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# Juvenile Waiver, Boot Camp, and Recidivism in a Northwestern State

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The waiver of juveniles to adult criminal court, an increasing phenomenon in recent years, transfers young offenders out of the juvenile system and into the adult criminal justice system, where the range of sanctions is presumably greater. Boot camps, one such sanction, are an intermediate response that are typically designed for youthful, first-time offenders, making waived youth likely candidates for placement there. The authors examine the effectiveness of a boot camp program in terms of recidivism for juveniles waived to criminal court in a northwestern state. They compare juveniles in the boot camp program to juveniles waived to criminal court and sentenced to probation using a 2-year follow-up period.

**Keywords:** *boot camp; waiver; juvenile; transfer; recidivism*

Serious and violent juvenile offenders pose a significant challenge to the juvenile justice system. They are responsible for a disproportionate amount of all crime and yet are still developing, which suggests they may be highly amenable to change (Farrington & Loeber, 1999). The decision regarding whether a youth is dangerous or amenable to rehabilitative treatment is one of the most difficult issues that confronts both juvenile courts and juvenile justice policy makers (Podkopacz & Feld, 1996).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, policy makers in most states punitively responded to serious and violent juvenile offending by increasing juvenile disposition options and adding or expanding juvenile waiver statutes allowing for easier transfer of certain youthful offenders to adult criminal court for prosecution (Bishop, 2000; Feld, 2003; Fritsch & Hemmens, 1995; Steiner & Hemmens, 2003). Correspondingly, the number

of juveniles waived to adult criminal court considerably increased during this period (Krisberg & Austin, 1993; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

On the other hand, waived juveniles still represent a small percentage of the convicted felons sentenced in adult criminal court (Bishop, 2000; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Criminal court judges have little experience dealing with this special population of offenders. Furthermore, they are rarely provided any information regarding the youths' juvenile court histories or their prospects for rehabilitation (Bishop, 2000). Yet criminal court judges are typically forced to decide between placing waived juveniles on probation or sentencing them to prison. Rarely do they have other sentencing options at their disposal.

Although states are being encouraged to develop specialized programs for youthful offenders, most states have not yet done so (Bishop, 2000). Austin, Johnson, and Gregoriou (2000) revealed that 44 states place transferred juveniles who are sentenced to prison into the general population, typically without any specialized services. Although a few states have experimented with alternatives to prison such as blended sentencing, housing waived youth in juvenile facilities until they reach 18, or segregating them within adult prisons, only a couple of states have developed sentencing options that the judiciary could impose for youthful offenders who they determine are not suitable for probation or prison (Bishop, 2000; Redding, 2003). Although the effectiveness of sentences to prison and probation, in terms of recidivism, has not been encouraging for waived juveniles when compared to similar youth retained in the juvenile system (e.g., Bishop, 2000; Bishop, Frazier, Lanza-Kaduce, & Winner, 1996; Fagan, 1995; Myers, 2003b; Podkopacz & Feld, 1996; Redding, 2003; Winner, Lanza-Kaduce, Bishop, & Frazier, 1997), the effects of alternative dispositions for this population are still unclear (Redding, 2003).

In this study, we evaluate the effectiveness of one northwestern state's alternative disposition, the rider program, for juveniles waived to adult criminal court. The rider program, which is subsequently described, is not restricted to transferred juvenile offenders, but it is typically reserved for first-time offenders. In addition, we reveal that the rider program was the most frequent sentence imposed for juveniles waived to criminal court in this rural northwestern state.

## **Bootcamps for Juveniles Waived to Criminal Court?**

Boot camps are often designed for younger offenders who do not have a prior criminal record (Correia, 1997; MacKenzie, 1994). In sentencing a

waived juvenile to an adult boot camp facility, the court would seemingly satisfy the harsher punishment goal of the waiver while still offering the juvenile an opportunity to better himself or herself in an environment that is not perceived as harsh as the prison milieu. In theory, this could be an effective manner of dealing with this dispositional challenge for the courts.

In some cases, juvenile-specific boot camps have generated significant differences in recidivism or time to recidivism when compared to other dispositions (e.g., Farrington et al., 2002). Other studies have revealed that juveniles have not responded well to the boot camp environment and have been equally as likely to recidivate on release as comparison groups (e.g., Thomas & Peters, 1996).

Findings with regard to adult facilities have also been mixed. Some studies have found no significant differences in recidivism rates between boot camp participants and comparison groups (e.g., Burns & Vito, 1995; Stinchcomb & Terry, 2001). Others have discovered that results differ by site (e.g., MacKenzie, Brame, McDowall, & Souryal, 1995), whereas some have found lower recidivism rates for boot camps offenders (e.g., Benda, Toombs, & Whiteside, 1996; Correia, 1997). A few studies have revealed higher recidivism rates for boot camp groups (e.g., Anderson, Dyson, & Lee, 1997; Jones & Ross, 1997; Wright & Mays, 1998). In their recent meta-analysis, Wilson and MacKenzie (2005) found no differences in the overall effect of boot camps relative to comparison groups in reducing recidivism for either juvenile or adult offenders. However, they noted that when an aftercare treatment component was combined with the boot camp program, some encouraging results emerged (Wilson & MacKenzie, 2005).

Much of literature suggests that the typical offender sent to boot camp facilities is a young, male, first-time offender (e.g., Anderson et al., 1997; Benda et al., 1996; Jones & Ross, 1997; Wright & Mays, 1998), which could include juveniles transferred to adult criminal court. Indeed, the samples assessed in several studies contained offenders ages 16 and 17 (e.g., Anderson et al., 1997; Jones & Ross, 1997; Wright & Mays, 1998). Although several of these studies controlled for age, no study of boot camps to date has examined their effects on juveniles waived to adult criminal court. In this study, we evaluate the effects of a boot camp program on this special population of offenders.

## Rider Program Description

The state department of corrections operates the boot camp, known as the rider program, under investigation here. The rider program provides a

sentencing alternative for those offenders who may, after a period of programming and evaluation, be candidates for probation rather than incarceration. During the period the offenders assessed in this study were confined, the rider program was primarily a discipline-oriented boot camp. The typical sentence length for an individual sent to the program was 180 days; however, a few offenders were sentenced to 120-day commitments.<sup>1</sup> When the offenders assessed here were in its custody, the rider program provided offenders basic education services but offered little else in the way of rehabilitative treatment. Completion of the rider program was intended to foster confidence and self-esteem in graduates. If an offender violated the rules of the facility, he or she was typically transferred to prison. Offenders who successfully completed the program were released on probation.

## Method

The study described here was designed to evaluate the effects of the rider program, in terms of recidivism, for juveniles waived to criminal court in a rural northwestern state. The target population for the study includes all juveniles waived to criminal court between 1995 and 1999 who were sentenced to the rider program or probation.

## Sample

The data evaluated in this study were collected with the assistance of the state's department of corrections. Information on all of the offenders younger than 18 years of age who entered the department of correction's system between the years of 1995 and 1999 was attained. In addition to attaining the information from the department of corrections, phone interviews were conducted with the individual county probation departments to determine whether the juveniles had been previously committed to a state juvenile institution for a delinquent offense.

It was determined that 102 juveniles 17 and younger were waived to criminal court between 1995 and 1999, 20 of whom were sent to prison and not examined in this study because not all of them had been released. Of the remaining 82 juveniles waived to adult criminal court, 49 were sentenced to the rider program, whereas 33 were placed on probation. Those juveniles sentenced to probation were used as a comparison group for the purposes of this study. The rider group and the probation group were not significantly different on measures of age, race, offense type, or type of county (urban or rural)

from which they were waived. The two groups were significantly different on whether they were previously committed to a state juvenile institution. Those sentenced to the rider program were more likely to have been committed to a state juvenile institution. This difference between the two groups constitutes a limitation of the study for which we adjust in part by including a control variable tapping whether a juvenile had a prior commitment.

Much like other studies where specialized populations have been assessed, the relatively small sample is a limitation of this study. However, further data with an appropriate follow-up period were not available. Unlike most areas where previous waiver research has been performed, this particular state is primarily rural, with a sparse population, and few juveniles are waived to criminal court. In addition, because of a change in the way the department of corrections stored their archival records, data prior to 1995 were not attainable. On the other hand, the sample is all inclusive of the juveniles 17 and younger who were waived to criminal court between 1995 and 1999 and sentenced to the rider program or probation.

## Dependent Variables

We examined both the rider group and the probation group for a 2-year period of street time. Two measures of recidivism were used to evaluate the rider program. *Reincarcerated* is defined as whether an offender was convicted of either a new offense or a technical violation of their probation. *Reoffended* is measured as a new felony conviction.

## Independent Variables

To examine what other factors improved prediction of a juvenile's likelihood of recidivating, we also examined the effects of several other variables. The sample and all the measures considered in this study are described in Table 1. A dummy variable, rider program, was created to assess the effects of the two different sentences on the dependent variables.

As noted above, the rider and probation groups differed as to whether the juveniles composing each of them had been previously committed to a state juvenile institution. To control for this, a measure, prior commitment, was created and defined as whether the juvenile had ever been committed to the state department of juvenile corrections or the state department of health and welfare for a delinquent offense.

Age has been a variable that has been examined in much of the prior waiver and boot camp research (e.g., Anderson et al., 1997; Myers, 2003a;

**Table 1**  
**Sample-Specific Means and Standard Deviations**

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Dependent variables		
Reincarcerated <sup>a</sup>	0.34	0.48
Reoffended <sup>a</sup>	0.26	0.44
Independent variables		
Age	16.63	0.53
Nonviolent <sup>a</sup>	0.39	0.49
Non-White <sup>a</sup>	0.37	0.49
Prior commitment <sup>a</sup>	0.35	0.48
Sentenced to rider <sup>a</sup>	0.60	0.49

Note: *N* = 82.

a. Dummy coded (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Winner et al., 1997). In this state, juveniles can be waived to adult criminal court once they reach the age of 14. As such, age for this sample can only range from 14 to 17 years of age. In addition to age, the type of offense the juvenile was transferred for is another variable that has been examined (e.g., Barnes & Franz, 1989; Bishop et al., 1996; Clement, 1997; Fagan, 1995; Langan & Levin, 2002; Myers, 2003b; Podkopacz & Feld, 1996). For the purposes of this study, offense type was coded as a dichotomous variable, nonviolent offense. Violent offenses were defined as those that could have resulted in injury to a person. Race has been examined by others who have explored these topics (e.g., Barnes & Franz, 1989; Benda, Toombs, & Peacock, 2002; Houghtalin & Mays, 1991; Jones & Ross, 1997; Myers, 2003b; Stinchcomb & Terry, 2001). This state under study here is homogeneous, where the 2000 census revealed it to be 93% White. Consequently, race was defined as a dichotomous variable, non-White.

The use of multivariate analysis with a sample of this size suggested a possibility of multicollinearity. Accordingly, the variables in each model were assessed for colinearity using ordinary least squares regression analysis (see Menard, 2001). Multicollinearity was not a problem here, as all of the predictor variables exhibited tolerance values greater than .50.

## Modeling Techniques

Multivariate analyses were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the rider program while controlling for prior commitment and to assess which

**Table 2**  
**Recidivism Outcomes for Juveniles Waived to Adult Criminal Court and Sentenced to Rider Program**

	Reincarcerated		Reoffended	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Constant	-0.13		-1.11	
Rider program	-0.78	0.49	0.16	0.09
Prior commitment	-0.28	0.52	-0.16	0.08

\* $p < .10$ .

predictors were the most proximate influences on a juvenile's likelihood for recidivism. Given that both outcome measures were dichotomous, the data were analyzed using logistic regression. Logistic regression, because it relies on maximum likelihood estimation, can be helpful for estimating parameters for skewed distributions, which often result when assessing multiple predictors using a small sample, such as the one examined here (Hanushek & Jackson, 1977).

## Findings

Before discussing the effectiveness of the rider program for juveniles waived to criminal court, we think it is noteworthy that nearly all (96%) of the juveniles sentenced to the rider program completed it. This finding is similar to those derived from evaluations of boot camps in some states, but it is an improvement over others (e.g., MacKenzie et al., 1995). Table 2 reports the results from the logistic model assessing the effects of the rider program while controlling for prior commitment. Although it approached significance in the model predicting whether a juvenile was reincarcerated, being sentenced to the rider program did not have an influence on either measure of recidivism.

Table 3 reports the results from the models predicting recidivism outcomes. As can be seen, when controlling for age, offense type, race, and whether the juvenile had been previously committed to juvenile facility, juveniles sentenced to the rider program were less likely to be reincarcerated on their release. However, when we assessed whether the juveniles reoffended, no relationship was observed.



**Table 3**  
**Predicting Recidivism for Juveniles Waived to Criminal Court**

	Reincarcerated		Reoffended	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Constant	0.73		-7.52	
Rider program	-0.87*	0.51	0.03	0.55
Age	-0.02	0.49	0.35	0.55
Nonviolent	-1.11*	0.58	-0.17	0.60
Non-White	-0.26	0.53	0.91*	0.55
Prior commitment	-0.23	0.54	-0.18	0.56
Model $\chi^2(5 df)$	7.78		3.54	
Percentage classified correctly with model	70.7		74.4	

\* $p < .10$ .

Juveniles sentenced for a nonviolent offense were also less likely to be reincarcerated than were those who were waived for a violent offense, but offense type was not important in explaining whether a juvenile reoffended. Interestingly, non-White race and whether a juvenile reoffended were related, suggesting minority offenders were more likely to reoffend than White offenders regardless of age, offense type, sentence imposed, or prior history with the state juvenile corrections system.

Given the potential policy relevance of the findings for the state in which the rider program is located and the findings regarding the rider program and offense type in the model predicting whether a juvenile was reincarcerated, we assessed an interaction term capturing the effect of the rider program for non-violent offenders. Although we did not reveal a relationship between the interaction term and whether a juvenile was reincarcerated, a correlation was observed in the model predicting whether a juvenile reoffended ( $b = -2.38$ ,  $SE = 1.22$ ). This finding suggests that while controlling for age, race, prior commitment, and the main effects of offense type and sentence, nonviolent offenders who were sentenced to the rider program were less likely to reoffend.

## Discussion

The extant research suggests that juveniles waived to criminal court are typically sentenced to prison or probation (Barnes & Franz, 1989; Bortner,

1986; Champion, 1989; Clement, 1997; Fagan, 1995; Houghtalin & Mays, 1991; Merlo, Benekos, & Cook, 1997; Myers, 2003a; Podkopacz & Feld, 1996; Redding, 2003). Boot camps represent an intermediate sanction that is typically reserved for young, first-time offenders (Correia, 1997; MacKenzie, 1994), making waived youth probable candidates for a boot camp sentence. Boot camps, whether juvenile or adult specific, have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism in some areas but to be ineffective in others (MacKenzie et al., 1995; Wilson & MacKenzie, 2005). Yet their effect on juveniles waived to adult criminal court has not been previously evaluated.

The findings from this study suggest that when controlling for age, race, offense type, and criminal history, waived juveniles sentenced to a boot camp facility known as the rider program were not less likely to reoffend than those offenders sentenced to probation. The rider group was, however, reconvicted at a lower rate. From this, it could be inferred that the rider program graduates were merely less likely to violate probation than the juveniles sentenced to probation. It may be that the rider program instilled discipline in these youthful offenders, which is arguably necessary to be successful on probation. Then again, it is likely that reductions in new offenses, and not probation success, is what the judiciary had in mind when sentencing these offenders to the rider program.

From a different perspective, it could be that the judiciary in this northwestern state may be using the rider program as a graduated sanction for previously committed youth. We observed that juveniles sentenced to the rider program were significantly more likely to have been previously committed to a state juvenile corrections facility than those juveniles sentenced to probation. Seemingly, the rider program would be a tougher sentence than what is typically imposed in the juvenile system. On the other hand, offenders are sentenced to the rider program for either 120 or 180 days. The average commitment to this state's department of juvenile corrections was 378 days in 1997 and 416 days in 1998 (Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections, 2001). Thus, it seems that those offenders sent to the rider program generally served less time than they would have had they been retained in this state's juvenile corrections system. Although we acknowledge the tenuous nature of this comparison, it does appear the rider program is not a more stringent punishment, at least with respect to time served, than what is typically doled out in the juvenile system.

An additional possibility is that the intent of the boot camp evaluated here is to reduce prison overcrowding. Indeed, some evidence suggests boot camps, if correctly applied, are effective in doing so (MacKenzie & Parent, 1991; MacKenzie & Piquero, 1994). In an effort to explore this possibility,

we conducted a subsequent analysis to determine where the waived juveniles who recidivated were sent on reconviction. The data revealed that more than 90% of those sentenced to the rider program who were reconvicted (nearly 74%) were subsequently sentenced to prison. Given these discouraging findings, it does not appear the boot camp program is reducing overcrowding or saving correctional costs in the long term with respect to this population. On the other hand, if prison were the likely sentence for the offenders who were sent to the rider program, the costs of the rider program for the juveniles who were reconvicted would need to be balanced against the projected costs of a prison sentence for those offenders (roughly 26%) who successfully completed probation after they were released from the rider program and those offenders (10%) who were reconvicted and not sent to prison. Determining these costs would provide a more complete picture of whether the rider program is reducing this state's prison population in a cost-effective manner.

In view of the differences across states in boot camp programs such as the one evaluated here (see MacKenzie et al., 1995) and the relatively small amount of juveniles waived to adult criminal court in this state, we are not comfortable generalizing the findings from this study so as to inform policy in other states. The findings here do allow us to feel comfortable in making the claim that the rider program is generally *not* effective in reducing reoffenses for juveniles waived to criminal court in this northwestern state. On the other hand, it did not aggravate recidivism either. In fact, we found that for nonviolent offenders the rider program was effective in lowering a juvenile's likelihood of committing a new offense. Accordingly, this state may want to experiment with sending certain types of juveniles waived to adult criminal court, such as those waived for nonviolent offenses, to the rider program.

We also suggest that our finding in the full multivariate model that boot camp program graduates were generally reincarcerated less often than the probation group, but that they reoffended at nearly the same frequency, is important. In the past, evidence has shown that boot camps with an aftercare component are effective in reducing recidivism (Benda et al., 1996; Correia, 1997; Wilson & MacKenzie, 2005). This particular northwestern state may want to examine the possibility of expanding the rider program to include aftercare services. Aftercare services could be an effective way to take advantage of the compliance on probation that the rider program seems to foster in these youthful offenders.

At the time of the study, the rider program did not contain any type of treatment component beyond basic education. Evidence suggests that boot

camps that contain an effective treatment component have produced some reductions in recidivism (Benda et al., 1996; Correia, 1997; MacKenzie et al., 1995). Including a treatment component that adheres to certain principles (see Andrews, 1995; Cullen, 2002; Cullen & Gendreau, 2000, 2001; Gendreau, 1996) may be a way for this state to experience more encouraging outcomes with this challenging offender group.

All told, the findings from this study may inform policy only in one state. Although we are cautious generalizing these results to other states, we do think that these findings support exploring the use of alternative sanctions for juveniles waived to criminal court. Although this study's findings overall are not supportive of a boot camp yielding reductions in recidivism for this population, it did not appear to make them worse either. Incarceration lengths in boot camps are typically shorter than prison sentences, which may ameliorate correctional system crowding (MacKenzie & Parent, 1991; MacKenzie & Piquero, 1994) and, possibly through the structure they provide, reduce a young offenders' likelihood for the victimization they often suffer when placed in general population adult prisons (Redding, 2003). Boot camps could also provide an environment that may be more conducive to treatment. Although this may seem counterintuitive at first, evidence has suggested that juvenile offenders found boot camps to be safer and more therapeutic than traditional facilities, which was then associated with improvements in inmate adjustment (MacKenzie, Wilson, Armstrong, & Gover, 2001). Taken together with the encouraging findings for boot camps that combine treatment (Benda et al., 1996; Correia, 1997; MacKenzie et al., 1995) and aftercare (Benda et al., 1996; Correia, 1997; Wilson & MacKenzie, 2005), it may be that using boot camps that contain effective treatment and aftercare could be a way for states to attend to this dispositional challenge. In any event, future empirical inquiry is certainly warranted.

## Note

1. Approximately 71% of the sample had a 180-day sentence imposed.

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