



## THE EFFECTS OF PAROLE ON RECIDIVISM: JUVENILE OFFENDERS RELEASED FROM WASHINGTON STATE INSTITUTIONS *FINAL REPORT*

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) was directed by the 1999 Legislature to determine whether juvenile parole services influence subsequent criminal conduct.<sup>1</sup> The Institute conducted a preliminary study in 2001 using a 12-month follow-up period and found that parole does not reduce the recidivism rates of juvenile offenders.<sup>2</sup> This report is an update using a longer follow-up period to measure recidivism.<sup>3</sup> In addition, a second comparison group of juveniles released to parole is included to further test the effectiveness of standard parole supervision.

**BACKGROUND.** In July 1998, the Legislature eliminated parole for youth released from Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA) institutions for all but the highest risk and sex offenders.<sup>4</sup> Parole was subsequently reinstated in July 1999. Thus, for a one-year period, about 57 percent of juvenile offenders were released without community supervision. This created what researchers call a “natural experiment” making it possible to test whether parole supervision affects recidivism rates.

### SUMMARY

In July 1998, the Legislature eliminated parole for youth released from Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA) institutions for all but high risk and sex offenders. In a 2001 report, preliminary recidivism findings were compared for juvenile offenders released on parole with juvenile offenders released without parole. Results indicated that parole does not have an influence on recidivism.

In this study, the Institute used a longer follow-up period and added a second comparison group. This 2006 study is therefore a more rigorous test of the effect of parole on recidivism for most juvenile offenders.

### Findings

- 55 percent of the Parole Group was convicted of a new felony within 36 months of release compared with 50 percent of the No-Parole Group. No statistically significant difference is found.
- This study upholds our preliminary finding that parole does not reduce recidivism for non-high risk and non-sex offender juveniles.

<sup>1</sup> ESSB 5180, Section 203 (1)(j).

<sup>2</sup> R. Barnoski and S. Aos, 2001, *The Effects of Parole on Recidivism: Juvenile Offenders Released From Washington State Institutions, Preliminary Findings*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 01-03-1201.

<sup>3</sup> Suggested citation for this report: E. Drake and R. Barnoski, 2006, *The Effects of Parole on Recidivism: Juvenile Offenders Released From Washington State Institutions, Final Report*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 06-05-1203.

<sup>4</sup> During the study period, the highest risk youth and sex offenders were released to JRA Intensive Parole and remaining youth were released to Parole. For findings on Intensive Parole, see R. Barnoski, 2002, *Evaluating How Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration's Intensive Parole Program Affects Recidivism*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 02-12-1201.

In our 2001 report, the Institute compared youth released with parole in Fiscal Year 1998 to youth released without parole in Fiscal Year 1999. After a 12-month follow-up period, 32.7 percent of the parole group had been reconvicted for new felonies compared to 30.2 percent of the no-parole group. This difference was not statistically significant.

**CURRENT STUDY OBJECTIVES.** Enough time has passed to improve the rigor of the preliminary analysis by the following:

- 1) A second comparison group is added that consists of youth released to parole in Fiscal Year 2000, the first year parole was reinstated. This strengthens the research design by allowing us to test whether there was a trend in declining recidivism rates over time.
- 2) The follow-up period for recidivism is extended to 36 months.

**STUDY GROUPS.** In this report, three cohorts of juvenile offenders are studied:

- 1) Parole Cohort 1 includes all but the highest risk and sex offenders released to parole in Fiscal Year 1998, a total of 839 youth.
- 2) Parole Cohort 2 includes all but the highest risk and sex offenders released to parole in Fiscal Year 2000, a total of 634 youth.
- 3) No-Parole Group includes 722 youth released without parole supervision from JRA during Fiscal Year 1999.

The Parole Group consists of Parole Cohorts 1 and 2 for a combined total of 1,473 youth.

We analyzed key characteristics to determine if the Parole and No-Parole Groups are comparable.

**Exhibit 1** shows no significant differences in the observed characteristics of the Parole and No-Parole Groups. Juveniles who were released without parole are similar to juveniles released with parole in each area except that they did not have parole.

There are, however, significant differences between Parole Cohorts 1 and 2 on three characteristics: prior admissions to JRA, residential length of stay, and criminal history. Youth in Parole Cohort 2 have slightly fewer JRA admissions, longer residential stays, and lower criminal history scores than youth in Parole Cohort 1. This indicates that youth in Cohort 2 are lower risk than those in Cohort 1. We control for these systematic differences using multivariate statistical analysis in the recidivism outcomes.

*Exhibit 1*  
**Key Characteristics of the Study Groups:  
 No Differences between Parole and No-Parole Groups  
 Differences between Parole Cohorts 1 and 2**

	Total Parole Group	No-Parole Group	Sig. Level	Parole Group Cohort 1 FY 1998	Parole Group Cohort 2 FY 2000	Sig. Level
<b>Number of Youth</b>	1,473	722		839	634	
<b>Averages</b>						
Prior Admissions to JRA	1.17	1.18	0.570	1.21	1.10	<.0001
JRA Residential Length of Stay in Months	9.36	9.47	0.783	8.87	10.01	0.010
ISCA Score <sup>a</sup>	22.53	22.53	0.996	22.55	22.51	0.914
Criminal History Total <sup>b</sup>	13.91	13.99	0.672	14.14	13.60	0.021
Age at Release	16.56	16.58	0.845	16.60	16.51	0.220
<b>Demographics</b>						
Male	88%	90%	0.134	88%	87%	0.414
White	49%	52%	0.255	49%	50%	0.522

<sup>a</sup> Initial Security Classification Assessment (ISCA) is a risk tool used by JRA to determine a youth's likelihood of re-offending once returned to the community. Offense seriousness is also included as part of the score.

<sup>b</sup> Criminal History Total is the total convictions in Washington State prior to the current conviction offense.

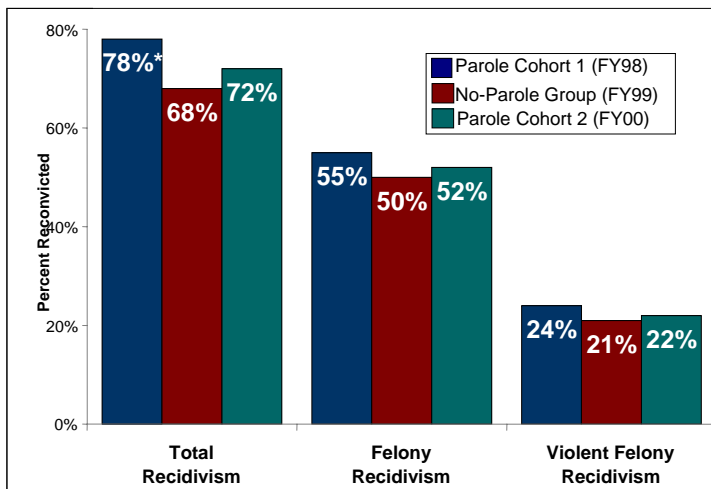
**RECIDIVISM.** Recidivism is defined as any offense committed after release to the community that results in a Washington State conviction.<sup>5</sup> This includes convictions in juvenile and adult court. Three types of recidivism are reported:

- Violent felony convictions;
- Felony convictions, including violent felonies;
- Total recidivism, including felonies and violent felonies, in addition to misdemeanor convictions.

We performed multivariate regression analysis to adjust for differences that may be inherent among the cohorts.<sup>6</sup> This enables us to calculate adjusted recidivism rates, which give a clearer picture of whether parole affects recidivism.<sup>7</sup>

**Exhibit 2** displays 36-month multivariate-adjusted recidivism rates for all measures—felony, violent felony, and total recidivism. Parole Cohort 1 has a total recidivism rate that is higher than the rates for Parole Cohort 2 and the No-Parole Group. No significant differences among the groups were found for felony and violent felony recidivism.

**Exhibit 2**  
36-Month Adjusted Recidivism Rates for JRA Youth Released With and Without Parole



\*Statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

<sup>5</sup> R. Barnoski, 1997, *Standards for Improving Research Effectiveness in Adult and Juvenile Justice*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 97-12-1201, pg. 2.

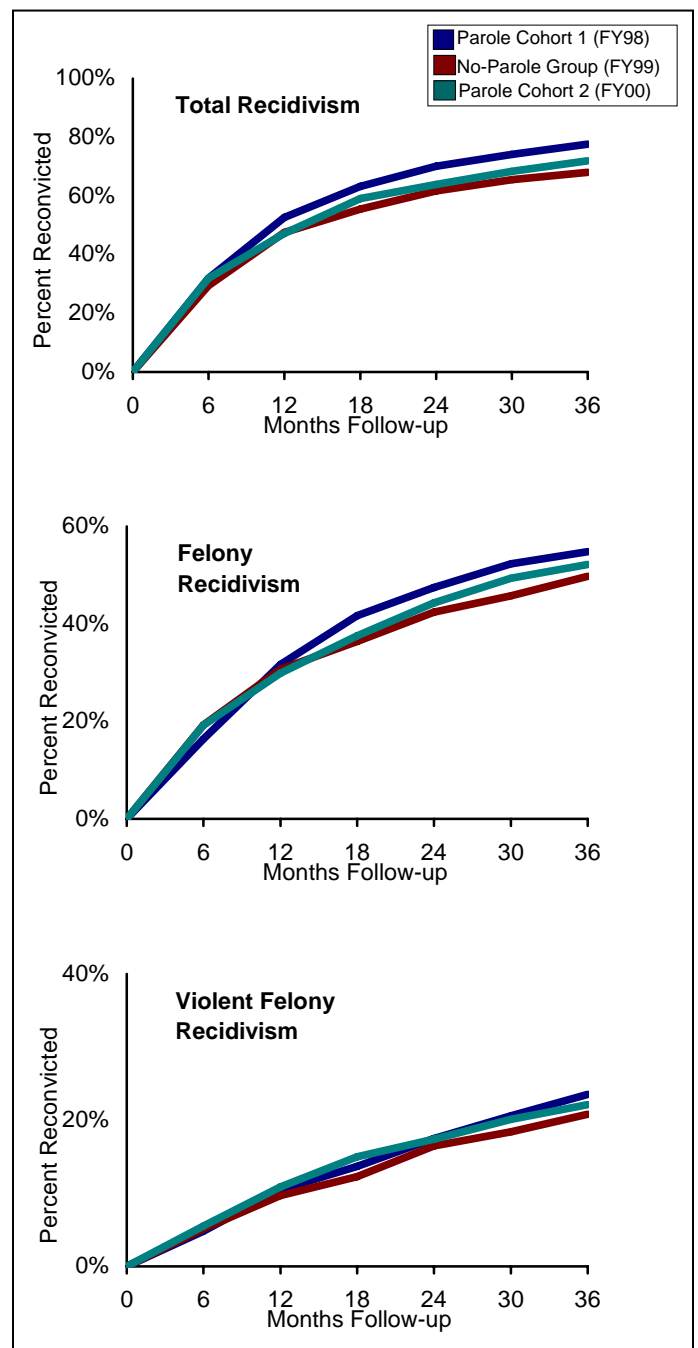
<sup>6</sup> Specifically, we used logistic regression and include the following independent variables: Parole Cohort 1, Parole Cohort 2, Initial Security Classification Assessment (ISCA) score, age at release, male, white, JRA residential length of stay, and criminal history.

<sup>7</sup> The regression results are shown in the Technical Appendix on page 4. The coefficient from the logistic regression and the mean values of the control variables are used to calculate mean-adjusted recidivism rates.

**Exhibit 3** displays multivariate-adjusted recidivism rates measured at six-month intervals, up to 36 months post-release. Juveniles in Parole Cohort 1 have higher total recidivism rates than Parole Cohort 2 and the No-Parole group for every follow-up period except 6 months.

No significant differences were found between the Parole and No-Parole groups for felony and violent felony recidivism. This indicates that parole had no influence on whether a juvenile reoffended for a felony or violent felony.

**Exhibit 3**  
6- to 36-Month Adjusted Recidivism Rates for JRA Youth Released With and Without Parole



Researchers sometimes hypothesize that official measures of recidivism, such as convictions or arrests, will be higher for people under supervision. The theory is that persons under supervision are more closely watched, therefore, have more arrests and convictions than unsupervised persons.

**Exhibit 3**, however, does not support this hypothesis. There is no difference in recidivism rates between the groups during the first six months when the Parole Group was under supervision. In addition, after 6 months, when youth in the Parole Group were no longer being supervised, recidivism rates for the No-Parole Group were lower or equal to the Parole Group.

**COST ANALYSIS.** The average cost of JRA parole is approximately \$12 per day.<sup>6</sup> The average length of stay on JRA parole is about 14 weeks.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it costs about \$1,176 on average to supervise a youth on parole. Since no significant difference was found for felony or violent felony recidivism, there are no estimated benefits related to recidivism.

Since the 2001 publication of our preliminary parole study, JRA has re-organized parole and implemented a family-oriented parole service called Functional Family Parole (FFP).

<sup>6</sup> Per phone conversation with Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA) staff, November 2005. This figure is based in FY06 dollars.

<sup>7</sup> This was calculated for non-sex offenders and low-risk youth released to regular parole for Fiscal Years 1998 and 2000.

**Technical Appendix**

**Logistic Regression Results for 36-Month Follow-up Period by Type of Recidivism**

This technical appendix summarizes the results of the logistic regression analyses. Regression analyses are performed—one for each type of recidivism, for each follow-up period. The odds ratios show how strongly parole is associated with recidivism. Odds ratios of less than 1 indicate parole is associated with a reduced likelihood of recidivism, while odds ratios above 1 indicate an increased likelihood. A probability level less than .05 is typically used to indicate a statistically significant difference in recidivism. All models include the following independent variables: Parole Cohort 1, Parole Cohort 2 (or Parole Group, see footnote), Initial Security Classification Assessment (ISCA) score, white, age at release, male, criminal history, and JRA residential length of stay.

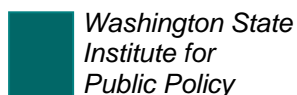
Variable	Total Recidivism			Felony Recidivism			Violent Felony Recidivism		
	Parameter Estimate	Odds Ratio	Sig. Level	Parameter Estimate	Odds Ratio	Sig. Level	Parameter Estimate	Odds Ratio	Sig. Level
Parole Cohort 1	0.481	1.62	<.0001	0.199	1.22	0.0655	0.160	1.17	0.1936
Parole Cohort 2	0.187	1.21	0.1305	0.097	1.10	0.4018	0.081	1.08	0.5436
Parole Group <sup>c</sup>	0.349	1.42	0.0008	0.155	1.17	0.1082	0.127	1.14	0.2534
ISCA Score	0.040	1.04	<.0001	0.031	1.03	0.0003	0.010	1.01	0.3265
White	-0.114	0.89	0.2556	-0.281	0.76	0.002	-0.393	0.68	0.0002
Age at Release from JRA	-0.159	0.85	<.0001	-0.221	0.80	<.0001	-0.182	0.83	<.0001
Male	0.748	2.11	<.0001	0.733	2.08	<.0001	0.867	2.38	<.0001
Criminal History Total	0.079	1.08	<.0001	0.076	1.08	<.0001	0.075	1.08	<.0001
JRA Residential Stay Days	0.000	1.00	0.0251	0.000	1.00	0.1686	0.000	1.00	0.1264
Number of Admissions to JRA	0.020	1.02	0.8573	0.257	1.29	0.0097	-0.032	0.97	0.7502

Total N = 2,193 (Parole Cohort 1 N = 839, Parole Cohort 2 N = 634, No-Parole Group N = 720; data missing for two juveniles)

<sup>c</sup> A separate model was run to determine the coefficient for the total Parole Group, which includes Cohorts 1 and 2.

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