

Short Custody or Community

Criminal Justice

Short prison terms against community orders for similar cases.

Short custody

- Interrupts work, housing and family contact
- Too short for any programme to run
- High reoffending rates after release
- Costly per person per week
- Delivers immediate incapacitation

Community order

- Supervision, unpaid work, treatment
- Keeps employment and housing intact
- Better outcomes in matched comparisons
- Depends on caseload and service capacity
- Breach can still result in custody

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

Matched comparisons generally favour community orders over short custodial terms for otherwise similar cases.

Educational reference. These are quasi-experimental findings; selection into sentence type is the central methodological problem.