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Evaluating How Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration's Intensive Parole Program Affects Recidivism

In 1997, the Washington State Legislature determined that the system for transitioning the highest-risk youth from state institutions to parole did not provide adequate rehabilitation and public safety.¹ The Legislature funded intensive parole for up to 25 percent of the highest-risk youth committed to the state's Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA).² JRA's intensive supervision program was designed to follow the intensive parole model developed by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).³

JRA contracted with the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to determine whether this strategy reduces recidivism. In addition, the Institute was asked to analyze intensive parole's costs and benefits to taxpayers and crime victims.

What Is Intensive Parole? JRA's intensive parole employs a case management system with low caseloads to facilitate the transition of high-risk delinquents from secure confinement to community supervision. Case management starts with a residential component when the juvenile first enters a JRA institution and continues through confinement. The community supervision component starts with the transition from a JRA institution and extends through the youth's time on parole. This model is based on the work of David Altschuler and Troy Armstrong⁴ and was adopted in 1994 by OJJDP as a "promising strategy." The following program elements are specified in the model:

- ✓ Information management and program evaluation;
- ✓ Assessment and selection criteria;
- ✓ Individual case planning;
- ✓ A mixture of intensive surveillance and services;
- ✓ A balance of incentives and graduated consequences;
- ✓ Service brokerage with community resources and linkage with social networks; and
- ✓ Transition services.

Each intensive parole counselor works with 12 paroled youth and 16 institutionalized youth. For regular parole, each counselor works with 20 youth.

¹ RCW 13.40.212.

² RCW 13.40.210.

³ David Altschuler and Troy Armstrong, *Intensive Aftercare for High-Risk Juveniles: A Community Care Model* (Washington D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, September 1994).

⁴ David M. Altschuler and Troy L. Armstrong, "Intensive Aftercare for the High-Risk Juvenile Parolee: Issues and Approaches in Reintegration and Community Supervision" in *Intensive Interventions with High-Risk Youths: Promising Approaches in Juvenile Probation and Parole*, ed. Troy Armstrong (Monsey, New York: Criminal Justice Press, 1991).

Previous Research Findings: At the time the OJJDP model was being implemented in Washington State, a study to test the model's effectiveness at three sites, Colorado, Nevada, and Virginia, was underway. The findings from this research are awaiting publication pending review by the OJJDP. Correspondence with the report's author revealed that intensive parole was not found to reduce recidivism at any of the three sites when compared with regular parole.⁵

Since passage of the 1997 legislation for intensive parole, the Institute has published a review of national crime reduction studies.⁶ Based on the seven intensive probation and seven intensive parole studies in the review, we found that neither version of intensive supervision produces a statistically significant reduction in recidivism. We have also conducted two evaluations of Washington State supervision programs for youth and found that lower community supervision caseloads do not affect recidivism rates.⁷

In summary, the research outside Washington casts doubt on the likelihood that this state's intensive parole program will reduce recidivism.

How Much Does Intensive Parole Cost? JRA provides three types of parole. Based on salary and overhead estimates, a 2002 Institute survey found that intensive parole costs \$7,785 per youth for an average of 9 months of parole (\$28.09 per day per youth). JRA also runs a "regular parole" program for lower-risk youth that lasts 6 months; this program costs \$1,984 per youth (\$12.22 per day per youth). JRA has a sex offender parole program that costs \$22,803 per youth over 36 months (\$21.04 per day per youth).

The Research Questions: This report answers two research questions for the intensive parole program evaluation: Does the program reduce criminal recidivism, and, if it does, do the benefits that crime victims and taxpayers receive from the reduced crime outweigh the program's \$7,785 price tag? That is, is the program a wise use of taxpayer money?

Evaluation Design: To evaluate intensive parole, we need to compare the recidivism of youth who received intensive parole with a group of comparable youth who did not. Fortunately, JRA has explicit criteria for intensive parole eligibility that allows us to identify youth in this group. To be given intensive parole, each youth must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- ✓ An Initial Security Classification Assessment (ISCA)⁸ score above 45 points (ISCA identifies the 25 percent highest-risk youth).
- ✓ A Level III on the Sex Offender Screening Tool (SOST—a specialized risk assessment developed in Minnesota to identify high-risk sex offenders).
- ✓ A Basic Training Camp program graduate (legislation directed that Basic Training Camp youth receive intensive parole supervision).

Our control group consists of eligible youth placed on *regular* parole between October 1997 and September 1998, the year before the intensive parole program was started. Based on information in JRA's administrative database, we determined that these youth would have been placed on intensive parole had the program been in effect at the time of parole placement. It must be noted that basic training camp youth in the control group received a different version of intensive parole.

The intensive parole program was implemented in three phases: (1) community supervision started in October 1998, (2) the residential phase started in October 1999, and (3) evidence-based treatments

⁵ Methodological problems may keep OJJDP from publishing its findings.

⁶ Steve Aos, Polly Phipps, Robert Barnoski, and Roxanne Lieb, *The Comparative Costs and Benefits of Programs to Reduce Crime, v. 4.0* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, May 2001).

⁷ Robert Barnoski, *The Effects of Parole on Recidivism: Juvenile Offenders Released From Washington State Institutions* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, March 2001); unpublished evaluation of the Early Intervention Accountability Program by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

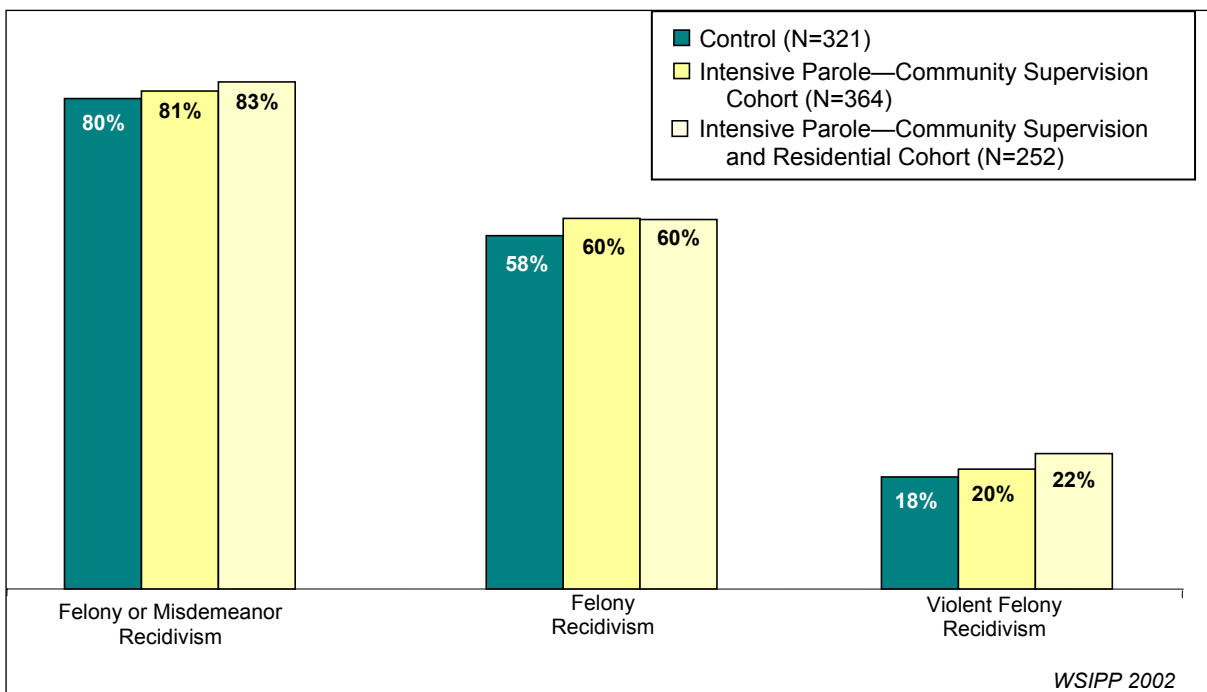
⁸ Robert Barnoski, *Juvenile Rehabilitation Assessments: Validity Review and Recommendations* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, September 1998).

started in October 2000. Sufficient time has lapsed to examine the cohorts of youth included in the first two phases.

The strength of this research design depends on the comparability of the control and intensive parole groups on variables that are strongly associated with recidivism—the outcome measure. We found the following statistically significant, but slight, differences between the two groups: the intensive parole youth were younger, had lower risk, and had less criminal history than the control group. Without correcting for these differences, the intensive parole group would be expected to have a slightly lower recidivism rate than the control group. Thus, we employ multivariate statistical techniques when analyzing recidivism to adjust for the differences.

Intensive Parole Program Results: Exhibit 1 shows that the 18-month recidivism rates for the control group and the first two intensive parole cohorts are not different from each other after adjusting for group differences.⁹ These analyses find no differences among the JRA regions. In addition, there are no differences in recidivism between the first intensive parole cohort that received only intensive community supervision and the second cohort that received a residential component in addition to intensive community supervision. Finally, we used multivariate statistical techniques¹⁰ to test for differences in the number of offenses committed during the follow-up period. The intensive parole youth did not have fewer offenses than the control group youth. We find no evidence from these data that intensive parole reduces recidivism.¹¹

Exhibit 1
18-Month Recidivism Rates for Youth in Intensive Parole Versus Control Group Youth



⁹ Logistic regression was used and included the following independent variables: the youth was in the intensive parole group, in the community supervision plus residential intensive parole cohort, and a basic training camp graduate. In addition, variables for ethnicity, age at release, gender, ISCA score, criminal history scale score, and JRA region were included.

¹⁰ Negative binomial regression was used with the same independent variables but where the dependent variables were the number of offenses committed during the follow-up period.


¹¹ Although our methodology statistically controls for basic training camp participation, we get the same results when the basic training camp graduates, all of whom received some form of intensive parole, are excluded from the analyses.

In our analyses of intensive parole, we discovered that Basic Training Camp graduates had significantly lower recidivism rates than youth who did not participate in Basic Training Camp. The Institute will be publishing a separate evaluation of JRA's Basic Training Camp program.

Conclusions: The first two cohorts in JRA's intensive parole program have the same recidivism rates as a control group of comparable youth; the anticipated reductions in recidivism, due to intensive parole, have not been observed. In a future report, we will examine the impact of intensive parole for youth who received evidence-based interventions. State statute provides for the supervision of juveniles in the community following their stay in a JRA institution (RCW 13.40.210). With constrained budgets, Washington policymakers may be able to reduce recidivism rates, improve public safety, and give taxpayers a better rate of return on their dollar by shifting the extra \$5,800 spent per high-risk youth from intensive supervision to intensive evidence-based interventions with regular supervision.

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