

Background

Home detention with electronic monitoring is used to restrict a person's activity and ensure compliance with conditions of community supervision, such as a curfew or participation in a treatment program or community service. People under electronic monitoring typically wear a tamper-resistant wrist or ankle bracelet, which transmits a signal through a home monitoring device to a central monitoring system. If the person ventures out of range during a period when he or she is required to be home, the device alerts supervision authorities. Punitive sanctions for non-compliance may follow. Given that electronic monitoring costs more and imposes more restrictions than supervision without monitoring, it is important to assess the degree to which it prevents reoffending.

Research Question

Do girls who serve home confinement with electronic monitoring differ in their rates of reoffending compared to those whose confinement lacks such monitoring?

Study Strategy

This study is the first to examine the impact of electronic monitoring on girls who have been adjudicated delinquent. The girls included in the study had been adjudicated by a midwestern court for delinquency or truancy between 2004 and 2012. Using a statistical method called propensity score matching, researchers matched 155 adjudicated girls who received electronic monitoring sanctions to 155 adjudicated girls who shared similar characteristics, but who were placed on home detention without monitoring. The girls' average age was 14 when they had their first contact with the courts, and most were youth of color. The girls were matched on the types of factors, including age, history of delinquency, race, ethnicity, and assessed risk of reoffending. The accuracy of the matching process was confirmed by comparing the two groups on a variety of measures; the only statistical difference identified pertained to family circumstances.

Researchers then compared the two groups to discern any differences in reoffending, as measured by having had any new court petitions within one and two years of the date on which electronic monitoring ceased (for those subject to monitoring) or the date of initial entry into court (for those not subject to monitoring).

Findings

Members of both the electronic monitoring and no monitoring groups had similar rates of reoffending at the one-year mark. However, after two years, girls who were assigned to electronic monitoring were more likely to reoffend than those who were on home confinement without monitoring. A little over half (51.6%) of those who had been electronically monitored reoffended, compared to just over one-third (34.8%) of those who had not been assigned to wear an electronic device; this difference was statistically significant. In addition, among girls who reoffended, those on electronic monitoring were more likely to have a court petition for a person-related offense (27.3%) than those who were not monitored (16.9%).

"In the current study, girls who received the [electronic monitoring] intervention had significantly higher recidivism rates two years following release from in-home detention compared to girls in the comparison group."

- Anderson et al. (2021)

Implications

These findings call into question the value of electronic monitoring in preventing reoffending among girls adjudicated delinquent in the year or two after their release from such monitoring. The topic, however, warrants additional investigation. First, this study does not speak to the recidivism reduction impact of electronic monitoring during the period in which girls are monitored but rather the period following it. In addition, it may be the case that the girls on electronic monitoring were more predisposed to continued delinquency based on factors that the researchers could not measure and thus were not included in the matching process, such as the original offense. It is also unknown whether the two groups had different levels of access to services, treatment, and supports. Some judges might have required more social service supports for girls on home detention in lieu of electronic monitoring. Perhaps that and other factors influenced the differential outcomes between the two groups.

"In-home detention is likely not effective at reducing recidivism among girls given that the intervention does not focus on criminogenic risk and need or gender-responsive factors that have been widely documented to improve outcomes among adjudicated girls"

- Anderson et al. (2021)

Still, this research has implications for family court practices pertaining to girls who are adjudicated for truancy or delinquency. The findings indicate that girls may be better off without electronic monitoring, which may be imposed in lieu of requirements to seek treatment and social service supports and could inhibit participation in recreational and other pro-social activities.

Future research should aspire to employ more rigorous randomized evaluation designs, test the degree to which these findings are replicated in other jurisdictions, and explore the same research question with boys who are adjudicated as delinquent or truant.

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