

Lettie Prell
Director of Research

Curt Smith
Executive Assistant to the Director



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Study: Residential Facilities Not for Everyone

Evidence-based practices include adhering to what is known as the *Risk Principle*: An offender's level of supervision and treatment should reflect their risk of recidivism. Providing high levels of supervision and treatment can actually increase the likelihood of failure for lower risk offenders. Recently, the DOC provided funding to the Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning to compare recidivism rates – as measured by new conviction and return to prison – for offenders under field supervision vs. offenders residing in more heavily supervised residential correctional facilities.

The study found that indeed, the risk principle held for lower risk offenders – that is, they had higher recidivism rates than lower risk offenders under field supervision. However, the study also found that, while high risk offenders in residential facilities did have lower new conviction rates than high risk offenders under field supervision, they did worse when other forms of recidivism, such as return to prison, were studied. Below is the breakdown by risk categories:

Recidivism Rates, by Group and Risk Categories

Recidivism	Residential			Field		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
New Conviction	49.5%	62.2%	67.3%	35.0%	56.5%	70.5%
Serious Misdemeanor or Greater Conviction	40.0%	54.0%	60.0%	26.6%	40.0%	59.6%
New Felony Conviction	16.6%	21.3%	23.9%	9.9%	16.7%	22.4%
Prison Admission*	35.4%	51.4%	58.2%	14.1%	25.7%	41.1%
Prison Admission without Conviction*	18.4%	32.1%	39.2%	4.7%	13.3%	18.7%

*Includes Violator Program placement

For DOC, the study findings indicate that the scarce residential beds should be used selectively, particularly for hard-to-place offenders, such as sex offenders under residency restrictions. Continued use of residential placement by judges as an alternative to prison still holds the benefit of diverting many offenders from the prison system and saves long-term costs. For the Board of Parole, the findings would indicate that if offenders of any risk level who are ready for release and have suitable parole plans, they should be seriously considered for parole rather than work release.

The full report is available by contacting the DOC director of research (phone 515/725/5718 or email lettie.prell@iowa.gov).