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Presentation title: The risk principle and the decrease in recidivism – How criminological knowledge contributes to crime reduction and desistance

In the last decades, in many countries worldwide legislative and juridical efforts were implemented in order to extend the sanctions, control, treatment, and supervision of convicted individuals. At the same time, the development of crime and recidivism rates indicated a decrease of sexual and violent offenses in many countries. The main assumption of this presentation is that the tremendous progress made in the field of risk assessment and management is one reason for this decrease if the risk-related efforts are based on empirical criminological research. In order to support this assumption, the results of two large-scale empirical studies were introduced. The aim of the first study was to examine a possible relationship between the legislative strengthening of risk assessment and management efforts and the (further) reduction of recidivism during the last 20 years in Austria. The analysis of data of N = 2,714 individuals convicted of sexual offenses released between 2002 and 2016 indicated a substantial increase of the number of conditional releases (since 2008 strongly associated with mandatory risk-related supervision and treatment obligations), whereas the recidivism rates for sexual and violent offenses dropped systematically within the same timeframe. For the second study data about N = 2,614 individuals predominantly convicted of (nonsexual) offenses were analyzed, who were registered and supervised by the Security Management Hesse II (SIMA-II), a special unit of the Hessian probationary service, which allocated its resources based on empirically sound risk assessment instruments. The results showed that the implementation of this new risk-based probationary service was associated with a significant decrease in recidivism. In general, the results of both studies provide clear indicators on how criminological knowledge transformed into concrete risk assessment and management strategies could lead to substantial reductions in crime and recidivism rates.