

Study measures impact of government services on juvenile community re-entry

Research suggests incarcerated juveniles face many challenges as they transition back into the community. To examine how services provided by schools, public aid, foster care, and other government programs impact youth re-entry and recidivism in Illinois, researchers analyzed administrative data from a variety of

state and local agencies that provide assistance to juveniles.

This *Research Brief* details re-entry experiences of juveniles, ages 13 to 18, released from Illinois juvenile correctional facilities between 1996 and 2003, as revealed in the research study “*From corrections to community: The juvenile reentry experience as characterized by multiple systems involvement.*”

The study described the involvement of formerly incarcerated youth with schools, public assistance, foster care, and government-supported services for health, mental health, and substance abuse treatment. Researchers also examined re-entry experiences across gender, race, age, employment, and region, and measured the way re-entry experiences affected post-release recidivism rates over an 18-month period. The study sought to determine whether the relationship between re-entry experiences and recidivism varied by social context across Illinois.

Researchers collected data on 13,511 youth exiting Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) Juvenile Division from Jan. 1, 1996, to June 30, 2003. Males made up the majority of exits, though the percentage of female exits slightly increased each year. Most juveniles were released from IDOC between the ages of 15 and 17 years old, with just more than 40 percent leaving at age 17 (*Table 1*). Most juveniles spent about eight months in the correctional facility before exiting.

The data was collected from Illinois State Police, Department of Children and Family Services, Department

of Employment Security, Chicago Housing Authority, Chicago Public Schools, and other agencies that serve juveniles. Variables such as name, birth date, and social security number were used to create common data linkages across systems. Researchers also utilized the 2000 U. S. Census and 2000 FBI Uniform Crime Reports for social context and county crime rates.

System involvement

After a youth exited IDOC, researchers measured their level of involvement in child-serving government agencies for a one-year period. Ten initial measures of system involvement across four domains, including public assistance, public health care assistance, child welfare, and public education, were examined (*Table 2*).

Researchers found low to moderate involvement among juveniles re-entering the community in any individual child-serving system. Involvement in Medicaid was the highest, with nearly 56 percent of the youth enrolled at some point during the first year post-release.

About 35 percent of juveniles exiting IDOC received public financial assistance and 9 percent were involved with the state child welfare system.

While prior involvement with the state child welfare system was high (65 percent), it is likely that post-release involvement was low because most juveniles leaving IDOC were 16 years old or older, when placement in out-of-home care is less common.

Although most data were available statewide, information on educa-

This *Research Brief* was written by Kimberly Burke, research analyst for the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. It summarizes a research report, “*From corrections to community: The juvenile re-entry experience as characterized by multiple systems involvement.*” submitted to the Authority by Gretchen Ruth Cusick, Ph.D., Robert M. Goerge, Ph.D., and Katie Claussen Bell, M.A.

For more information, or for copies of this or other publications, contact the Authority at (312) 793-8550, or visit our website at www.icjia.state.il.us.

The project was supported by grant #04-DB-BX-0043 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, through the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or the Authority. Printed by authority of the State of Illinois.

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Table I
Demographics of juveniles exiting IDOC Juvenile Division, 1996-2003*

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003**
Number of exits	1,589	1,972	1,857	1,903	1,795	1,625	1,852	918
Gender								
Male	90.9%	90.8%	90.1%	89.6%	87.6%	87.2%	87.7%	88.6%
Female	9.1%	9.2%	9.9%	10.4%	12.4%	12.8%	12.3%	11.4%
Race								
Black	49.9%	52.7%	55.4%	53.1%	55.8%	53.2%	51.5%	55.6%
White	38.9%	35.6%	33.9%	34.4%	33.6%	36.6%	38.9%	34.2%
Hispanic	10.4%	10.7%	10%	12%	10%	9.7%	9.1%	9.9%
Other	0.8%	1%	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%	0.3%
Age at exit								
13	0.9%	0.7%	1.9%	1.3%	1.2%	2%	1.7%	1.7%
14	5.5%	6.1%	5.6%	6.5%	7.2%	6.3%	7.2%	7.5%
15	18.9%	16.8%	18.6%	18.9%	17.3%	16.4%	16.1%	18.6%
16	34.5%	33.8%	32.4%	34.7%	32.5%	34.2%	34.3%	33.3%
17	40.2%	42.5%	41.5%	38.6%	41.8%	41.2%	40.7%	38.8%
Education								
Some grade school	15.1%	14.9%	18.1%	23.3%	24.8%	23.9%	23.5%	23.2%
Grade school graduate	35.4%	33.3%	38.2%	40.2%	39.5%	39.1%	36.6%	26.4%
Some high school	40.5%	42.3%	33.5%	31.5%	30.5%	32.9%	37.5%	37.6%
High school graduate/ GED	0.9%	0.7%	0.3%	0.8%	0.4%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%
Offense type								
Drug	11.6%	15.3%	17.3%	16.5%	18.2%	15.1%	13.6%	12.5%
Property	48%	45.9%	46.5%	47.7%	45.9%	48.9%	52.6%	53.5%
Person	40.4%	38.8%	36.2%	35.8%	35.9%	35.9%	33.9%	34%

*Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to missing data.

**2003 data was compiled only for January to June.

tional experiences were only available for the Chicago Public School system.

Classifying the re-entry experience

The collective re-entry experience of juveniles exiting IDOC, as characterized by involvement across multiple systems, was classified by four categories. They included:

- **Class 1—Uninvolved:** This class represented 44 percent of statewide exits and consisted of juveniles who

were not involved with any child-serving government systems during the year following the exit.

- **Class 2—Welfare linked:** This class represented about 24 percent of statewide exits and consisted of juveniles having the highest probability of public assistance through food stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. Juveniles exiting in this class also had the highest probability of Medicaid enrollment.

- **Class 3—Marginally served:** This class represented 24 percent of statewide exits and consisted of juveniles with the highest probability of being involved with the child welfare system. Class 3 juveniles had a lower probability of receiving food stamps or TANF benefits, but a higher probability of receiving Medicaid health care, mental health, and substance abuse rehabilitation services.

- **Class 4—Comprehensive:** This was the smallest class, representing 8 percent of juveniles. Class 4 was char-

Table 2
Description of juvenile involvement with government programs post-release

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003*	Total
Number of exits	1,589	1,972	1,857	1,903	1,795	1,625	1,852	918	13,511
Indicators									
Public assistance									
Food stamps	35.7%	33.2%	31.2%	30.2%	32.8%	34.6%	39.1%	40.4%	34.2%
TANF benefits	21.1%	18.9%	18.3%	12.6%	11.3%	9.4%	6.4%	4.7%	13.4%
Public health care									
Medicaid enrollment	48.1%	49.7%	55.6%	57.3%	58%	58.8%	58%	61.8%	55.6%
General medical care	19.8%	21.5%	26.2%	23.9%	23%	25.5%	31.5%	37.7%	25.4%
Mental health treatment	11.6%	12%	16.5%	17.5%	15.1%	18%	19.3%	24.5%	16.3%
Substance abuse treatment	9%	9.4%	13.1%	13.3%	11.3%	13%	11.3%	13.5%	11.6%
Child welfare									
Out-of-home care placement/maltreatment report	8.2%	7.5%	8.6%	9.3%	9.4%	10.1%	10.2%	8.8%	9%

*2003 data was compiled only for January to June.

acterized by involvement in almost all government systems during the one-year re-entry period.

Few substantively large differences existed in the characteristics of juveniles in the four classes of exits. Class 1 juveniles contained youth that were slightly older at the time of exit than the other classes, with nearly 46 percent at age 17. Class 2 juveniles had a high percentage of black youth (73 percent) and a low percentage of white youth (21 percent). Class 4 juveniles had the highest probability of receiving mental health services and contained the highest percentage of females exiting IDOC (15 percent). Also notable in the Class 4 population was that employment was uncommon, with less than 10 percent of all juveniles who were eligible for employment being formally employed during the first year post-release.

Recidivism

Of juveniles who exited IDOC during the study period, 49 percent were arrested again within 18 months of re-entry. The chances of recidivism were higher among older youths, among youth with a high number of prior arrests upon incarceration, and among those who were employed after their exit. Those who were incarcerated for a drug or property crime had a higher chance of being re-arrested than those who had served time for a crime against a person.

The likelihood of re-arrest was higher among males. In addition, black and Hispanic youth were more likely to be re-arrested than white youth.

Class 1 juveniles, who had no involvement with government programs, had the lowest percentage of arrests during re-entry (42 percent), followed by Class 3, or marginally served, juveniles (51 percent). Class 2, or welfare

linked, juveniles had the highest percentage of arrests during the 18-month period (59 percent). Class 4 juveniles had the second highest arrest rate (53 percent).

School involvement: Chicago population

School involvement was an important indicator of success for juveniles during the re-entry period. Because information on the juvenile educational experiences post-release was available only from the Chicago Public School (CPS) system, these experiences could not be measured at the state level.

Of the population studied, 3,662 exits from IDOC were made by juveniles who were enrolled in a CPS school up until incarceration. The population examined in this area included all former Chicago public school students who were eligible for re-enrollment following their incarceration. Nearly 35 percent of the

population were recorded by CPS as inactive during the semester prior to incarceration. Reasons for the classification included transferring to evening school, dropping out, or that officials were unable to locate them. Although these juveniles were inactive during the semester immediately prior to their incarceration, they were included in the Chicago population studied in an effort to most thoroughly examine educational experiences of formerly incarcerated juveniles, including those at highest risk of disconnect from the public educational system.

Only 1,337 exiting juveniles, or 35 percent of the population studied, were characterized by school involvement during the one year re-entry period. Of them, 1,178 were actively enrolled in a CPS or had graduated from high school (13 juveniles) during the year post-release. Another 124 exiting juveniles were recorded as having transferred and being enrolled in a non-CPS school. Finally, 35 juveniles were recorded as having transferred to a CPS evening program following release.

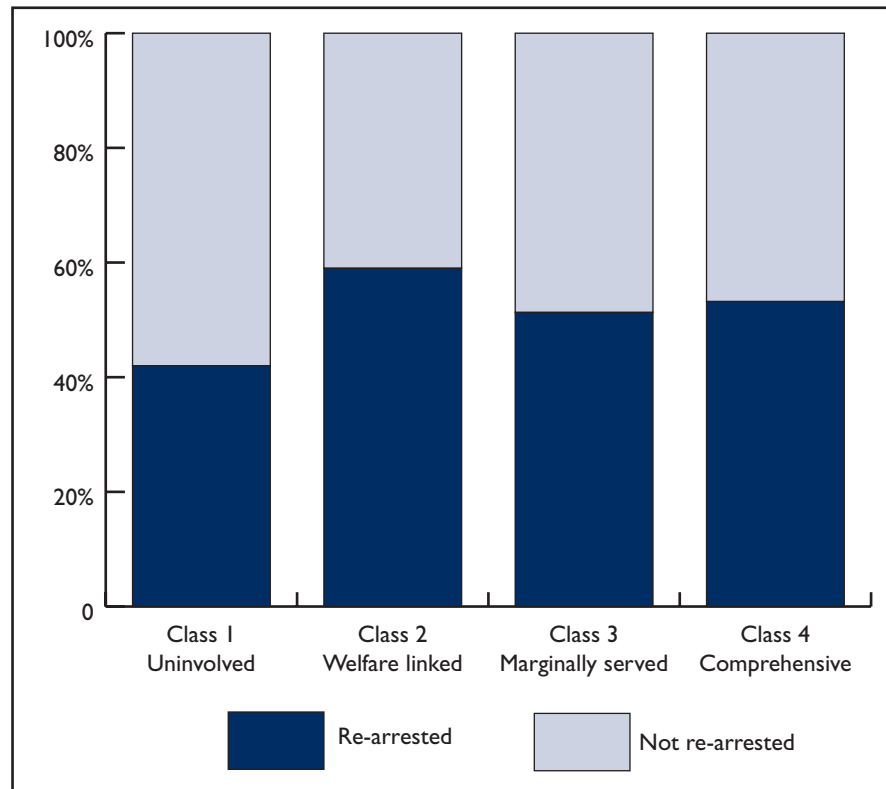
Of juveniles who were inactive in the CPS system prior to incarceration, 75 percent remained inactive post-release. The majority of students were active prior to incarceration. Of students who were active prior to incarceration, however, 57 percent became inactive during the post-release period studied.

Implications

Overall recidivism rates point to the need for increased attention from government aid and social service systems to meet the needs of juveniles during re-entry and to reduce the chances of re-arrest.

The study showed that 42 percent of Class 1 juveniles, with no collective involvement in child-serving government systems, were arrested again

Figure 1
Re-arrests among classes



within 18 months post-release. Given this finding, measures of need for services should be examined, in addition to receipt of services. Some youth may not be receiving needed services during the re-entry period. For instance, while 56 percent of the population studied was enrolled in the Medicaid program, less than 25 percent received any general health, mental health, or substance abuse treatment.

Because research has shown that obtaining health care services is difficult for youth re-entering the community, a determination must be made on whether those not involved in any systems are uninvolved because they have no need or because they have difficulty connecting to services.

Further research also is needed to examine the challenges youth face in accessing services, enrolling in school,

and obtaining employment upon re-entry into the community. Only about 36 percent of Chicago youth were enrolled in school following their release from IDOC. Most youth who were not enrolled in school were also unemployed. While nearly half of the exiting IDOC population returning to their Chicago communities were age 17, few youth re-enrolled in school and even fewer were employed.

The results suggest a need for coordinated efforts between the juvenile justice system and government and social service programs to provide mental health and substance abuse treatment, public aid, food stamps, and health services in Illinois.