

Correctional Facilities

A correctional facility is any residential facility with construction fixtures or staffing models designed to restrict the movements and activities of those placed in the facility. It is used for the placement of any juvenile adjudicated of having committed an offense, or, when applicable, of any other individual convicted of a criminal offense.

When a precipitous rise in violent juvenile crime during the early 1990s aroused public fears about the emergence of “violent juvenile superpredators,” legislators responded with a “get tough” approach that resulted in tougher sanctions on juvenile offenders: more mandatory and determinate sentences, blended sentencing (combining juvenile and adult sanctions), more offenses that qualified for the most severe sentences, progressive sanctions, and “zero tolerance” policies (Howell 1998). The increased reliance on confinement and adult transfers placed huge burdens on existing juvenile and adult detention and correctional facilities.

As a result of changes in juvenile justice policies, the total number of juveniles in residential placement facilities (which includes correctional facilities) rose 41 percent from 1991 to 1999. The total number decreased 10 percent from 1999 to 2003, but this was still a 27 percent increase from 1991 to 2003 (Snyder and Sickmund 2006). According to the latest data available from the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement, in 2006 there was a 1-day count of 92,854 juvenile offenders in residential placement facilities (Sickmund, Sladky, and Kang 2008).

Correctional facilities are comparable with prisons in the adult criminal justice system (Justice Policy Institute 2009). A primary difference between residential placement in a correctional facility and placement in other nonsecure facilities is the use of confinement fixtures or features to restrict juveniles within in the facility. Among the facilities responding to the Juvenile Residential Facility Census survey in 2004, 49 percent reported using one or more confinement features, other than locking sleeping rooms. These confinement features usually include security doors or external gates that are locked by staff to confine young persons within a specific building or area in the facility. A facility’s staff can also provide security, and in some incidences, such as wilderness camps, the remote location is a security feature that keeps youth from leaving (Livsey, Sickmund, and Sladky 2009).

The costs and resources required to keep juveniles in a correctional facility can be substantial. The Justice Policy Institute (2009) found that it costs on average of \$240.99 per day (close to \$88,000 per year) per youth in state-funded, post-adjudication residential facilities. Because of budget constraints, many states are rethinking how they fund the juvenile justice system and looking for ways to reduce

Suggested Reference: Development Services Group, Inc. 2010. “Correctional Facilities.” Literature review. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Correctional_Facilities.pdf
Prepared by Development Services Group, Inc., under cooperative agreement number 2013–JF–FX–K002. Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.

the number of youth incarcerated through expansion of community-based, detention alternatives.

Outcome Evidence

Research on juvenile corrections has generally found that confinement can negatively affect youth in custody and can lead to further involvement in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems rather than interrupting the offending cycle or facilitating rehabilitation. Youths in custody are more likely to recidivate or end up in the adult criminal justice system, compared with youths who are diverted from detention or confinement facilities (Holman and Zidenberg 2006). Studies have generally shown that the most effective secure corrections programs serve only a small number of participants and provide individualized services. Missouri, for example, has achieved “exceptional” reductions in juvenile recidivism by abolishing its state reform school and replacing it with a network of small group homes emphasizing personal attention and therapeutic treatment (Mendel 2003). Large, congregate-care facilities, such as training schools and boot camps, have not proven especially effective at reducing recidivism (Howell 1998). In the words of one juvenile justice expert, “virtually every study of recidivism among youth sentenced to juvenile training schools finds that at least 50 percent to 70 percent of offenders are arrested within 1 or 2 years after release” (Mendel 2003).

Lipsey (1998) performed a meta-analysis of 83 studies of interventions with institutionalized juvenile offenders and found that “recidivism effect sizes for the different treatment types were most consistently positive for interpersonal skills interventions and teaching family homes.” Behavioral, community-based residential, and multiple-service programs also appeared to reduce recidivism, but the small number of studies in each category makes it difficult to draw strong conclusions. A recent systematic review by Lipsey and Cullen looked at meta-analyses of correctional rehabilitation programs. The meta-analyses included research on juvenile and adult offenders, although as the authors noted “treatment effects for juvenile offenders have been more thoroughly analyzed and document than for adult offenders” (2007, 306). Across the various meta-analyses of studies, the authors noted two key results. First, in meta-analyses that compared recidivism outcomes for offenders receiving greater sanctions versus lesser or no sanctions (such as incarceration versus community supervision), the results showed at best there was a modest mean reduction in recidivism for offenders who received greater sanctions (such as incarceration), but at worst the results showed an increase in recidivism for that condition. Second, meta-analyses that compared offenders who received rehabilitation treatment with offenders who did not receive treatment found that offenders who had gone through rehabilitation had lower mean recidivism rates. Further, almost all of the meta-analyses of specific rehabilitation treatments found a reduction in recidivism rates, and the majority of those reductions are greater than the largest reduction found in any meta-analysis of sanctions including incarceration.

Characteristics of Correctional Facilities

The basic characteristics of correctional facilities—including their size, structure, security arrangements, type of programming, and ownership—are highly variable. Within a single state or jurisdiction, secure correctional programs may range from military-style boot camps to large, state-run training schools, to intimate family-style group homes.

Most incarcerated youths are still sentenced to traditional training schools and other large correctional units housing 100 to 500 individuals. In 2004 the largest facilities (those holding more than 200 residents) accounted for only 3 percent of all facilities, but they held 25 percent of the juvenile population in custody (Livsey, Sickmund, and Sladky 2009). Many of these large, congregate-care facilities suffer from overcrowding and unsafe conditions. A national survey of juvenile detention and

correction facilities in the early 1990s found that more than 75 percent of youths incarcerated nationwide are housed in facilities that violate federal standards related to living space. Such crowded conditions are also associated with high rates of injury and suicidal acts (Parent and Abt Associates 1994). Youths housed in these types of facilities often have higher rates of physical injury, mental health problems, and suicide attempts, as well as inferior educational outcomes compared with counterparts who are treated in the community (Sedlak and McPherson 2010; Holman and Zidenberg 2006).

Recent studies also show that many of the nation's juvenile offenders are being kept in overcrowded, secure facilities even though they could be safely maintained in less-secure settings. In 2006, fewer than 25 percent of all juvenile offenders in residential placements had committed a violent offense (including homicide, robbery, and aggravated assault), but more than 80 percent of all juvenile offenders were held in locked facilities—as opposed to the staff-secure facilities favored in national accreditation standards (Sickmund, Sladky, and Kang 2008; Snyder and Sickmund 2006).

Concerns/Issues

In recent years, there has been a spate of media reports about the deteriorating conditions in “juvenile jails,” and Amnesty International, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, and the American Bar Association have all called for significant reform of the country's juvenile correctional facilities (Hubner and Wolfson 1999). A report completed in compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 found that an estimated 12 percent of youths in juvenile facilities reported experiencing one or more incidents of sexual victimization by another youth or facility staff (Beck, Harrison, and Guerino 2010). Within the juvenile justice system, there has been a concomitant emphasis on the need for graduated sanctions and alternatives to detention that will keep juveniles out of secure facilities for as long as is safely possible (Howell and Lipsey 2004).

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