

A Review of Practices to Reduce Recidivism

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Introduction

Background

- ▶ PhD in Economics from the University of Toronto
- ▶ Assistant Professor at the University of Montreal

Research interests

- ▶ Economics of crime
- ▶ Applied econometrics
- ▶ Cognitive-behavioral therapy, offenders' mental health, parole, risk assessments

Causal Inference

Definition

- ▶ Determining whether a policy or an intervention *causes* an *effect*

Types of questions

- ✗ Do offenders who participate in the program exhibit lower recidivism rates?
- ✓ Does participation in the program cause a reduction in recidivism?

Gold standard

- ▶ Randomized controlled trials (RCTs)—challenging to implement within correctional facilities

In-Prison Programming

State of the literature

- ▶ No clear consensus on the effect on recidivism
- ▶ Limited research looking at impacts on health, earnings, welfare

In the United States

- ▶ Alsan et al. (2024) study the IGNITE (*Inmate Growth Naturally and Intentionally Through Education*) program in Flint, Michigan
- ▶ Findings : ↓ in recidivism
- ▶ Expanded to North Carolina, Ohio, North Dakota, Michigan, Texas and Minnesota (Hennepin)

IGNITE program

Personalized education

- Daily 2-hour instruction (5 days/week)
- Range from basic literacy to college credits
- Post-release continuation

High participation structure

- 90% participation rate
- Incentivized through tablet privileges

In-Prison Programming

Regular programs

- Education : ~ 220 hours
- Employment : ~ 420 hours
- Benefits/costs ratio : between 5 and 10
- Costs : \$350 → Benefits : \$2640

Cognitive-behavioral therapy

- 24 hours of intervention (+ individual work)
- Targets high-risk individuals, low receptivity
- Benefits/costs ratio : 3

In Canada

- ▶ Sentences of less than two years
- ▶ Arbour et al. (2024) : employment and education programs ⇒ no change in rearrests, but ↓ reincarceration
- ▶ Arbour (2024) : cognitive-behavioral therapy ⇒ ↓ short-term recidivism

Key takeaway

- ▶ Targeted programs, when rigorously implemented and supported by follow-up treatments, appear to encourage rehabilitation

Parole

Parole in Canada

- ▶ For some individuals, parole starts at the 1/3 of the sentence
- ▶ Parole is accompanied by specific conditions, such as refraining from alcohol consumption, participating in therapy, and residing in a halfway house

Halfway houses

- ▶ Focused on rehabilitation and well-integrated within communities
- ▶ Encourage continuation of treatment initiated during incarceration



Parole

Results

- ▶ Arbour and Marchand (2024) find puzzling results
- ▶ ↑ in reincarceration, ↓ in reoffenses
- ▶ How can these results be reconciled?

Measuring recidivism

- ▶ Parolees face a higher likelihood of reincarceration due to *technical violations*
- ▶ Outcome of interest : examine total time spent in prison
- ▶ Even when accounting for technical violations : parolees spend, on average, four fewer months in prison

Conclusion

Key takeaways

- ▶ Programming : tailored programs (e.g., education, employment) significantly reduce recidivism and improve reintegration outcomes
- ▶ Parole : short-term increases in reincarceration due to technical violations do not overshadow long-term reductions in crime and incarceration

Thank you !

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