

9.5: Halfway Houses

Halfway Houses have long been used to control/house offenders. Dating back to the early 1800s from England and Ireland, halfway houses began around 1820 in Massachusetts. Initially, they were designed to help an offender “get back on their feet,” and were generally funded in benevolent ways by non-profit organizations like the Salvation Army.

Currently, halfway houses are typically used as a stopping point for offenders coming out of prisons but have also recently been used as more secure measures of monitoring probationers in lieu of going to prison. They are even used as a test measure of parole. With the creation of the IHHA in 1964, halfway houses have become an integral part of every state, with mixed but more promising results than ISPs or boot camps. The core design of a halfway house is meant to be a place where individuals can get back on their feet, half-way out of prison. However, as stated, their uses have evolved, becoming residential, or even partial residential places where individuals under correctional control can check-in, find reprieve or assistance, in order to rejoin society as a normal functioning member.

There are some issues regarding the examination of halfway houses. The IHHA break down halfway houses into four groups along two dimensions. As discussed, halfway houses were initially funded by private non-profit organizations. However, many halfway houses today (in part, due to the IHHA) are both privately and federally (and State) funded. Additionally, halfway Houses are also divided into supportive and interventive groups. That is, halfway houses that serve only a minimal function (a place to stay while reintegrating back into society) are generally labeled supportive. Interventive halfway houses typically have multiple treatment modalities and may have up to 500 beds. However, most halfway houses fall somewhere in the middle of these two continuums.

Halfway House Success

Because of the variations of halfway houses, researchers find them difficult to assess. For instance, it may be difficult to generalize because of the variability. Second, gathering a representative comparison may also prove difficult. That is, halfway houses may have increased recidivism, reduced recidivism, or had no effect. Although clouded, one could argue that halfway houses are at least useful in the sense that these offenders, who received more treatment fared no worse than individuals who needed less treatment.

As a whole, HWH studies show mixed results. That is, some studies yield reductions in recidivism, while some show no difference, and others show almost equal increases. When disaggregated by type, programs using the principles of effective interventions, these halfway houses generally have better reductions in recidivism. One difficulty with understanding the effectiveness of halfway houses may be within their funding. As stated, there are numerous revenue streams for the creation and management of a halfway house, to include for-profit agencies. This design may override the design of providing the level of care comprehensive enough to match the level of need by the individuals in the halfway houses. As with the other intermediate sanctions, it is important to note that using the principles of effective intervention are among the driving causes of their success.

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