

Rhode Island Department of Corrections *Annual Recidivism Brief*

August 2019

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Director Patricia Coyne-
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“Outcomes need to be measured and the results should direct data-driven decision making and evidence-based policy and planning.”

-RIDOC Guiding Operational Philosophy

For this study, the release cohort consisted of 2,641 individuals representing 2,887 distinct release events. The majority of releases were white (55%) males (89%) between the ages of 20-29 (39%). Nearly all of those released had been serving time for a nonviolent (48%) or violent (33%) crime.² The average sentence length imposed by RI courts was approximately 1.5 years. As a result of the relatively short sentences, the most common manner of release was expiration of sentence (89%). Due to the imposition of split sentences, RIDOC estimates over 85% of releases from incarceration immediately begin probation supervision in the community.

Overview

By Caitlin O'Connor

When individuals transition from incarceration to the community, they often are faced with obstacles which makes reintegration difficult. It is the mission of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) to maintain a balanced correctional system to facilitate successful reentry. A key indicator to measure the Department's progress is recidivism. RIDOC defines a recidivist as a person released from a sentence who either returns as a sentenced offender or an awaiting trial detainee within 36 months of release.¹

This report is based on data extracted from RIDOC's inmate tracking system. A release cohort for calendar year 2015 (CY15) is followed for three years post-release (through the close of CY18) to gauge success. If an inmate can stay in the community for 36-months, they are considered successful as their likelihood to return greatly diminishes as time progresses. For those who do return, they can do so in several ways: as an awaiting trial detainee, a newly sentenced offender, or a probation or parole violator.

¹ RIDOC tracks offenders 36-months post-release as is standard in the criminal justice system. After 3-years, the likelihood of recidivating greatly diminishes
² Nonviolent crimes include charges such as violation of a no contact order, shoplifting, or drug violations. The remaining types of crimes not listed are sexual crimes, property crimes such as breaking and entering, and drug crimes.

Readmissions

Sentenced Readmissions

At 3-years post-release, 47% of individuals returned to RIDOC as a sentenced offender. This is the lowest reported recidivism rate since the Department began tracking yearly cohorts in 2004. Thirty-six percent (36%) of females and 49% of males were recommitted as sentenced offenders.



Virtually all offenders who returned were for a new sentence (70%) or as a probation violation (25%). Parole violators accounted for approximately 4% of recidivists. The majority of parole violators returned for a technical violation (81%) while the majority of probation violators returned with new charges (82%).

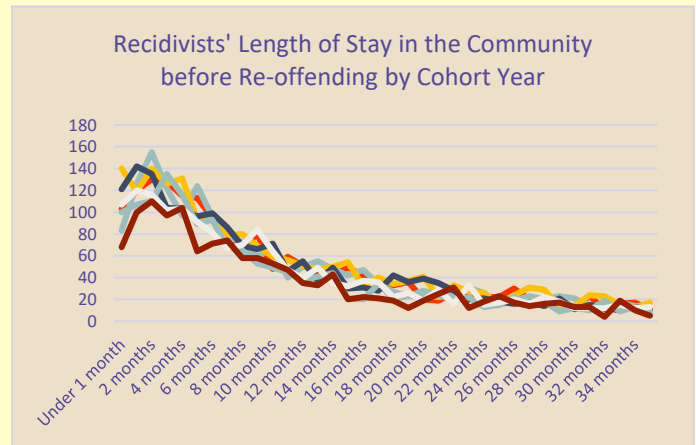
In general, offenders returned for the same type of crime from which they were originally released. Violent offenders tend to come back for violent crimes (83%), drug offenders for another drug charge (73%), etc.

A significant trend to note is the difference in probation violator commitments between cohorts. Probation violator recidivists dropped by nearly half from 2004 to 2009. After that, a steady increase was apparent, however in 2015, these types of commitments made up a significantly smaller proportion of recidivists than past cohorts.

Time in the Community

The average time spent in the community for CY15 was 10.8 months. Almost 5% of recidivists had returned within 30 days of release. An additional

41% returned between 1 and 6 months. By 1-year post-release, nearly 70% of recidivists had returned to RIDOC.



Offenders with children spent more time in the community before reoffending. Those released from serving a less serious type of offense (i.e., nonviolent) returned sooner than more serious offenses (i.e., violent). Lower risk assessment scores indicated longer time in the community.³

Awaiting Trial Readmissions

RIDOC operates a unified correctional system, meaning all pre-trial detainees and sentenced offenders (regardless of sentence length or crime type) are under the department's jurisdiction. Unlike most corrections departments, this gives RIDOC the unique ability to report recidivism rates for those who returned to await trial. By 36-months, 57% of the cohort returned as awaiting trial detainees. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of releases returned within 1 year as awaiting trial detainees; 51% within 2 years; and 57% by the third year. Of the women released in 2015, 51% returned to await trial within 36 months of release while 58% of men returned in the same time period. Similar to sentenced offenders, these rates are lower compared to past cohorts.

The majority of awaiting trial detainees were committed as probation violators (45%) or for failure to appear in court (30%). Two-thirds of awaiting trial recidivists (66%) were held without bail while an additional 30% were held on surety bail. Surety bail allows for detainees to post 10% of the total bail to gain release.

³RIDOC uses evidence-based risk assessments to identify the likelihood a person will re-offend

Correlates of Recidivism

The following variables were significantly correlated to recommitment rates: Age at release, education level, offense type, security level at release, and risk assessment score. Younger offenders and those who had not received a high school diploma were more likely to reoffend. Offenders who were released from serving a sexually-based conviction were less likely to reoffend than the general population. Offenders, regardless of time served, were more likely to return if they were released from a maximum-security facility versus minimum or community-based security. Security level was also correlated with time in the community. Those offenders serving in higher security facilities (i.e. High Security, Intake Service Center, and Maximum Security) stayed in the community for shorter times.

Risk level also corresponds to time in the community. Those at higher risk of reoffending tend to spend less time in the community than their lower risk counterparts prior to recidivating. In fact, low risk offenders spend on average nearly 200 days longer in the community than high risk offenders. All 10 domains of the LSI-R were individually correlated with recidivism. Criminal history had the strongest relationship followed by education, family, leisure/recreation, and companions. Identifying an offender's needs through these domains is tantamount to success. By relying on the LSI-R, appropriate case management strategies can be implemented on an individual level. For example, an offender may score high in the attitudes/orientation domain. This would indicate he or she may benefit from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), an evidence-based form of treatment known to address criminal thinking behaviors and patterns. When interventions are done correctly and with fidelity, the overall LSI-R can be reduced, resulting in a lower risk to re-offend and an increase in public safety.

Working with this cohort, RIDOC staff along with an outside researcher performed a validation study using advanced statistical analysis. In sum, the analysis confirmed the LSI-R predicts recidivism for the sentenced population and supports RIDOC's use of evidence-based practices and adherence to RNR principles. Both entities are currently working on updating risk level cut-off scores to assist in placing offenders in the most appropriate groups to ensure resources are distributed effectively by targeting the right population with the best and most suitable services.

The Level of Service Inventory-Revised and Risk/Need Assessment and Risk Need Responsivity

Over the past decade, RIDOC has moved toward using risk assessments to inform case management decisions by implementing the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R), a 54-item empirically supported risk/need assessment that quantifies offender's likelihood of reoffending across 10 domains; criminal history, education/employment, financial, family/marital, accommodation, leisure/recreation, companions, alcohol/drug problem, emotional/personal, and attitudes/orientation. Analysis indicates a positive correlation to recidivism: the higher the LSI-R score and risk level, the more likely an offender is to recidivate.

RIDOC has also adopted the Risk-Need-Responsivity approach to effectively address the needs of the offender population. Literature indicates these principles have a positive effect on recidivism reduction (Andrews, 2001, Andrews & Bonta, 2010, Bonta & Andrews, 2007, 2010) and allow for appropriate allocation of resources. The Risk Principle identifies who to target (Andrews & Bonta, 1990). RIDOC uses the LSI-R assessment to categorize offenders by risk level (low through high) and triage to the appropriate case management and program services. The Need Principle identifies what to target (Andrews & Bonta, 1990). Specifically, which criminogenic needs should be addressed to increase the likelihood of success for an offender. The Responsivity Principle identifies how to target by creating interventions to address needs that are negatively impacting successful reintegration (Andrews & Bonta, 1990). The interventions can be general (e.g. therapy) or specifically tailored to the individual (e.g. ESL).

Andrews, D. A. (2001). Principles of effective correctional programs. In L. L. Motiuk & R. C. Serin (Eds.), *Compendium 2000 on effective correctional programming* (pp. 9-17). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Services of Canada. Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2010a). *The psychology of criminal conduct* (5th ed.). New Providence, NJ: LexisNexis Matthew Bender. Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. A. (2007). Risk-need-responsivity model for offender assessment and treatment (User Report No.2007-06). Ottawa, Ontario: Public Safety Canada. Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. A. (2010). Viewing offender assessment and rehabilitation through the lens of the risk-need responsivity model. In F. McNeil, P. Raynor, & C. Trotter (Eds.), *Offender supervision: New directions in theory, research and practice* (pp. 19-40). New York, NY: Willan. Andrews, D. A., Bonta, J., & Hoge, R. D. (1990). Classification for effective rehabilitation: Rediscovering psychology. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 17, 19-52.

An Interview with RIDOC Director Patricia A. Coyne-Fague, Esq.

The latest national recidivism rates reported by the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) state 50% of persons return to a new prison sentence within three-years of release. Although RIDOC's current rate is lower than the national rate, the Department continually strives to improve. The new RIDOC leadership is challenging the status quo.

Director Patricia A. Coyne-Fague, Esq. recognizes the possibility people can change and be reinvented with the proper assistance. She knows people make mistakes and wants her department to make sure they do everything in their power to help those under their supervision to succeed upon release.

Director Coyne-Fague attributes the CY15 low recidivism rate to many different pieces coming together. When asked to elaborate, she graciously talked about a man she considers her friend and mentor: former RIDOC Director A.T. Wall: "A lot of the credit goes to A.T. Wall because he set the tone when he took over the Department in the early 2000's. Under his direction, RIDOC was able to get out from under nearly two decades of federal control. He took steps to ensure the facilities were well-run, safe, and clean. Those who came to work for him were expected to be professionals. Director Wall blazed a trail to offer rehabilitative options to give individuals under RIDOC's control the tools to succeed. He saw the importance of programming for the incarcerated population, pushed for innovative approaches to enhance the criminal justice system and knew the importance of collaboration with state, federal, and community-based agencies. Director Wall ushered in a generation of staff that provided forward-thinking ways to increase public safety through a variety of recidivism reduction strategies."

Although RIDOC boasts one of the safest and cleanest run facilities in the country, Director Coyne-Fague refuses to become complacent. She inherited a department with extraordinarily well-run, safe, and quiet facilities which has allowed her to focus on the broader picture. She wants to ensure offenders, who want to actively participate in their rehabilitation, have access to education and employment training and opportunities to assist in their transition back into RI communities.

"We are looking at everything and willing to challenge the status quo. We ask ourselves as soon as people enter our custody: what does this person need for programming? Are we offering appropriate programs to everyone we supervise? Are there statutes that need to be addressed to bring RI up-to-date to reflect effective correctional practices? As a Department, what can we do better? We need to involve the communities and employers because we cannot do this alone. Virtually every person in prison will be released one day. We need to come together to provide an environment they can succeed in by having an education, a job with a steady income, and a safe and stable place to live. We will do everything possible to continue the pace A.T. set for us and further enhance his impressive legacy."



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