

HON202_H Honors Capstone Seminar, 2016

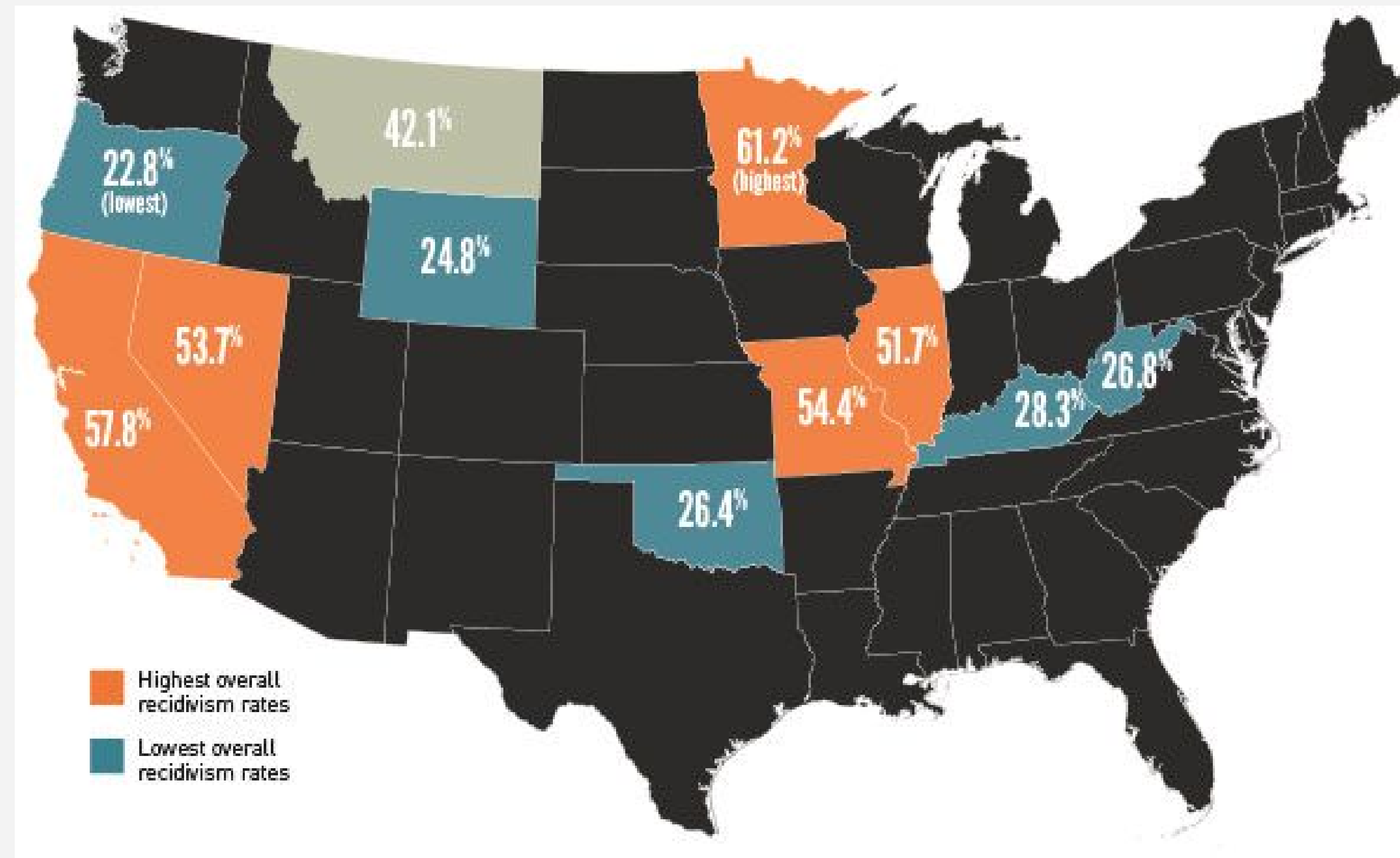
ABSTRACT

Too many inmates are reincarcerated after being released from prison. This is not only an economic burden for American taxpayers but it also represents the loss of potentially productive members of society who instead spend their lives behind bars. Many people believe that long-term incarceration is the most efficient and cost effective approach to reduce recidivism; however, little is currently known about the impact of reentry services on lowering recidivism rates and what the cost or effectiveness of the services might be. Our research focused on Oregon and examined the effect of mental health care services for ex-offenders upon recidivism rates. It also asked what the economic impact of increasing these services would be on the state.

INTRODUCTION

Recidivism is the likelihood of an individual to reoffend after being released from incarceration. A generalization that many Oregonians make about recidivism is that criminals will always be criminals; they will never be able to change their behavior. Many Oregonians also believe that the best way to ensure that criminals will not reoffend is through long-term incarceration, most especially offenders with mental illness. In our research, we challenged the assumption that long-term incarceration is more effective at reducing recidivism rates of mentally ill offenders than offering rehabilitation programs. Our literature research and personal interviews led us to the conclusion that programs aimed at altering behavior and providing support for ex-inmates, along with a cooperative approach to offering these services, are the most effective means of preventing recidivism.

RESULTS



Oregon's overall recidivism could be further reduced by lowering juvenile recidivism rates

- Lowering youth involvement within the juvenile corrections system, decreases the chances that they will become involved in the adult corrections system.
- Mental health issues are a largely contributing factor to juvenile crime. 94% of females and 74% of males incarcerated in Oregon Youth Authority involved youth being diagnosed with a mental illness.
- Mental health treatment is less available to incarcerated youth than youth in the community, and because of a lack of resources many mentally ill youth are incarcerated instead of receiving appropriate mental health support.
- As an alternative to incarceration, effort should be made to treat juvenile offenders through community based, evidence based support services that have been shown to decrease recidivism.

Oregon's recidivism rates are one of the lowest in the country due to Oregon's effective correctional system.

- Alternative Incarceration Program (AIP) is a correctional program that was created by the Oregon legislature in 1994.
- This program consists of three sub-programs which educate inmates to think critically about their actions and their outcomes.
- These programs are controlled by House Bill 267 which requires all incarceration programs to be proven effective and cost-worthy.

The cost of recidivism is not an efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

- Family lose their loved ones for great periods of time due to incarceration and recidivism.
- Tax dollars are spent to pay for their food and shelter.
- Financially, it is smarter to help educate an inmate by altering their thinking patterns.
- To be more economical, recidivism needs to be reduced and prevented.
- Taxpayer dollars should be invested in ways to better prevent recidivism.
- The average annual expense to provide an inmate with health care is \$567.
- The expense to house an inmate in Oregon for one year is almost \$31,00

CONCLUSIONS/DISCUSSION

We need to change the presumption that incarceration in itself is an effective means to reduce recidivism, and shift our focus towards programs and services that work together to provide ex-inmates comprehensive support systems once they are released. Finances need to be relocated to fund community based reentry services to provide ex-inmates support that is tailored to their needs. The close cooperation between the agencies in Oregon that offer these support services has proven effective and is an important factor in the reduction of recidivism. The current resources which inmates require, and will not receive if economical support is refused, are crucial to the low rates of recidivism for which Oregon is praised. Our goal, as a state, should be to better our citizens' way of life and reduce the social and financial costs of crime. To increase the effectiveness of invested funds, more research must be conducted on the interaction between support services to determine which types of programs offer the best balance of effectiveness and cost.

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