

Aftercare programmes and intensive supervision probation for young offenders

Increased supervision, strict conditions of compliance and access to services to prevent young people reoffending.

First published
16 December 2024

Effect scale	Quality of evidence				
	Effect Impact on crime	Mechanism How it works	Moderator Where it works	Implementation How to do it	Economic cost What it costs
<div><div></div><div>No overall change</div></div>	<div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div>Strong</div></div>	<div><div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div><div>Low</div></div>	<div>No information</div>	<div>No information</div>	<div>No information</div>

Focus of the intervention

Aftercare programmes and intensive supervision probation (ISP) offer community-based supervision to reduce reoffending.

- Aftercare programmes offer supervision and any service deemed to help with the successful transition and reintegration of offenders from custody to the community.
- ISP is defined by increased intensity, control and supervision of offenders in the community, characterised by small caseloads, intensive surveillance and strict conditions of compliance.

The focus of this summary is the effect of aftercare programmes and ISP on young people’s reoffending. The specific reoffending outcomes covered by the review are:

- alleged offences: arrests, charges, referrals and court or police contact
- convicted offences: convictions, legal proceedings undertaken via court and imprisonment

The summary is based on one systematic review covering 27 studies, of which 25 were subject to meta-analysis. Primary studies included in the review focus on:

- young offenders who were mainly between 12 and 18 years old
- 'typical offenders', excluding programmes which targeted specific offenders

Meta-analyses were conducted separately for ISP (15 studies) and aftercare programmes (10 studies). The majority of studies were conducted in the USA, with a small number conducted in the UK.

Effect – how effective is it?

Overall, there is no evidence to suggest that aftercare programmes and ISP have had a statistically significant impact on young people's reoffending.

The review found that:

- There was no statistically significant difference in the likelihood of young people having future convicted offences between those who did and did not participate in aftercare programmes.
- There was no statistically significant difference in the likelihood of young people having future alleged or convicted offences between those who received ISP and the control groups who received standard probation.
- However, young people who participated in aftercare programmes were statistically significantly less likely to have alleged offences upon release from custody, compared to the control groups who received care as usual.

The review conducted a subgroup analysis of effect sizes for aftercare programmes. This found that:

- Primary studies with weaker research designs were more likely to find that aftercare programmes (statistically) significantly reduced alleged offences in young people than studies with stronger designs.

- Primary studies with larger sample sizes (100+ participants) were more likely to find that aftercare programmes (statistically) significantly reduced alleged offences in young people than studies with smaller sample sizes.
- Primary studies with longer follow-up periods (more than 12 months) were more likely to find that aftercare programmes (statistically) significantly increased convicted offences in young people than studies with shorter follow-up periods.

A subgroup analysis of effect sizes for ISP found that primary studies with weaker research designs, shorter follow-up periods (less than 12 months), larger sample sizes (more than 100 participants) and including more technical reports were more likely to find that ISP increased convicted offences in young people.

Mechanism – how does it work?

Aftercare programmes and ISP are collectively assumed to reduce young people's reoffending through increased supervision and control.

Aftercare programmes are assumed to reduce reoffending in young people released from prison by providing:

- increased supervision and monitoring which leads to a decrease in criminal activity
- access to services that are deemed to help offenders transition and reintegrate from custody to the community

ISP is assumed to reduce reoffending by having small caseloads, intensive or more frequent surveillance and contact, and strict conditions of compliance leading to increased intensity, control and supervision. In turn, the intensive supervision would serve as a specific deterrent for young people.

However, the review did not test these potential mechanisms to establish whether they were responsible for any increases or decreases found in young people's reoffending.

Moderators – in which contexts does it work best?

The review did not examine under what conditions or for what population groups aftercare programmes and ISP might work best.

Implementation – what can be said about implementing this initiative?

The review gave no account of how aftercare programmes and ISP were implemented, nor of any implementation challenges encountered by the primary studies.

Economic considerations – how much might it cost?

The review did not mention the costs or benefits of aftercare programmes and ISP, and no formal economic analysis was provided.

General considerations

Caution should be taken when applying the evidence summarised here to other geographical contexts and populations. This is because samples were exclusively made up of young people. Furthermore, the majority of studies were exclusively conducted in the USA, and in some cases, had samples exclusively made up of males or people from ethnic minorities.

The strict exclusion criteria used in the review means the findings are not representative of the literature on aftercare programmes and ISP, so caution must be taken when applying to offender populations. Specific populations of offenders were excluded including:

- perpetrators of domestic violence
- people with serious mental health problems
- substance users
- sex offenders
- known gang members
- age related violations (such as under-age drinking and truancy)
- probation breaches

The review summarises evidence published in the period of 1990–2015, so the findings may be outdated.

Summary

Overall, there is no evidence to suggest that aftercare programmes and ISP have had a statistically significant effect on young people's reoffending.

The review was sufficiently systematic that many forms of bias that could influence the study conclusions can be ruled out. However, some methodological issues impact the ability to be more certain about the effectiveness of aftercare programmes and ISP. These include:

- insufficient consideration for using weighting in the calculation of mean effect sizes
- the implications of combining different outcome measures
- the influence of unanticipated outcomes on the size of the effects

Additional evidence is needed to test potential explanations for how aftercare programmes and ISP are expected to work, and under what conditions or for what populations they might work best.

The review did not examine how aftercare programmes and ISP were implemented or economic considerations.

Caution should be taken when applying the evidence summarised here to other geographical contexts and populations because of the studies included, demographic make-up of the samples and strict exclusion criteria used.

Reviews

Review one

Reference

- Bouchard J and Wong J. 2018. '[Examining the effects of intensive supervision and aftercare programs for at-risk youth: A systematic review and meta-analysis](#)', International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 62(6), pp 1509–1534.

[Return to the toolkit](#)

Tags

- [Crime reduction](#)