



Briefing Report
The Risk Principle
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Prepared by:

Michael Baglivio, Ph.D.

DJJ Research and Planning

Issue:

The Risk Principle dictates the intensity and duration of services provided should mimic the risk level of the youth, with higher risk youth receiving more intense services for a longer period of time. Research shows intensive services provided to low risk youth are iatrogenic, meaning they have the unintended consequence of actually *increasing* recidivism likelihood (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Andrews & Kiessling, 1980; Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990; Lipsey, 2009; Lipsey, Howell, Kelly, Chapman, & Carver, 2010). This briefing report examines the effectiveness, as measured by recidivism, of Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FDJJ) services provided to low risk to re-offend youth by placement type.

Methodology:

Data was taken from the final completion files used in the creation of the 2012 Comprehensive Accountability Report (CAR). The CAR is published annually by the FDJJ and contains information regarding recidivism rates for all youth who completed a FDJJ service during fiscal year 2010-11 (July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011). Youth were tracked twelve months post-completion for a subsequent juvenile adjudication/adjudication withheld, or adult offense for which the individual was found guilty (for youth who turned eighteen years of age during the follow-up period). A particular youth could have been included more than one time in the current study if that youth completed more than one FDJJ placement during the examined fiscal year.

The current study used data for these 2010-2011 fiscal year completions, and matched them to the corresponding PACT assessment prior to the placement. The PACT assessment captures the youth's overall risk to re-offend and rank orders the youth's top risk factors. The PACT assessment has been validated across multiple samples of Florida DJJ youth, published in multiple peer-reviewed journals and independent research agency reports (Baglivio, 2009; Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013; Winokur-Early, Hand, & Blankenship, 2012). The closest PACT assessment prior to placement was used in order to capture the youth's risk to re-offend level at time of placement. The type of placements examined included Diversion Services, Intensive Delinquency Diversion Services (IDDS), Probation Supervision, Community Based Intervention Services (CBIS), Probation Enhancement Services (PES) (may include mental health counseling, substance abuse counseling, mentoring, career and education enhancement activities, parent and youth support groups/counseling, and respite services), Day Treatment, Redirection, Residential Services, and Post Commitment Services (both state-run and provider-run combined).

All youth from the 2010-2011 completion pool that were classified by the PACT as low risk to re-offend were included in the current study to examine effectiveness of placement types as defined by the official definition of recidivism of FDJJ. The final sample consisted of 27,311 low risk youth, of which thirty-three percent were female, and sixty percent classified as white. Independent samples t-tests were used to explore whether recidivism rate differences between placement types were statistically significant.

Highlighted Results:

The following bullets provide a brief synopsis of the analyses. Comprehensive results and detailed explanations follow below:

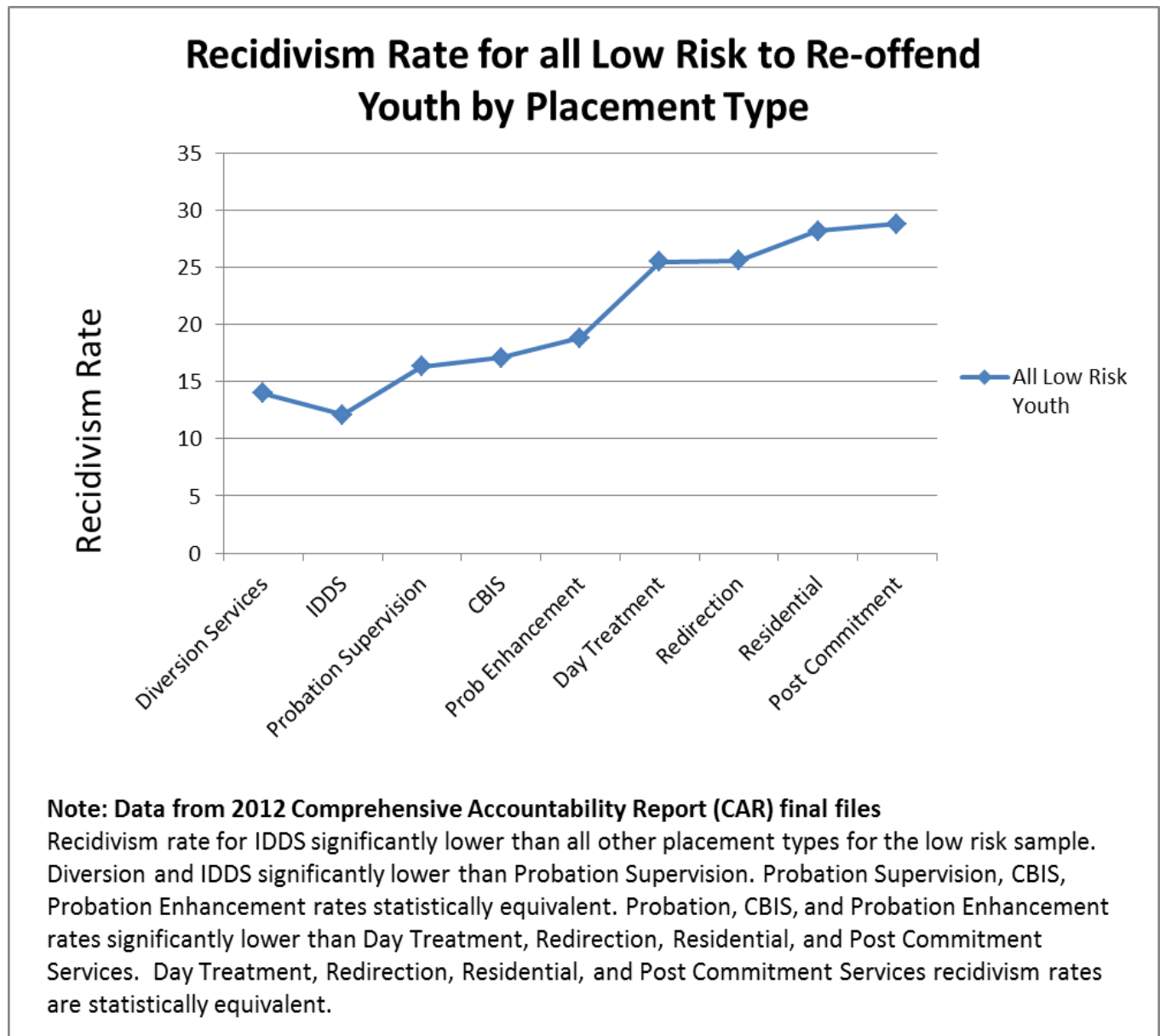
- Results support the Risk Principle for low risk youth indicating the deeper the placement, the higher the recidivism rate;
- Diverting low risk youth is the most effective strategy in terms of reducing subsequent re-offending;
- Low-end services are more effective for both low risk males and low risk females;
- Low risk “high needs” youth also evidenced significant increases in recidivism rate for deeper-end placements;
- Adherence to the Risk Principle is empirically demonstrated to be the most effective strategy for the youth receiving services, public safety, and in the interest of fiscal accountability to taxpayers.

Comprehensive Results:

The resulting analysis demonstrates a positive linear relationship between placement type and recidivism for the low risk youth. Specifically, as the restrictiveness level of the placement increases, the recidivism rate *increases* (see Table 1). Statistical analyses revealed the recidivism rate for IDDS was significantly lower than the rates for all other placement types. Both IDDS and Diversion demonstrated significantly lower recidivism rates than all other services, including Probation Supervision. These results demonstrate diverting low risk youth is the most effective strategy in terms of reducing subsequent re-offending (consistent with the Risk Principle).

The recidivism rates for Probation Supervision, CBIS, and PES were statistically equivalent to one another, and each significantly lower than the recidivism rates for low risk youth placed in Day Treatment, Redirection, Residential, or Post Commitment Services. While the actual recidivism rates increased from Day Treatment to each subsequent stage of the continuum, the rates for Day Treatment, Redirection, Residential, and Post Commitment Services are statistically equivalent. These analyses demonstrate the unintended negative repercussions of placing low risk to re-offend youth deeper into the continuum of juvenile justice services than probation supervision and overlay services.

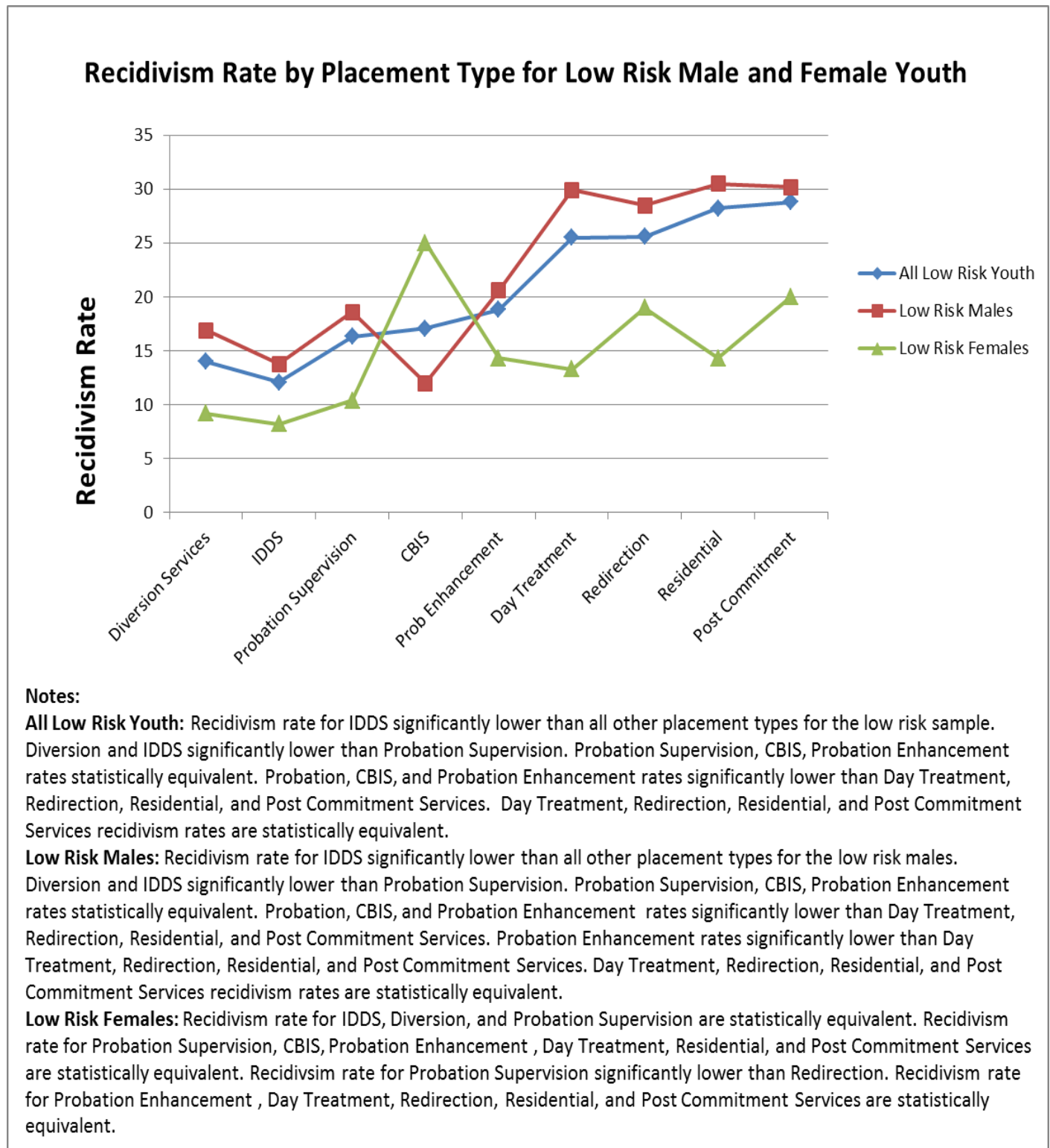
TABLE 1.



Results for Male and Female Youth:

The next step was to examine whether the results found for the full sample of low risk youth applied across gender. The recidivism rates by placement type for low risk males and low risk females were examined separately (see Table 2). Results show lower recidivism rates for low risk female youth than those for low risk male youth for all placement types, with the exception of CBIS. The results illustrated for CBIS placements of low risk female youth should be interpreted with caution due to very low sample size (N= 16).

TABLE 2.



The results for low risk males parallel those of the full sample, with IDDS recidivism rates significantly lower than all other placement types, and IDDS and Diversion rates significantly lower than Probation Supervision. As in the full sample, low risk male recidivism rates for Probation Supervision, CBIS, and Probation Enhancement were statistically equivalent. Probation Supervision, CBIS, and Probation Enhancement recidivism rates were significantly lower than Day Treatment, Redirection, Residential, and Post Commitment Services. Day Treatment, Redirection, Residential, and Post Commitment Services recidivism rates were statistically equivalent for the low risk males.

The results for low risk females, in contrast, show statistically equivalent rates for IDDS, Diversion, and Probation Supervision. The recidivism rate for Probation Supervision, CBIS, Probation Enhancement, Day Treatment, Residential, and Post Commitment Services were statistically equivalent, while the rate for Probation Supervision was significantly lower than the recidivism rate for Redirection. There were no statistically significant differences in the recidivism rates of low risk females receiving Probation Enhancement, Day Treatment, Redirection, Residential, or Post Commitment Services.

These results indicate IDDS and Diversion to be the most effective placement type for low risk males, and either IDDS, Diversion, or Probation Supervision most effective for low risk females. Traditional probation services (Supervision, CBIS, PES) were more effective than all deeper end placements for low risk males. For low risk females no differences were found between Probation Supervision and deeper end placements, with the exception of Redirection, where Probation Supervision outperformed. These analyses indicate, for low risk females, more expensive deeper end placements achieve usually higher, though statistically similar, recidivism results to Probation Supervision. This finding indicates no added bonus to traditional Probation Supervision by increasing service intensity. For low risk males, diversion services (IDDS and Diversion) are the most effective, while traditional Probation Supervision outperforms all deeper end placements. In fact, deeper end placement into Day Treatment, Redirection, and Residential have substantial recidivism *increases* for low risk males.

Consistent with vast amounts of prior criminological research, female youth evidence lower recidivism rates than male youth for all placement types (Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001; Piquero, Hawkins, & Kazemian, 2012). The exception to this finding was CBIS, most likely due to the low sample size of female youth that actually were placed in that type. Interestingly, for both males and females, the addition of Post Commitment Services (aftercare) did not mitigate the recidivism rate increases evidenced by placing these low risk youth in residential facilities. This is demonstrated by the actual recidivism rate for all low risk youth increasing slightly, decreasing slightly for low risk males (insignificantly), and increasing for low risk females in Post Commitment Services compared to Residential placement.

Results for Low Risk “High Needs” Youth:

The next step in the analysis was to examine whether there may be some sub-group of low risk youth that do benefit from deeper end placement. These youth are often termed “high needs”. Practitioners speak of youth who may be low risk to re-offend, but are “high needs” needing more intense services. To examine this possibility, we separated low risk youth that scored greater than

one standard deviation above the mean on the social history score of the PACT assessment from other low risk youth. This sub-group of “high needs” youth is the approximately sixteen percent of low risk youth that have the greatest risk/needs in areas such as school (enrollment, conduct, attendance and performance), delinquent peer associations, history of running away/getting kicked out of the house, family incarceration history, alcohol and drug use, physical/sexual abuse or neglect history, and history of mental health problems.

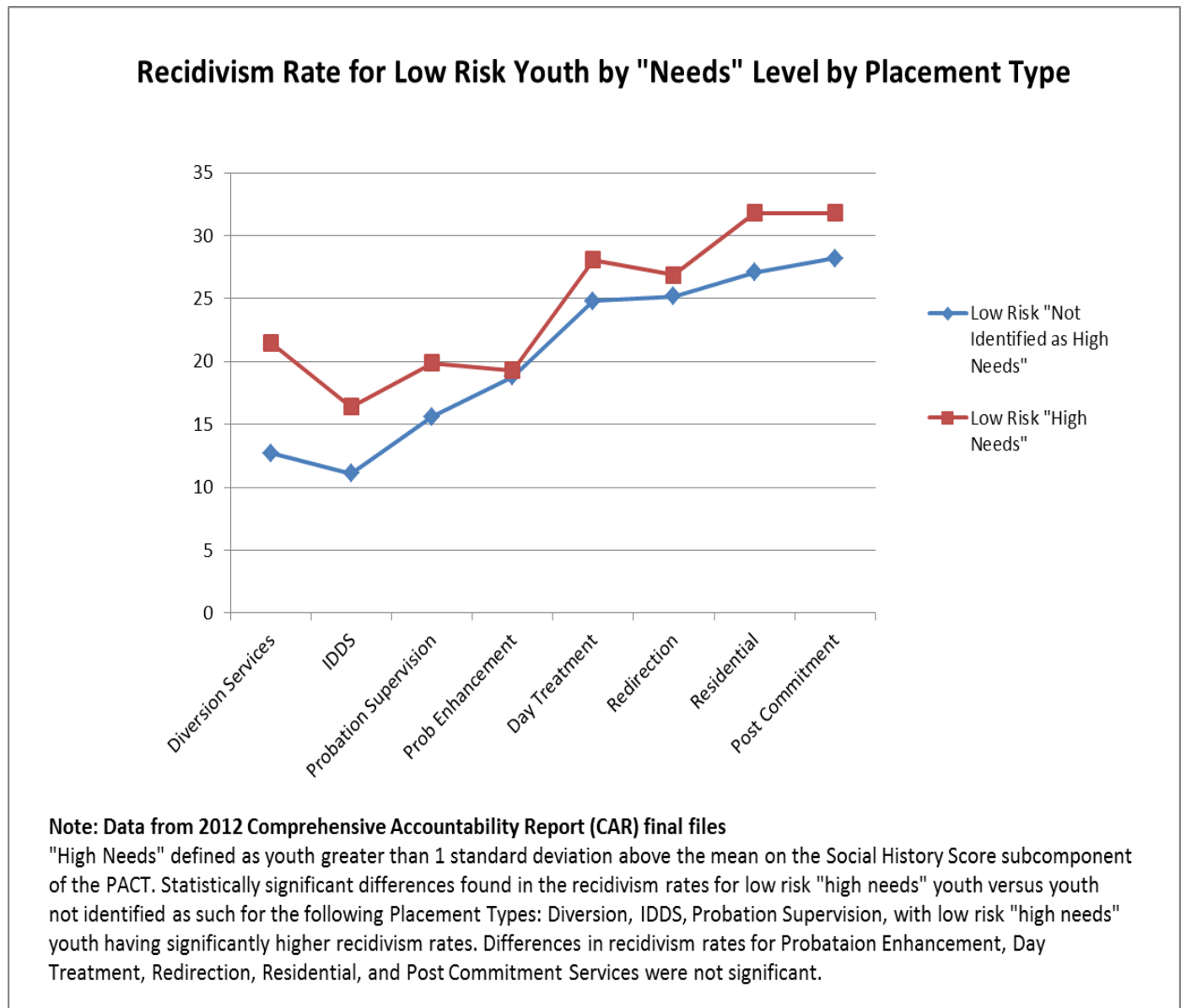
Results show the low risk “high needs” youth do indeed have significantly higher recidivism rates than other low risk youth when placed in Diversion, IDDS, or Probation Supervision. The recidivism rates are statistically equivalent for all deeper end placement types. Results show a substantial increase in recidivism rate for the low risk “high needs” youth when they move from Probation Enhancement Services to deeper end placements. These findings demonstrate that while there is a group of low risk “high needs” youth that respond better to more formal juvenile justice services, the difference in effectiveness erodes to non-significance above the level of Probation Supervision. This indicates low risk “high needs” youth may indeed benefit from added services in terms of “enhancements” to probation, but deeper end placement beyond probation leads to *increased* recidivism. In additional analyses (not shown), the recidivism rate of low risk “high needs” youth was significantly lower than that of high risk youth for low-end placements (as expected). However, for Day Treatment, Redirection, Residential, and Post Commitment Services, the recidivism rate for low risk “high needs” youth was increased to the statistical equivalent of that of high risk to re-offend youth.

These additional analyses indicate the significant negative effect of placing low risk “high needs” youth in deeper end services in hope of addressing any need not predictive of risk to re-offend. By far the most effective services for low risk “high need” youth remain low-end diversion and probation services.

Implications:

These results may help assist the Department with resource allocation efforts by demonstrating the risk in ignoring the Risk Principle. The Risk Principle establishes that the intensity and duration of services provided to a youth should be commensurate with the risk to re-offend level of the youth. Higher risk to re-offend youth should receive more intense services, while low risk youth should be diverted from the formal juvenile justice system, or receive low-end placements. The results of the current analysis demonstrate the unintended *increase* in recidivism that accompanies deeper-end placement of low risk youth, using the most recent cohort of Florida DJJ youth available. Results hold for both male and female low risk youth, indicating the deeper the placement, the higher the recidivism rate. While a sub-group of low risk “high needs” youth was identified, that group also evidenced significant increases in recidivism rates for deeper-end placements. Even in instances where placements evidenced statistically equivalent recidivism rates, the resources expended for the deeper-end service would be more effectively used serving higher risk youth, without decreasing public safety. Adherence to the Risk Principle is empirically demonstrated to be the most effective strategy for the youth receiving services, public safety, and in the interest of fiscal accountability to taxpayers.

TABLE 3.



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