

4-11-2011

Non-Violent Drug Offences: Are There Alternatives to Imprisonment?

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8th Annual Undergraduate research Conference, April 11, 2011

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Introduction

No one wants to be sent to jail but laws and punishment for violation of laws are part of every society. Unfortunately, USA is the leader in percent of population imprisoned. Based on current projections, by 2011 the U.S. prison population will increase by 13 percent, which is triple the growth of the entire population as a whole, to more than 1.7 million. Supporting that increase in incarcerated people will cost American taxpayers and local/state budgets an estimated \$27.5 billion. This results in an enormous burden on society. Our research attempts to evaluate what effects this prison overcrowding has on Idaho's economy through cost analysis and comparison along with a look at true effectiveness of punishment methods based on recidivism rates. We focus on the non-violent drug offender population and offer an alternative to imprisonment.

Data Source: 2010 Alcohol Monitoring Systems, Inc. (2010) *Prison Stats for Idaho*. Retrieved March 20, 2011 from: <http://jailovercrowding.com/index/the-problem>

Cost

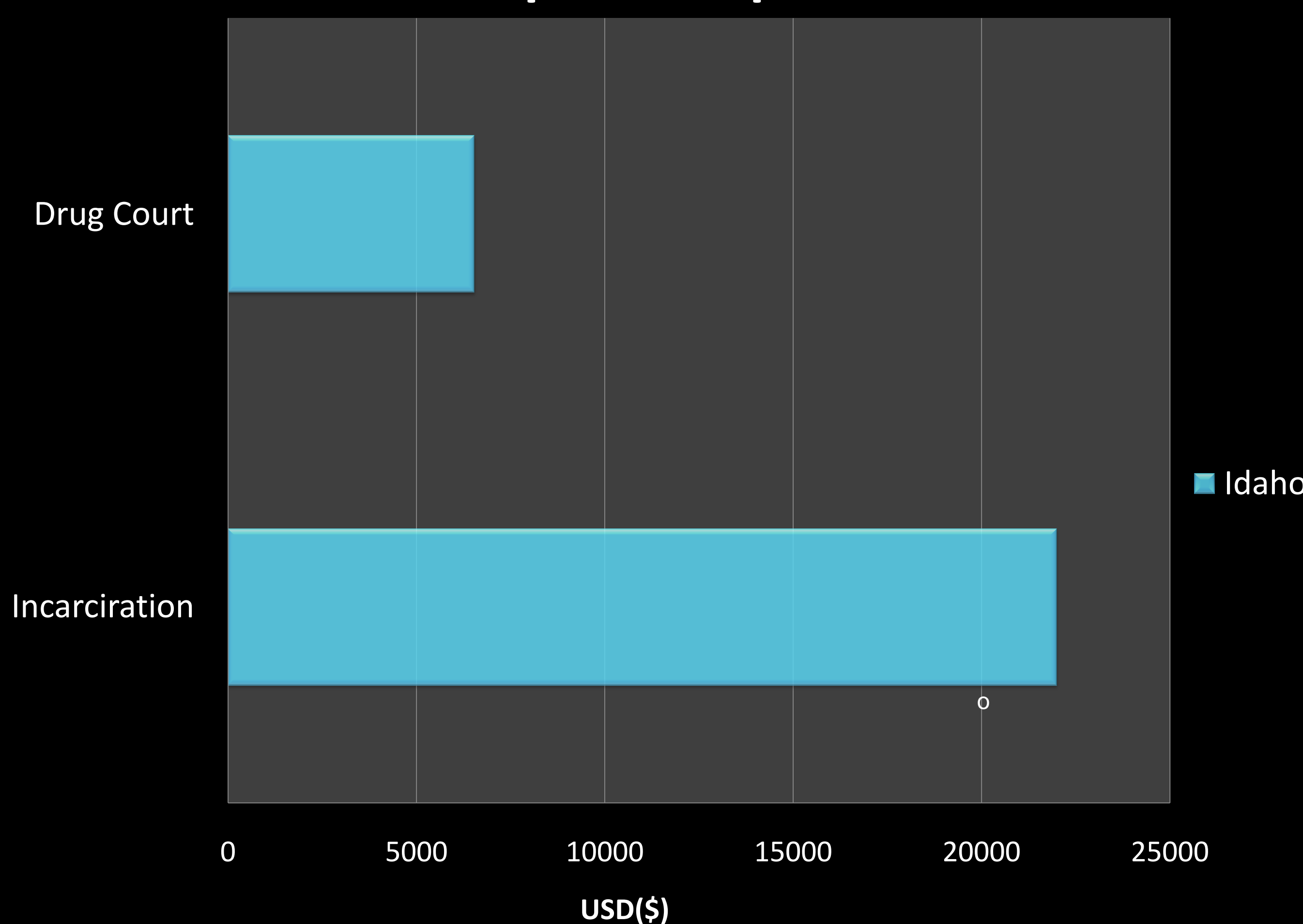
According to a 2008 survey, 1/100 adults are incarcerated in the United States. In Idaho, about 32% of those imprisoned are housed for non-violent drug offenses, a rate that has steadily rose since 2002. Since a third of prison population is being held for similar drug offenses, there is reason to explore alternative treatment options when dealing with prison overcrowding and rising cost of incarceration.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics (2011, March 28). *Data Analysis Tool*. Retrieved March 12, 2011, from: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov>

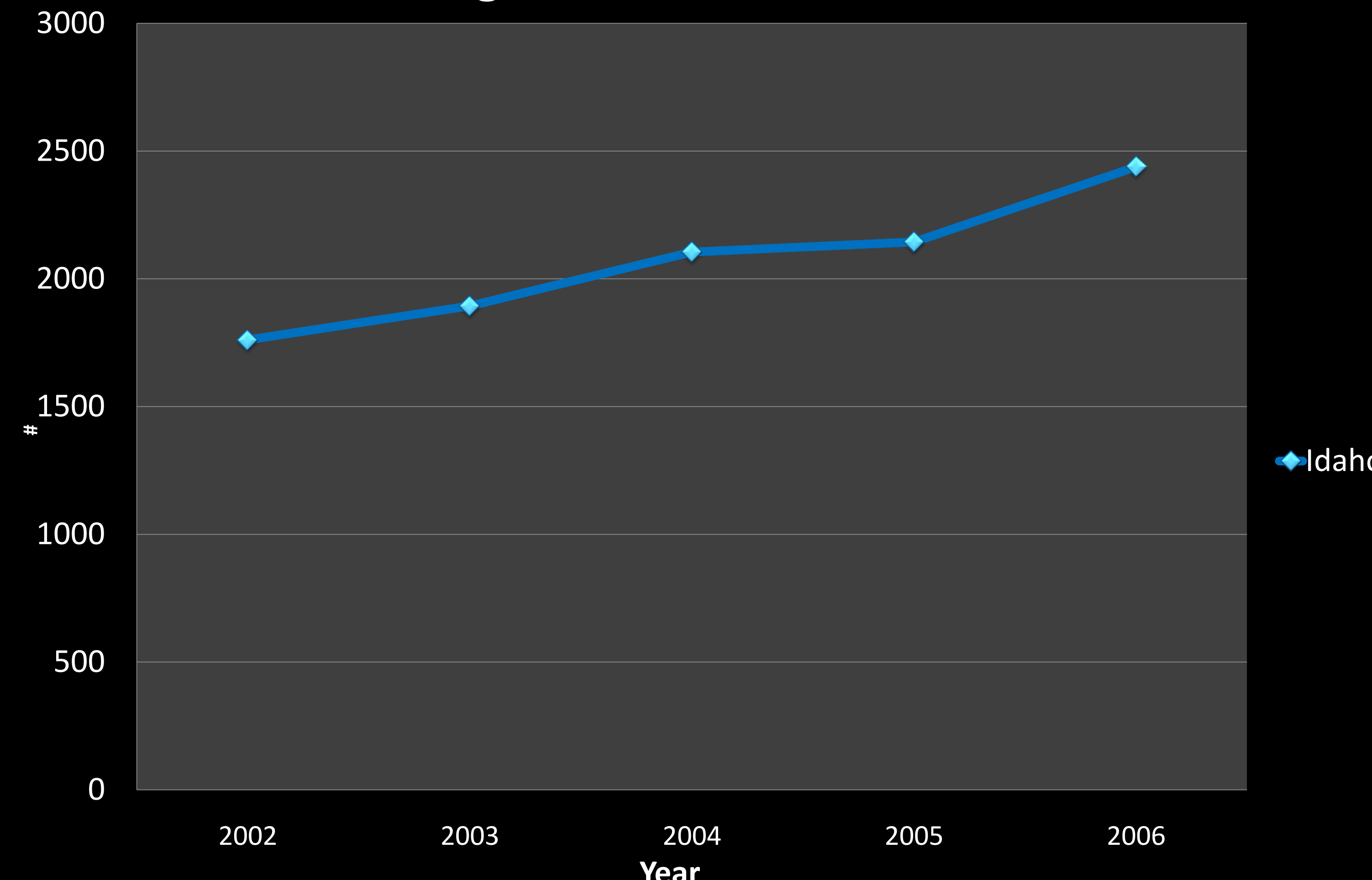
Recidivism

Recidivism is defined as the act of a person repeating an undesirable behavior after they have either experienced negative consequences of that behavior, or have been treated or trained to extinguish that behavior. The ultimate goal of punishment whether through incarceration or drug court is to try and make sure that the offender learns through their mistakes and desires to change their behavior. Drug court has a much lower rate because it aims to cure the root psychological causes of drug addiction.

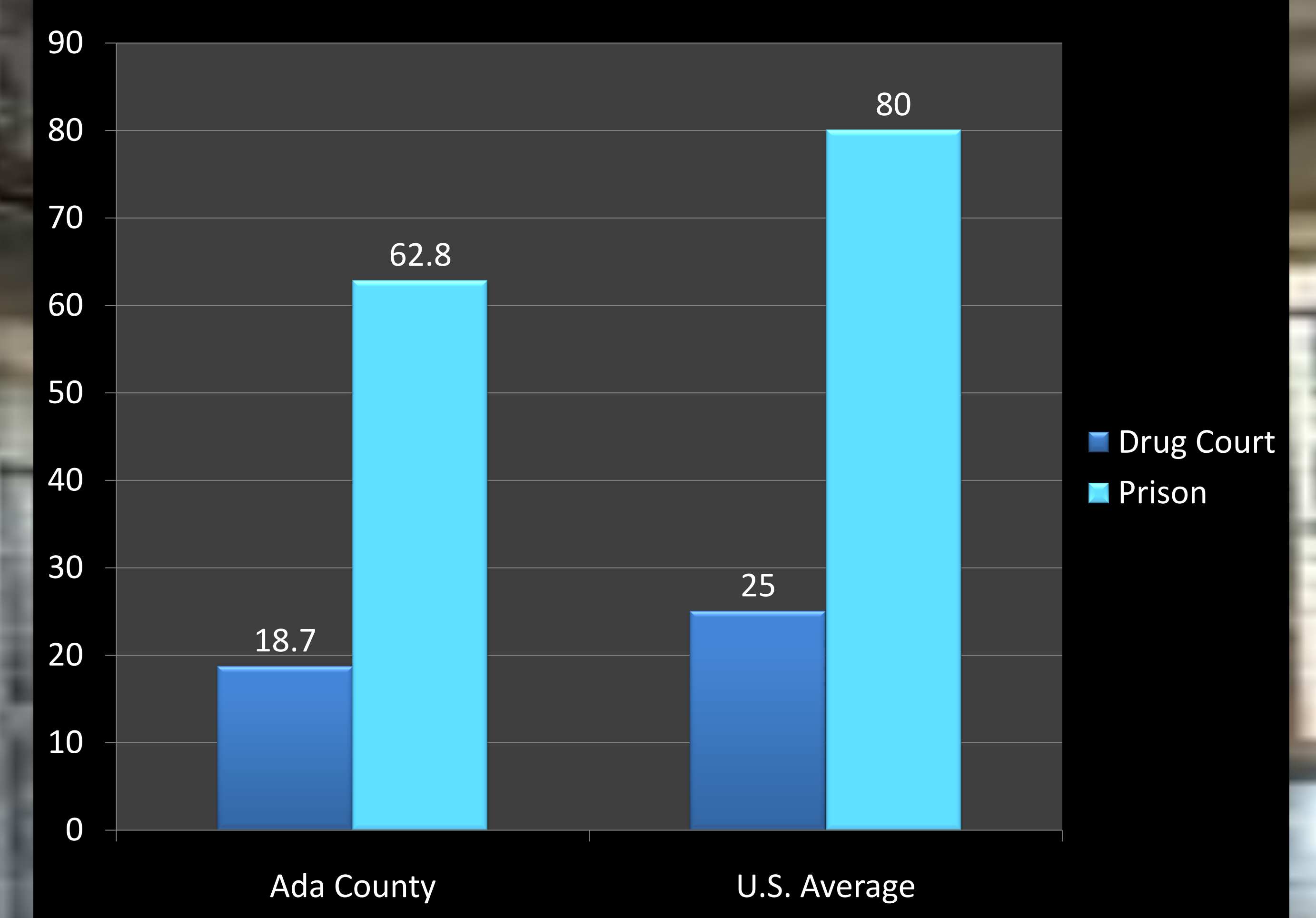
Cost per Year per Person



Drug Related Arrests



Recidivism Rates



Cost Estimates: Prison vs. Drug Courts

- Idaho has 7,319 prisoners behind bars.
- On average, it costs prisons about \$23,000 to house one person per year.
- Total cost of drug courts is \$6,550 per person per year.
- Drug courts also address the core issues involved in drug use leading to much lower recidivism rates.

Source: ONDCP Drug Policy Information Clearinghouse staff (2008, June 1). *State of Idaho Profile of Drug Indicators*. Retrieved March 14, 2001, from: <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/statelocal/id/index.html>

Conclusion

Our main research was aimed at determining whether it was cost effective to place non-violent drug offenders into other forms of rehabilitation. Through our research we determined that not only was it cost effective but it was a more successful choice than the normal form of imprisonment. Through drug court the offenders are punished for their mistakes but are also rehabilitated to become successful members of society once they have graduated from the program. We believe that drug court offers a great alternative to imprisonment that would help not only the offenders but also Idaho's economic concerns.

Drug Court Findings

- 2006 study showed 41 percent of offenders were employed at time of arrest.
- After completion, 97 percent of graduates were employed with an average wage increase of \$6.38/hr.
- 2010 economic impact was over 8.7 million dollars per year.

Source: Drug Courts and Mental Health Courts (2006). Report to Governor Butch Otter. Retrieved from <http://www.isc.idaho.gov/links/D&MHCourts-FINAL.pdf>