

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



AN EVALUATION OF THE MINNESOTA COMPREHENSIVE OFFENDER REENTRY PLAN (MCORP) PILOT PROJECT: FINAL REPORT

October 2013

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) recently completed the final evaluation of the MCORP pilot project. The evaluation assessed the effects of the pilot project on recidivism among 689 offenders, of whom 415 were MCORP participants. The average follow-up period for the offenders in this study was three years. The evaluation also included a cost-benefit analysis of the pilot project.

KEY FINDINGS

- Participating in MCORP significantly reduced four of the five recidivism measures examined.
- MCORP participation significantly reduced recidivism by:
 - 20 percent for rearrest
 - 21 percent for reconviction
 - 25 percent for technical violation revocation
 - 24 percent for any return to prison
- MCORP reduced costs by an estimated \$1.8 million.
 - The cost-benefit results were highly sensitive to the presence of one offense.
- The benefit per participant was \$4,305
- The overall return on investment (ROI) was \$1.80
 - For every dollar spent on MCORP, the benefit was \$1.80

During the 2007 legislative session the DOC received \$2.24 million in state funding to design and implement the MCORP pilot project. Based on the premise that offender reentry begins as soon as offenders are admitted to prison, MCORP emphasized increased collaboration between prison caseworkers and supervision agents to provide planning, support, and direction for offenders to address their strengths and needs in both the institution and the community. More specifically, the core programmatic theme of this project was the development of dynamic case planning and case management that provided continuity between the offender's confinement and return to the community.

Further, MCORP was developed on the notion that the increased collaboration will enhance the delivery of services by increasing the extent to which offenders access employment, suitable housing, and programming in the community. The enhanced service delivery will, in turn, purportedly lead to a reduction in recidivism. Following the project design and development phase during the fall of 2007, MCORP was implemented in early 2008. The pilot project ended in 2011.

The MCORP evaluation used a randomized controlled trial to determine whether it had an impact on recidivism. If offenders met the eligibility criteria to participate in MCORP, they were randomly assigned to either the experimental (MCORP) or control (business as usual) groups. During the 2008-2011 period, 415 offenders participated in MCORP and were released from prison to correctional supervision in Hennepin, Ramsey, Dodge, Filmore, and Olmsted counties. Recidivism outcomes for these offenders were compared to those of the 274 offenders in the control group.

The MCORP evaluation also assessed whether the program is cost effective by comparing program operating costs with the costs resulting from recidivism. To determine whether MCORP has produced a benefit resulting from reduced recidivism, the study compared the number of offenses committed by offenders in the MCORP and control groups. The costs of these offenses were then monetized based on cost of crime estimates developed through prior research.

Recidivism Results

The data in Figure 1 show that MCORP participants had lower recidivism rates than the control group offenders for all five measures examined. For example, 70 percent of the MCORP participants had been rearrested for a new offense by the end of June 2012 compared with 76 percent of the control group offenders. The results also show that 58 percent of the MCORP participants were reconvicted for a new offense compared to 64 percent in the control group. In addition, 29 percent of the MCORP participants were reincarcerated for a new felony compared to 30 percent of the control group. Further, compared to the offenders in the control group, who had a technical violation revocation rate of 38 percent, MCORP participants had a rate of 31 percent. Lastly, 47 percent of MCORP offenders returned to prison for a new offense and/or a technical violation versus 52 percent of those in the control group.

The results from the multivariate statistical analyses, which controlled for time at risk and other observed differences between the two groups, showed that participating in MCORP had a statistically significant effect on four of the five recidivism measures. MCORP participation significantly lowered the risk of recidivism by 20 percent for rearrest, 21 percent for reconviction, 25 percent for technical violation revocation, and 24 percent for any return to prison.

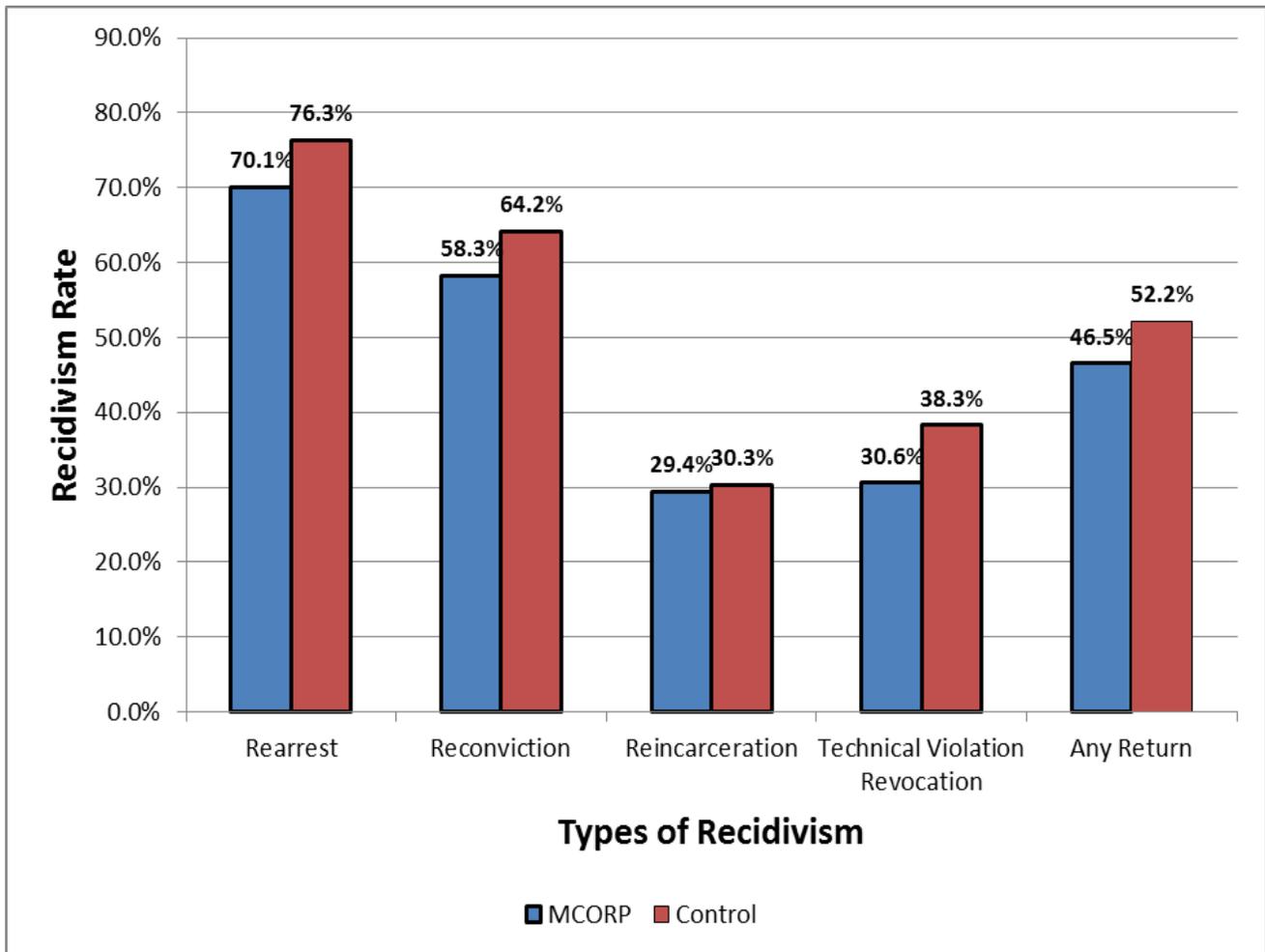


Figure 1. Recidivism Rates for MCORP and Control Group Offenders

Cost-Benefit Results

As noted above, \$2.24 million in state funding was devoted to the implementation of the pilot project, which represents MCORP’s operational costs. Potential benefits, on the other hand, stem from whether the pilot project lowered recidivism enough to produce a reduction in the costs associated with crime (e.g., victim costs, criminal justice costs, and lost productivity of incarcerated offenders).

The results showed that the MCORP pilot project reduced costs, but the size of this benefit was highly sensitive to one offense committed by a control group offender. The most plausible estimate suggests that MCORP produced a benefit of about \$4,300 per participant, which amounts to \$1.8 million overall. The cost-benefit ratio indicates that for every dollar spent on MCORP, the State of Minnesota has seen an estimated benefit of \$1.80, which results in an 80 percent return on investment.

Summary

While the MCORP pilot project achieved generally positive recidivism and cost-benefit outcomes, the results from this study have several implications for prisoner reentry policy and practice. First, the MCORP pilot project was, by and large, a community-based intervention during both phases. To further improve recidivism outcomes, the MCORP pilot project needed to be more consistent with one of the main concepts on which it was based—that reentry begins at the time of admission to prison.

Second, the Minnesota experience with prisoner reentry may provide some indication as to what works, and what does not, with these types of programs. Rather than using funding to hire additional personnel to serve as liaisons between prison and community corrections, using it to help modify and improve existing practices may be a more promising approach.

Finally, this study lends some support to the notion that prisoner reentry programs can yield a positive return on investment. In particular, the results underscore the value of preventing very serious, costly offenses such as homicide. From a cost-benefit perspective, programs that effectively reduce violent recidivism are more likely to see relatively large returns on investment.