

# MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



## *The Rehabilitative Ideal versus the Criminogenic Reality: The Consequences of Warehousing Prisoners*

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Using data on more than 55,000 offenders released from Minnesota prisons between 2003 and 2011, the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) examined whether criminogenic effects arising from imprisonment may stem from a lack of institutional programming. In addition to assessing the relationship between recidivism and warehousing (i.e., the absence of involvement in any programming), the evaluation analyzed the impact of participation in multiple correctional interventions on recidivism.

### KEY FINDINGS

- 31 percent of the offenders released from prison between 2003 and 2011 had been “warehoused” insofar as they had not participated in any institutional programming.
  - Offenders were much more likely to get warehoused when they were:
    - male
    - admitted to prison as probation or supervised release violators
    - in prison for shorter periods of time
- Warehousing increased the odds of recidivism by 13 percent.
- Participation in at least one successful recidivism-reduction intervention lowered the odds of recidivism by 12 percent.
  - A little less than half (49 percent) of the released prisoners participated in at least one successful recidivism-reduction intervention.
- Participation in at least two successful recidivism-reduction intervention lowered the odds of recidivism by 26 percent.
  - Only 18 percent of the released prisoners participated in at least two successful recidivism-reduction interventions.

Based on a sample of 55,676 releases from Minnesota prisons between 2003 and 2011, this study examined the extent to which participation in institutional programming had an impact on recidivism outcomes. By evaluating the aggregate effects of programming over the entirety of each prisoner’s confinement time on a system-wide

basis, this study not only examined the extent to which prisoners are warehoused, which was defined as the absence of any involvement in institutional interventions during a prisoner's entire confinement period, but also whether warehousing affects recidivism.

Along with evaluating the effects of warehousing on recidivism, this study looked at the relationship between reoffending and the number of interventions in which offenders had participated. Moreover, given that all but a handful of the interventions offered in the Minnesota Department of Corrections (MnDOC) have been previously evaluated, the study investigated whether the effects of programming vary on the basis of what prior research has found. That is, it compared the effects of successful recidivism-reduction interventions (SRRIs) and unproven recidivism-reduction interventions (URRIs) on recidivism. A total of 23 correctional interventions were evaluated in this study.

In carrying out one of the first system-wide analyses of the impact of prison programming (or lack thereof) on recidivism, this study attempted to address a number of questions that have implications for correctional research, policy and practice. What is the warehousing rate, at least for Minnesota prisoners? What predicts who will get warehoused? What effect, if any, does warehousing have on recidivism? Does participating in more than one institutional intervention have an impact on reoffending? Likewise, does participating in multiple interventions with a track record of success have a greater effect on recidivism? And, if providing prisoners with programming lowers recidivism, how much would need to be provided to prisoners to yield an appreciable reduction in a state's overall recidivism rate?

Recidivism was measured as a rearrest and as a reconviction for a new criminal offense, regardless of severity level. The follow-up period for recidivism ranged from 3.5 to 12.5 years. Propensity score matching (PSM) was used to individually match the offenders who were warehoused with a comparison group of offenders released from prison who had participated in programming. Similarly, PSM was used to individually match the offenders who participated in multiple interventions with a comparison group of prisoners who had not. Multivariate statistical analyses were used to determine the effects of warehousing and participation in multiple interventions on recidivism.

### **The Effects of Warehousing and Program Participation on Recidivism**

The table below shows that 31 percent of the offenders were warehoused and 64 percent of these offenders were reconvicted within three years of release. In the same column, the results show that 17 percent of the offenders participated in one intervention and the three-year reconviction rate was 61 percent. In general, as participation in correctional interventions increased, the recidivism rate decreased. The rate drops to 57 percent for offenders participating in two interventions, 53 percent for those involved in three interventions, 47 percent for those who participated in four interventions and 43 percent for those involved in five or more.

When focusing on participation in the 12 recidivism-reduction interventions, the SRRIs column, the results show that 49 percent of the offenders were involved in at least one of these programs. Notably, however, only 18 percent of offenders participated in two or more effective interventions. Again, recidivism rates decrease as involvement in SRRIs increase. The three-year rate for offenders who were involved in five or more SRRIs (30 percent) was less than half the rate for the offenders who did not participate in a single SRRIs (63 percent).

### Descriptive Statistics and Recidivism Rates by Program Participation

Number	Any Intervention			SRRI			URRI		
	Rate	N	% of Total	Rate	N	% of Total	Rate	N	% of Total
0	0.642	17,084	0.307	0.627	28,594	0.514	0.625	22,277	0.400
1	0.614	9,319	0.167	0.559	17,033	0.306	0.555	12,161	0.218
2	0.570	8,365	0.150	0.438	6,118	0.110	0.524	9,432	0.169
3	0.533	7,306	0.131	0.323	3,275	0.059	0.503	5,465	0.098
4	0.466	5,375	0.097	0.299	531	0.010	0.500	2,710	0.049
5 or More	0.428	8,227	0.148	0.296	125	0.002	0.454	3,631	0.065
N		55,676			55,676			55,676	

SRRI = Successful Recidivism-Reduction Intervention

URRI = Unproven Recidivism-Reduction Intervention

Sixty percent of the offenders participated in the interventions that have yet to be evaluated or have not reduced recidivism. Moreover, nearly 40 percent of the offenders were involved in two or more of these interventions. As with the any intervention and SRRI columns, the recidivism rate decreases as participation in the URRI's increases.

The results indicated that offenders were significantly more likely to get warehoused when they were male, American Indian, Asian, older, had more supervision failures, had a greater specialization in property offenses, were admitted to prison as a probation or supervised release violator, and had a shorter confinement period. On the other hand, the odds of getting warehoused were significantly lower for offenders who had more felonies, were married, were committed from the Twin Cities metro area, were incarcerated for drug, DWI and "other" offenses, had a history of suicidal tendencies, and had greater STG (i.e., gang) involvement.

The results from the multivariate statistical models examining recidivism showed that warehousing increased the odds of reconviction by 13 percent. Participation in unproven interventions had no impact on recidivism, and greater involvement in these interventions did not lead to a significant reduction in reoffending. Participation in one successful intervention reduced the chances of recidivism by 12 percent, while involvement in two interventions decreased it by 26 percent.

Additional analyses indicated that providing every offender access to a successful intervention would decrease the overall recidivism rate by 3.4 percentage points, a 6.1 percent reduction. Likewise, providing offenders with access to two successful interventions, which lowered the odds of recidivism by 26 percent, would drop the estimated overall rate by 7.5 percentage points, a 13.5 percent reduction.

### Summary

The results call into question policies about revoking offenders on probation and parole and then sending them to prison for short periods of time to be warehoused. Reducing the warehousing rate has implications for improving recidivism outcomes for prisoners but, as the results suggest, it is not just about increasing access to programming. Rather, what is truly important for recidivism outcomes is providing prisoners with access to effective programming. From a recidivism reduction perspective, participating in a single effective intervention is better than participating in multiple unproven interventions. Still, a little less than half (49 percent) of the offenders participated in any

successful intervention. When prison visitation is excluded, however, the rate dropped to 23 percent. Participation in multiple effective interventions yielded the best recidivism outcomes, but only 18 percent of the offenders were involved in two or more successful interventions, including prison visitation.

The evidence from the “what works” literature suggests, on the whole, that providing prisoners with correctional programming can yield better outcomes relating to prison misconduct, post-prison employment, recidivism and cost avoidance. Warehousing prisoners, on the other hand, exacerbates public safety by increasing recidivism. Moreover, it may not only compromise the safety of correctional institutions by increasing misconduct, but it may also result in more unemployment for prisoners after their release from prison. Although warehousing may appear to be a more frugal approach, it may be more costly in the long run.