

# Maximizing the Impact of Interventions for Youth: The Importance of Risk/Needs Assessment

**GINA VINCENT, PhD**

*Assistant Professor, University of Massachusetts*

*Medical School*

*Co-Director, National Youth Screening &*

*Assessment Project (NYSAP)*

# National Youth Screening & Assessment Project (NYSAP)

- Academics providing technical assistance for screening and assessment in juvenile justice systems
- Focus on
  - ▣ Risk of behavioral health problems and re-offending
  - ▣ Evidence-based practice
- Nationwide consultation services...
  - ▣ Tool selection and implementation
  - ▣ Staff training
  - ▣ System evaluation and outcome
- Headquarters for **MAYSI-2™** and **MAYSIWARE™** (mental health screening in JJ settings)



# Three Key Points

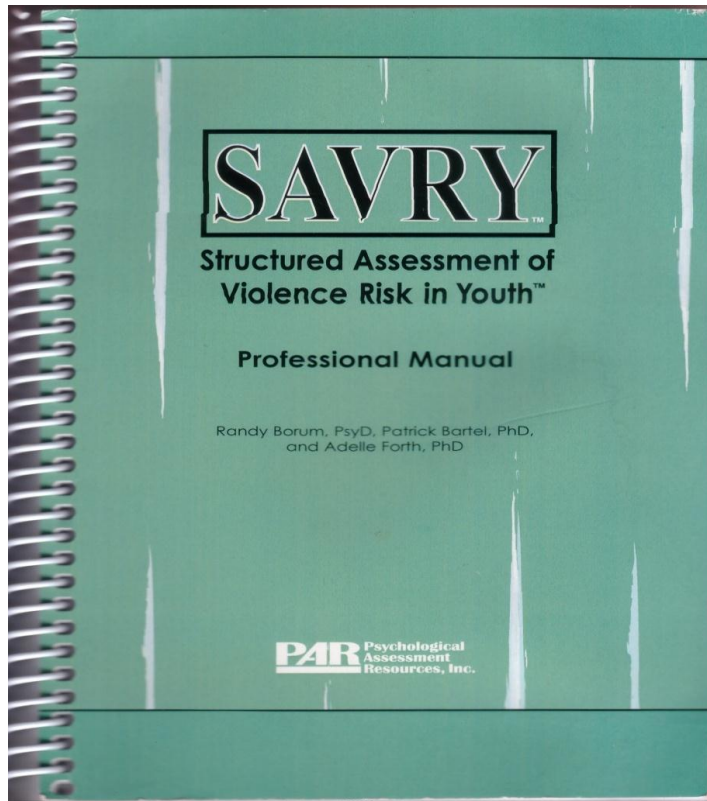
---

- Use of a valid risk/needs assessment tool with most every youth is essential for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare agencies
- Risk assessment helps states to conserve resources and to improve outcomes for youth
- Quality implementation and buy-in is crucial for success

# What is a Risk Assessment Tool?

- Risk = risk for serious delinquent offending or violence
- *A risk for reoffending or violence assessment tool* is an instrument developed to help answer the question: **“Is this youth at relatively low or relatively high risk for reoffending or engaging in violent behavior?”**
- Some, but not all, risk assessment tools also address what is causing the youth to be at low or relatively high risk for reoffending (in other words, some identify ***crime-producing needs***)

# Example of a Risk/Needs Assessment



	Moderate	High	Critical Item
<input type="checkbox"/> acts of violence		≥3 acts of violence	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> 3 prior acts of violent offending		≥5 prior acts of nonviolent offending	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> own violent act between ages 1 and 13		First known violent act prior to age 11	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> comply w/ court w/ or treatment times		Failed ≥3 times to comply w/ court orders or treatment	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> self-harm gestures w/ suicidal intent		History of serious self-harm or suicide attempts	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> occasional aggression and/or serious forms of violence in the home		Witnessed chronic physical aggression or serious forms of violence in the home	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> serious or neglect		Chronic or severe physical abuse or neglect	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> history of minor or as		Parental/caregiver history of frequent (≥5) minor or any serious criminal behavior as an adult	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> of ing		Significant discontinuity of care occurred during childhood (>1 year)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Significant difficulties in school achievement	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Low	Moderate	High	Critical Item
11. Peer Delinquency	<input type="checkbox"/> Does not associate w/ delinquent peers	<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally associates w/ delinquent or antisocial peers	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently associates with criminal or antisocial peers	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Peer Rejection	<input type="checkbox"/> No peer rejection	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate peer rejection or significant past peer rejection	<input type="checkbox"/> Significant peer rejection	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Stress and Poor Coping	<input type="checkbox"/> Mild stress, no significant losses, with average coping ability	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate stress or loss, with adequate coping ability	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate to significant stress or loss, with poor coping ability	<input type="checkbox"/>

(continued)

24 Risk Items  
- 10 Static  
- 14 Dynamic

+ 6 Protective Items

Items rated a on 3-pt scale using interview + all available info

# Could it Have Been Prevented?



Pro-criminal attitudes  
Poor anger control  
Substance Abuse  
Negative Peers  
Manipulative

High risk for  
violence?

Low risk for  
violence?

WHY IS RISK ASSESSMENT  
IMPORTANT?  
NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE



# Research Evidence: Guiding Principles

## There is emerging consensus on characteristics of effective programming for young offenders:

- ❑ Punitive sanctions **do not** have a significant effect on re-offending (Gatti et al., 2009).
- ❑ Mixing low-risk youth with more antisocial youth can make them worse (42% in group prevention programs & 22% in probation programs) (Lipsey, 2006).
- ❑ When services are **matched** to youth's level of risk and their "crime-producing" (criminogenic) needs, the lower the chance of offending.
- ❑ The goal is to have the right services for the right youth.



# Juvenile Justice

## Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (1974 – reauthorized 2008)

- “Programs should be designed to **reduce risks and develop competencies** in youth that will prevent or reduce violent behavior”
- States should “**utilize risk assessment mechanisms** to aid JJ personnel in determining appropriate sanctions for delinquent behavior”

# Child Welfare

## Adoption and Safe Families Act (1997)

- Stressed the use of assessments for safety and well-being

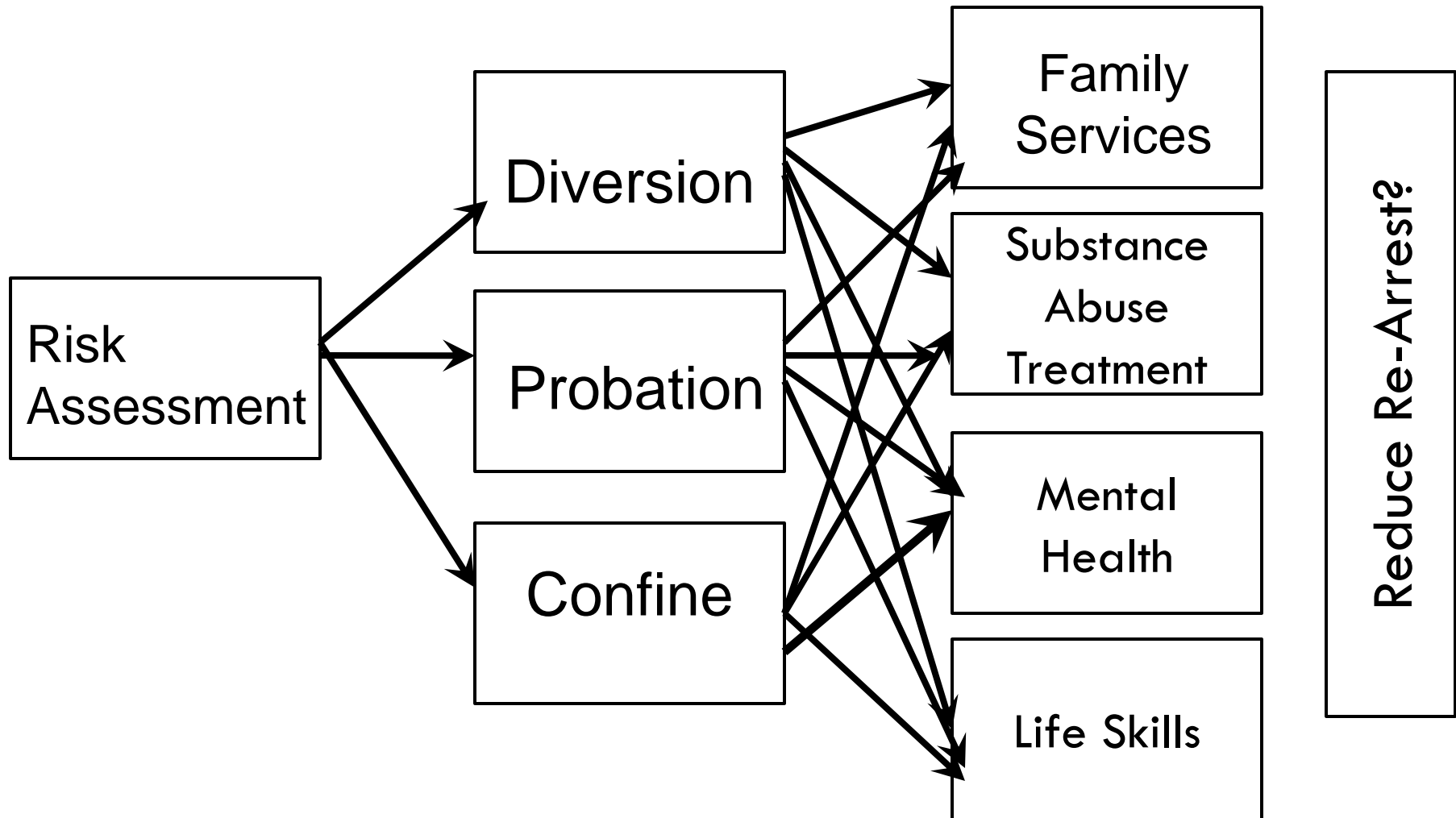
## JJDPA

- “...represent communities that have a comprehensive plan designed to identify at-risk juveniles and to prevent or reduce the rate of juvenile delinquency, and that involve other entities operated by individuals who have a demonstrated history of involvement in activities designed to prevent juvenile delinquency;”

CONSERVE RESOURCES &  
IMPROVE OUTCOMES



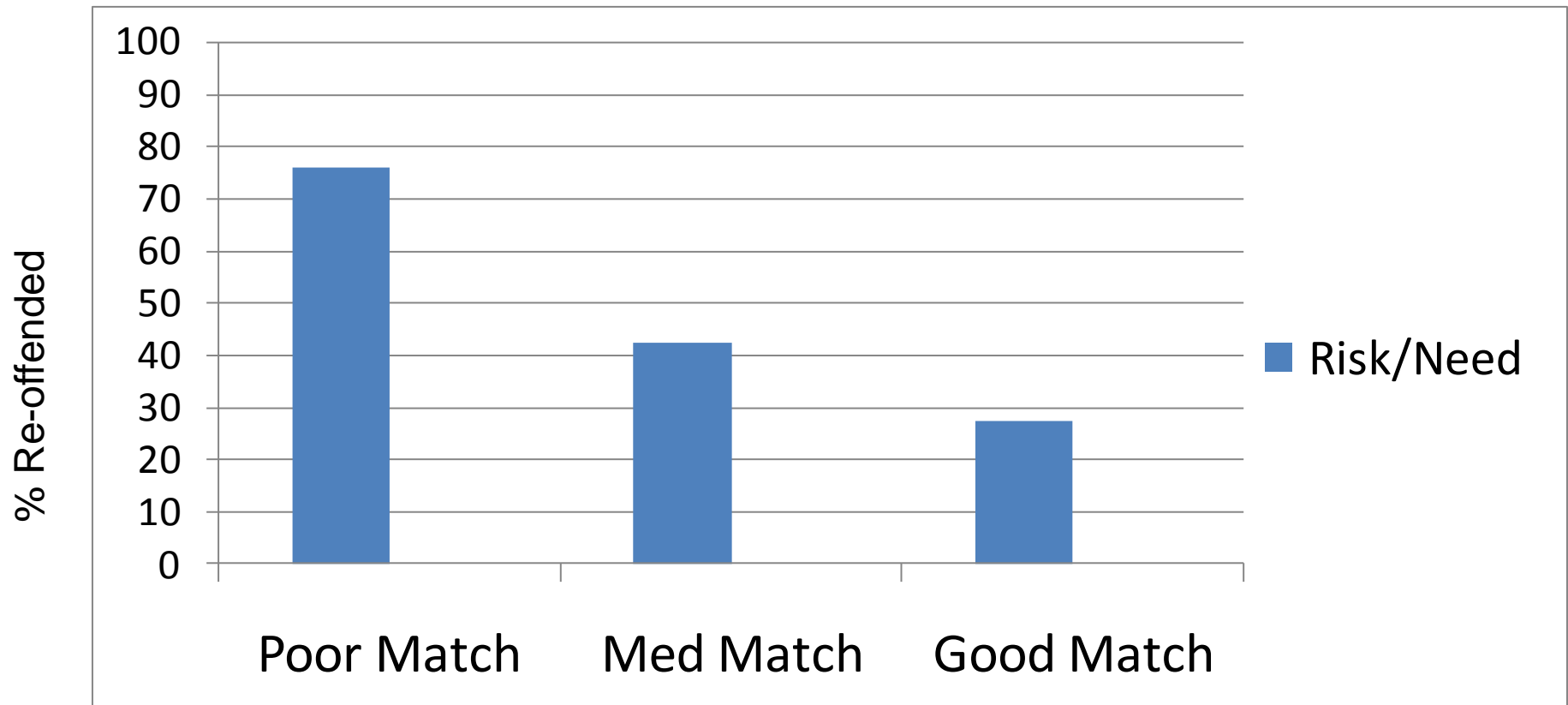
# Matching the Right Youth to the Right Juvenile Justice Interventions and Services



# Benefits of Avoiding Incarceration of Youth Per Dollar Invested (Aos, 2006)

- **For every \$1.00 spent on the following services, taxpayers save:**
  - Functional Family Therapy: \$28.34
  - Multisystemic Family Therapy: \$28.81
  - Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care: \$43.70
  - Adolescent Diversion Project: \$24.92
  - Juvenile Boot Camps: \$0.81
  - Scared Straight: **-\$477.75** (NET LOSS)

# Reduction in Recidivism by Matching Youth to Services Based on Crime-Producing Needs (Vieira et al., 2009)



Match based on # of Services Given in Response to a Youth's Criminogenic Needs

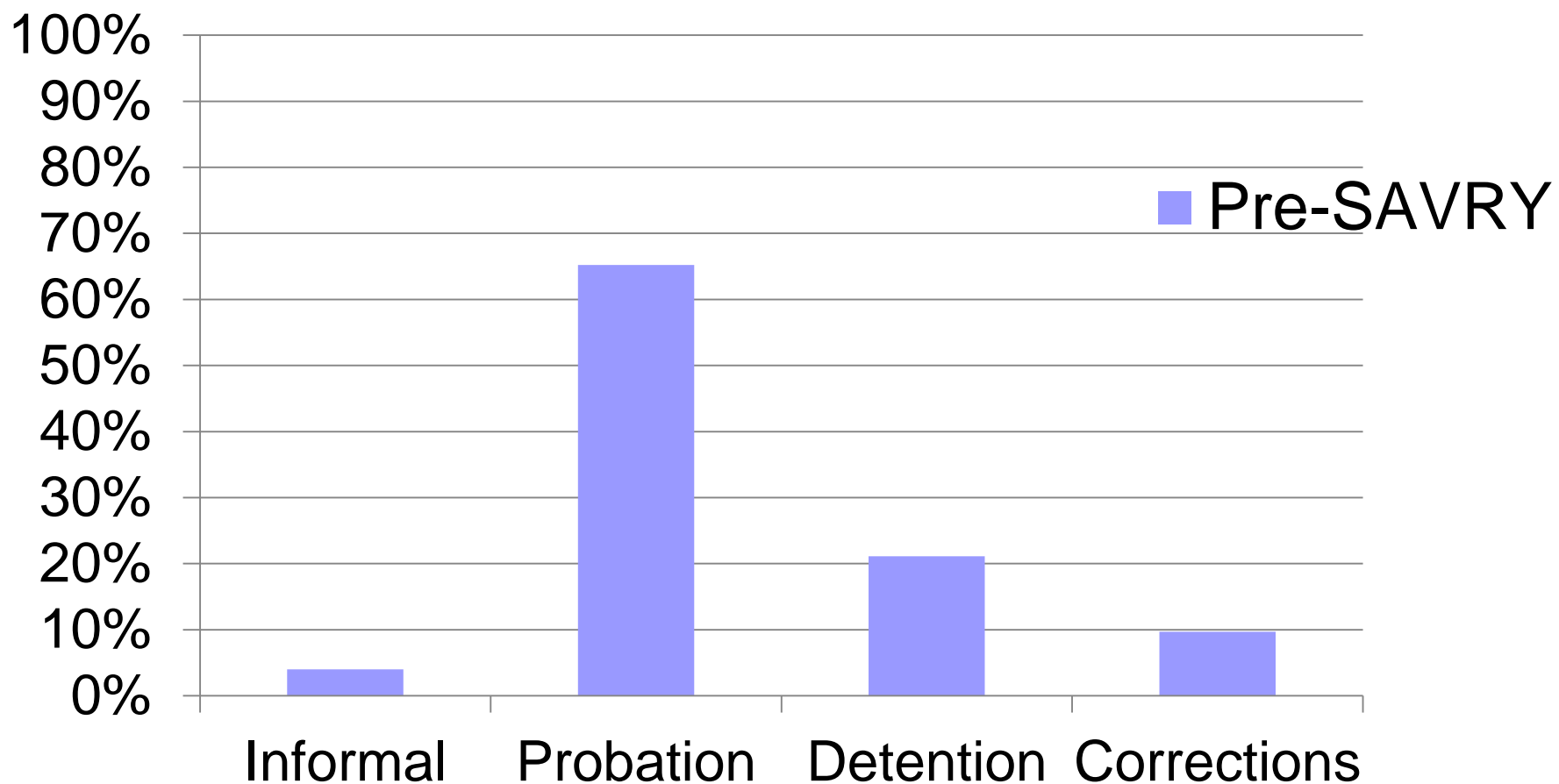
# Proper Implementation of a Risk Assessment Tool Can Save Costs by.....

- Avoiding referrals to services for youth who **do not** need the services,
- Reducing costly out-of-home placement when it is unnecessary for addressing the risks and needs of the youth,
- Guiding case planning to reduce chances of re-offending and violence (or delinquency in general), and
- Still protecting public safety.

# Risk Assessment Implementation in JJ Study

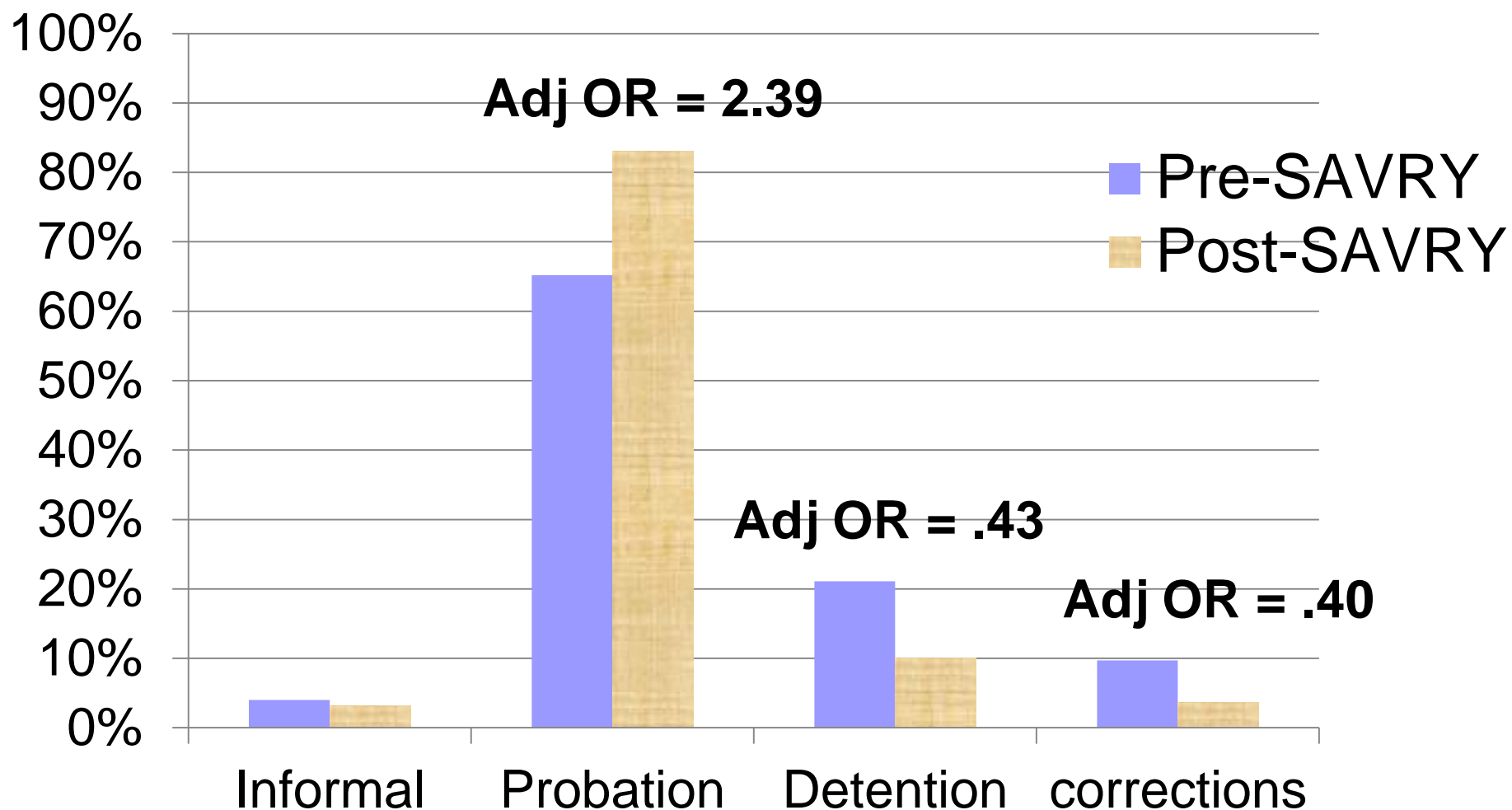
## MacArthur Foundation (Vincent et al., 2011)

### Dispositions Before Implementation of a Risk Assessment

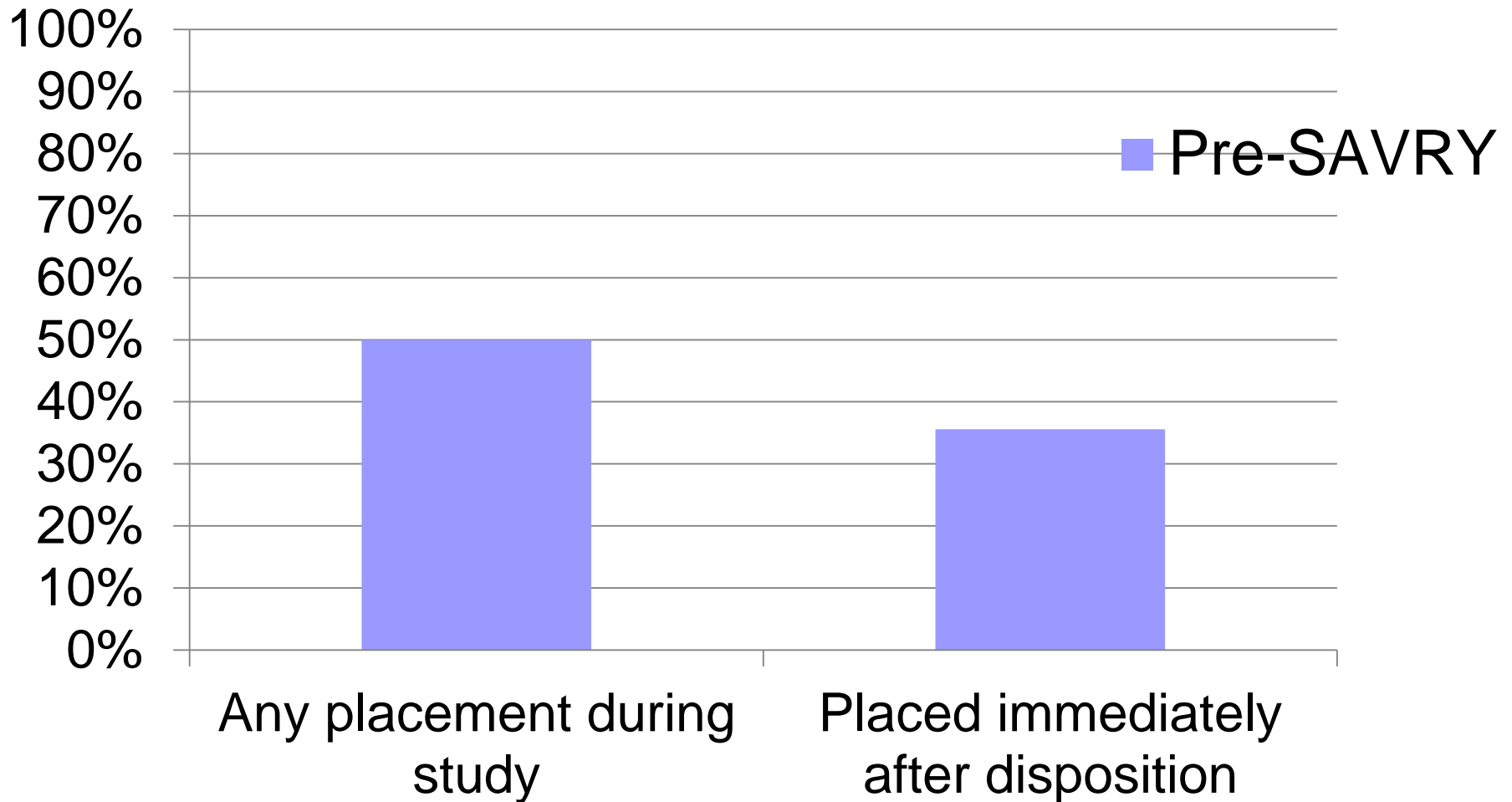




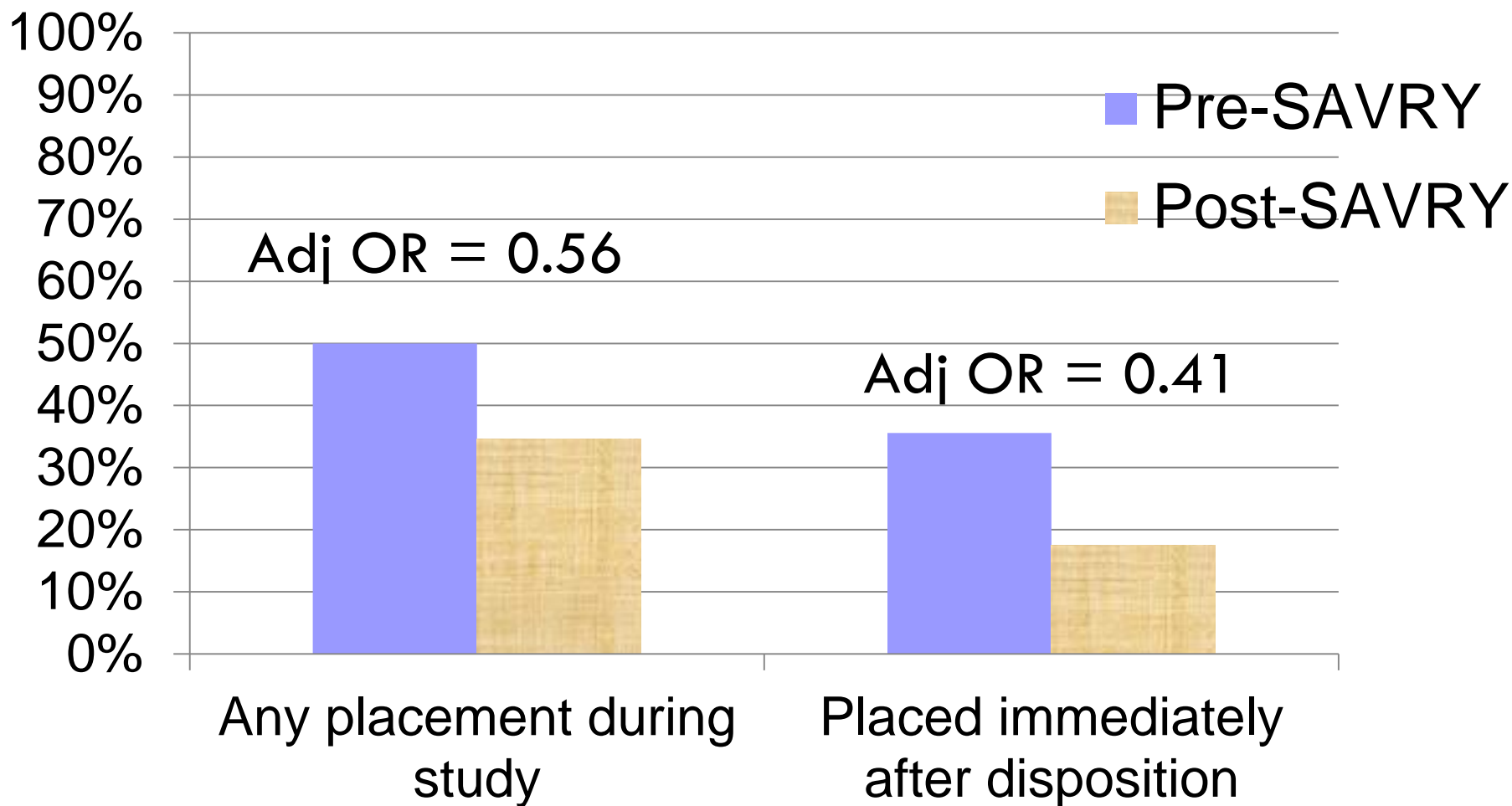
# Increase in use of probation



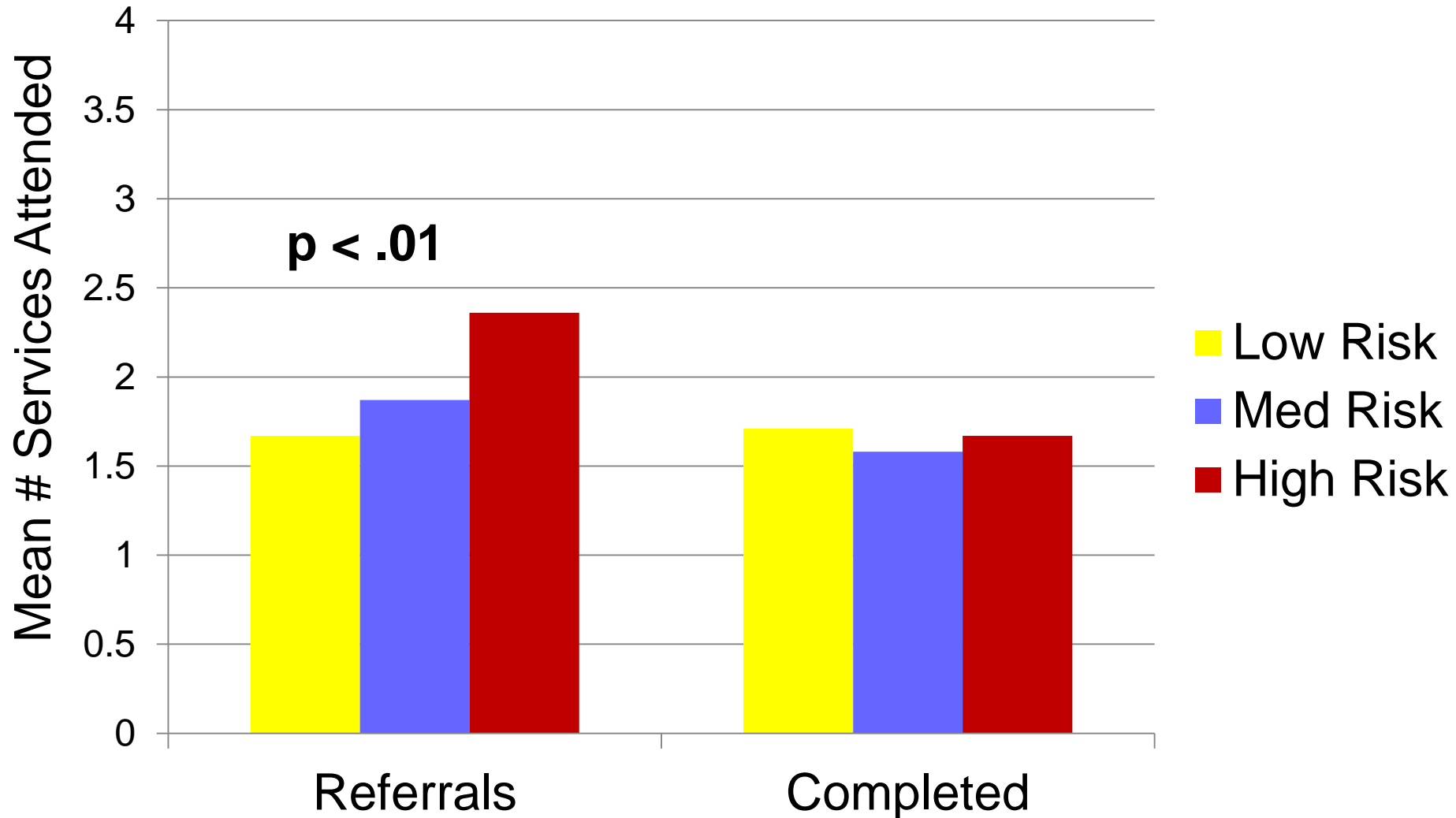
# Out-of-Home Placement Rates Before



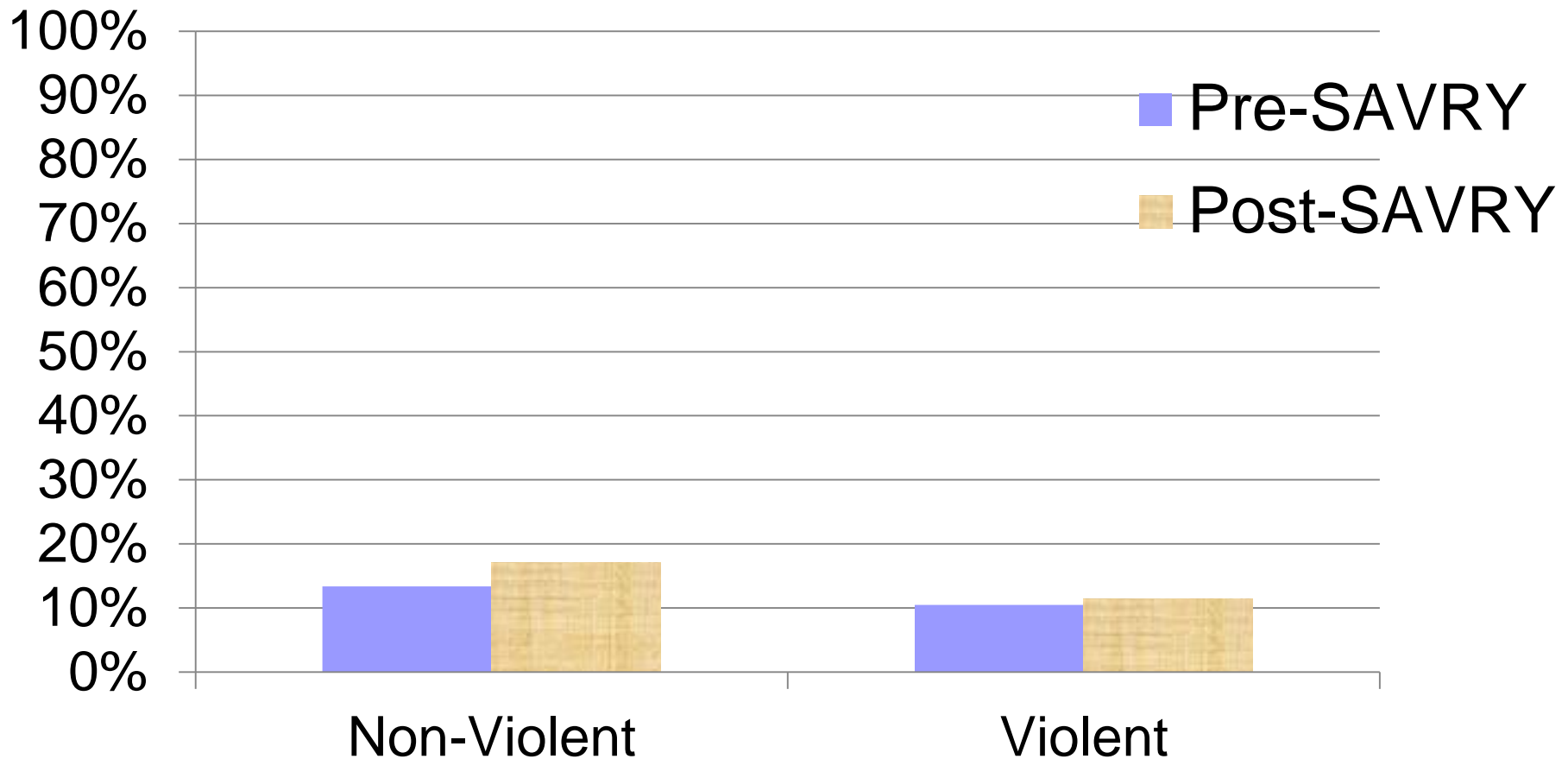
# Decrease in Placement Rates After Risk Assessment Implemented



# Increase in Use of Community Services for High Risk Youth –Decrease for Low Risk



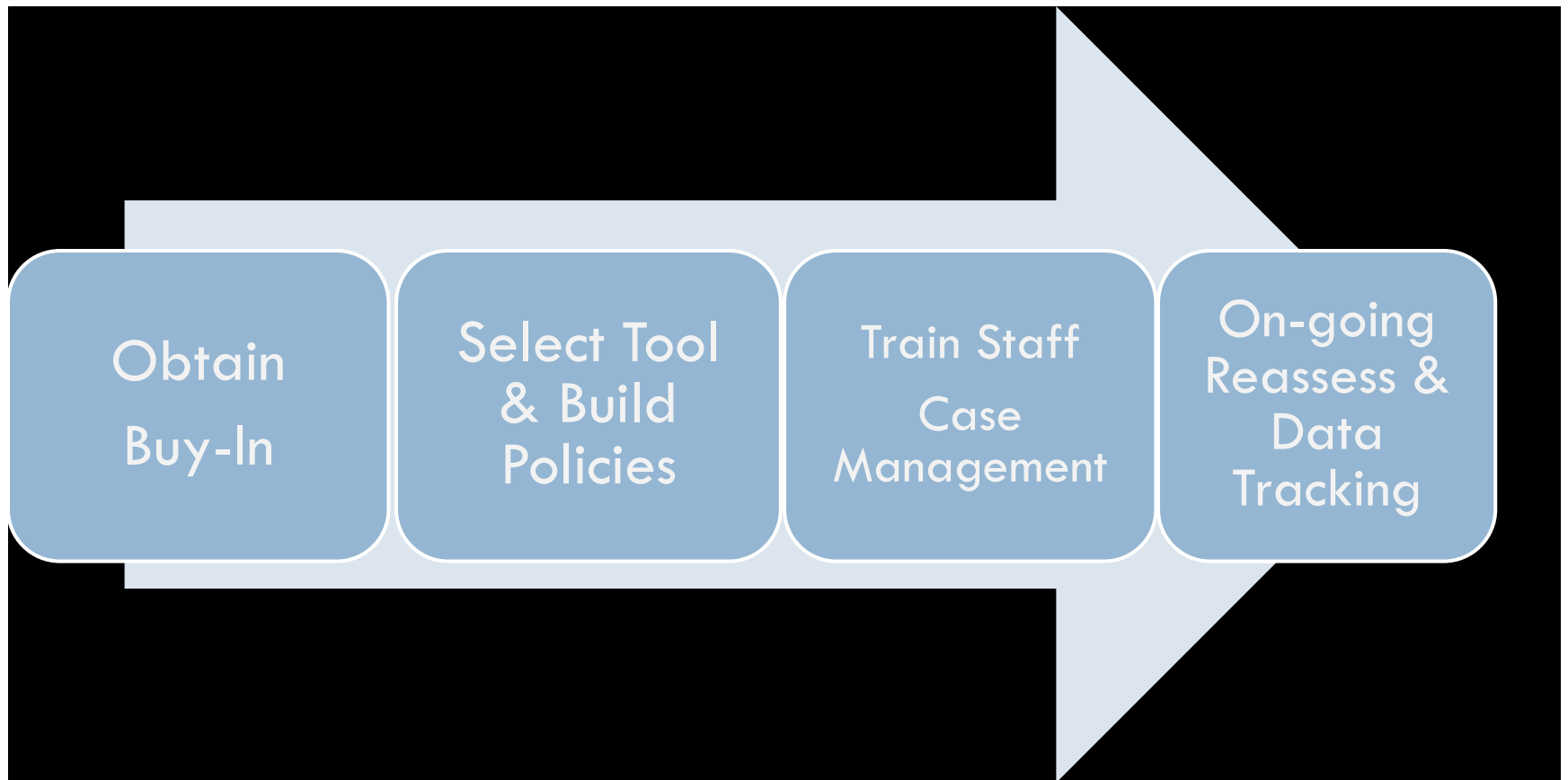
# No Change in Recidivism



# QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION AND BUY-IN IS ESSENTIAL

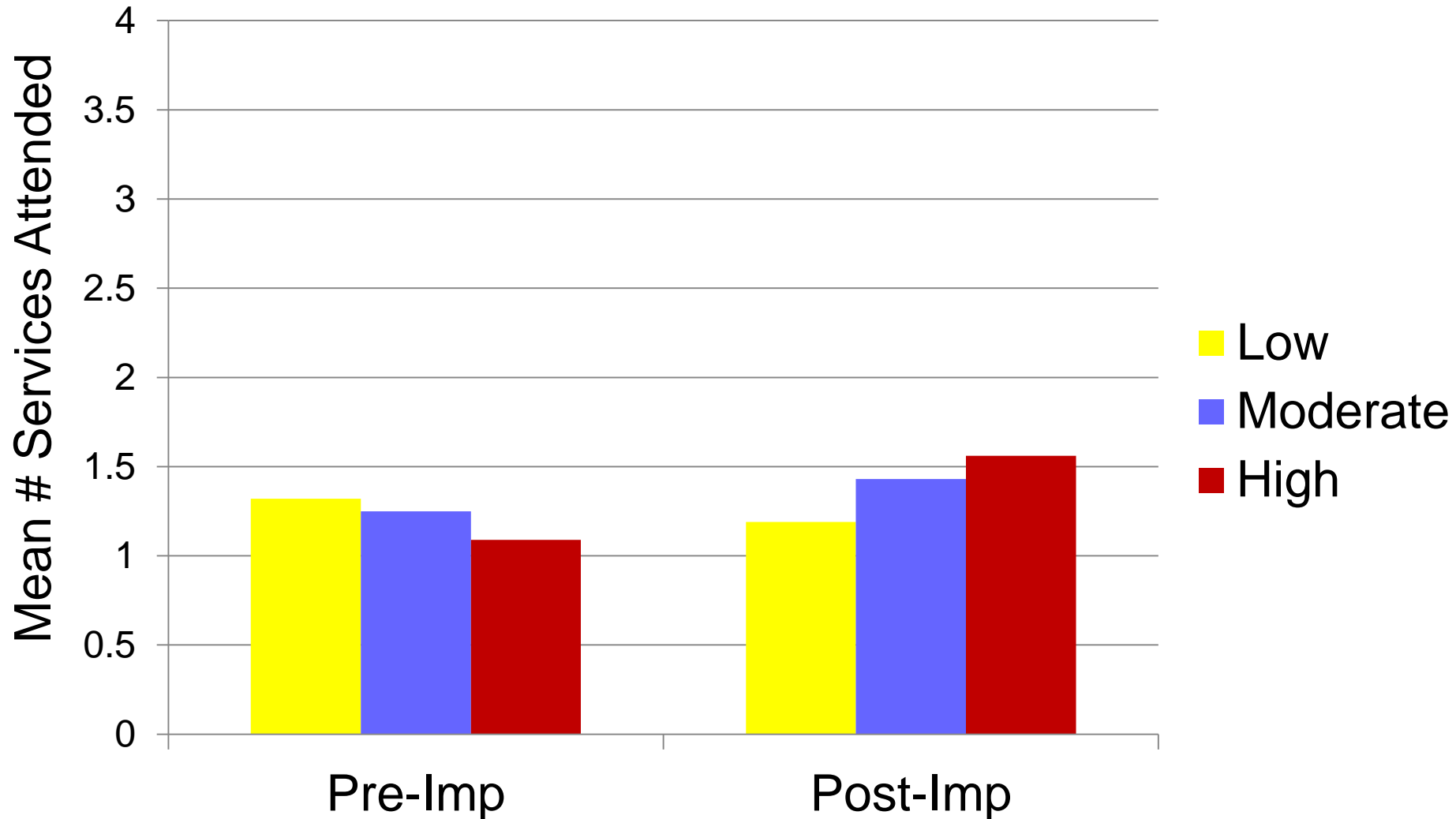


# The Implementation Process is Crucial



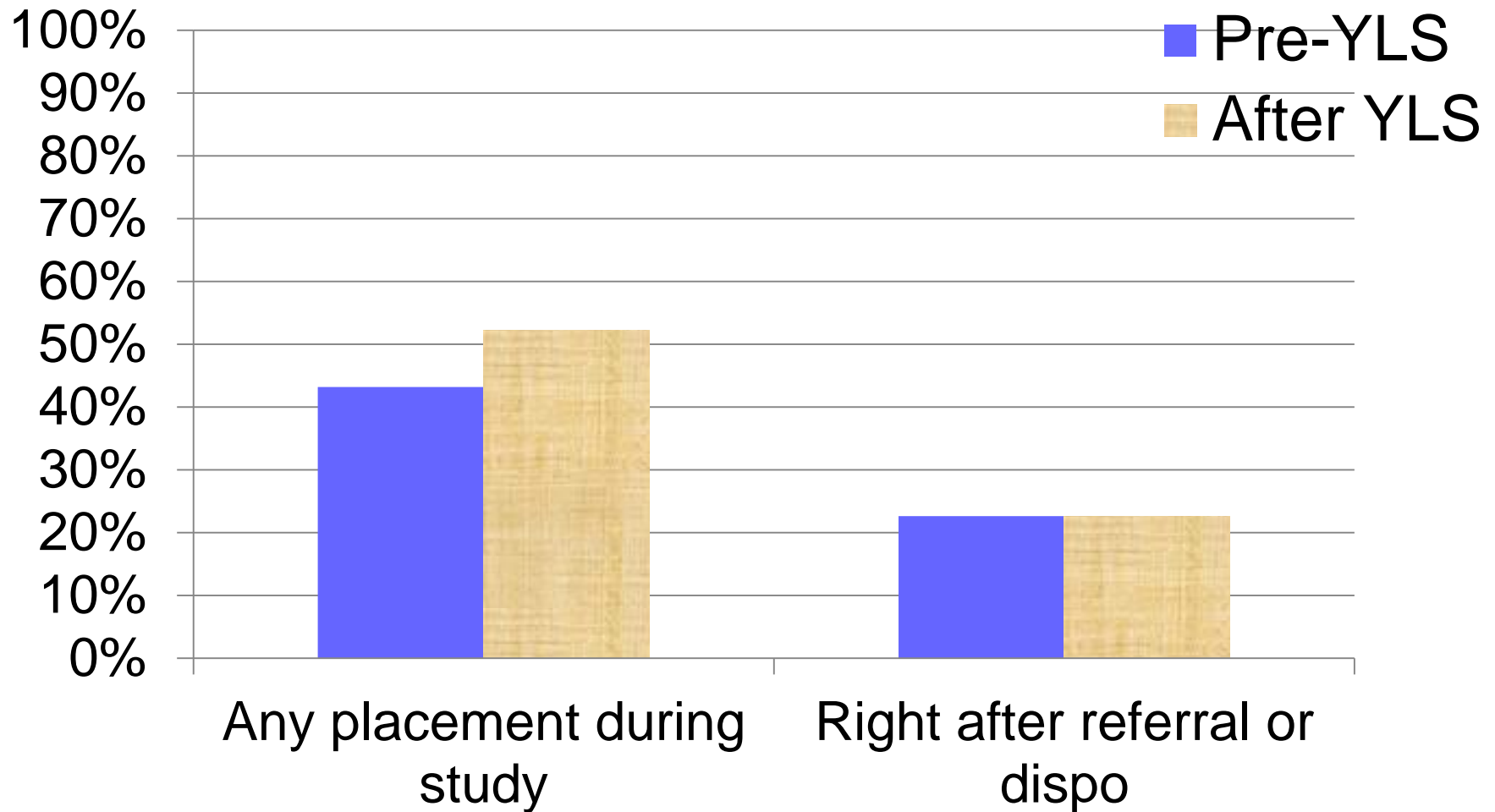
# Services Attended

## Before and After Good Implementation





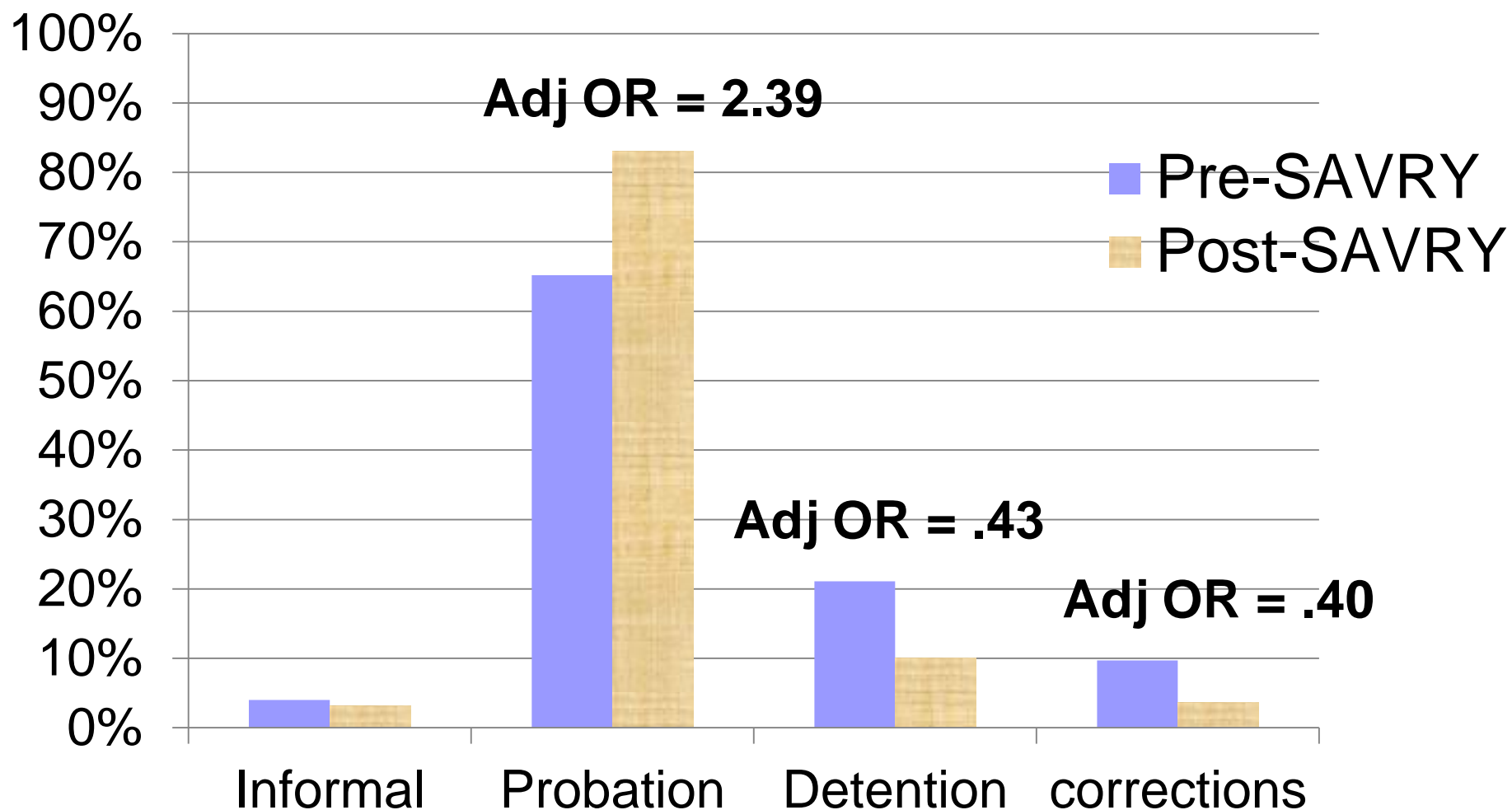
# Change in Placement Rates Before and After Implementation – no Judge Buy-In



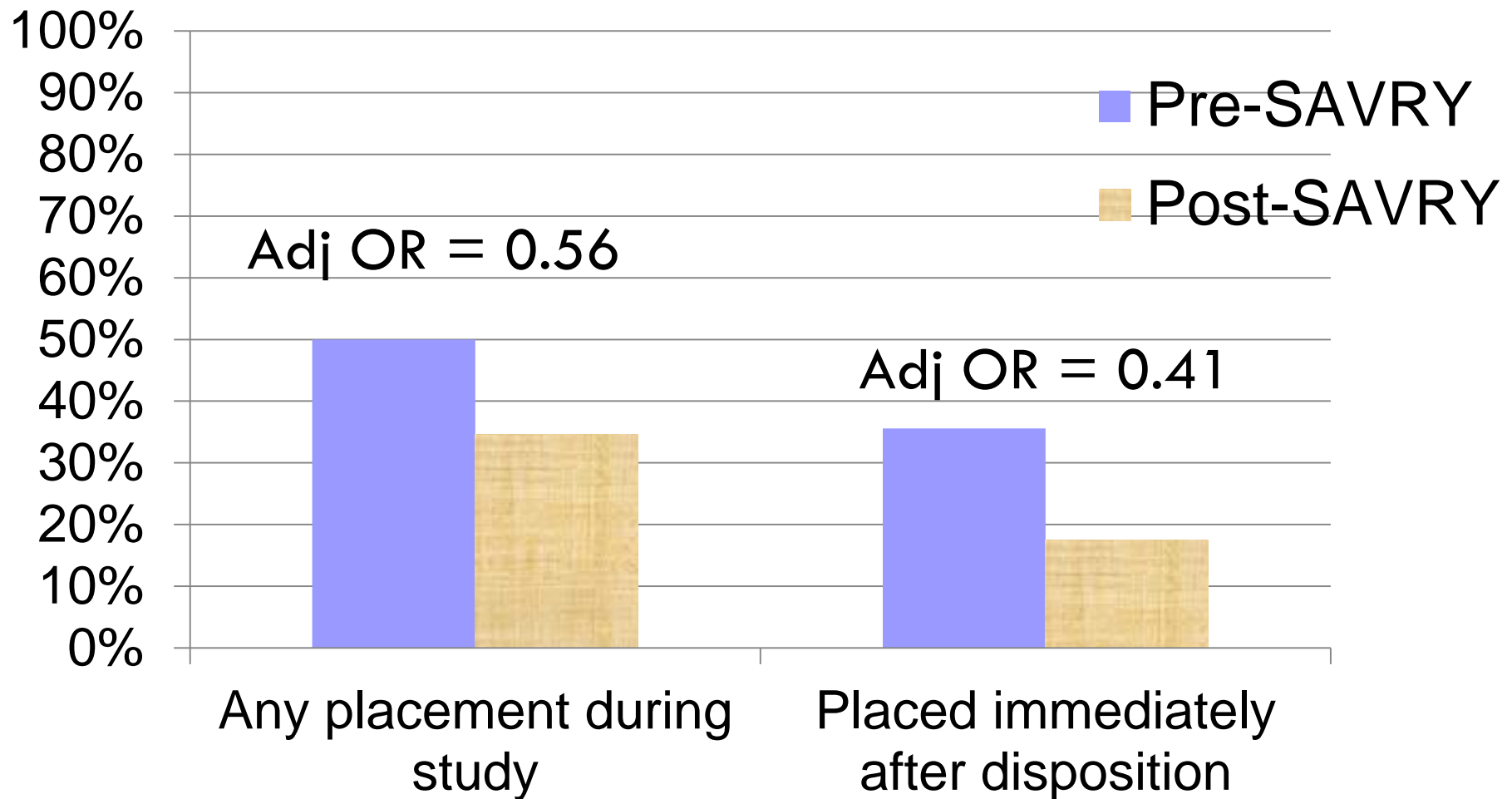
SO....TO REVIEW  
GOOD IMPLEMENTATION OF A  
RISK ASSESSMENT  
CAN LEAD TO....



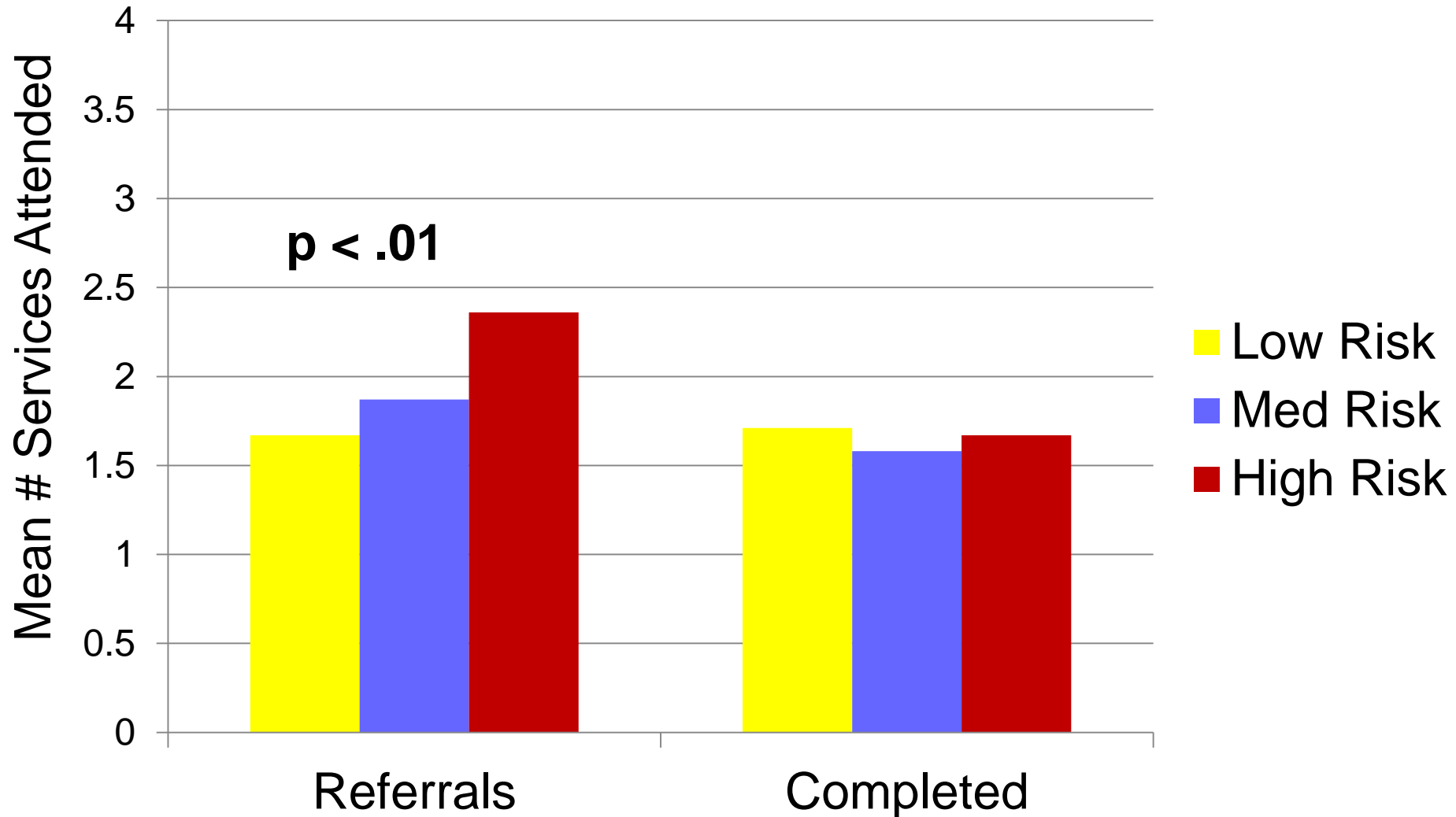
# Increase in use of probation



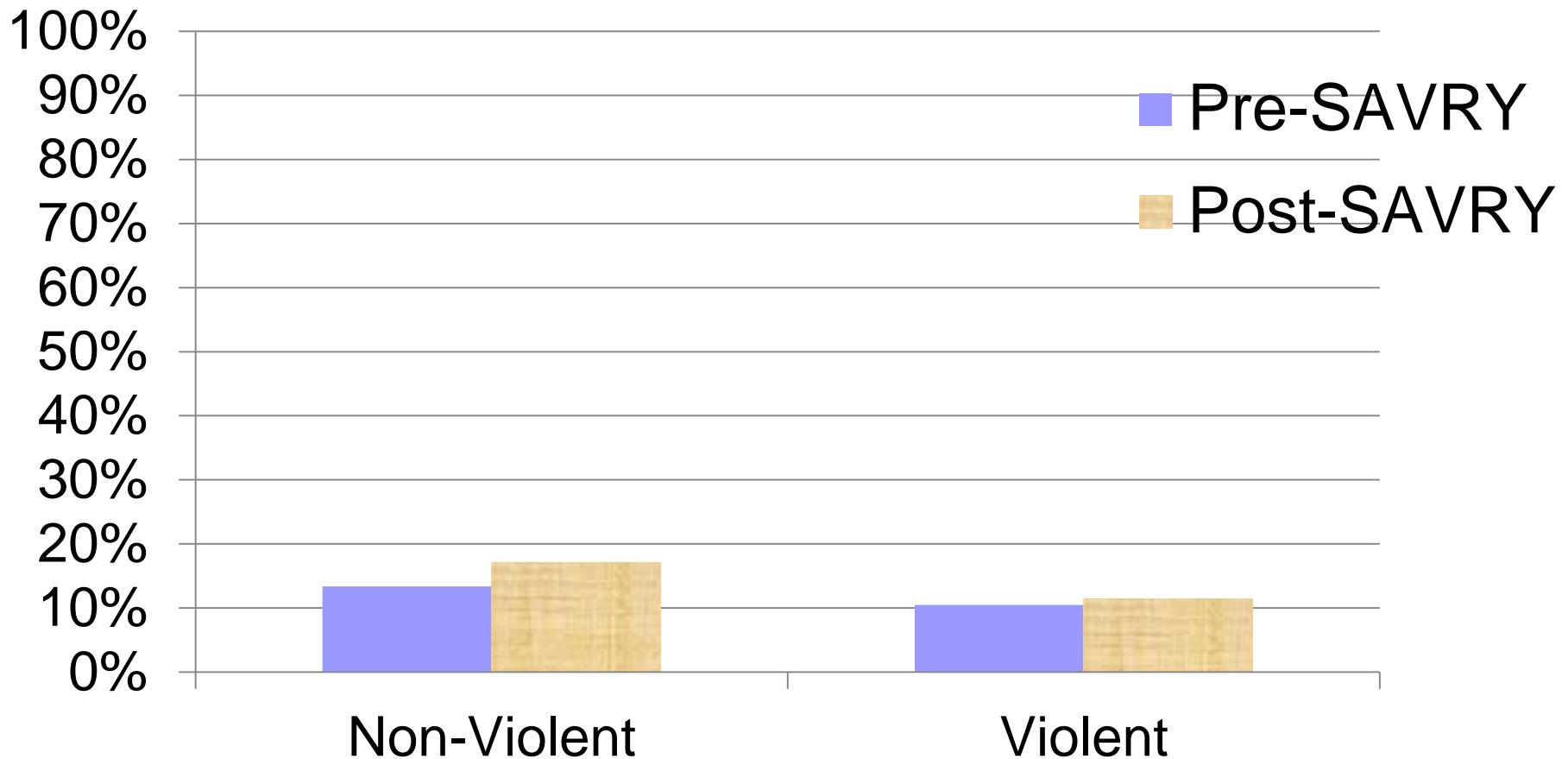
# Decrease in out-of-home placement



# Increase in Use of Community Services for High Risk Youth



# And, no increase in recidivism



# Conclusions

- Every state JJ system should adopt a valid risk assessment tool
- Conserves resources and improves outcomes for youth
  - ▣ Improved chance of reducing risk = reducing re-offending and violence or at least not increasing it
  - ▣ Better use of services = improved youth functioning
  - ▣ Cost Savings
  - ▣ Track data and measure outcomes
- Without quality implementation the benefits will not be realized