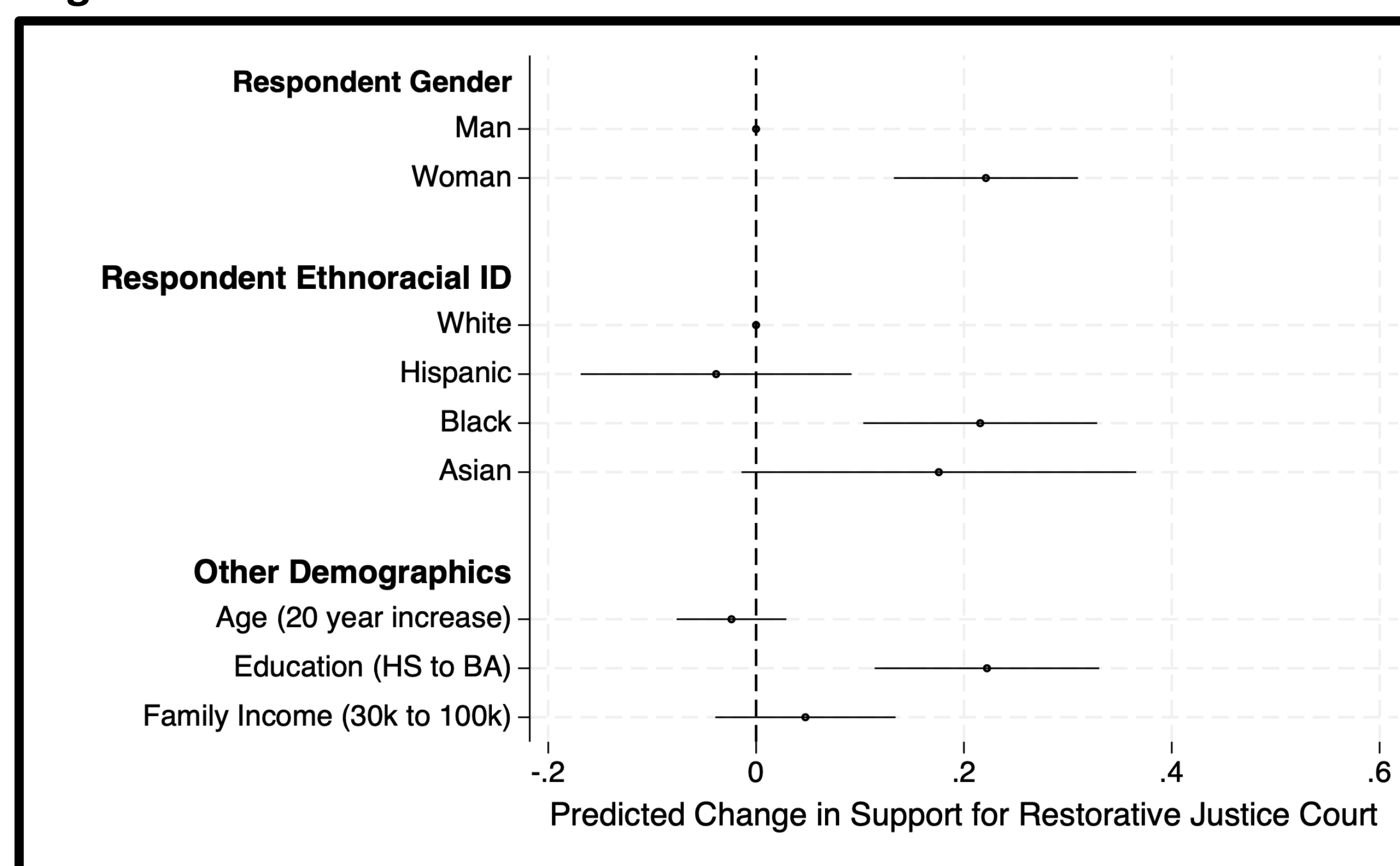
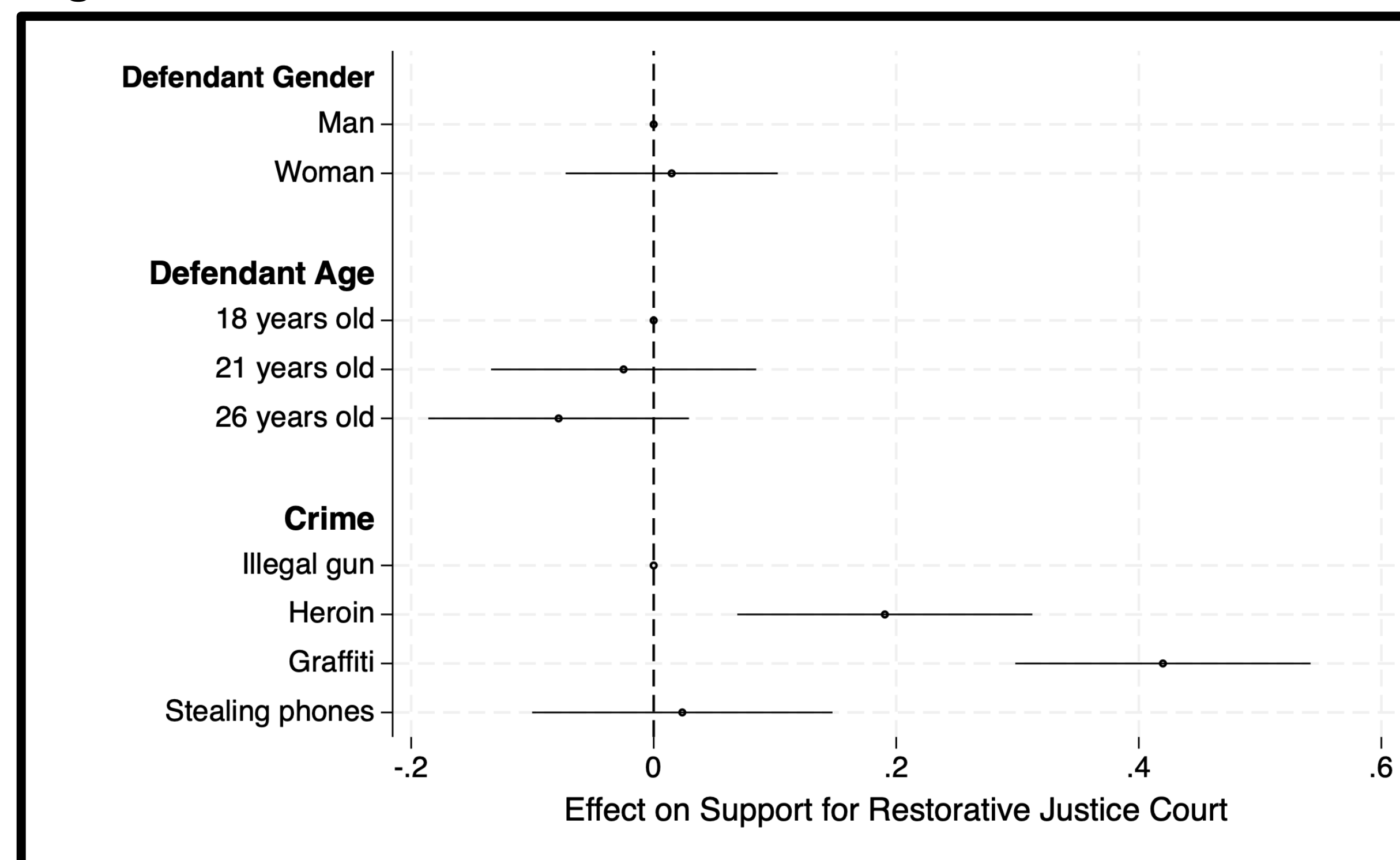


Figure 3.



## Conclusion and Future Work

Interestingly, the most significant impact on opinions about restorative justice was associated with variation of the type of crime provided in the scenario. Generally, respondents were more supportive of using restorative justice practices in response to crimes that could be perceived as having less possibility of a negative effect on others.

Further, the gender of the respondent had a more significant impact than the gender of the defendant. The gender of the defendant did not affect support for restorative justice. On the other hand, women were more supportive of using restorative justice practices than men.

This gender-based variation in opinion provides a framework for future work involving gender and public opinion. Additional research within the Cook County Community Survey will likely include looking at further connections between gender and opinions regarding criminal justice practices, particularly programs that exist within Cook County.

### Reference:

Restorative Justice Community Courts. (n.d.). Circuit Court of Cook County. <https://www.cookcountycourt.org/ABOUT-THE-COURT/Restorative-Justice-Community-Courts>