



Crime rates have been falling, yet prison populations continue to rise. The return to prison of previously incarcerated offenders - broadly labeled recidivism - is contributing to prison population growth. Factors such as education, rehabilitation, and work experience influence an individual's success or failure when reentering society. Within prison, inmate educational programming promotes rehabilitation, which in turn lowers recidivism. This Data Spotlight presents the wide-ranging definitions of recidivism, how recidivism relates to the escalating prison population, and an evaluation of the factors that influence outcomes for released offenders.

DEFINITIONS

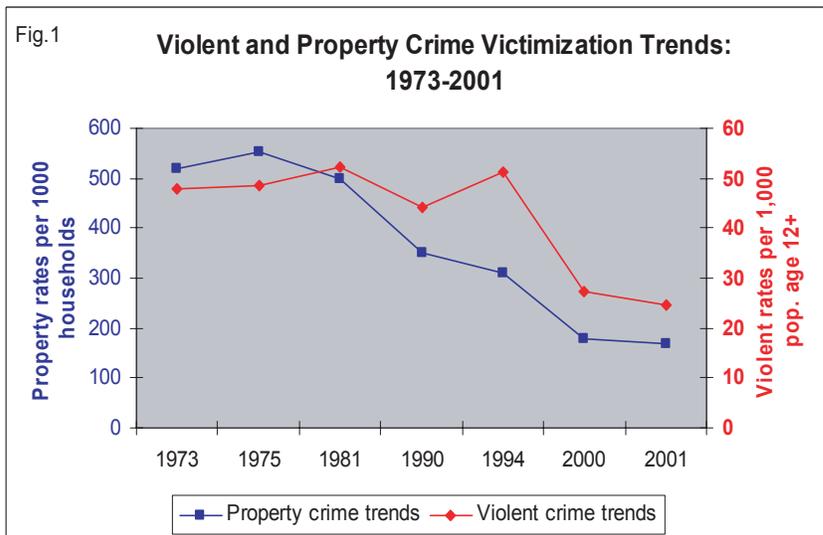
The commonly accepted definition of recidivism refers to persons re-arrested, re-convicted, and re-incarcerated for a new felony. However, policy makers have yet to agree on a uniform definition across jurisdictions, making comparisons of outcomes, programs, or other criteria extremely difficult.

- **RECIDIVISM** - defined by Webster's Dictionary is "a tendency to slip back into a previous criminal behavior pattern."
- The Performance Measure committee of the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) offered the following approach for calculating prison returns. "Returns for new felony conviction: Number of individuals released from the DOC during a calendar year who returned to the DOC prison system within three subsequent years after release for a new felony-level conviction."

CRIME RATES

Crime rates have been falling since 1994. In fact, violent and property crime rates are at their lowest levels in 30 years. (Figure 1)

- Of the 24.5 million violent and property victimizations in 2001, 75% involved property (burglary, motor vehicle theft, and theft). In 1973, property crimes totaled 51.5 million, triple the rate in 2001.
- From 2000 to 2001, simple assault rates dropped 10%, as did violent crime (10%), personal theft (33%), and property crime (6%).
- Texas, California and New York have witnessed elevated crime rates late in 2002, which may point to a change in the national rate.



RECIDIVISM RATES

Recidivism as reported in the Corrections Yearbook is rising. In 1990, the recidivism rate was 31.7%. By 2000, recidivism increased to 33.8%. In the 1990s, the number of released prisoners returned to prison grew 54%, compared to a 7% growth of inmates convicted for new crimes.

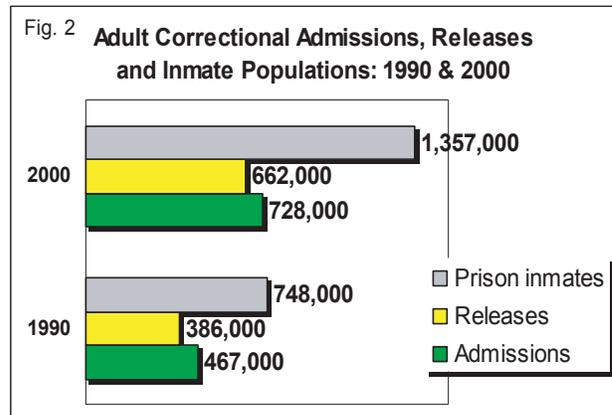
- Data from a Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report on Recidivism indicates that within 3 years of release, 67.5% of released prisoners were re-arrested, 46.9% were reconvicted for new crimes, 25.4% were re-sentenced for new crime, and 51.8% returned to prison.

WHY IS THE PRISON POPULATION GOING UP?

The escalating prison population is due to the revolving door phenomenon in our nation's prisons. More than 95% of prisoners return to the community, usually within two years. Overall, the number of prisoners released is on the rise, though keeping pace with admissions (Figure 2). However, repeat offender admissions currently exceed new crimes. The incidence of technical parole or probation violations resulting in re-incarceration is also more prevalent.

COUNTS - Inmate population has continued to grow moderately, 1.1% from 2000 to 2001, despite the declining crime rate. Adult correctional agencies under the jurisdiction of Federal or State authorities held 1.4 million inmates at yearend 2001. In total, 2.1 million individuals were incarcerated in the U.S. (Dec. 2001).

- In January 2001, nearly one out of every ten inmates (9.5%) had a prior felony conviction.
- More parole violators as a percent of total admissions were admitted in 2000 than in 1990. Parole violators returned to state prisons jumped from 27,000 in 1980 to 203,000 in 2000, a 652% increase.
- In 2000, inmates served an average 2.5 years behind bars, a 50% jump from the 1990s.
- The number of individuals released from prison in 2000 increased 71% from 1990. Admittances to adult correctional facilities over that period increased 56%.



FACTORS THAT AFFECT RECIDIVISM

Recidivism predictors include age, employment, education, prior convictions, drug use, types of supervision, and informal social networks. Some variables are alterable, suggesting the need to establish programs that help offenders overcome or at least cope with these issues. Upon release, supervision and support services are crucial for managing life on the outside.

PROGRAMS THAT REDUCE RECIDIVISM

CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION - Educational programming has a proven positive impact on recidivism. Participants earn higher wages, have increased family stability, higher workforce participation, and contribute to cost-savings for the system. Yet State prison inmates' involvement in education dropped from 56% in 1991 to 51.9% in 1997 and likewise for Federal inmates from 67% to 56.4% (BJS).

- Three quarters of State prison inmates, almost two thirds of Federal inmates, and nearly 7 in 10 jail inmates did not complete high school.
- A Correctional Education Association (CEA) study shows participants in educational programming enjoy a statistically significant lower re-incarceration rate of 21% compared to 31% for non-participants.
- Job placement - Federal and State statutes limit job opportunities for offenders. In 1996, within 1 year of release, one study found a 60% unemployment rate.
- Inmates who do not complete high school or a GED are more likely to recidivate.

SUBSTANCE AND DRUG ABUSE TREATMENT - Many inmates are drug offenders, mentally ill, and adults with infectious diseases. Drug therapy while in prison and under post-incarceration supervision can reduce recidivism by roughly 50% (Office of National Drug Control Policy).

- Persons in state custody for drug offenses increased from 19,000 in 1980 to 251,000 in 2000.
- The percent of jail inmates with drug offenses grew from 9.3% in 1983 to 22% in 1996.
- In Jan. 2001, 12.9% of inmates confined in 45 Departments of Corrections were participating in drug treatment programs, slightly more than the number receiving treatment in 1990.
- Of local jail inmates, 70% used drugs regularly prior to arrest or committed a drug offense.

COGNITIVE SKILLS TRAINING - Research indicates that programs focused on changing participants' thoughts and attitudes - cognitive skills reprogramming - are effective in reducing recidivism.

- Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) has a 28% recidivism rate for participants versus 32% for the control group.
- Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R & R) therapy proved successful with participants, reducing recidivist behavior 37%.

RE-ENTRY PROGRAMS - Supervised reentry programs across the country appear to reduce recidivism. Participant recidivism dropped 41% for new criminal convictions over a three-year period. At the Chicago Southside Parolee Re-entry program in Illinois, the treatment group recidivated at 35% compared to 52% for the control group.

Costs of Recidivism

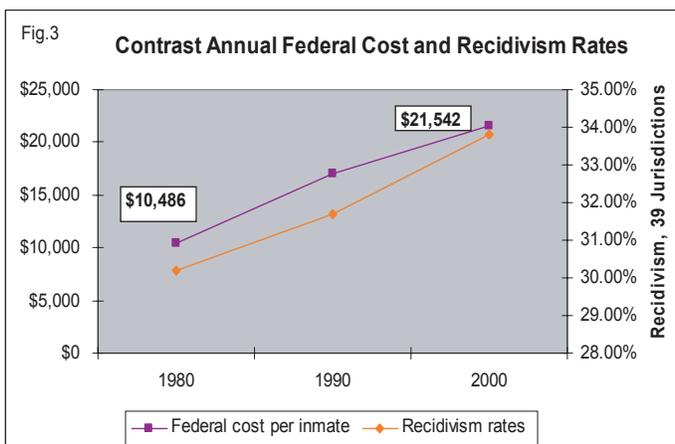
Recidivism has human and financial costs. Expenses related to major state criminal justice functions such as prosecution, policing, and imprisonment climbed by as much as 332% from 1982 to 1998. The average annual cost to house a prisoner in 2000 was over \$21,000, up 23% from 1983 (Figure 3). Government coffers are stretched to the limit on facility construction and operation. This budget crunch is seriously impacting education and job skill program offerings.

On the human side, crimes committed by recidivists create new victims, social unrest, and demand for additional prisons.

The economic burden of recidivism is threefold: 1) the cost of non-employment in lost income taxes or contributions to the economy; 2) the cost of the crime event itself compounded by police, prosecution, and court expenses; and 3) the cost of incarceration.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University calculates, for released program participants after 1 year, the cost avoidance adds up to 10 times the amount spent on rehabilitation.

Furthermore, a new CEA study on recidivism found that Maryland had effective returns in terms of custodial costs of \$2 for every \$1 spent on education.



In conclusion, recidivism costs are high for society and the offender. Research shows educational programs, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and employment assistance lead to lower recidivism. Rehabilitation programming also improves the inmate's quality of life. While prison program funding is tight, the return on investment in both monetary savings and the reduction in victimization is great.

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AN EYE TO THE FUTURE . . .



With crime rates at their lowest in years, one reason for the rising prison population is recidivism. This Data Spotlight examines the multiple costs of recidivism as well as programming proven to reduce recidivism. Educational, social, and substance abuse programs help offenders overcome the challenges that lead them to commit new crimes. Investments in programming yield high returns and keep future criminal activity in check.

Management & Training Corporation (MTC) is an international private contractor that manages and operates Job Corps centers and correctional facilities.

MTC Institute is dedicated to examining data and projecting trends relevant to job training and corrections programs.

The Data Spotlight is a periodic publication highlighting issues that impact the future of young people and inmates.

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