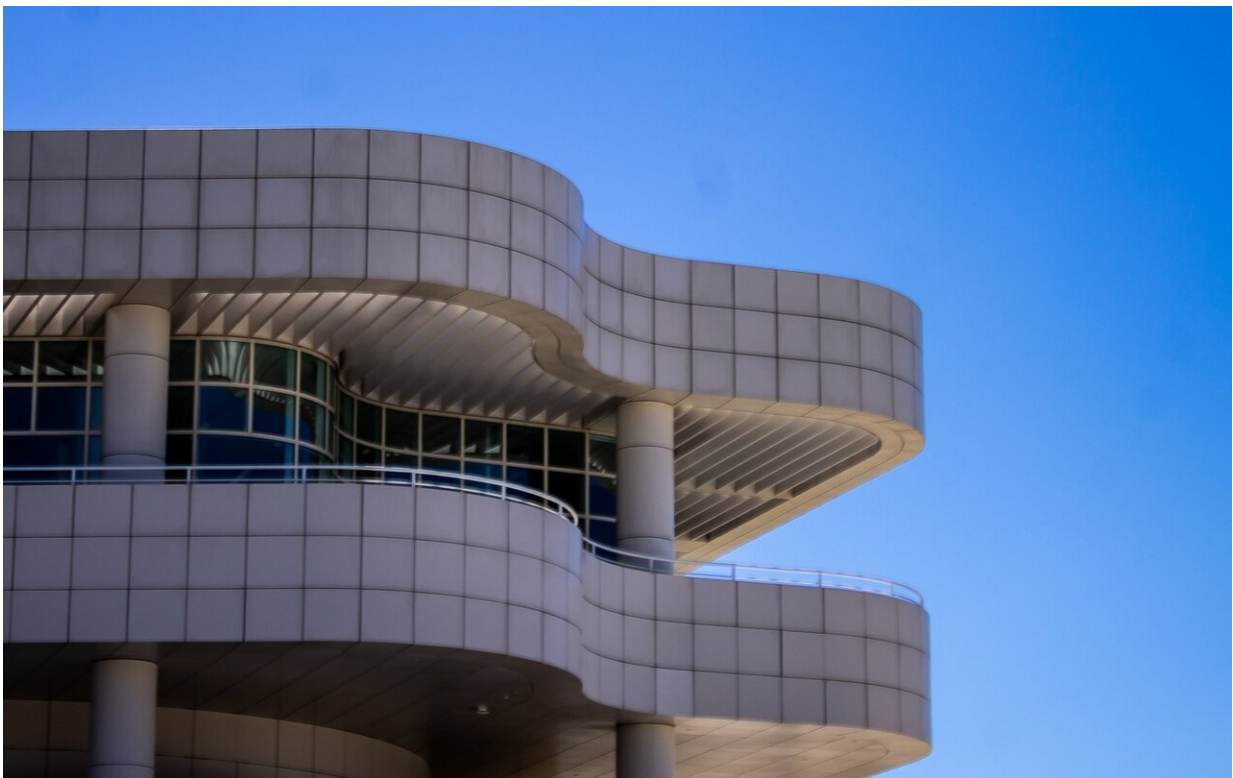


# Electronic monitoring failed to reduce recidivism for girls in juvenile justice system, says study

June 21 2021

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In recent years, many juvenile courts have adopted in-home detention with electronic monitoring tethers as an alternative to institutional incarceration. A new study has examined whether this approach reduces

recidivism among girls involved in the juvenile justice system. The study found that tethers failed to reduce reoffending among the girls; in fact, they may be harmful because in-home detention limits girls' access to treatment programs.

The study, by researchers at the University of Cincinnati (UC) and Michigan State University, appears in *Justice Evaluation Journal*, a publication of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

"We believe this is the first study to examine tethers' effectiveness among girls," says Valerie R. Anderson, assistant professor of criminal justice at UC, who led the study. "Most criminal justice practices and policies have been developed for and tested on boys and men, then applied to girls. Our study will help inform policy and evidence-based practice for adjudicated girls."

In-home detention with [electronic monitoring](#) (or tethers) has been used widely among adults. Individuals are confined to home and wear tethers so their location can be monitored at all times; tethers are used primarily to ensure compliance with detention requirements, not necessarily to restrict those sentenced from leaving home.

Juvenile courts have begun to use this approach to reduce youth's future delinquency and involvement with the criminal justice system. Tethers are considered an alternative to residential placement as well as an early release alternative to institutional options for continued secure detention, but their effectiveness for girls is unclear.

In this study, researchers used data from a mid-sized Midwestern juvenile family court's delinquency and truancy divisions between 2004 and 2012. They evaluated the effectiveness of in-home detention with tethers on recidivism rates, comparing 155 girls who received in-home detention with tethers to a [control group](#) of 155 girls with characteristics similar to

the first group who received either curfews or in-home detention without tethers. The girls' average age was 14 when they had their first contact with the courts, and most were youth of color.

Researchers assessed the girls on 41 items across eight domains, including prior/current offenses, education, leisure and recreation, peer relationships, substance abuse, family circumstances, attitudes and orientation, and personality. They measured recidivism by whether girls received new court petitions one and two years after sentencing.

The study found that in-home detention tethers were not effective in reducing recidivism for girls. Girls who received a tether had significantly higher rates of recidivism two years after release from in-home detention (52 percent) than girls who did not receive a tether (35 percent).

The study also found that court petitions were more likely to be related to persons for girls who had been tethered; both tethered and nontethered girls had the same distribution across other types of offenses (e.g., property, drugs, status—offenses such as running away from home and truancy from school).

The authors suggest that gender-specific experiences of adjudicated girls may place them at greater risk for recidivism after at-home detention with tethers. Descriptive analyses of the girls sentenced to electronic monitoring showed that they had significantly higher scores on a measure of risk assessment that measured education, substance abuse, family dynamics, and other factors. This indicates that the girls likely required intensive levels of treatment and support, but by being restrained at home with electronic monitoring, they may have been restricted from fully engaging in [treatment programs](#) that could have led to reductions in their risk of recidivism.

In addition, tethering places girls under closer scrutiny, increasing opportunities for probation officers to observe violations, which may lead to new court petitions, the authors explain. And placing girls in homes that may be unstable and where they may experience domestic violence may further exacerbate girls' risk of reoffending.

"In-home detention with tethers is touted as more cost-effective than institutional incarceration and this type of approach may appear better than detention centers, but it is still a punitive sanction that fails to fully address the risks and needs of girls and their families," notes Laura Rubino, a Ph.D. candidate in criminal justice at UC, who coauthored the study. Instead, the study's authors call for programs for girls in the [juvenile justice system](#) that address social support, safety, and mental health.

The authors point to several limitations of their study, including shortcomings of the archival data (e.g., restricted flexibility in measurement, lack of measures of gender identity). In addition, racial/ethnic minority and LGBTQ+ [girls](#) are overrepresented in the legal system and consistently experience harsher treatment than their counterparts, which requires more research to understand the effects of in-home [detention](#) sanctions with diverse groups of youth.

**More information:** Valerie R. Anderson et al, (In)Effectiveness of In-Home Detention Tethers to Reduce Recidivism for System-Involved Girls, *Justice Evaluation Journal* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/24751979.2021.1933570](#)

Provided by Crime and Justice Research Alliance

Citation: Electronic monitoring failed to reduce recidivism for girls in juvenile justice system,

says study (2021, June 21) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-06-electronic-recidivism-girls-juvenile-justice.html>

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