

# Youth Protective Factors Study: Key Findings on Risk-Reduction Services

Gina M. Vincent, PhD, Professor, Law & Psychiatry Program, UMass Chan Medical School

Jennifer Skeem, PhD, UC-Berkley

Josh Weber, MPA, Council of State Governments Justice Center

**Research Team:** Emily Rogers, CSG Justice Center; Luyi Jian, PhD; Rachael Perrault, MA; Karlie Rice, MA; Jennifer Pendleton, MA; Kayla Carew, BA

<https://www.umassmed.edu/lawandpsychiatry/law-and-psychiatry-research/NIJ-Youth-Protective-Factor-Study/>

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**Justice Center**  
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS



# The Youth Protective Factors Study Background

# Positive youth justice— how to do this?

**BRIEFING PAPER**

**STRENGTHENING YOUTH JUSTICE PRACTICES WITH DEVELOPMENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRINCIPLES**

THE ANASTAS K. GURRY FOUNDATION ENCOURAGES THE USE OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENTAL CONCEPTS TO SUPPORT THE REFORM AND IMPROVEMENT OF LOCAL YOUTH JUSTICE PRACTICES. FOR THE DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO BECOME MORE THAN AN ADHOC KNOW-WORK OR A PIALEPHORICAL PERSPECTIVE, POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENTAL CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES MUST BE ALIGNED WITH THE SCIENCE OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT. THIS BRIEFING PAPER DESCRIBES THE POSITIVE YOUTH JUSTICE MODEL AND ASSSESSES ITS POTENTIAL AS A TOOL FOR STRENGTHENING REFORMS.

**Introduction**

Positive youth development (PYD) is a field of practice that applies lessons from the science of adolescent development to the routine practices of youth-serving organizations. The PYD approach encourages communities and agencies to build upon the positive assets of youth rather than simply reduce youth problems and treat youth deficits. It judges success by every youth's attainment of positive outcomes rather than their avoidance of negative outcomes. A PYD approach helps youth transition from adolescence to adulthood through the acquisition of pro-social skills and supportive relationships.

A developmental approach is appropriate for all adolescents, including those involved in the justice system. For justice-involved youth, PYD could be a key component in any broader strategy to reduce delinquency and ensure public safety. Of course, PYD is not a panacea. Youth affected by particular deficits, such as substance abuse, family violence, trauma, and mental health issues, may still require comprehensive treatment that targets

NEPAL MODEL 2014

Dr. Jeffrey A. Sells, Consultant

Sells, Jeffrey A., Senior Research and Teacher (at Power) (2014). Positive Youth Justice: Finding Justice and the Power of Youth in Youth Justice Systems. Boulder, CO: Colorado Junction Press.

PRACTICE DOMAINS	Domain-Specific Example*	CORE ASSETS			
		Learning / Doing		Attaching / Belonging	
		Activity or Opportunity	Outcome Measures	Activity or Opportunity	Outcome Measures
Work	Job readiness	Resume writing workshop	Resume submitted to potential employer	Job-seeker support group	Frequency or length of group participation
Education	Computer skills	One-on-one skill building in HTML or other language	Youth has an operating web site	Youth-to-youth tutoring program	Number of successful tutoring matches
Relationships	Communication skills	Training in conflict management	Youth completes training program	Youth-adult mentor program	Frequency and duration of mentoring relationship
Community	Youth-led civic improvement campaign	Prepare and present formal testimony	Youth speaks at public hearing	Launch new advocacy organization	Number of meetings attended
Health	Physical Fitness	Weight training	Number of training circuits completed	Team sports	Number of games played
Creativity	Self-expression	Mural art program	At least one mural designed or completed	Group performance, music or theater	Number of performances in which youth participated

# What about Risk-Needs-Responsivity?



OR



# Youth Protective Factors Study Goals

## Goal 1

Build data tracking capacity to accurately measure recidivism-reduction/success.

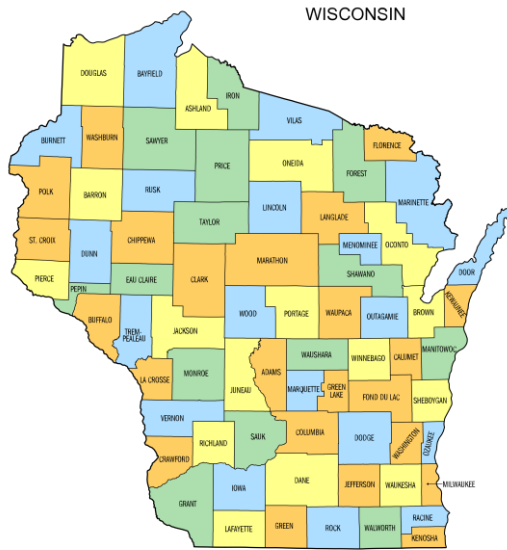
## Goal 2

Identify the risk and protective factors and types of services most strongly associated with reduced reoffending to inform supervision practices (examines RNR and positive youth justice).

## Goal 3

Examine Goal 2 questions by youth age.

# State Partners and Methods



4 to 5 jurisdictions per state



## What were they asked to do?

- Implement a protective factors survey alongside their pre-disposition risk/needs assessment (YLS/CMI or YASI).
- Expand service data tracking capacity.
- Provide new juvenile and adult new petitions. Recidivism = new petitions post-supervision (up to 1.5 years).

# Research Questions

Q1

Which risk factors are most strongly associated with serious recidivism post-supervision, and do these differ by age?

Q2

What services are youth most commonly receiving, and is the risk principle being followed?

Q3

Was receipt of risk-reduction services predictive of lower recidivism post-supervision?



# State Samples: June 2021–July 2022 (N = 3,380)

## STATE 1 Referrals

### **Youth (n = 1,293)**

M age = 15 ± 1.7

72% male

64% non-White

47/44/9 lo/mod/hi risk

25% probation or placed

### **Post- sup. recidivism**

Any = 17%

Violent = 7%

## STATE 2 Referrals

### **Youth (n = 252)**

M age = 14 ± 1.6

71% male

39% non-White

43/43/12 lo/mod/hi risk

14% probation or placed

### **Post-sup. recidivism**

Any = 21%

Violent = 14%

## STATE 3 Post-adjudication

### **Youth (n = 416)**

M age = 15 ± 1.6

76% male

78% non-White

38/40/22 lo/mod/hi risk

27% probation or placed

### **Post-sup. recidivism**

Any = 26%

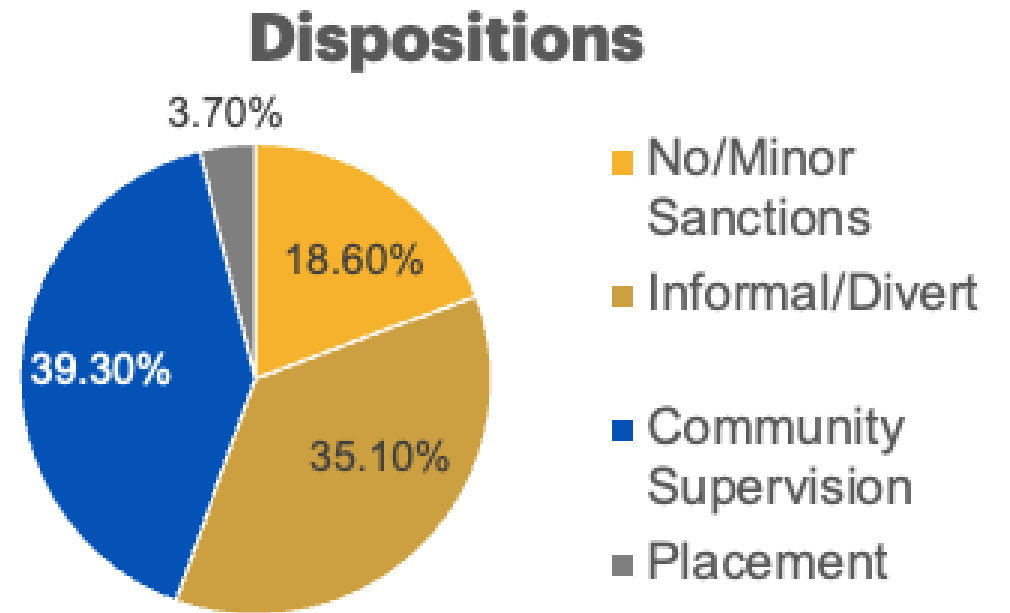
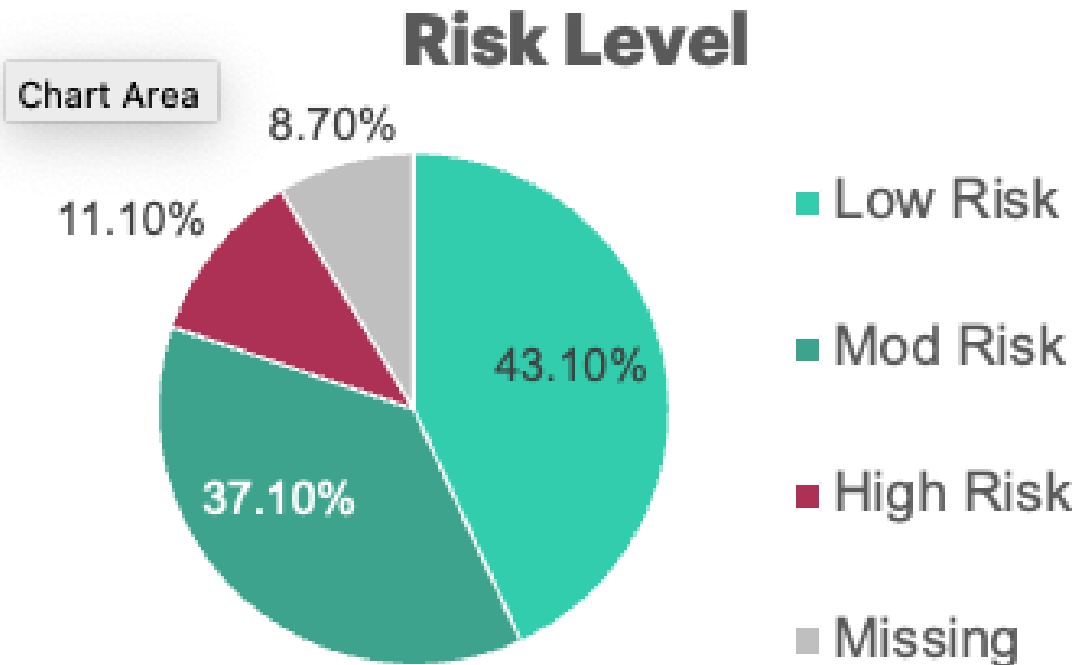
Violent = 17%

**Key Finding 1:** A significant proportion of court-referred youth received little to no intervention or services, likely because over 40 percent were assessed as low risk for reoffending.





Among referred youth, 43% were low risk, and 54% of all youth received no supervision.



62% of low-risk youth received no supervision or services.

**Key Finding 2:** Some risk factors predict violent reoffending more strongly than others and should be prioritized for service delivery.



# What risk factors matter most for predicting post-supervision violent recidivism?

## Top Predictors Varied by Risk/Needs Assessment

RNA	Risk Domain	Strength (HR)
YLS/CMI	Personality Behavior	2.05 CI[1.89, 2.21]
YASI	Family	1.73 CI[1.46, 2.06]

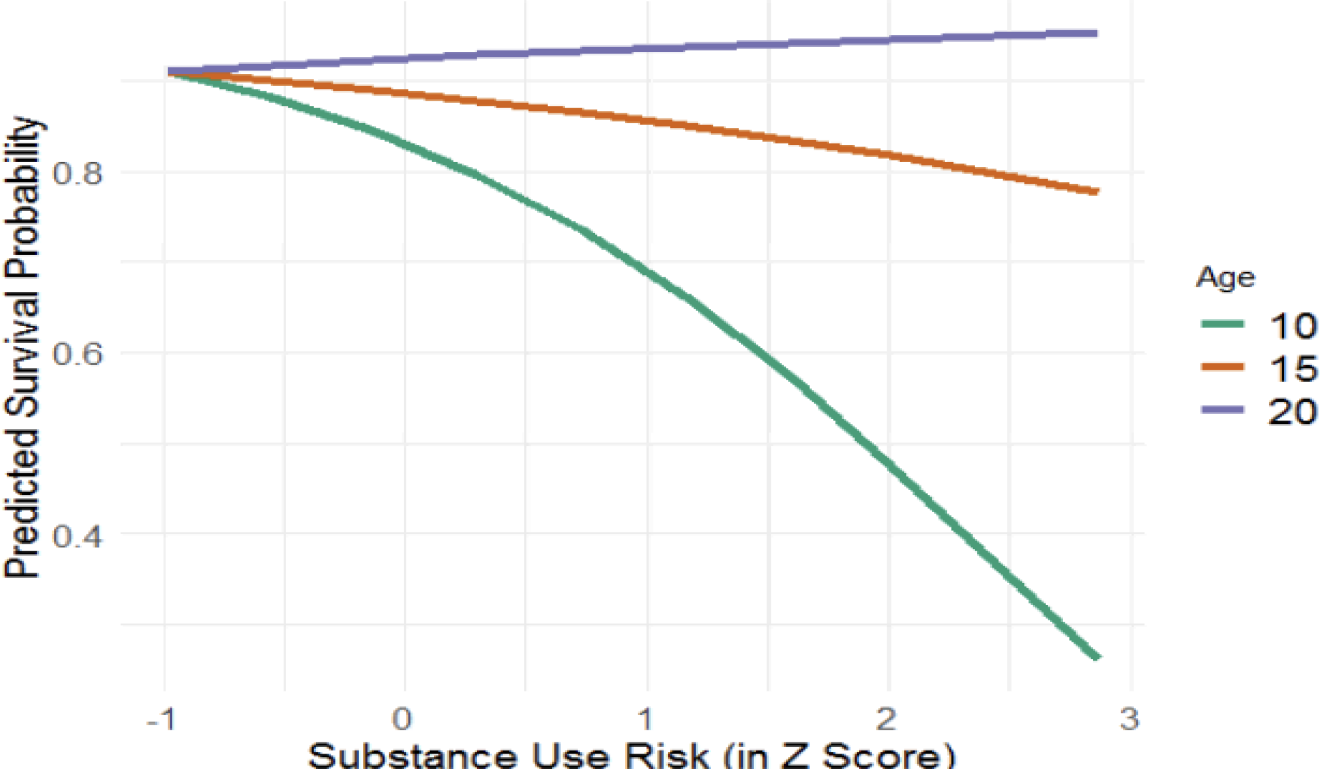
## Other Strong Predictors

Education/School Problems (both instruments)
Peer Associations (both instruments)
Attitudes/Orientation (YLS/CMI only)

# Interactions with age: Substance abuse may be a red flag for more serious offending among *only* younger youth.

## Importance of Substance Abuse Depends on Age

Predicted Survival Probability by Age and Substance Use Risk, Holding Gender as Male and Race as Black



Robust Effect found in both prospective and retrospective samples

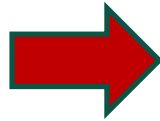
**Key Finding 3:** Higher-risk youth did not consistently receive the dosage, type, or quality of services required to prevent reoffending.



# Defining Service Types

## Risk-Reduction

Services designed to address or “treat” dynamic risk factors (needs); focus on reducing risk factors to prevent recidivism

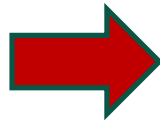


### Examples

- Anything CBT based
- Family services to improve conflict and parenting (e.g., MST, FFT, PMT)
- Substance use treatment
- Aggression-related (e.g., anger management)
- Gang-related interventions
- Structured one-on-one work with POs focused on criminogenic needs (e.g., Carey Guides, EPICs)

## Strengths-Based

Services promoting competence and skill building, prosocial engagements, and/or prosocial attachment



### Examples

- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Prosocial skills and life-skills training
- Vocational training
  - School-based (e.g., sports)
  - Volunteer work
- Restorative programs w/ victim mediation component

# Defining Service Types (cont.)

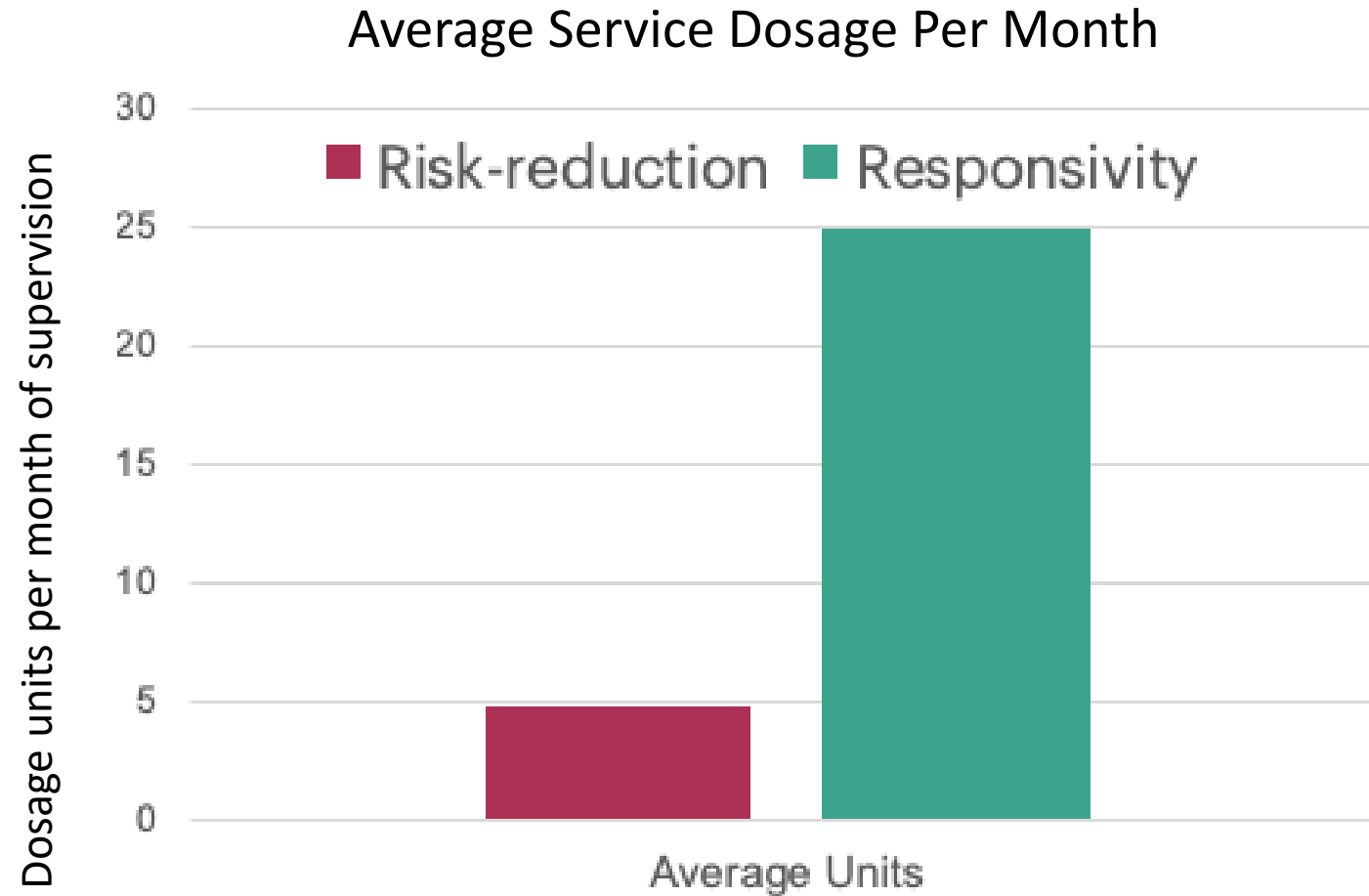
## Responsivity-Related Services

Provide treatment in a style and mode that is responsive to the individual's learning style and ability and could facilitate the effectiveness of other services. May also address barriers to one's ability to benefit from or participate in other services.

### Examples

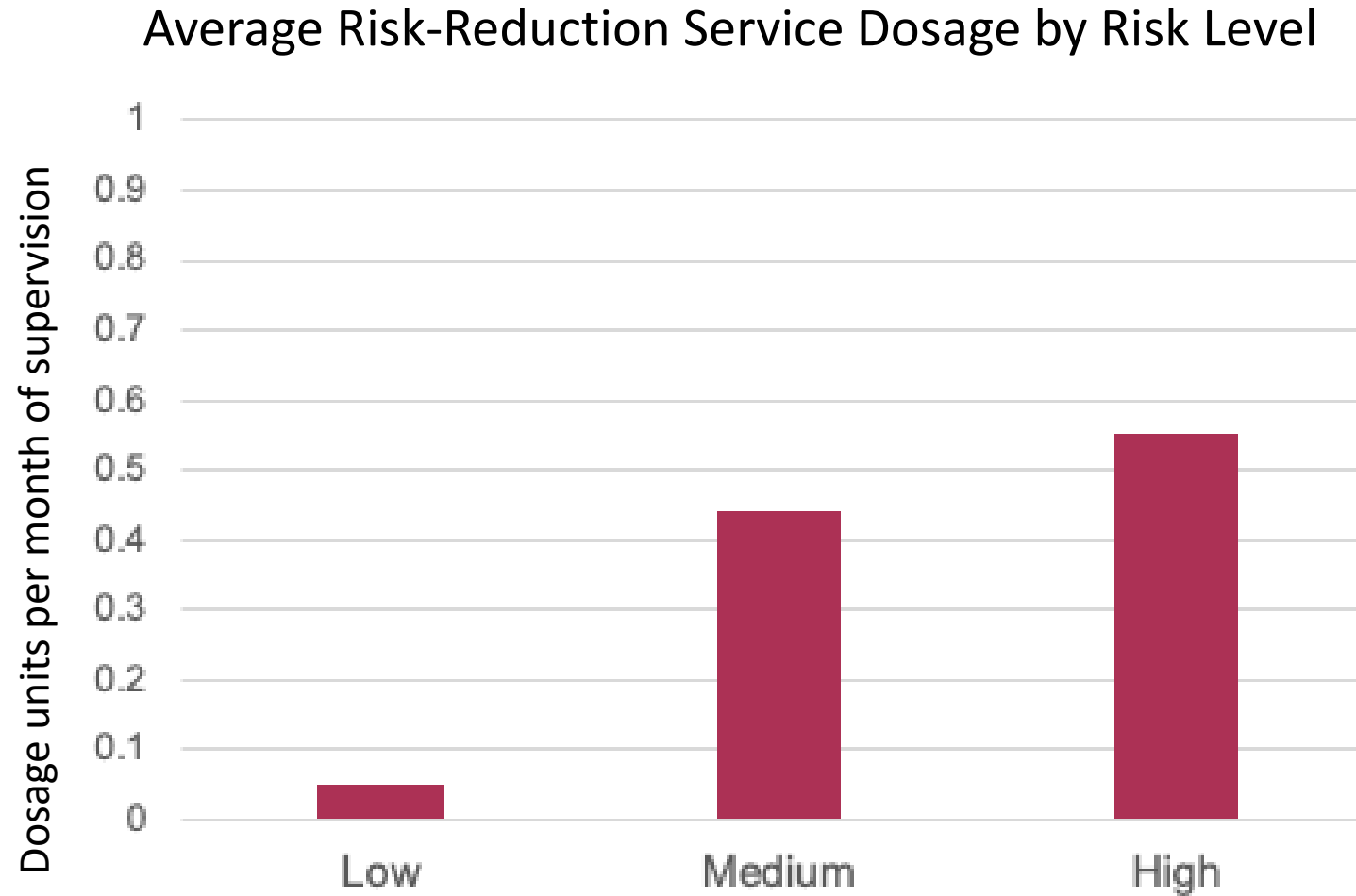
- Mental health counseling/inpatient
- Case management
- Family wraparound
- Special education; tutoring
- Culture-specific services
- Gender-specific services

**Services focused on responsiveness were provided much more often than those reducing risk, even for youth in placement.**



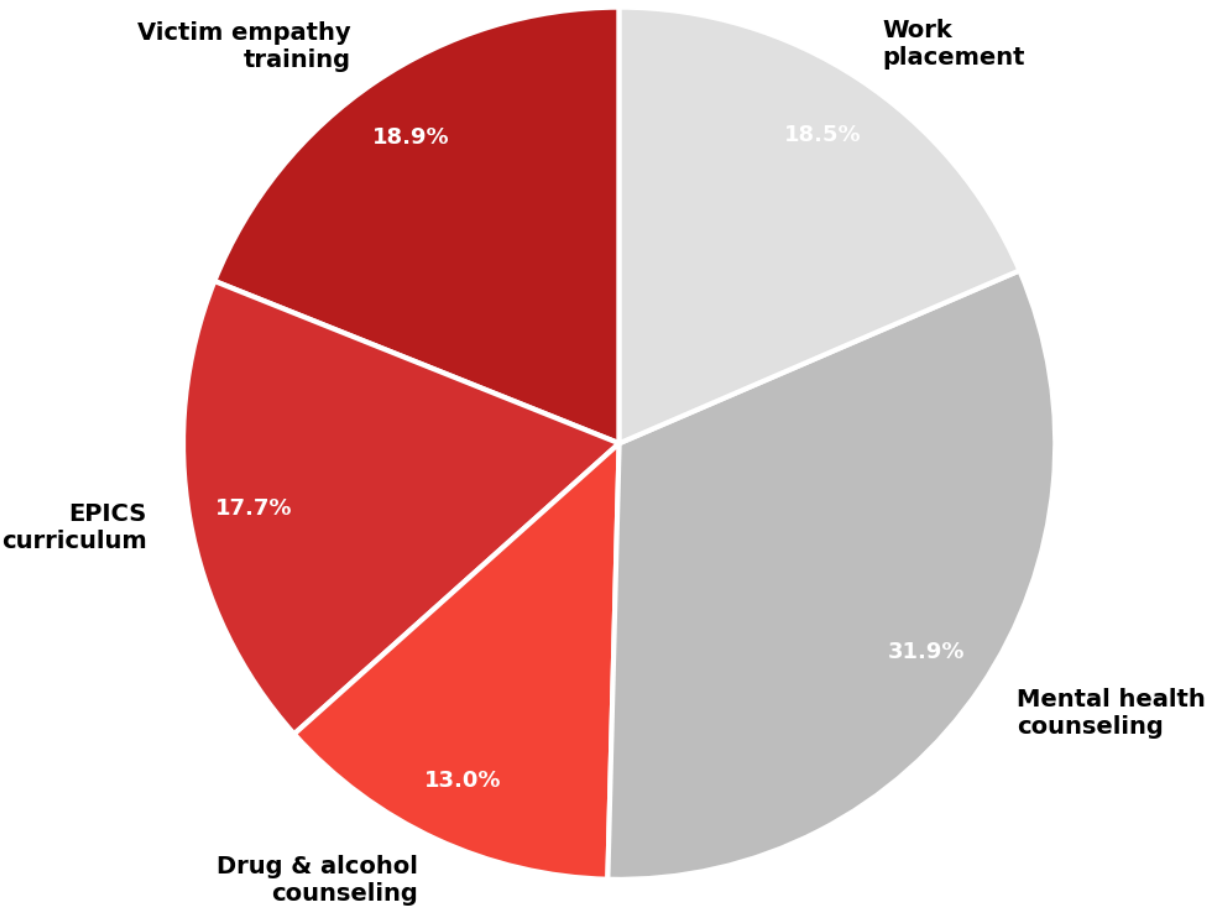


## Risk-reduction services were not strongly prioritized for those at the highest risk of reoffending.



The risk-reduction services commonly provided in practice were not those shown to prevent reoffending and/or that targeted robust risk factors.

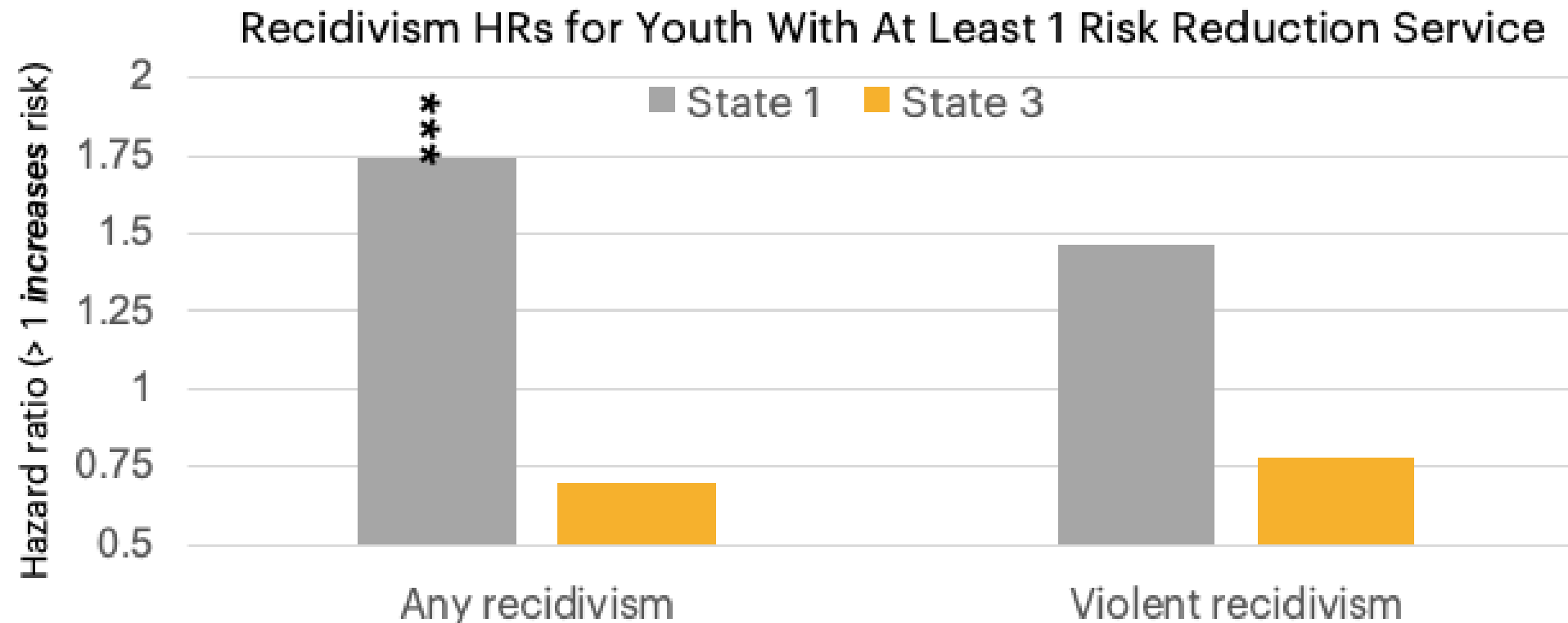
Services Most Commonly Received Among Referred Youth



**Key Finding 4:** Youth who participated in risk-based services were no less likely to reoffend than youth who did not participate in such services.



**Youth who participated in any risk-based services were more or as likely to reoffend post-supervision than youth who did not.**



# Key Implications for Practitioners and the Field



## **The YPFS shows that jurisdictions can strengthen their use of resources, tools, and best practices to improve public safety and youth outcomes.**

- ✓ Expand early intervention services for youth at risk of justice involvement as well as pre-arrest diversion for low-risk youth jurisdiction-wide.
- ✓ Use risk and needs assessments to guide diversion, dispositional, and service matching decisions with a priority focus on the risk and protective factors that matter most for long-term, serious reoffending.
- ✓ Institute more individualized approaches to probation conditions, drug testing, case planning, and service delivery.

## The YPFS shows that jurisdictions can strengthen their use of resources, tools, and best practices to improve public safety and youth outcomes (cont.).

- ✓ Invest in more robust, evidence-based, community-based services systems that are aligned with youth's priority risk factors and service needs.
- ✓ Ensure a sufficient focus for providers, funders, and agency staff on service matching (intensity and needs), risk reduction, evidence-based models, and dosage.
- ✓ Ensure out-of-home placement for high-risk youth prioritizes risk-reduction services.
- ✓ Collect, evaluate, and use risk, needs, and service data to improve resource allocation, accountability, and stakeholder communications.