

New study identified juvenile offenders most likely to commit more crimes after release from residential placement

September 25 2013, by Meghan Speakes Collins

Extensive data collected by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) can help predict which youths are most likely to commit additional crimes following release from a residential placement. Also, youths often experience improvements in behavior during their residential stay, and those with the greatest improvements are less likely to commit new crimes.

These conclusions were reached in a study conducted by Florida State's College of Criminology and Criminal Justice and the Florida DJJ. The study evaluated the predictive usefulness of the Residential Positive Achievement Change Tool (R-PACT), an [assessment tool](#) DJJ uses to track key areas of development for residential youths. The tool collects data on prior criminal history, [academic performance](#), involvement with antisocial peers and use of appropriate social skills for controlling emotions and handling difficult situations.

The study focused on data from roughly 4,700 youths released from residential facilities in 2010 and 2011. It was meant to answer two questions. First, can the R-PACT data be used to predict who will become a reoffender? The study found that those who scored well according to the data had a reoffending rate of 26 percent within 12 months of release—this is less than half the reoffending rate of 55 percent observed among youths scoring poorly on the R-PACT data. Thus, the data can improve predictions about who will commit new

crimes in the future.

The study's second research question involved changes youths experience during the residential stay. The average youth experienced a 28 percent increase in the "protective" factors expected to reduce later crime. The greatest improvements were in the use of basic social skills. By the end of their residential stay, youths were more likely—as observed within their facility—to effectively use [social skills](#) to deal with others, handle difficult situations, and control emotions and aggression.

Importantly, youths who experienced the greatest improvements during their residential stay were less likely to become reoffenders.

"Researchers have long sought to understand how youthful offenders experience their time in a residential facility," said Carter Hay, professor of [criminology](#) and criminal justice at Florida State and principal investigator for the study. "For that small percentage of youths who need residential confinement, well-designed and well-implemented services can make a difference and lower reoffending."

"What we've learned from this study will help the department craft policies that will enable us to protect public safety while also ensuring Florida's at-risk and troubled youth have the greatest chance of leading successful lives," said Florida DJJ secretary Wansley Walters. "Many of the youth who enter the juvenile justice system are bright, talented individuals with boundless potential to contribute to their communities. Being equipped with this information empowers us as an agency to make sure they receive the services they need to tap into that potential and prosper."

As a result of this study, DJJ will expand its use of the R-PACT to make assessments about which youths are most likely to reoffend, monitor

youth changes during the residential stay, and inform supervision and treatment plans for youths, both during and after their residential stay.

Provided by Florida State University

Citation: New study identified juvenile offenders most likely to commit more crimes after release from residential placement (2013, September 25) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-09-juvenile-commit-crimes-residential-placement.html>

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