

Assessing the Effectiveness of Intermediate Sanctions

Multnomah County, Oregon

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REPORT SUMMARY • JULY 2008

Key Findings

- > Most people (70 percent) did not receive any type of sanction or intervention while on probation or under post-prison supervision in Multnomah County, and most were neither re-arrested (74 percent) nor reconvicted (85 percent) after their supervision ended.
- > Multnomah County relies heavily on jail to sanction those who violate conditions of supervision. Of the 30 percent of the supervised population who were sanctioned, 92 percent received jail time.
- > The use of jail as an intermediate sanction had a negative effect on both short-term outcomes (completion of probation) and long-term outcomes (re-arrest and reconviction). People who received any intermediate sanction (including jail) were 44 percent more likely to have their supervision revoked, compared to a similar group. Those receiving jail were 76 percent more likely to have their supervision revoked.

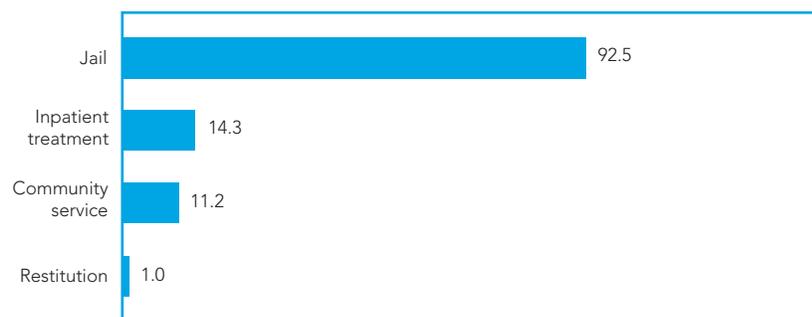
BACKGROUND

In the 1990s the Multnomah County, Oregon, Department of Community Justice (DCJ)—the agency responsible for supervising people on probation, parole, or post-prison supervision in the county—initiated a series of evidence-based reforms. As part of this effort, DCJ officials asked the Vera Institute to examine how the county uses intermediate sanctions when people violate the conditions of their probation or post-prison supervision. Intermediate sanctions (e.g., drug treatment, community service, day reporting, and jail) represent a stepped hierarchy of penalties and programs that can forestall a return to prison. Vera conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the county's use of these sanctions. This brief provides an overview of our key findings.

USE OF INTERMEDIATE SANCTIONS

Our analysis found that most of the people under supervision in Multnomah County (about 70 percent) do not receive any type of intermediate sanction. When they are sanctioned, however, despite the numerous other options available, the vast majority of people are sent to jail (92.5 percent), as illustrated in the figure below. Furthermore, jail sanctions are given for most types of violations, ranging from failure to report to a parole or probation officer to failure to obey all laws. The only type of violation for which jail sanctions are not given very often is failure to comply with a program (for which jail is imposed in just 39 percent of cases).

Use of Intermediate Sanctions in Multnomah County, by percentage of those receiving sanctions



SHORT- AND LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

In looking at whether people were able to complete their supervision successfully, we found that those who received intermediate sanctions were significantly more likely to have their supervision revoked than those who did not receive a sanction. Controlling for demographic and crime-related attributes, we found that people who received any intermediate sanction were 44 percent more likely to have their supervision revoked; those who received jail as an intermediate sanction were 76 percent more likely to have their supervision revoked.

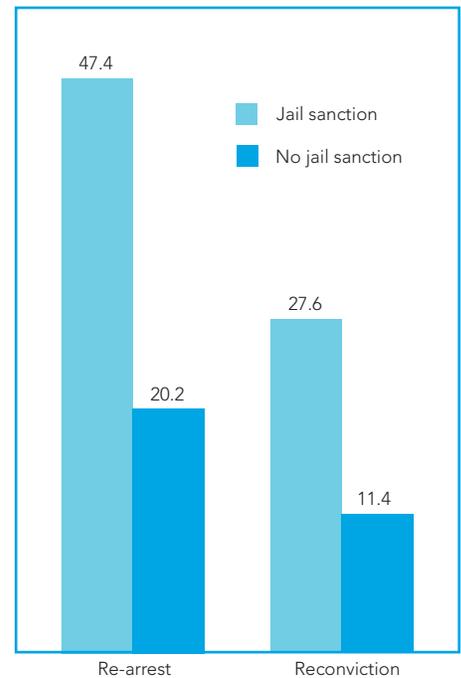
Were people who received jail sanctions different from those who didn't receive sanctions or who received sanctions other than jail? If so, did this difference account for their unsuccessful outcomes? To account for this potential bias, we compared two groups with a similar propensity to receive sanctions. We found that intermediate sanctions had a negative effect on both re-arrest and reconviction. As the figure (right) shows, both re-arrest and reconviction rates were higher for the group given a jail sanction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, we suggest several ways DCJ could improve supervision and outcomes. These include:

- > **Conducting a service inventory** to ascertain whether an adequate range of sanctions other than jail exist and can be readily accessed by supervision officers;
- > **Increasing the use of sanctions other than jail** and considering targeting the use of jail to the group for which it is most appropriate, namely those who pose the greatest risk to public safety. Besides reducing jail time (and the negative effect on outcomes identified here), this would increase the number of people receiving other sanctions, allowing for future studies of the effects of intermediate sanctions other than jail;
- > **Examining in more detail how jail is used**, specifically the number of jail days given for each sanction;
- > **Educating probation and parole officers** on DCJ's practices and protocols to ensure accurate data collection and to ensure that sanctions given align with the agency's goals; and
- > **Conducting future studies**, which should include cost-benefit analysis, on the effect of sanctions other than jail.

Effects of a jail sanction on recidivism (percentage)



For More Information

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The Vera Institute of Justice is an independent nonprofit organization that combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety.