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Washington State's Community Commitment Program: Recidivism Findings

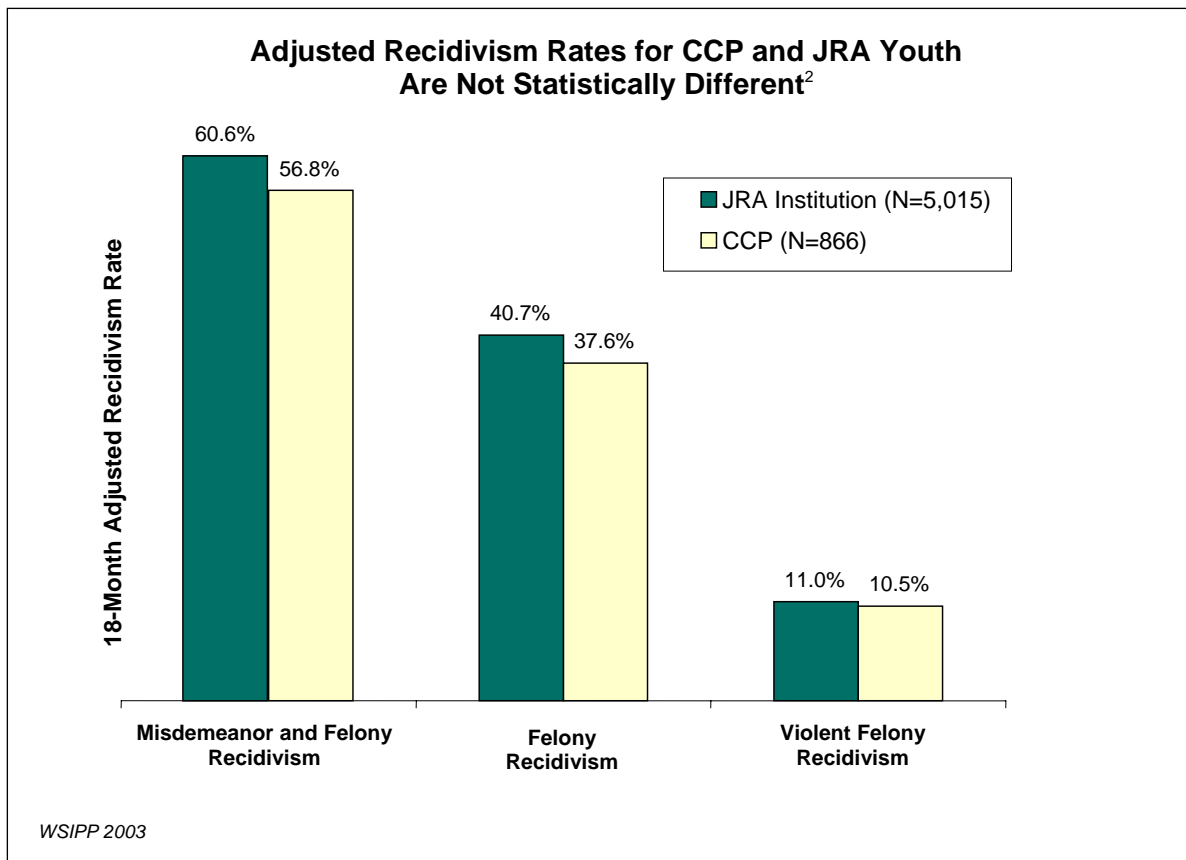
Prior to 2001, the Washington State Community Commitment Program (CCP) allowed county juvenile courts to use local juvenile detention facilities to incarcerate youth who otherwise would have served their sentences in Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA) facilities. Under contract with JRA, the county courts were paid a daily rate to confine these youth. The courts selected youth for the CCP from the pool of juvenile offenders with sentences to JRA.

During the 2003 legislative session, interest was expressed in reinstating the program. Legislative staff requested that the Washington State Institute for Public Policy review the recidivism patterns of former CCP participants. The specific request was to determine whether keeping youth in their community CCP resulted in recidivism rates lower than those of youth sent to state JRA facilities.

Methodology: Fortunately, JRA maintains a database on all committable youth, so it is possible to obtain and analyze information regarding CCP youth, as well as youth sent to a JRA institution. The sample in this study consists of all youth admitted to either the CCP or a JRA institution between January 1, 1996, and June 30, 2000.

The CCP relied on the discretion of county courts to select participants rather than explicit criteria. Given this selection process, we cannot precisely identify a comparison group. A reasonable alternative is to control for systematic differences in characteristics between the youth committed to JRA and the CCP. These factors include age, gender, ethnicity, prior criminal convictions, offense seriousness, and the risk factors measured in JRA's Initial Security Classification Assessment.¹ It would be preferable to use an array of additional variables, including factors found to be "protective" against future criminal involvement. The factors we are able to use, however, control sufficiently for the selection process allowing us to reach a conclusion.

¹ Robert Barnoski, *Juvenile Rehabilitation Assessments: Validity Review and Recommendations* (Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, September 1998).



Results: The chart shows that, after an 18-month follow-up period, recidivism rates of youth confined under the CCP are slightly lower than the rates of youth confined in a JRA institution; however, these differences are not statistically significant. For example, 37.6 percent of the CCP youth were re-convicted for a new felony after 18 months, compared with 40.7 percent of youth in JRA, a result that is not statistically significant.

Conclusion: Juvenile offenders placed in the CCP do not have a significantly lower recidivism rate than youth confined in a JRA institution. Because we cannot fully control for the CCP selection process, the slight differences in recidivism may be due to the characteristics of the youth chosen for CCP rather than the program itself. Reinstating the CCP may be desirable for cost savings or other policy reasons; the evidence presented in this report, however, does not suggest that it will reduce the recidivism rates for participants.

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² Logistic regressions were used and included the following independent variables: participation in the CCP, ethnicity, age, gender, ISCA items, criminal history scale score, and county.