



Massachusetts Recidivism Study: A Closer Look at Releases and Returns to Prison

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Massachusetts DOC and Urban Institute Collaboration

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Massachusetts Recidivism Study reflects a collaborative effort between the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center and the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) to closely examine factors contributing to recidivism, with three interrelated study components: an analysis of DOC administrative data and recidivism, parole officer focus groups, and interviews of recidivists as they return to prison. This report provides the findings of the first component while the companion report, "Reincarcerated: The Experiences of Men Returning to Massachusetts Prisons," provides results from the focus groups and survey of recidivists.

Key Findings

- The overall three-year reincarceration recidivism rate among the 1,786 males released from the DOC in 2002 was 39 percent; with technical parole violators excluded, the recidivism rate dropped to 35 percent.
- Recidivists, on average, were younger, served shorter-prison terms, and were more likely to be unmarried. Additionally, blacks recidivated at a significantly higher rate than other races.
- Property offenders had the highest recidivism rates (57 percent) with similar patterns among inmates paroled and those released because their sentences expired. Nonviolent offenders, consisting primarily of property and drug offenders, recidivated at a significantly higher rate (43 percent) than violent offenders (36 percent).
- Of the 426 inmates in the cohort serving a sentence for a drug offense, 227 (53 percent) were serving a drug sentence associated with a mandatory minimum term; recidivism rates among those serving a mandatory minimum drug offense were significantly lower (29 percent) compared with the rate for nonmandatory drug offenders (46 percent).
- On average, recidivists became involved in the criminal justice system at an earlier age and had criminal histories with more juvenile and adult arraignments, convictions, and prior adult incarcerations.
- Sixty-five percent of the release cohort was released to the street via expiration of sentence; the remaining 35 percent were paroled to the street.
- The recidivism rate (45 percent) for inmates paroled to the street was significantly higher than the rate (36 percent) of inmates released to the street via expiration of sentence.
- Among the 623 inmates paroled, 29 percent were revoked and returned to prison for either a technical violation of their parole conditions or for committing a new offense. When technical violations were excluded from the calculation, the parolee return rate decreased to 10 percent.

- Inmates released for the first time had lower recidivism rates than those who had a prior parole or probation violation (and had been “rereleased”).
- Almost half (47 percent) of inmates who recidivated did so within one year of being released; by 18 months after release, 67 percent of those who recidivated had returned to prison.
- The majority (58 percent) of first-year recidivists were returned to prison on a new sentence (38 percent county and 20 percent state), 40 percent were returned for violations of parole (28 percent for a technical violation and 12 percent for a new crime arrest), and 2 percent for violations of a probation term.
- Higher recidivism rates corresponded to release from higher security levels; half of all inmates in the cohort released from a maximum security facility recidivated.
- Participants in the Transition Workshop recidivated at a higher rate (43 percent) than those who did not participate (35 percent), but also represented a disproportionate number of inmates released from facilities with higher security levels.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.

MASSACHUSETTS RECIDIVISM STUDY

In Massachusetts state prisons, recidivism statistics show a slight reduction in rates over the past few years.¹ At the same time, though, admissions, custody levels, and overcrowding rates are on the rise. From 2004 to 2007, the criminally sentenced custody population at the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) increased 10 percent, by 897 inmates. Along with the increase in the custody population, the number of criminally² sentenced admissions increased by 10 percent during the same time frame. The number of parole violators has also increased and represents approximately 10 percent of admissions among all criminally sentenced inmates over the past four years, second only to new court commitments.

This study was originally based on prison reentry and research staff asking the question, “What happens to inmates when they get out of prison that impacts their ability to stay out of prison?” Furthermore, “How can we improve positive behavior and increase the chances of successful reentry into the community by considering inmates’ previous incarceration experiences?” In our partnership with the Urban Institute’s Justice Policy Center, we looked more closely at recidivism in three ways: interviewing recidivists as they were returned to prison, conducting focus groups with parole officers, and conducting statistical analyses of administrative data comparing recidivists versus nonrecidivists. The companion report, “Reincarcerated: The Experiences of Men Returning to Massachusetts Prisons,” covers the first two points; this report examines the third.

The overall study was designed to improve our understanding of how the experiences of incarceration, transition to community, and living in the community influence recidivism. This report focuses on findings from analysis of the 2002 male release data. Traditionally, the DOC produces annual recidivism reports.³ This report expands on those annual recidivism reports by including additional administrative data in relation to an inmate’s risk to recidivate, including race, Hispanic ethnicity, age, offense type, type of release from prison, type of return to prison, security level of releasing institution, time served, criminal history, and participation in a DOC transition workshop. This report also looks closely at recidivism data in relation to parole, while the companion report explores the process of parole revocations by parole officers. By comparing recidivists with nonrecidivists, we gain a better understanding of the known static variables. This component of the larger study was also intended to provide a conceptual framework to our findings in the survey of recidivists provided in the companion report. The analysis of administrative data provides a basis of comparison for the sample of recidivists interviewed for the study.

The sidebar on offender-reported postrelease statistics summarizes comparable findings from the Massachusetts DOC postrelease survey with those from the recidivism survey conducted for this

¹ Kohl, Rhiana and Hollie Matthews Hoover (2007). *Recidivism Overview*. Milford, MA: Massachusetts Department of Correction.

² Compared to other admission types, specifically those awaiting trial detainees and civil commitments.

³ Massachusetts DOC recidivism reports are available on the Internet at <http://www.mass.gov/doc>.

study. Beginning in 2003, the DOC piloted a comprehensive postrelease survey designed to capture the progress of offenders in the community after leaving prison. All (male and female) criminally sentenced inmates released from DOC custody via expiration of their sentence or paroled “to the street” were deemed eligible for the survey. In that effort, attempts to telephone all eligible inmates were conducted at 30 days, 6 months, one year, and 18 months following release. Approximately, 10 to 12 percent of those eligible were reached, and almost all who were asked to participate agreed to do so.

A central focus of the Massachusetts Recidivism Study has been to improve our understanding of the inmate’s experience in his or her community after being released from the DOC, particularly, but not limited to, factors leading to his or her return to prison. This study also presents selected findings from the DOC postrelease pilot survey that can be compared with the recidivism survey to enrich the findings from the perspective of released inmates who were not recidivists when they participated in the postrelease survey.

Selection and Limitations of Release Cohort

The 2002 release cohort was selected for this study for several reasons. The Massachusetts Recidivism Study was initiated in 2006. At the time, 2002 releases were the most current recidivism cohort to include all three years after release, which allowed the time⁴ needed to collect, analyze, and report recidivism data. Another reason for using the 2002 release cohort was because the DOC had previously collected criminal histories for all 2002 released inmates, which, due to the nature of the court activity record information (CARI) files, had to be done manually and was only completed for that year’s cohort of releases. Additionally, the Massachusetts DOC created a reentry unit in 2001 dedicated to coordinating and improving prison reentry, resulting in the expansion of transition programming and other initiatives in 2002.⁵

During 2002, there was less reentry programming compared with what has since been implemented, and programming may have become available to many inmates in the recidivism survey⁶ who were released after 2002. There were, however, major limitations regarding information on incarceration experiences among the 2002 release cohort. Statistics reflecting whether or not an inmate had a probation term to serve after being released from the DOC were not available. Data (2004 to the present) indicate anywhere from 10 to 12 percent of inmates released to the street via parole from the DOC *also* had a probation term to serve after release. Additionally, another 20 to 26 percent of inmates released without parole had probation terms to serve, such that probation supervision was the only postrelease criminal justice supervision in the community. In other words, more inmates released from state prisons in Massachusetts had probation than parole supervision. Approximately 33 to 40 percent of inmates released to the street were under no criminal justice postrelease supervision.

⁴ In addition to the three years after a calendar year of inmates released has passed, at least one additional year is needed for all the court information to be entered into the CARI files and the time needed to extract, analyze and report the data.

⁵ Unfortunately, program participation data and other key indicators reflecting inmates’ incarceration experiences were largely inconsistent or unavailable among the records of inmates released in 2002, one drawback of using this release cohort.

⁶ Inmates surveyed for the companion portion of the Massachusetts Recidivism Study consisted of 178 male recidivists who had previously been released from the DOC between 2003 and 2006.

Definition of Terms

CARI Files. The court activity record information (CARI) file provides criminal history information starting with each arraignment. The Massachusetts Board of Probation (BOP) maintains the CARI file on the Massachusetts criminal justice information system (CJIS).

Earned Good Time (Massachusetts General Law: M.G.L. c. 127, § 129D). An inmate may receive a maximum of 7.5 days a month deduction from sentence for satisfactory performance in an approved employment, educational, or vocational training program or activity. An inmate may earn good time unless the law under which the inmate is committed specifically prohibits deductions for earned good time. Any deductions from sentence earned, once granted, cannot be forfeited for disciplinary infractions.

Expiration of Sentence. Inmates who serve out their sentence (less any time deducted for earned good time or statutory good time).

“From and After” Sentence. A sentence (which can be a probation term) which does not take effect until the completion of another previously imposed sentence is a consecutive or “from and after” sentence. A consecutive sentence commences upon discharge of the earlier sentence

Governing Offense. The offense associated with the longest maximum discharge date, when there are multiple offenses per inmate.

Mandatory Minimum Sentence. A minimum sentence term required by statute (Massachusetts General Law) for inmates convicted of specific crimes, including but not limited to numerous drug offenses and crimes against a person.

Nonviolent Offense. Any offense that falls under the categories of property, drug, or “other.”

Parole Regional Reentry Center. Eight centers throughout Massachusetts operated by the Massachusetts Parole Board servicing all individuals under parole supervision and any inmate returning to the community.

Parole Violation. An act or failure to act by a parolee that does not conform to the conditions of parole related to having been arrested for a new offense.

Provisional Revocation. A provisional revocation is the withdrawal of a decision to parole an inmate on a provisional or temporary basis. Only parole board members have the authority to provisionally revoke parole.

Technical Violation. A violation of parole conditions that does not necessarily constitute grounds for revoking parole or being arrested for a new offense.

Time Served. For the purposes of this report, time served is calculated using the offenders incarceration and release dates. For inmates who were serving a state prison sentence, jail credits are included in the calculation.

Violent Offense. Any offense that falls under crimes against the person or a sex offense category.

Wrap-ups. A term for inmates released via expiration of sentence, having completed their sentence with no time left or without any period of parole remaining

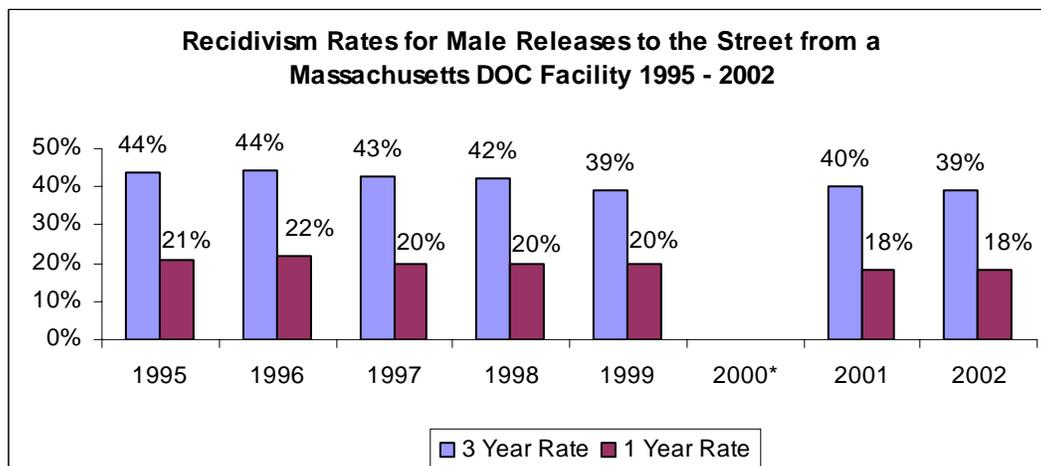
SECTION 1.

RECIDIVISM DEFINITION AND RATES: MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

The Massachusetts DOC defines a recidivist as any inmate⁷ released from the DOC in a given year who is reincarcerated⁸ within three years of his or her release to the community for either a new sentence or a technical violation. In 2002, the cohort of inmates “released to the street” totaled 2,524 inmates; 1,786 were males (71 percent) and 738 were females. The data and the following discussion focus on the male cohort. This report provides and compares findings on male recidivists and nonrecidivists within three years of being released in 2002.

This report provides macro-level information on what happens to *all* criminally sentenced male prisoners released from the DOC in 2002, while the companion report, “Reincarcerated: The Experiences of Men Returning to Massachusetts Prisons,” provides a more detailed description of what led to reincarceration for a subset of individuals. Three-year recidivism rates for the Massachusetts DOC date back to 1995.⁹ Overall, three-year recidivism rates for males dropped from approximately 44 percent in 1995 and 1996 to approximately 39 percent for subsequent years through 2002¹⁰. One year postrelease recidivism rates, as reflected in figure 1, remained relatively consistent across these years, fluctuating slightly between 18 and 22 percent and suggesting a slight overall decline.

Figure 1. Recidivism Trends, 1995–2002



Note: 2000 data are not yet available.

⁷ This includes all criminally sentenced inmates released from a DOC facility (state and county sentenced).

⁸ To a Massachusetts state, county, or federal correctional facility.

⁹ The Massachusetts DOC expanded the recidivism definition from one to three years postrelease starting with the 1995 release cohort. Resources and time needed to collect and analyze recidivism data are taxing, even after progress has been made to collect data electronically versus manually.

¹⁰ After completing the recidivism report based on 1999 releases, it was determined to skip ahead to 2002 releases and work backward. As a result recidivism data based on the 2000 release population has not yet been completed.

SECTION 2.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RELEASE COHORT AND RECIDIVISTS

Race and Hispanic Ethnicity

When analyzing the characteristics of the release cohort, statistical testing¹¹ was used to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between recidivists and nonrecidivists. A significant difference was found between these two groups in race, marital status, and age; however, there was no significant difference for Hispanic ethnicity. Black and Native American/Alaskan inmates recidivated within three years at disproportionately higher rates than Caucasian and Asian inmates. Twenty-five percent of males released reported a Hispanic ethnicity¹²; the recidivism rate among male Hispanics was 41 percent, which differed minimally from non-Hispanics.

Table 1. Recidivism Rates by Race

Race	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data			
	Number of releases	Percent of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
African American	531	30%	234	44%
Native American/Alaskan	13	1%	5	38%
Caucasian	1,233	69%	461	37%
Asian	9	1%	0	0%
Total	1,786	100%	700	39%

¹¹ Pearson's Chi-Square test was used to determine statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).

¹² Hispanic ethnicity is included separately from race by the DOC, consistent with the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) statistical policy.

Marital Status

Most (68 percent) of the men in the cohort reported themselves as “single.” The marital status of recidivists was significantly different than that of nonrecidivists. Recidivists were more likely to report being single (74 percent) than nonrecidivists (63 percent), and they were less likely than nonrecidivists to report being married (12 percent and 15 percent, respectively). Further, inmates reporting a marital status of single had a recidivism rate of 43 percent, compared to a recidivism rate of 30 percent for married male inmates. This finding was consistent with other studies identifying male married inmates as having a lower risk of reoffending.

Age

Age at incarceration yielded statistically significant results as well. On average, inmates were 30 years old when they were incarcerated, ranging from 15 to 75 years old. Significantly more recidivists were under age 35 when they were originally incarcerated. Since the average time served among DOC males is between four and five years, an inmate’s average age increases by about five years from the time he is incarcerated until he is released. Although the average age at release for this cohort was 35 years, a disproportionate amount of recidivists were under age 35 at release and when they were reincarcerated. This finding, that significantly more recidivists were younger than 35 when incarcerated, when released, and when reincarcerated supports other research that younger inmates have higher risks of reoffending.

Table 2: Recidivism Rates by Age at Release

	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data		
Age at time of release	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
35 years or older	853	283	33%
Younger than 35 years	933	417	45%
Total	1,786	700	39%

Demographic Characteristics: Recidivists versus Nonrecidivists

A disproportionate number of recidivists in the 2002 cohort were black, single, and younger when incarcerated, released, and reincarcerated compared with those who did not recidivate to prison. Table 3 shows further comparisons between the two groups based on age, race, ethnicity, and marital status.

Table 3. Demographic Information for Recidivists vs. Nonrecidivists

Characteristic (self-reported)	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data	
	Recidivists (n = 700)	Nonrecidivists (n = 1,086)
Average age at incarceration	28 years	31 years
Average age at release	33 years	36 years
Caucasian	66%	71%
Black	33%	27%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%
Hispanic	26%	24%
Never been married	74%	63%
Married	12%	17%
Divorced/Separated	13%	16%

SECTION 3.

OFFENSE TYPES AND TIME SERVED

Offense Types

The largest proportion of offenders among the male release cohort were those serving time for a crime against a person (42 percent), followed by drug (24 percent), property (16 percent), sex (11 percent) and other (7 percent) offense types. Among the 1,786 males released in 2002, 54 percent had been incarcerated for a violent offense (figure 3). The remaining offense types consisted of nonviolent governing offenses.¹³

Figure 2: Offense Type

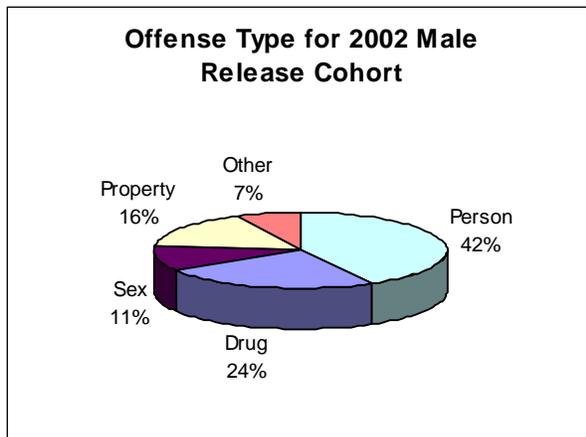
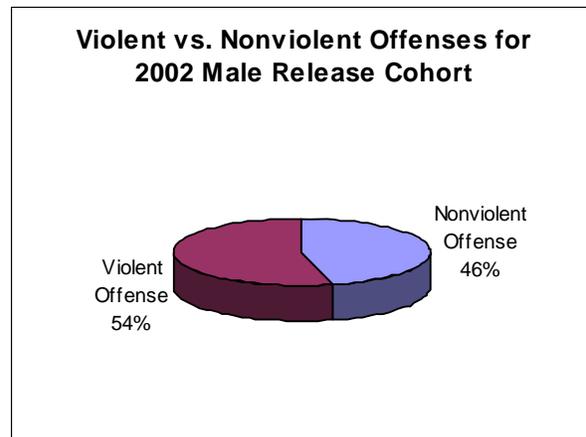


Figure 3: Violent vs. Nonviolent Offense



¹³ Nonviolent offense types include those for drug, property, or "other" offenses. The "other" offense category includes those related to motor vehicle crimes, such as operating under the influence, weapons possession, and public disorder. The data relevant to offense types are based on the "governing offense," which is an inmate's offense with the longest maximum sentence.

The finding, as shown in table 4, that those serving time for property crimes had the highest recidivism rate (57 percent) was statistically significant and consistent with findings from previous years (in Massachusetts as well as national studies). Further analysis of property-crime recidivists in terms of their history of adult convictions showed property offenders who recidivated had many more prior adult convictions, 41 on average, compared with nonrecidivists, who averaged 26 convictions.

Table 4. Recidivism Rates by Offense Types

Offense type	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data		
	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
Property	281	159	57%
Person	761	302	40%
Drug	426	158	37%
Other	119	38	32%
Sex	199	43	22%
Total	1,786	700	39%

Drug Offenses with “Mandatory Minimum” Sentences

Of the 426 inmates in the release cohort serving time for a drug offense, 227 (53 percent) were serving a drug sentence with a mandatory minimum term. Over the past 30 years, there have been many changes in sentencing legislation and corrections policies nationally and at the state level. Massachusetts enacted statutes requiring mandatory minimum sentencing on specific crimes, including numerous drug offenses. Such statutes not only impact the minimum term of a given sentence but may include restrictions associated with that minimum term, such as participation in work-release or community-based programs.¹⁴ Offenders serving nonmandatory drug sentences recidivated at significantly higher rates compared with offenders serving mandatory drug sentences (table 5).

Table 5. Recidivism Rate for Drug Offenders by Mandatory Offense

Mandatory offense	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data		
	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
Not a Mandatory Drug Offender	199	92	46%
Mandatory Drug Offender	227	66	29%
Total	426	158	37%

Note: Of the drug offenders released during 2002, mandatory offenders had the lower rate.

Time Served

The average time served calculated for the 2002 male release cohort was 50 months or just over four years.¹⁵ Less time incarcerated was negatively associated with recidivism rates; in other words, as time served increased, recidivism rates decreased. This trend generally held true; as inmates who served six months or less had a recidivism rate of 48 percent, inmates who served between six months and five years had a rate of 43 percent, and inmates who served more than five years had a rate of 30 percent.

¹⁴ See Rhiana Kohl, *Statutory Restrictions on Inmate Placement and Other Sentencing Related Statistics*. Milford, MA: Massachusetts Department of Correction, 2007.

¹⁵ This calculation reflects the time an inmate was incarcerated after conviction, including jail credits or a complex sentence at the time of release.

SECTION 4.

CRIMINAL HISTORIES

Recidivists in the cohort had a more extensive criminal history than nonrecidivists. On average, recidivists started their criminal careers at a younger age. Similarly, recidivists' alcohol and substance abuse arraignments occurred at younger ages than nonrecidivists. Table 6 shows average ages and totals for criminal history data for recidivists and nonrecidivists. This table also highlights recidivists broken out by those who returned for a "new crime" versus "technical violation" of parole.

The analysis of the 2002 release cohort was conducted, in part, to present a framework on which to base the findings from the Massachusetts recidivism survey.¹⁶ The last column in table 6 provides results in the analyses of criminal history data for all inmates (recidivists) who participated in the survey. An assessment of these findings demonstrates that the criminal histories of inmates who returned to the DOC and participated in the survey, generally, had criminal histories similar to the 2002 release cohort of recidivists.

Table 6. Criminal History of Technical Violators, New Crime Offenders, Recidivists, and Nonrecidivists

Criminal history	2002 Release cohort by recidivism		2002 Release cohort recidivists by return type		Recidivism survey participants (n = 178)
	Nonrecidivists (n = 1086)	Recidivists (n = 700)	New crime offenders (n = 585)	Technical violators (n = 115)	
Age at first arraignment	21	19	19	19	19
Number of juvenile arraignment charges	3	6	6	4	6
Age at first adult drug-related arraignment	23	22	22	21	23
Age at first adult alcohol-related arraignment	26	22	22	22	21
Number of prior adult arraignment charges	31	47	48	39	47
Number of prior adult incarcerations	3	5	5	4	4

Note: Multiple arraignments can represent one arrest incident.

¹⁶ As reported in "Reincarcerated: The Experiences of Men Returning to Massachusetts Prisons."

In Massachusetts, police statistics are not currently maintained in the same database with court or DOC (state correction) data. Thus, in lieu of traditional arrest data, arraignment statistics were included in this report.¹⁷ An analysis of juvenile and adult criminal histories revealed most offenders had at least one prior incarceration and many had considerable juvenile records. The mean number of juvenile arraignments was close to four and close to two for juvenile convictions. On average, this cohort had over 37 prior adult arraignments and 18 adult convictions. Most of those who served prison time did so in Massachusetts county facilities.

History of Juvenile and Adult Arraignments

Table 7 shows that 58 percent of inmates in the cohort had no juvenile arraignments, and 42 percent had at least one juvenile arraignment. Offenders who had at least one juvenile arraignment¹⁸ recidivated at a disproportionately higher rate, making this variable a strong risk factor for reoffending.

Table 7. Recidivism by Juvenile Arraignment History

Juvenile arraignment history	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data		
	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
No juvenile arraignments	1029	326	32%
At least one juvenile arraignment	757	374	49%
Total	1786	700	39%

The average age in this cohort for first adult arraignment was 20 years old. The average age at first arraignment for a drug or alcohol-related charge was 23 years old, with 68 percent having a history of at least one drug charge and 37 percent a history of at least one alcohol charge.

History of Adult Convictions

In terms of actual adult convictions, the average age at the first adult conviction for offenders in the cohort was 22 years old. Fifty-seven percent of the cohort had a history of at least one drug conviction. The average age of first drug or alcohol-related conviction was between 24 and 25 years old. Recidivism rates were inversely and significantly correlated to an inmate’s age at his first adult arraignment *or* conviction. The younger he was when first arraigned or convicted in an adult court, the higher his rate of recidivism among the 2002 release cohort.

¹⁷ The vast majority of arrests resulted in a court arraignment within a very brief time from arrest, usually one day, making “arraignments” a suitable replacement for arrest data.

¹⁸ Inmates arraigned in a juvenile court or arraigned in an adult court at age 17 or younger are included.

Table 8. Recidivism by Age of First Arraignment in Adult Court

Age of first arraignment in adult court	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data		
	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
17 yrs of age or less	842	410	49%
18 yrs of age	295	109	37%
19 - 22 yrs of age	309	98	32%
23 yrs of age or more	305	74	24%
Total	1,751	691	39%

Note: There were 35 inmates with missing age at arraignment information.

History of a drug arraignment was also statistically significant for recidivism. With 67% percent of the release cohort having a criminal history with a drug arraignment, this was a significant factor related to recidivism rates. Table 9 illustrates how 45 percent of offenders with a history of drug arraignments recidivated as opposed to only 28 percent for offenders with no drug arraignments.

Table 9. Recidivism by Adult Drug Arraignment History

Adult drug arraignment history	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data		
	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
No adult drug arraignments	562	159	28%
At least one adult drug arraignment	1,195	534	45%
Total	1,757	693	39%

Note: There were 31 inmates with missing drug arraignment history data.

As table 10 shows, almost all (98 percent) of the male release cohort had a history of at least one adult conviction. Analysis of the data on prior incarcerations¹⁹ in a state, county, or federal prison facility indicated approximately 72 percent of the cohort had been previously incarcerated *prior* to the prison term they were released from in 2002. Among the 700 recidivists, 85 percent had a prior incarceration, compared with 65 percent of the nonrecidivists, which was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Having a history of a prior incarceration was less pronounced among those in the cohort who were paroled (67 percent), compared with those released via expiration of sentence (75 percent). In sum, most men released from the DOC in 2002 were, at least conceptually, already recidivists at the start of that incarceration term.

Table 10. Recidivism by Number of Convictions in Adult Court

Number of convictions in adult court	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data		
	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
6 or less	457	105	23%
7–13	452	154	34%
14–23	385	172	45%
24 or more	462	262	57%
Total	1,756	693	39%

¹⁹ Prior incarceration data were not available for 41 inmates in the cohort.

SECTION 5.

RECIDIVISM BY RELEASE TYPES AND RETURN DATA

Recidivism by Type of Release (Parole vs. Expiration of Sentence)

A major focus of this project was to consider the impact of inmates paroled versus those released via expiration of sentence (“wrapped up”). The majority (65 percent) of those released served their prison term and wrapped up, compared with 35 percent who were paroled. The recidivism rate among parolees was 45 percent, compared with 36 percent for those released via expiration of sentence. Among the 623 inmates paroled, 29 percent were returned to prison for a parole violation.²⁰ When *technical* violators are excluded from the calculations, the percentage of those paroled who returned as parole violators decreased to 10 percent. The total recidivism rate for the male cohort decreased from 39 to 35 percent when excluding technical violators.

Recidivism rates are based on each “release to the street” in a given calendar year. Each year, some inmates paroled and revoked to prison are rereleased from the same sentence. For 19 percent of the 2002 cohort ($n = 335$), this was not their first release for the same sentence. The recidivism rate among those having their “first release” was 38 percent, compared with 44 percent among those for which it was *not* their first release.

To further examine the differences between inmates paroled versus those who “wrap up,” cross-tabulations were calculated in relation to offense types (table 11). Parolees of all offense types had a higher recidivism rate than inmates who “wrapped-up,” with the exception of inmates serving an offense in the “other” category. Recidivism rates among parolees serving a violent (person or sex) or drug offense were significantly higher than those released via expiration of sentence for the same offense types. This may be due, in part, to the close supervision of these known violent offenders. This close supervision could result in more technical violations, such as failing a drug test, rather than the offender committing new crimes.

²⁰ Inmates being returned to prison on a violation of parole with a new offense or a technical violation are returned on the sentence they were serving prior to their release.

Table 11. Recidivism Rates by Offense Type and Type of Release

	Type of Release					
	Parole to street			Expiration of sentence		
Offense type	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
Person	277	125	45%	484	177	37%
Sex	57	14	25%	142	29	20%
Property	93	54	58%	188	105	56%
Drug	160	78	49%	266	80	30%
Other	36	11	31%	83	27	33%
Total	623	282	45%	1,163	418	36%

Time from Release to Reincarceration

Most inmates who recidivated did so within the first 18 months of being released. Table 12 shows almost half (47 percent) of the recidivists in the sample returned to prison within one year of release. After six more months, two-thirds of the recidivists were back in prison.

Table 12. Time until Return for Recidivists

Time until return	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data		
	Number of recidivists	Percent returned (%)	Cumulative total (%)
< 30 days	12	2%	2%
1 to < 6 Months	129	18%	20%
6 to < 12 Months	186	27%	47%
12 to < 18 Months	144	21%	67%
18 to < 24 Months	109	16%	83%
24 to < 30 Months	59	8%	91%
30 to 36 Months	61	9%	100%

Recidivism by Type of Return

The majority (58 percent) of first-year recidivists were returned for a new sentence²¹ (38 percent county and 20 percent state). An additional 40 percent of male recidivists were returned for violations of parole, 28 percent on a technical violation, and 12 percent for a new crime arrest. Parole violation rates were highest in the first year after release.

Table 13. Type of Return by Year for Male Recidivists Released in 2002

Type of return	Year of Return for Recidivists							
	First Year		Second Year		Third Year		Three Year Total	
	Number of recidivists	Percent returned (%)	Number of recidivists	Percent returned (%)	Number of recidivists	Percent returned (%)	Number of recidivists	Percent returned (%)
Technical parole violator	93	28%	17	7%	3	2%	113	16%
Parole violator new offense	41	12%	17	7%	7	6%	65	9%
County sentence	125	38%	165	66%	84	69%	374	53%
State sentence	65	20%	43	17%	25	21%	133	19%
Technical probation violator	0	0%	1	0%	1	1%	2	0%
Probation violator new offense	6	2%	6	2%	1	1%	13	2%
Total	330	100%	249	100%	121	100%	700	100%

²¹ This includes inmates reincarcerated due to receiving a new state or county criminal sentence.

While criminally sentenced inmates are released “to the street” from the DOC either via expiration of sentence or parole, they can be returned to prison for a variety of reasons.²² Table 14 reflects the different “type of returns” among recidivists based on either being released via expiration of sentence or paroled. Almost half (43 percent) of the 700 recidivists who wrapped up were reincarcerated for a new *county* sentence. The second largest subgroup by type of return was parolees revoked for technical violations, followed closely by inmates wrapping up and returned to prison for a new *state* sentence.

Table 14. Type of Return by Release Type for Male Recidivists Released During 2002

Type of return	Type of Release			
	Parole		Expiration of Sentence	
	Number	Percent of return type	Number	Percent of return type
Technical parole violator	113	40%	0	0%
Parole violator, new offense	65	23%	0	0%
County sentence	70	25%	304	73%
State sentence	26	9%	107	26%
Technical probation violator	1	0%	1	0%
Probation violator, new offense	7	2%	6	1%
Total	282	100%	418	100%

²² Only those paroled on a given sentence can be revoked by parole on that sentence. Inmates released with a probation term to serve as part of a “from and after” sentence can be revoked on a probation violation back to prison based on the sentence from which they were originally released. It is possible for an inmate to be under both parole and probation supervision.

Security Level of Releases

The year 2002 represented a time of transition at the Massachusetts DOC, when some prison facilities were closed while others changed their mission in terms of housing by gender or security levels. Most of the 21 DOC facilities housing males in 2002 were medium security. Among 2002 males released, 11 percent were released from a maximum security facility, 58 percent from a medium security facility, and the remaining 31 percent from a minimum/prerelease facility.

Seven DOC facilities accounted for 61 percent of all male releases in 2002. MCI-Concord, the male reception site for the DOC, had the highest number of inmates released and returned to prison within three years. The recidivism rate of 46 percent among inmates released from MCI-Concord was most likely related to MCI-Concord having released the most parolees/parole violators in the department in 2002. As seen in table 15, as security levels increase, recidivism rates increase; this finding was statistically significant.

Table 15. Recidivism Rate for Security Level of Releasing Institution

Security level of releasing institution	2002 Male Release Cohort Recidivism Data		
	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
Maximum	193	96	50%
Medium	985	392	40%
Minimum/prerelease	443	153	35%
Treatment and support facilities*	165	59	36%
Total	1786	700	39%

*Treatment facilities as of 2002 included Massachusetts Alcohol and Substance Abuse Center (MASAC), Bridgewater State Hospital (BSH), the Massachusetts Treatment Center (MTC, a facility for sex offenders), Shattuck Hospital Correctional Unit, and the Massachusetts Boot Camp.²³

²³ The recidivism rate among the 63 inmates released from the Boot Camp was 49 percent, which was closed in 2002. The recidivism rate at MTC was 21 percent. Many of the inmates housed at MTC and most of the inmates at BSH and MASAC were civil commitments.

SECTION 6.

IN-PRISON REENTRY PREPARATION

Participation in Transition Planning Workshop

During 2002, a five-day workshop was available at most facilities²⁴ for inmates with a parole eligibility date or projected release date within a year.²⁵ Approximately 900 of the release cohort participated in this Transition Workshop prior to their 2002 release.²⁶ Participants recidivated at a higher rate (43 percent) than those who did not participate (35 percent). The higher recidivism rate among participants may be more directly associated with the fact that 78 percent of them released from higher-security facilities (12 percent from maximum and 66 percent from medium security facilities). In comparison, 61 percent of those who did not participate in the workshop were released from a maximum (10 percent) or medium (51 percent) security facility.²⁷

Table 16. Transition Workshop Participation by Release Type

Transition Workshop	Release Type					
	Parole to Street			Expiration of Sentence		
	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)	Number of releases	Number of recidivists	Recidivism rate (%)
No Participation	341	128	38%	546	185	34%
Participation	282	154	55%	617	233	38%
Total	623	282	45%	1,163	418	36%

Note: Workshop participation data reflect only 629 of the 899 participants who completed the workshop.²⁸

²⁴ This transition workshop continues to be offered, on a voluntary basis by inmates, at the Massachusetts DOC in an increased number of facilities compared to the availability in 2002 and has been expanded to cover ten days rather than five. In 2002, most DOC facilities offered the transition workshop, except for the treatment-type facilities and female prisons. Thus, if an inmate was housed in one of the treatment facilities at the time of eligibility, he would not have been able to participate.

²⁵ Since inmates become eligible for the workshop one year prior to their parole eligibility date and participation is voluntary, the time between when an inmate participates in the workshop and is released runs the gamut from weeks to years. Inmates may take the workshop more than once within a sentence term but are only eligible for earned good time credits for the first time they complete the program.

²⁶ Due to limitations in the data tracking for this program, it was difficult to obtain an accurate number of participants or determine whether they took the workshop.

²⁷ Approximately 45 percent of those paroled in 2002 participated in the transition workshop. When comparing workshop participants with those who did not participate by whether they were released via expiration of sentence or paroled, those paroled who *did* participate recidivated at the highest rate (55 percent).

²⁸ Reasons for not completing the Transition Workshop include "dropping out" as well as being released or transferred from the facility offering the program.

Offender-Reported Postrelease Statistics

Many DOC postrelease survey²⁹ questions and topics were captured in the Massachusetts recidivism survey³⁰ and are reported here. A major difference between the two surveys is that the postrelease survey was based on inmates who had *not* returned to prison since being released, whereas the recidivism survey was based on those who *did* return to prison and was conducted at the point of that reincarceration. Furthermore, questions posed by telephone for the postrelease survey were general in nature, whereas those asked in person delved more deeply into the topics. The following discussion explores data for housing, family relations, employment, substance abuse, and health care.

Housing

DOC postrelease survey respondents were more likely to live in permanent housing, with 55 percent living in permanent housing at 30 days and 66 percent at six months after release. One reason for this was the nature of the survey sample, which consisted of inmates released to the street who could be reached via telephone.³¹ The respondents interviewed for the Massachusetts Recidivism Study seemed less likely to live in stable housing. Fifty-seven percent moved once and 23 percent moved multiple times.

Three-quarters of the postrelease survey respondents who reported living in a private residence at 30 days after release stated that they were living with a family member, including a spouse. Only 9 percent reported living alone. By six months, only half reported living with family, and those living alone increased to 21 percent. During most of their time in the community before reincarceration, 37 percent of the Massachusetts recidivism survey respondents lived in their own house or apartment, and 22 percent lived in the home of a family member. Eighty-five percent did not live alone, living with others in their own home or living in the home of a family member or friend.

Among the 126 postrelease survey respondents at 30 days who were living in temporary housing, 42 percent reported that they were having trouble finding permanent housing. Sixteen percent of the inmates interviewed for the Massachusetts Recidivism Study said they had trouble finding a place to live, in most cases because they lacked money for rent or deposit. Comparisons between the two respondent groups were skewed by the fact that only those in temporary housing were asked about challenges of finding permanent housing.

Marital and Family Support

Most respondents for both surveys reported that their families were highly supportive during their transition out of prison: for postrelease survey respondents, 92 percent at 30 days and 99 percent at six months, and for the recidivism study, 86 percent of inmates.

Most male respondents in the postrelease survey did not report having children under 18 years old. Of those who did have minors, most reported not living with those children. Similar findings were reported by inmates participating in the recidivism study; 69 percent of those with minor children reported not living with their children at the time of their arrest.

²⁹ Data included from the Massachusetts DOC postrelease survey reflect 502 telephone interviews with males conducted 30 days and/or six months after release between May 2004 and December 2006: 382 at 30 days and 120 at six months after release. DOC researchers made efforts to contact all eligible released inmates at each postrelease time interval unless it was determined that they were back in prison (or deceased). Efforts to reach all released offenders at each interval were made regardless of whether they had been reached previously. For example, a released offender may have participated in completing a survey six months after release even if he or she had not participated in the 30 day postrelease survey, so all the same respondents were not reached at both one and six months after release. Not all respondents answered all questions.

³⁰ Complete findings from the Massachusetts recidivism survey are in the companion report for this study, "Reincarcerated: The Experiences of Men Returning to Massachusetts Prisons."

³¹ Released individuals living in temporary housing, such as shelters or residential programs, as well as those who were homeless, were less likely to be reached due to the lack of a telephone or confidentiality issues at residential programs.

The postrelease survey respondents who did live with their children reported the children's adjustment as being above 7 on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being "excellent." Seventy percent of recidivism survey respondents reported it was easy for their children to adjust to their return from prison. Generally speaking, findings from both surveys revealed a perspective that families adjusted well to an inmate's transition out of prison and were often viewed as being supportive in the process.

Employment

The postrelease survey respondents' employment status appears to improve from 30 days to six months out of prison. Although 44 percent of respondents were working at 30 days after release; by six months, 65 percent were working in some capacity, and only 35 percent reported not working at all. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents from the Massachusetts recidivism survey worked at some point between their release and rearrest, while only 56 percent were employed at the time of their arrest. Just under a third of the unemployed postrelease survey respondents saw their criminal record as a handicap to getting a job. In the Massachusetts recidivism survey, 68 percent of respondents, even those who did find employment, felt their criminal records had affected their ability to find work.

As reported in the recidivism survey, structural work (construction) was the most common type of employment (32 percent) among postrelease survey respondents. Other employment types at 30 days included factory and warehouse work (11 percent) closely followed by food services (10 percent) with similar findings at six months out. Forty-one percent of Massachusetts recidivism survey respondents had been employed in construction with no other occupation accounting for more than 10 percent of reported jobs.

At 30 days, 30 percent of postrelease survey respondents reported finding their job through a family member, 24 percent from a job listing, and 12 percent through a nonfamily contact. At six months, the percentages were slightly higher.³² This is consistent with more respondents reporting employment. Altogether, approximately 10 percent of the postrelease survey respondents reported having had a job lined up prior to having been released from incarceration. At 30 days after release, 2 percent reported having jobs arranged by the Department of Correction, and 7 percent had participated in prerelease work while in prison; by six months, 1 percent of those employed reported having had participated in prerelease work. Seventeen percent of inmates interviewed for the Massachusetts Recidivism Study participated in prerelease work or vocational training, which might explain the higher proportion reporting being employed.

Despite the fact that a small percentage (9 percent at 30 days and 13 percent at six months) of the postrelease survey respondents who were working reported earning over \$501, over 60 percent of the 173 ex-offenders responding at 30 days and the 79 ex-offenders responding at six months felt they earned enough to support basic expenses. The median income for the Massachusetts recidivism survey respondents was \$2,200 per month (about \$550/week), and the underlying theme was that many, if not most, were not able to meet their financial obligations. Those in the postrelease survey averaged less income but reported being able to meet their expenses. This apparent discrepancy may be related to their not having as many additional costs, such as supervision fees, debt, and court fines.

³² Thirty-five percent found their job through a family member, 22 percent via a nonfamily contact, and 17 percent from a job listing.

Substance Abuse

An average of 95 percent of postrelease survey respondents reported reducing their drug and alcohol intake within 30 days of being interviewed for the survey whether at the 30 day or six month interval. The majority reported having participated in self help/peer counseling groups, such as Alcohol Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Cocaine Anonymous, etc. (85 percent at 30 days and 94 percent at six months). Eleven percent spent time in a special facility, and 3 percent spent time in a detoxification unit, at the 30 day survey administration. Over a third of the Massachusetts recidivism survey respondents reported that they had attempted to stop using drugs or alcohol in the months before their return to prison, but many acknowledged abusing alcohol and/or illegal drugs. Among frequent users, 62 percent reported having tried to stop using drugs or alcohol. Nearly half of the respondents reportedly attended some type of substance abuse treatment, including AA and NA.

Health Care

In terms of having any medical insurance, 63 percent of those respondents to the postrelease survey after one month from release reported having insurance and 76 percent of those after six months after release. Just over half of the postrelease survey respondents conveyed they had Mass Health insurance. Other means of coverage were through family or a job. Thirty-one percent at 30 days and 18 percent at six months reported they did not have any health care coverage. Three-quarters of the Massachusetts recidivism survey respondents had health care coverage, 57 percent were covered by Mass Health (on par with the postrelease respondents), 11 percent through a job, 5 percent through Medicare, and 6 percent were covered by a family member.

Of the 67 postrelease survey respondents who responded to the question on medical and mental health care at 30 days after release, 3 percent reported receiving inpatient medical care, and 7 percent inpatient mental health care. In turn, 14 percent of the Massachusetts recidivism survey respondents had been hospitalized for a physical health problem.

Due to the self-selected nature of the sample for the postrelease survey, released individuals who were surveyed were arguably in relatively stable situations where they could be reached by telephone, especially after six months. Most individuals in the release cohort were not reachable and many were not included because they had already returned to prison. A broad assessment of the surveys combined would speculate that, except for a few offenders who get into trouble immediately after being released, most spend the first few months trying to get on their feet, and that six-month time frame seems to be pivotal to their success.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In 2002, the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) released 1,786 male inmates to the community via expiration of sentence or parole. In total, 39 percent recidivated by being returned to prison for a new sentence or on a technical parole violation within three years of release. On average, the 700 men in the 2002 release cohort who returned to prison were young, single, and more likely to commit nonviolent (i.e., property) crimes. These characteristics were consistent with other findings in the literature. Likewise, a disproportionate number of black inmates recidivated at a statistically higher rate of 44 percent compared with other races. Whether these demographic characteristics are a function of behavior, environment, the criminal justice system, or other factors needs to be further explored.

In general, inmates released from the Massachusetts DOC had dense and lengthy criminal histories. When a comparison was made between recidivists and nonrecidivists in the cohort, recidivists, on average, were younger when they became involved in the criminal justice system and accumulated more arraignments, convictions, and incarcerations. The criminal histories of the recidivist cohort among the 2002 releases and the criminal histories of the survey respondents who participated in the recidivism survey were very similar. Within the recidivists, on average, parolees returned for a technical violation had a less dense criminal history, perhaps because their parole officers returned them to prison before they could commit additional offenses.

Most noteworthy was that at least 72 percent of the men in the release cohort had been incarcerated at least once prior to entering prison for their current sentence. This was most pronounced for the 700 recidivists in the release cohort, as well as those who had been released via expiration of sentence. A critical component of effective reentry planning relies on risk and need assessments at the onset of incarceration. Such assessments should expand beyond identifying key static and dynamic factors identified from the research and address individual experiences in prior incarcerations as well as failures in the community that resulted in being reincarcerated.

Often the public perceives those who have committed serious violent crimes as having the highest “risk to recidivate.” Research has demonstrated that committing a violent crime is not necessarily a predictor of having a higher risk to reoffend. Among the 2002 cohort of male releases, nonviolent offenders recidivated at a rate of 43 percent, which was significantly higher than the 36 percent among violent offenders. These figures were driven largely by the extremely high recidivism rate of 57 percent among property offenders, which is consistent with Massachusetts and national recidivism studies. The misconception that serious violent offenders, including sex offenders, will reoffend may be due in part to misrepresentations in the media and a general fear of these particular offenders.

During the “war on drugs,” Massachusetts implemented mandatory minimum sentence statutes on specific types of drug offenses, which not only require the minimum sentence be at least that promulgated by statute, but also restrict inmates from participating in work release or any other community-based program during their mandatory term and often their entire incarceration. Currently, this issue is being reassessed politically as the restrictions impact reentry preparation. Our analysis compared inmates serving mandatory minimum sentences with those without

among all 426 drug offenders in the cohort. The results showed drug offenders with mandatory minimum sentences recidivated at a statistically significant lower rate (29 percent) compared with the “nonmandatory” drug offenders (46 percent).

Further exploration into this discrepancy should factor in differences in time served, release type (i.e., parole), and the nature of the drug offense. By having mandatory minimum terms, do inmates serve longer sentences than those who do not? Data on overall time served supported other findings concluding that longer prison terms correlated with being less likely to recidivate. This finding is often associated with the concept of inmates “aging out” in relation to older inmates being less likely to recidivate.

In addition, a closer look at the nature of drug offenses that have mandatory minimum statutes may reveal what appears to be a slight difference between drug crime types. Most drug offenders with mandatory terms were serving drug trafficking offenses, compared with 86 percent of the nonmandatory drug offense types, which were more likely first-time offenses for “distribution or possession with intent to distribute.” This raises the question of whether a substance abuser who sells drugs to maintain his or her habit should be treated differently than someone who sells drugs for business.

Many inmates sentenced with mandatory minimums are given a one-day difference between their minimum and maximum sentence terms, essentially eliminating the possibility of being paroled, which may also impact recidivism rates. Whether inmates are paroled or released via expiration of sentence has many implications on their return to the community and the nature of their recidivism rates. Over the past 10 years or more, including the 2002 release cohort, approximately a third of inmates were paroled from the DOC to the community. The recidivism rate among inmates paroled in the cohort was 45 percent, compared with 36 percent for those released via expiration of sentence. When technical violators were excluded from the calculation, recidivism rates among parolees dropped to 36 percent. When returns to prison for a parole technical violation are excluded, the recidivism rate for the overall release cohort dropped from 39 to 35 percent.

Fluctuations in parole rates and the corresponding number of release cohorts can affect recidivism rates in the context of parole violators. Recidivism rates of inmates released on parole are consistently higher, in general, than of inmates released via expiration of sentence. Thus, the more inmates paroled, the more likely recidivism rates will be higher. In addition, if the percent of parolees returned to prison remains constant or increases, the DOC admissions rate will increase as parole rates and corresponding numbers of parole revocations increase. Though this may appear counterintuitive, the revocation of technical violators by parole is a significant factor in recidivism rate calculations and is understandable in the context of parolees being under supervision and closely monitored.

Both technical violation rates and the number of recidivists, in general, were highest during the first year after release. Three-quarters of all parole revocations occurred during the first year. The majority (67 percent) of those who recidivated did so by 18 months after release. Since recidivism rates are based on each release in a three-year timeframe, some parolees are revoked and rereleased from the same sentence. Recidivism rates are higher among inmates rereleased

(44 percent) compared with those from their first release. This finding is not only consistent with national trends, but raises further questions about the revocation and rerelease process.

Among the 700 recidivists in the cohort, 25 percent were returned on any type of parole technical violation. Just over half (53 percent) were returned to prison for a county sentence, and 19 percent for a state sentence. Almost a quarter (23 percent) of those inmates returning to prison on a new (state or county) sentence had been released on parole but were not necessarily under parole supervision when they committed a new crime or were convicted and sentenced for the new offense.³³ Forty percent of recidivists in the release cohort had been paroled, compared with 76 percent of those interviewed for the recidivism survey. Considering that almost all inmates admitted to the DOC while the recidivism survey was conducted who qualified as recidivists (previously released from the DOC within three years) participated, that sample reflects a window of male recidivists for July 2006 through June 2007. Thus, further inquiry as to whether the survey sample reflects an increase among inmates paroled, recidivating, or other related factors is needed to better understand the relationship between parole and recidivism.

Another factor associated with recidivism rates is the security level of the prison facility from which the inmate was released. The majority (58 percent) of inmates released from the DOC were in medium custody. Not surprisingly, the recidivism rate among those released from medium security facilities (40 percent) was consistent with the overall recidivism rate of 39 percent. It was no less surprising and consistent with other findings that the 193 inmates released from a maximum security level recidivated at this higher rate (50 percent) compared with lower security levels and treatment facilities.

The challenge in classifying inmates to minimum and prerelease facilities prior to release is, to a degree, limited by statutory restrictions (i.e., mandatory minimum sentencing) as well as the balance between risk and public safety. This poses both a practical and philosophical challenge because a more gradual process of transitioning an inmate provides better reintegration into the community. If an inmate is going to be released into a community without being paroled (as current trends indicate), policymakers should devise a method of reducing, if not eliminating, the number of inmates who live in a medium or maximum custody prison one day and in the community the next. This could be achieved in a variety of ways, such as using transition houses or a graduated step-down process with more intensive community supervision.

Until these challenges can be better addressed, correctional facilities must continue to provide adequate reentry programming and transitional assistance for inmates. Though the DOC provides a multitude of evidence-based inmate programming designed to reduce recidivism, this study was only able to collect data on the transition workshop designed primarily to enhance an inmate's awareness and realization of what he needs to do to prepare for his transition back into the community. The recidivism rate among the 899 workshop participants within the release cohort was 43 percent, compared with 35 percent among nonparticipants. These results are based on participation occurring prior to or in 2002, and since that time, the workshop has been

³³ Parole discharge dates were not available.

expanded in length and content. Other factors that may have contributed to the discrepancy in recidivism rates may include the release of a disproportionate number of participants from higher (maximum and medium) security facilities and the unknown time between when an inmate participated and was released. There was no way to measure whether an inmate was an active participant in the workshop or followed through after the workshop and stayed actively involved in transition planning or refused assistance, as many inmates do. These results also beg the question if an inmate who chooses to participate in such a workshop is a different type of offender.

While much is accomplished by devising an initial reentry plan as an outcome of the workshop, the key “reality checks” are addressed during the DOC triage reentry process that follows. This individualized case management process focuses on inmates’ inappropriate or unrealistic plans, and efforts are made to work with them to develop reentry plans that realistically address needs in housing, employment, medical/mental health, treatment, education, social well-being, and more. Again, the success of these plans can largely depend on the active role an inmate takes in the planning process and varies from case to case. Among inmates who are paroled, packets of information, including reentry plans and referrals, are shared with the corresponding parole regional reentry centers, where those inmates report upon being released from the DOC.

What an inmate encounters during the transition back into the community and how well he is equipped and supported in handling that process is key to a successful transition. The comparison between postrelease surveys, conducted by telephone with inmates one and/or six months after release, to results from the in-person recidivism surveys demonstrate the many challenges released inmates experience. Though most inmates reported “stable” or “permanent” housing, more individuals who were still in the community when contacted had stable housing compared with recidivists reflecting back on their time in between incarcerations. This seemingly stable housing trend corresponded with the overwhelming perception that inmates’ families were very supportive. Offenders reported challenges regarding employment and more recidivists reported problems associated with substance abuse. Participation in substance abuse treatment varied but seemed higher immediately after being released for both groups.

The analysis of administrative data from the DOC of the 2002 release cohort was consistent with and expanded on static factors associated with the risk to recidivate. Armed with these and new analyses, the DOC is better positioned to focus transitional resources by targeting the subgroups who recidivate the most—“short-termers,” those being released from higher security levels, younger inmates with property offenses, those with long criminal histories who started their criminal careers early, and those with a history of certain offense types, largely associated with drug use. The new risk and needs assessment tool, COMPAS³⁴ soon to be implemented by the DOC and parole, captures most of these static variables and will be instrumental in assisting both agencies in focusing resources. Additional partnerships between not only the DOC and parole, but among sheriffs, Department of Youth Services, probation, the courts, community service providers, and other related criminal justice and health and human service agencies are

³⁴ COMPAS stands for Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions.

imperative to improve the sharing of information that may not be readily captured and available, such as program participation, medical and mental health histories, family involvement and support, and behavior patterns while incarcerated or under community supervision. Such information would greatly enhance efforts for each phase and responsible agency in planning and providing services for individuals as they move through the criminal justice system. What is needed is not only the sharing of information and relevant background information, but a continuation of care and case management.

Ultimately, the transition from prison to the community relies on more than preparing inmates for a successful transition back to the community. There must be partnerships with appropriate community service providers, and support systems must be available in collaboration with all supervisory agencies (parole and probation) when involved. Results from this analysis illustrate that that transition, especially the first year after release, is fraught with challenges. By knowing more about what these challenges are, we can better focus our resources and partnerships to facilitate a more successful process that will result in less recidivism and increased quality of life for everyone.