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REDUCING CRIMINAL RISK: AN EVALUATION OF  
THE HIGH RISK OFFENDER INTENSIVE SUPERVISION PROJECT

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**DOCUMENT DIGEST**Department of Health  
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**Project Description**

In 1984 the Division of Corrections (DOC) established a project to develop intensive supervision procedures for use with high risk offenders. The objective of the high risk offender intensive supervisory procedures (HRO/ISP) developed by project staff was to reduce criminal activity. Agents operating HRO projects screen cases entering probation or parole in their community, select high risk offenders as their clients, and use intensive supervision procedures to actively discourage criminal behavior.

The intensive supervision procedures used in the project are made possible by a significantly reduced offender caseload. Offenders selected for the HRO/ISP project receive more than twice the agent supervisory attention than the average Wisconsin probationer or parolee. This permits agents to construct highly individualized supervisory rules and to actively enforce them by monitoring offender behavior very closely.

**Evaluation Findings**

The evaluation compares the community supervision outcomes of HRO/ISP clients to a reference group of offenders with very similar characteristics. Reference group offenders received conventional community supervision.

New criminal convictions for felony or misdemeanor offenses were significantly lower for offenders in the HRO/ISP project. One year after their release from prison, 29% of the offenders receiving regular supervision had been returned to prison for a new criminal conviction. This was true of only 5% of the HRO/ISP clients. There was also a much lower incidence of conviction for violent offenses such as armed robbery, sexual assault or battery among HRO/ISP clients (12% and 3% respectively). Each offender in both groups had an assaultive criminal history.

**Conclusions**

The findings suggest that intensive supervision procedures developed in the HRO projects have significantly reduced criminal behavior among high risk offenders. If adopted more widely, supervision of this kind could have a positive impact on public safety.

## Reducing Criminal Risk: An Evaluation of the High Risk Offender Intensive Supervision Project

### BACKGROUND/PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In 1984, the Division of Corrections began operating an experimental intensive supervision program called the High Risk Offender (HRO) project in the Madison community corrections region. The objective of this program was to significantly reduce criminal activity among high risk offenders serving probation or parole terms in the community by supervising them very closely. Two agents were assigned to the Madison HRO project by the Division of Corrections' administrator and, in early 1984, they began to develop model intensive supervision procedures for a caseload of 30 high risk offenders. In late 1985, a second High Risk Offender project, which employs similar community supervision and client selection procedures, was begun in Kenosha.

The program design is very simple. Both projects are operated by experienced, volunteer agents working in two person teams. These agents screen cases entering probation or parole in their area, select only high risk offenders as clients, and attempt to discourage criminal activity with special supervisory procedures.

Community supervision procedures used by the HRO projects incorporate many unique features, but most important is the unusually high level of agent/offender contact made possible by a significantly reduced caseload. Offenders selected for the HRO project receive more than twice the agent supervisory attention accorded the average Wisconsin probationer or parolee.

The two underlying assumptions of the HRO project are: 1) high risk offenders can be identified; and 2) intensive supervision can effectively discourage criminal behavior. This evaluation attempts to test both assumptions.

### OFFENDER SELECTION AND SUPERVISION

The project was conceived as an experimental program for developing effective supervision strategies for high risk offenders, i.e., offenders with a documented history of assaultive behavior. A caseload limit of 30 offenders for a two agent team was established (later increased to 40) to make very close supervision possible, but agents were expected to design and implement supervisory procedures they felt worked best. A detailed description of the project's history and the evolution of high risk offender intensive supervision procedures is available from the Division of Corrections (see Appendix 1). The brief project description which follows describes current supervisory procedures which agents in the project have developed over a five year period.

### Selecting High Risk Offenders

The HRO projects supervise offenders who have exceptionally serious criminal offense histories. They are not "typical" community corrections clients, but individuals selected for intensive supervision because they pose an unusually high degree of criminal risk. A history of assaultive behavior is a pre-condition for consideration as a HRO client. Project agents make final selections from this group based on case file reviews and interviews. The majority of offenders screened into the projects have lengthy criminal records, punctuated with assaultive offenses such as battery, sexual assault or armed robbery. Other characteristics agents look for are poor prison conduct, poor attitude towards supervision and an unwillingness to participate in treatment for known drug abuse, mental health or alcohol problems.

Profile data recorded at project entry indicate that virtually all (94%) HRO clients have a prior penal experience as a juvenile or adult, about 40% have a history of sexual assault, and around 40% have used or possessed a weapon during a crime. Drug and alcohol abuse are common - more than two thirds have committed a crime while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Many of the individuals selected are habitual offenders.

### Intensive Supervision Procedures (ISP)

For the most part, HRO agents use what can be described as conventional community supervision techniques. Electronic monitoring devices, for instance, have not been employed. Supervision received by HRO clients differs from that provided other offenders primarily in intensity, i.e., the reduced caseload gives agents much more time to work with each offender. That time is used to carefully investigate the client's history, to impose highly individualized supervisory rules and to closely monitor the offender's behavior in the community. Agents operating the projects have, however, developed a distinctive style of intensive supervision referred to here as HRO/ISP. Some of the key elements of these procedures are described briefly below:

**A) Imposition of Specialized Probation and Parole Rules - High Risk agents impose a variety of probation and parole rules on their clients to discourage criminal activity. The most common are prohibitions on alcohol and drug use. Other client activities which may be restricted include associations with certain individuals or groups, use of a motor vehicle, entry into designated geographic areas, and movement outside the offender's residence during evening hours.**

Since they are designed to control the circumstances and behavior associated with each offender's prior criminal activity, supervisory rules are often highly individualized. A pedophile, for instance, would be prohibited from contact with children and from loitering around school yards. A client with a history of committing crimes during night prowls might have evening home curfews or no driving conditions imposed on him.

The general tactic is to establish rules which restrict behavior(s) associated with a past criminal pattern. The activities restricted are not themselves crimes, but behaviors which, in the past, tended to precede criminal acts. To discourage crime, agents try to impose supervisory conditions which the client will violate if a past criminal pattern is resumed. Obviously, rules alone will not accomplish this objective. Close surveillance is required to observe rule violations as early as possible and make effective enforcement possible.

**B) Mandatory Daily Activity Scheduling** - High risk clients are required to be engaged in employment, school, or community service within 30 days after entering supervision. Participation in treatment programs is mandatory if recommended by a professional assessment. Offender activity schedules are planned with the agent and reviewed weekly. The schedule indicates where the client is supposed to be during most hours of the day and is used by the agent to monitor offender activity through collateral contacts with employers, treatment providers, etc. It may also be made available to local police.

**C) Police Registration and Surveillance** - Offenders entering the project are required to register with local police by submitting a photo, fingerprints, a handwriting sample, their past offense history and a current local address. Police are subsequently informed by HRO agents of the supervisory rules (described above) imposed on the offender and routinely given updated information about residence and daily activities. These communications make it possible for police officers to help agents monitor offender behavior.

Close coordination between HRO agents and local police can expand offender surveillance which, in turn, can improve rules enforcement. If they have contact with police, HRO clients are required to identify themselves and their agent to the officer and then notify their agent immediately. In the Madison police department, a liaison officer routinely passes HRO client information from HRO agents to duty patrol officers and often accompanies the agents on client home visits.

**D) Agent Surveillance** - Agents are required to make at least four face to face contacts with each client each month including two visits in the offender's home. Home visits are both

scheduled and unscheduled and may occur during day or evening hours. The client may be required to take a urinalysis screen for drug and alcohol use at any time. In addition, frequent collateral contacts are made with police, employers, landlords, associates, and treatment providers to verify compliance with supervisory rules and monitor daily activity. Collateral contacts may increase surveillance well beyond that the agent can perform directly.

In a recent, well publicized case, a HRO agent notified elementary school officials, the school's parent/teacher association and the local neighborhood association that a convicted child molester had moved into the neighborhood. Photographs of the offender were made available to these groups and they were asked to report contacts they or their children might have with the offender. Since this client's supervisory rules prohibited him from associating with children or approaching school property, this technique is an example of how surveillance can be increased without direct agent/client contact.

**E) Supervisory Rule Enforcement** - The purpose of setting supervisory rules is to structure offender activity in a way that discourages criminal activity. The probability that rule violations will be discovered is increased considerably by the intensive supervision surveillance techniques described above. The fact remains that offenders are more likely to comply with rules if they believe violations will be discovered and punished very quickly.

High risk agents encourage compliance by imposing sanctions, such as jail detention, for each rule violation. The general policy, for instance, is to either impose jail detention or revoke any client who fails to attend mandatory treatment programs or refuses to participate in mandatory daily activities such as employment, school, or community service.

In addition, HRO clients are likely to be revoked when rule violations involve behavior strongly related to a past criminal episode. Rules of this type are offender specific, but examples include alcohol and drug use, or contact with minors.

#### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

In summary, intensive supervision, as practiced in the HRO projects (HRO/ISP), differs from regular community supervision primarily in the degree of attention given to key activities. Both forms of community supervision impose rules, monitor offender behavior and sanction rule violations. The significantly reduced caseload in the HRO project permits supervisory rules to be more carefully constructed, more closely monitored, and more actively enforced. High risk agents also

have more time to expand offender surveillance through coordination with police, mandatory daily activity scheduling, and collateral contacts with others in the community.

Two agents who administer a combined caseload of 40 are more likely to influence offender behavior than a single agent serving 60 clients. The objective of high risk intensive supervision is to reduce criminal activity among high risk offenders. Close surveillance, combined with the other supervisory techniques described above, is expected to either deter criminal behavior, pre-empt it, or reduce it in degree. In theory, this may occur in one of three ways:

- 1) Some offenders may refrain from criminal activity because they believe restrictive rules and close surveillance increase both the likelihood of detection, and the certainty of punishment;
- 2) Other offenders may violate supervisory rules and be revoked very early in their criminal behavior pattern, i.e., before they actually commit a crime;
- 3) Offenders who do resume criminal activity may be forced by close surveillance to commit less serious crimes or at best, fewer crimes before detected and punished.

If intensive supervision can deter crime, it should work best among offenders likely to commit them. Since agents operating the High Risk project attempt to select offenders who have a high probability of reoffending, especially for crimes of violence, the project offers a unique opportunity to assess the impact of intensive supervision on criminal behavior.

#### EVALUATION PLAN

The evaluation poses two questions concerning the HRO/ISP project performance: 1) can agents accurately identify "high risk" offenders, i.e., those likely to commit serious crimes; and 2) does intensive community supervision reduce either the incidence or seriousness of criminal activity these offenders commit?

#### Establishing a Reference Group of High Risk Offenders

A reliable estimate of the HRO project's impact on criminal behavior can best be drawn from comparison with a similar group of high risk offenders supervised in the customary manner. Identifying this kind of reference group is complicated by the fact that agents in the HRO projects select their own clients using procedures that are discretionary. To be considered for

high risk supervision, offenders must have an assaultive offense history and score in the 'high risk'/maximum supervision range of Wisconsin's case classification instrument. Although agents consistently chose all their clients from this group of offenders, they also reject many individuals with these qualifications.

To identify offenders for the reference group, the agent decision making process was replicated. Project agents were asked to review unfamiliar case files and identify for researchers individuals like those they were currently selecting for high risk supervision. The case files presented to them described offenders released from prison during 1983. Each case review candidate met the minimum criteria for high risk clients. Each had been convicted of a violent offense, scored 'high risk' on the Wisconsin case classification instrument, and was released to conventional maximum intensity parole supervision.

Reviews were conducted in the following way. A random sample of 1983 cases meeting these initial criteria was drawn and case file information typically available at prison release (including the rap sheet and presentence investigation report) was given to agents working in the Madison HRO project for review. These reviews were blind. Information describing the offender's behavior after prison release was removed from the record and individuals supervised in the agents' region (with whom they might have been familiar), were excluded.

#### Agent Selection Results

During the case review exercise, agents identified 56 offenders they felt were good candidates for high risk supervision. A very small percentage (15% to 20%) of the offenders meeting the minimum HRO selection criteria (prior violent offense/high risk case classification score) were chosen. The vast majority of candidates were rejected because, in the opinion of the reviewing agents, they did not pose sufficient criminal or assaultive risk. Their judgement proved to be accurate. The rejected cases had much lower new conviction and violent offense rates than those selected (see Appendix 2). The case review exercise generally affirms the ability of these agents to identify offenders who pose unusually high criminal risk. In the findings that follow, the 56 hypothetical high risk offenders serve as a reference group for assessing the impact of HRO intensive supervision on criminal behavior.

THE IMPACT OF INTENSIVE SUPERVISION ON CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Group Characteristics

Since case outcome comparisons between the reference group cases and HRO clients are reliable measures of project performance only insofar as the individuals in each group are similar, offender characteristics, particularly prior offense history, will be examined first. At minimum, members of the HRO and reference groups are similar in that each : 1) was released from prison to parole supervision; 2) had a prior violent offense conviction; 3) scored 'high risk' on the case classification instrument; and 4) was identified by agents as a "high risk offender" in a discretionary case review.

The table below compares prior criminal history, age and other background characteristics recorded at the time of the prison release. The 64 member HRO group includes every offender who entered the Madison HRO project after a prison term during the 1985 and 1986 calendar years.

Characteristics of the High Risk Offender  
and Reference Groups at Prison Release

<u>Prison Release</u>	<u>HRO Group</u>	<u>Reference Group</u>
Number of Offenders	64	56
Average Age at Release	34 years	30 years
Prior Personal Assault	75%	70%
Prior Sexual Assault	42%	32%
Possession of Weapon	42%	23%
Alcohol Problem	58%	55%
Drug Problem	31%	39%
In-Patient Mental Treatment History	28%	11%
Adult/Juvenile Penal Experience (Prior to Current Episode)	94%	96%
<u>Average Number of:</u>		
Prior Adult Offenses	9.7	8.1
Prior Juvenile Offenses	2.3	3.6
Prior Violent Offenses	3.7	2.9

At prison release, HRO clients were, on average, somewhat older than reference group offenders (34 years versus 30). They were also more likely to have a sexual assault history (42% versus 32%) and a history of weapons possession. The greatest difference appears in inpatient mental health treatment. Approximately 28% of the offenders in the HRO project had a treatment background compared to 11% of the reference group. This discrepancy is attributable, in part, to releases from Mendota Mental Health Institute to the Madison HRO project (11% of the HRO clients came from the Institute).

The groups compare closely on other background measures such as alcohol or drug problems, total adult or juvenile offenses, prior violent offenses and parole experience. The HRO offenders typically have more prior adult offenses. They are somewhat older and, therefore, have had a longer period in which to acquire a criminal history.

While different in some respects, the HRO and Reference groups are reasonably similar. It should be noted, however, that criminal histories this extensive are relatively rare among offenders released from Wisconsin prisons.

#### New Criminal Convictions and Parole Violations

Both groups were observed for one year following their release from prison to field supervision. Offenders in the reference group were released to conventional maximum parole supervision during 1983. Offenders in the HRO project were released to intensive supervision during 1985 and 1986. New criminal offenses or parole violations serious enough to cause the offender's return to prison were recorded for both groups.

The table below classifies these prison returns by their cause - felony conviction, misdemeanor conviction or parole violation.

#### Criminal Convictions and Parole Violations One Year After Prison Release

<u>Returned to Prison For:</u>	<u>HRO Group</u>	<u>Reference Group</u>
Felony Conviction	(2) 3%	(15) 27%
Misdemeanor Conviction	(1) 2%	(1) 2%
Parole Violation	(26) 40%	(7) 12%
=====	=====	=====
Total Return	(29) 45%	(23) 41%

Both groups have exceptionally high total prison return rates - 45% for HRO clients and 41% for the reference group. The reasons for prison return, however, are strikingly different. Only 3% of the offenders supervised by the HRO project were convicted of a new felony, but 40% were returned to prison for parole violations. In the reference group, the HRO outcomes are nearly reversed - 27% received a new felony conviction and 12% were returned for rule violations.

### Offense Seriousness

Total convictions, violent offense convictions (both felonies and misdemeanors) and the average sentence received are the measures used to estimate the relative seriousness of the criminal offenses observed for the two groups. Violent offenses include sexual assault, armed robbery, battery and other crimes which either threaten physical violence or actually involve a physical assault. Since offenders in both groups have an assaultive background, this is an important measure of new offense behavior.

### Violent Offense Convictions and Average New Sentence

<u>Returned to Prison for:</u>	<u>HRO Group</u>	<u>Reference Group</u>
Total Convictions	(3) 5%	(16) 29%
Violent Offense Convictions	(2) 3%	(7) 12%
Average Sentence Length*	5.3 months	16.7 months

=====

\*This average is computed by dividing total felony and misdemeanor sentences by the total group size.

Three HRO offenders (5%) were convicted of a new felony or misdemeanor and 3% were convicted of a violent offense. The average sentence for convictions in the 64 member HRO group was 5.3 months. The reference group had 16 new convictions (29%), of which 7 or 12% were for violent offenses. The reference group's average sentence computed for the 56 member reference group was 16.7 months.

The HRO group had proportionately fewer criminal convictions and a lower conviction rate for violent offenses than the reference group. As a result, average sentences were much shorter.

### Why Intensive Supervision Reduces Crime?

Some tentative conclusions about why HRO project supervision was successful in reducing criminal behavior can be drawn from a more detailed examination of the findings.

As a group, HRO clients had a higher overall rate of supervisory failure (45% failed versus 41%) than reference group offenders, but they failed for quite different reasons. In the reference group, a new criminal conviction was the most common cause of prison returns (16 of 23), while all but a few HRO clients were returned to prison for violating supervisory rules (26 of 29). In addition, HRO/ISP clients failed much more quickly -- 33% were revoked within 180 days of their release from prison to field supervision. Only 18% of the reference group offenders failed during this timeframe (see Appendix 3).

A tentative conclusion to be drawn from the case outcome comparisons is that HRO/ISP suppresses criminal behavior by preempting it. Since the overall HRO failure rate is high and the crime rate is very low, it appears that offenders were revoked for violating supervisory rules before they could commit a crime.

This hypothesis of why HRO/ISP succeeds is consistent with the kind of intensive supervision procedures employed by HRO agents, i.e., careful construction of supervisory rules combined with active surveillance and tough enforcement. Comparison of rule violation and revocation patterns in the reference and HRO groups offer some additional clues as to how these supervisory techniques work.

In the table below, the rule violations for which offenders were revoked and returned to prison are classified into three types: 1) those precipitated by a police arrest that did not result in a conviction; 2) violations of drug or alcohol rules; and 3) all other rule violations including failure to attend mandatory treatment sessions, absconding, etc.

#### Revocation for Rule Violations by Type

<u>Returned to Prison For:</u>	<u>HRO Group</u>	<u>Reference Group</u>
Arrest by Police	(6) 9%	(3) 6%
Alcohol or Drug Rules	(14) 22%	(2) 3%
Other Rules	(6) 9%	(2) 3%
=====		
Total Rule Violations	(26) 40%	(7) 12%

HRO clients were returned to prison for supervisory rule violations at a rate more than three times higher than the reference group (40% versus 12%). Only a small part of this difference is explained by incidents in which offenders were initially arrested by local police. Nine percent of the HRO clients and 6% of the reference group fall into the arrest by police category. The two remaining types of violations are

attributable more directly to active rule enforcement by agents supervising the offender. Both rates are higher among HRO clients, but the greatest discrepancy appears in alcohol and drug related violations - 22% of the HRO clients were revoked for this reason, but only 3% of the reference group.

The imposition and active enforcement of drug and alcohol rules may have played an important role in the success of the HRO project. Both the HRO and reference group contain a high percentage of offenders who have drug and alcohol problems. Imposing no drink/no drug rules on individuals whose past offense patterns were associated with alcohol or drug abuse, and revoking them when these rules are violated may be one of the ways the HRO/ISP project pre-empted criminal behavior.

#### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings are not difficult to interpret. Offenders in the comparison group had a criminal conviction rate five times greater than HRO clients (29% versus 5%) and were much more likely to be convicted of a violent crime (12% versus 3%). This evidence suggests that intensive supervision, as practiced in Wisconsin's HRO projects, has significantly reduced criminal behavior.

Given the extensive criminal histories of the offenders supervised by the project (all have one or more prior violent offense convictions), the large reductions in both total criminal convictions and violent offense convictions must be seen as a very positive demonstration of the HRO intensive supervision procedures. Furthermore, the apparently successful suppression of criminal behavior among a group of offenders who pose an unusually high degree of criminal risk is evidence of the positive impact this kind of supervision may have on public safety.

The lower caseload makes HRO/ISP two or three times more costly than conventional maximum supervision, but the added cost may be justified by the impact on crime.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Division of Corrections should consider exporting the intensive supervisory procedures developed by the project to other community corrections settings where there are sufficient numbers of high risk offenders to justify an HRO/ISP agent team.

While high risk offenders may be the best candidates for this kind of supervision, experimental attempts to apply HRO/ISP in part or whole to offenders with less serious criminal histories appear to be warranted by the results. Active enforcement of alcohol and drug rules is one example of an HRO/ISP technique which might be adapted for supervision of other offenders.

The HRO project appears to have been very successful without using high tech supervisory tools such as electronic surveillance monitoring. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that electronic surveillance combined with intensive supervision may prove even more effective with clients currently served by the project. DOC may wish to experiment with electronic surveillance for high risk offenders in existing HRO/ISP sites.

## APPENDIX I

See Description of the High Risk Offender Project, BCC.

## APPENDIX 2

The new felony conviction rate for all offenders in the review sample was 17% during the 12 months following prison release. The conviction rate for violent offenses was 8%. Comparable rates for offenders identified by agents as high risk candidates were 27% and 12% respectively.

## APPENDIX 3

A feature of intensive supervision in the HRO project which may be more a symptom than a cause of its success in reducing criminal activity is the unusually quick detection of criminal offenses and rule violations. This is due primarily to active offender surveillance. The table below graphs the cumulative prison return rate for both the HRO and reference groups by quarter for the 12 month followup period. The date of jail custody was used to fix the time at which the crime or rule violation was detected.

Prison Return Rate by Quarter  
for the 12 Month Followup

<u>Cumulative % Returned to Prison at the End of:</u>	<u>HRO Group</u>	<u>Reference Group</u>
90 days	20%	14%
180 days	33%	18%
270 days	42%	23%
365 days	45%	41%

Although year end prison return rates are similar, offenders in the HRO group were revoked much more quickly than their counterparts. Restrictive rules and close surveillance appear to fail offenders early in the supervisory process -- possibly before they commit a crime.