

April 2003

Evaluation of Washington State's 1996 Juvenile Court Program for High-risk, First-time Offenders: Final Report

The 1996 Washington State Legislature appropriated \$2.35 million for a program called the juvenile court "Early Intervention Program" (EIP).¹ The program's goal was to prevent *high-risk, first-time* juvenile offenders from becoming further entrenched in the court system. Juvenile court administrators had identified this population as amenable to treatment. Funds were awarded to juvenile courts on a competitive basis, and 12 of the state's 33 juvenile courts received funding.

At the request of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) conducted a study to determine if the EIP resulted in reduced recidivism. In early 1998, the Institute examined six-month outcomes and found that EIP produced no significant difference in recidivism rates. In the 1998 session, the Legislature discontinued funding the EIP, shifting the funds to research-based programs in Washington's newly enacted Community Juvenile Accountability Act.

This final outcome report presents longer-term recidivism rates for the EIP program.²

What Is EIP? The courts included the following core elements in their Early Intervention Programs:

- *Assignment of only higher-risk youth* to the program using a standardized risk assessment instrument. This instrument ranked youth by their likelihood to reoffend.
- *Reduced caseload* sizes of 25 youth per probation officer with the assignment of a case monitor for a team approach. By comparison, regular probation caseloads ranged from 30 to 100 youth per probation officer.
- Development of *individualized case plans* to hold youth accountable and provide services.

Beyond these core elements, each court developed individual programs that ranged from family involvement (reinforcing parental authority and discipline) to holding youth accountable (close monitoring of school attendance and compliance with the court orders).

Youth stayed in the program during their entire period of juvenile court supervision, which lasted from 3 to 12 months.

¹ Chapter 283, Section 203(c) Session Laws 1996 Regular Session.

² Earlier reports on the EIP by the Institute include *Juvenile Early Intervention: Testing Juvenile Accountability in the Courts*, Robert Barnoski, August 1996; *Evaluating Early Intervention in Washington State Juvenile Courts: A Six-Month Progress Report*, Robert Barnoski and Scott Matson, January 1997; and *Assessing Risk: Washington State Juvenile Court Early Intervention Program*, Scott Matson and Robert Barnoski, July 1997.

EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation design involves the comparison of recidivism between two groups of youth who were assessed as eligible for EIP. Youth were randomly assigned to either the EIP (EIP group) or standard probation (control group). As a result of this random assignment, differences in recidivism between these two groups can be attributed to the program.³ EIP group youth were placed on probation between July 1, 1996, and June 30, 1998. Control group youth were placed on probation starting July 1, 1996. Each court continued to place youth in its control group until the group included at least 20 youth.

The primary evaluation criterion is whether the EIP participants had lower recidivism rates than youth who received standard probation. We measure recidivism by whether the youth is reconvicted for a subsequent offense. Since the EIP was in operation several years ago, we are able to exceed our recommended 18-month follow-up period and track the offenses committed by these youth for 36 months.⁴ Although this is a random assignment design, we use multivariate statistical techniques to adjust for the possibility of any systematic differences between the two groups.⁵

STATEWIDE RESULTS

We did not find any statistically significant differences in the 36-month adjusted recidivism rates of EIP youth and control group youth. Exhibit 1 displays the rates for three types of recidivism: total recidivism (any misdemeanor or felony conviction), felony recidivism, and violent felony recidivism. For example, the chart shows that 36 percent of youth in the control group, compared with 35 percent of youth in the EIP, were re-convicted for a new felony offense after 36 months, a statistically insignificant difference.

In Exhibit 2, we show how the adjusted felony recidivism rates for the two groups increase as the follow-up period is lengthened from 6 months to 36 months. The chart further illustrates that the EIP and control group rates follow the same pattern. At the 6- and 12-month follow-up periods, EIP youth had a slightly higher rate than control group youth, but then dropped slightly below the control group at the 18-, 24-, and 36-month follow-up periods. None of the differences is statistically significant.

³ Based on visits to each court, we believe the random assignment process was well implemented.

⁴ Our normal recommendation for measuring recidivism includes an 18-month follow-up period for re-offending and an additional 12 months for the adjudication process to result in a conviction. See: *Standards for Improving Research Effectiveness in Adult and Juvenile Justice*, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, December 1997.

⁵ Logistic regression was used and included the following independent variables: age at assignment, gender, criminal history risk score, social history risk score, court, and EIP or control group membership.

Exhibit 1
Comparison of the 36-Month Adjusted Conviction Rates:
EIP Group vs. Control Group

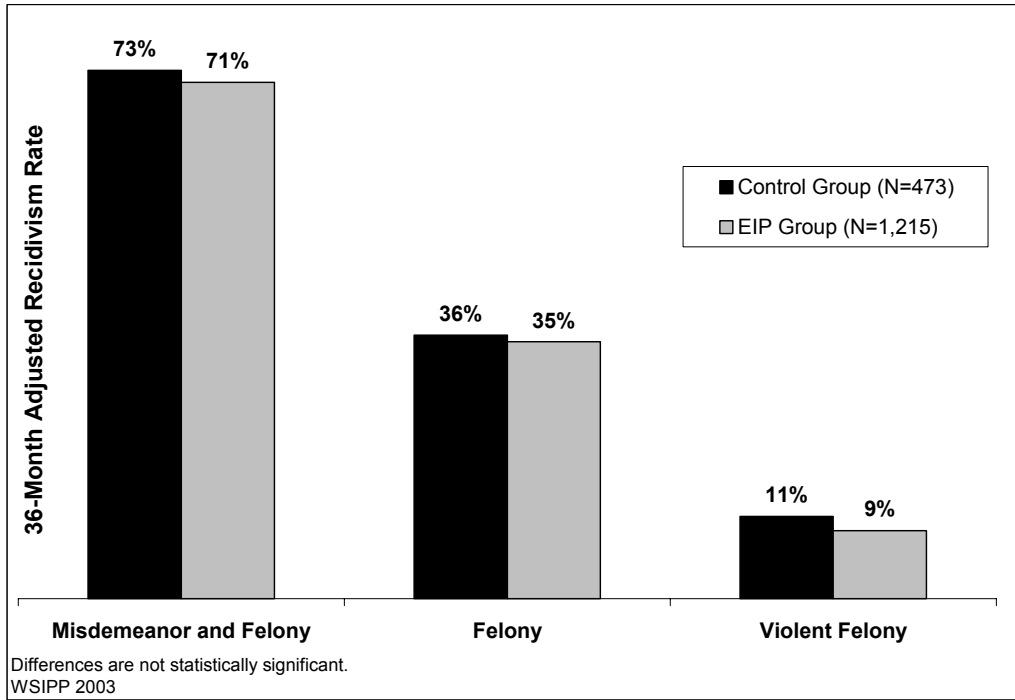
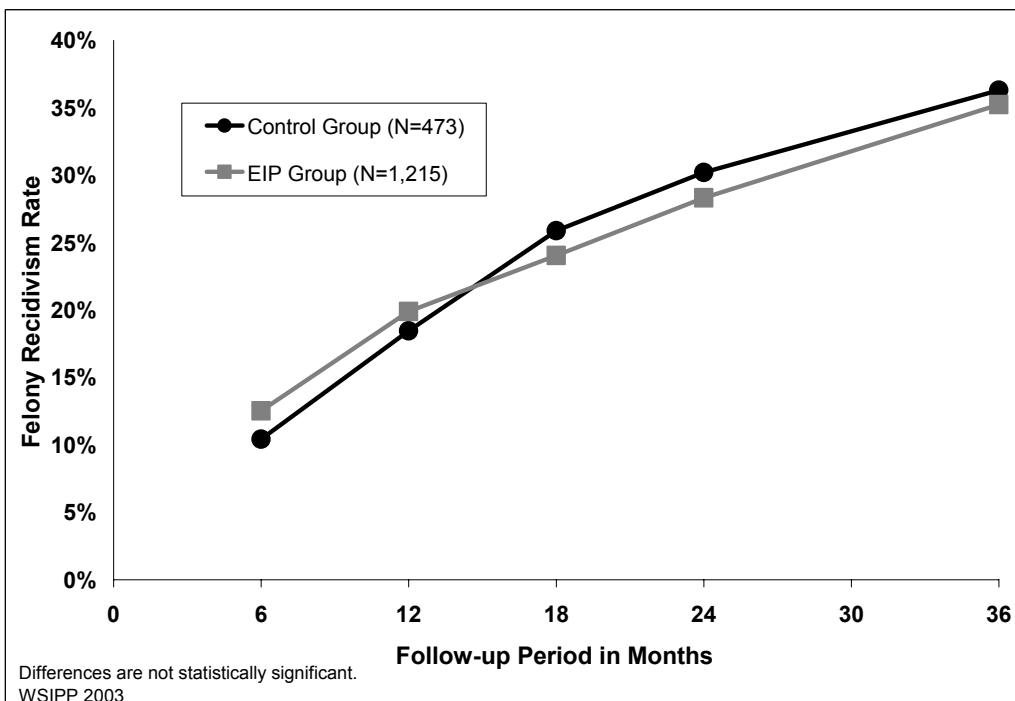


Exhibit 2
Adjusted Felony Recidivism Rates for Follow-Up Periods
Varying From 6 to 36 Months



INDIVIDUAL COURT RESULTS

The preceding analyses examined the results of the EIP for the state as a whole. Since each court developed an individual program, we also examined whether recidivism rates varied by court. Exhibit 3 shows the 36-month adjusted felony recidivism rate for each court.⁶ In every court, the difference between the control and EIP groups is far from achieving statistical significance.

Readers may be confused by this finding, as some differences in the table appear relatively large. For example, in Kitsap County, the recidivism rate for the control group was 39.7 percent, while the EIP group was 26.5 percent. Given the size of the sample, however, this difference could occur by chance alone 25 percent of the time. (The standard rule for statistical significance is to look for differences that could occur by chance 5 percent of the time or less.)

In a separate analysis (not shown), to increase the size of the control group, we included youth assessed as moderate to high risk but not randomly assigned. In many courts this doubled the size of the control group. The EIP still failed to come close to achieving a statistically significant reduction in recidivism.

Exhibit 3
Individual Court 36-Month
Adjusted Felony Recidivism Rate Comparisons

Court	Sample Sizes		36-Month Adjusted Felony Recidivism		P-value
	Control	EIP	Control	EIP	
Benton/Franklin	20	58	31.5%	38.7%	0.59
Chelan/Douglas	25	80	30.3%	45.7%	0.20
Clallam	18	59	41.5%	31.3%	0.45
Clark	48	118	34.3%	33.7%	0.94
Cowlitz	24	63	43.1%	40.3%	0.83
King	100	194	40.5%	44.3%	0.56
Kitsap	23	85	39.7%	26.5%	0.25
Pierce	74	159	39.2%	36.4%	0.69
Skagit	20	41	26.5%	23.1%	0.78
Snohomish	50	164	38.5%	32.7%	0.47
Spokane	48	130	35.9%	31.9%	0.61
Whatcom	23	64	22.8%	24.5%	0.88

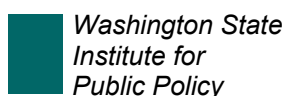
Note: P-values are from the logistic regression equation. The conventional cut-off P-value for statistical significance is .05 or less; the higher the P-value, the more likely the difference is due to chance.

CONCLUSIONS

This report confirms the Institute's earlier findings on the Early Intervention Program. Unfortunately, the approaches implemented by the 12 courts receiving EIP funding did not show a statistically significant reduction in recidivism.

For further information, contact Robert Barnoski at (360) 586-2744.

⁶ Logistic regression was used and included the following independent variables: age at assignment, gender, criminal history risk score, social history risk score, court, and participation in each court's unique EIP.



The Washington Legislature created the Washington State Institute for Public Policy in 1983. A Board of Directors—representing the legislature, the governor, and public universities—governs the Institute and guides the development of all activities. The Institute's mission is to carry out practical research, at legislative direction, on issues of importance to Washington State.