

Recidivism of Young Parolees

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Approximately 69% of a group of young parolees were rearrested for a serious crime within 6 years of their release from prison, 53% were convicted for a new offense, and 49% returned to prison. These findings are based on a sample of 3,995 parolees, representing 11,347 persons between the ages of 17 and 22, who were paroled from prisons in 22 States in 1978. These States accounted for 50% of all State prisoners paroled in the Nation during that year.

Other findings include the following:

- Excluding violations of parole and probation, these parolees were rearrested for more than 36,000 new felonies or serious misdemeanors, including approximately 6,700 violent crimes and nearly 19,000 property crimes.
- Approximately 10% of the persons paroled accounted for 40% of the subsequent arrest offenses.
- About a fifth of the subsequent arrests occurred in States other than the original paroling State.
- An estimated 37% of the parolees were rearrested while still on parole.
- Recidivism rates were highest in the first 2 years after an offender's release from prison. Within 1 year, 32% of

May 1987

Recidivism is one of the most important issues facing those who formulate and administer our sentencing and corrections policies—policies intended to punish and rehabilitate offenders and to protect the public from crime. This special report, with its innovative methodology, broad scope of coverage, and rich data, should be of particular interest to all those concerned about these policies.

This report traces the criminal activities over a 6-year period of a sample of young adults paroled in 1978 from prisons in 22

those paroled had been rearrested; within 2 years, 47% had been rearrested.

- Recidivism was higher among men, blacks, and persons who had not completed high school than among women, whites, and high school graduates.
- Almost three-quarters of those paroled for property offenses were rearrested for a serious crime compared to about two-thirds of those paroled for violent offenses.
- Approximately a third of both property offenders and violent offenders were rearrested for a violent crime upon release from prison.

States. It examines the relationship between rates of recidivism and a variety of other factors, including the age and prior arrest record of the parolees, the length of time each parolee had spent in prison, and the nature and location of the rearrest charges.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics wishes to express its gratitude to the personnel at the Identification Division of the FBI and all others whose cooperation and assistance made this report possible.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

- The longer the parolee's prior arrest record, the higher the rate of recidivism—over 90% of the parolees with six or more previous adult arrests were rearrested compared to 59% of the first-time offenders.
- The earlier the parolee's first adult arrest, the more likely the chances for rearrest—79% of those arrested and charged as an adult before the age of 17 were rearrested, compared to 51% of those first arrested at the age of 20 or older.
- Time served in prison had no consistent impact on recidivism rates—those who had served 6 months or less in prison were about as likely to be rearrested as those who had served more than 2 years.

Measuring recidivism

Criminal history data for the sample of parolees in this study were obtained from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. These data included information on arrests, prosecutions, and incarcerations for felonies and serious misdemeanors that occurred either before the parolee was released from State prison in 1978 or within 6 years after release. (See Methodology for a further description of the sample and discussion of data contained in the FBI criminal history files.)

A rate of recidivism is an estimate of the likelihood that someone released from prison commits another crime. Estimates of recidivism vary with the length of the followup period and the measure selected. Three measures of recidivism are employed in this study: rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration.

Rearrest refers to any felony or serious misdemeanor arrest reported to the FBI after the date of parole. Arrest data were reported on fingerprint cards, which were submitted by an arresting agency, typically a police department or a sheriff's office. Reconviction refers to a conviction on at least one charge after the date of parole entry. Reconviction data were reported to the FBI by prosecutors' offices, courts, and correctional agencies. Reincarceration refers to any return to a prison or any admission to a local jail with a new sentence. Confinements in correctional institutions were reported to the FBI by the receiving agencies, typically State or Federal prisons and local jails.

Because the three measures reflect successive transactions within the criminal justice system, the percent rearrested will always be the highest; the percent reincarcerated, the lowest.

In previous studies of criminal history records, criminologists have relied on arrests as the principal measure of recidivism.¹ For the sake of simplicity and comparability with these studies, arrests are also emphasized in this report. Violations of parole or probation that lead to incarceration are included among arrests.

Although some rearrested individuals may have been innocent of the crime charged, using only reported convictions would understate the true re-

Cumulative percent of young adults paroled in 1978 who were rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated, by 6-month intervals

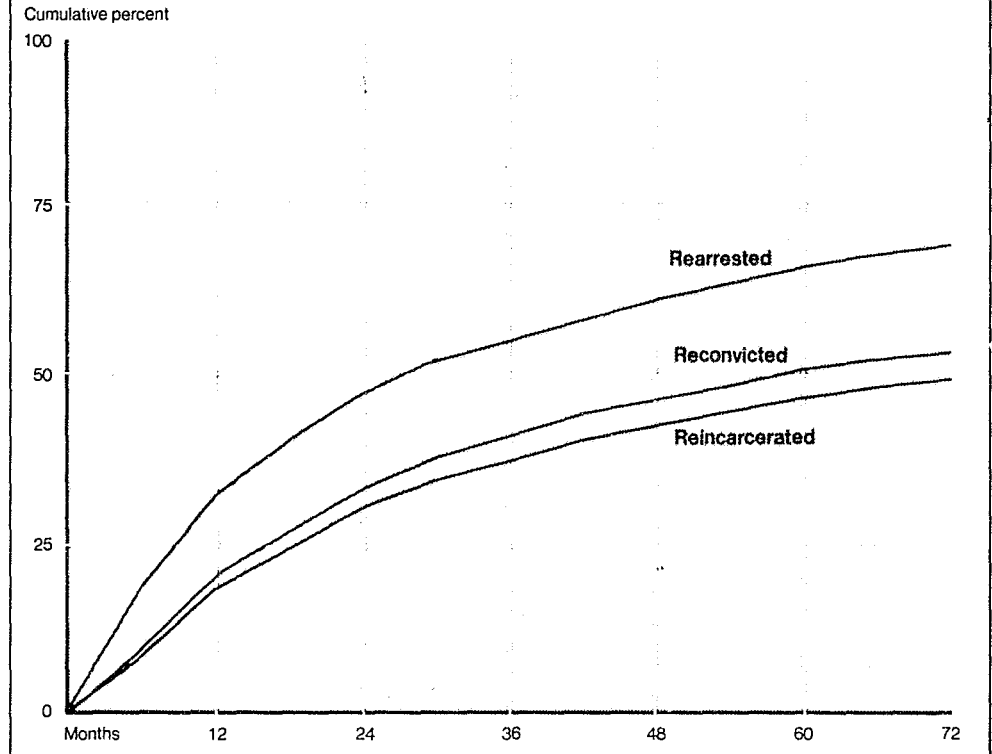


Figure 1

cidivism rates because not all offenders are prosecuted or go to trial. Parolees are often not prosecuted for new offenses but have their parole revoked and are returned to prison to serve the balance of their original sentence.

Moreover, new convictions were the most underreported of the three measures. Data on convictions and other dispositions were not reported for approximately a third of the arrests in the criminal history files; however, more than half of the 927 persons who lacked a final disposition on their first rearrest were convicted on a subsequent arrest.

Because of this underreporting, the true reconviction rate following parole would be greater than the reported conviction rate, but still less than the reported arrest rate. If all persons without dispositions on their first rearrest or without convictions on subsequent arrests had been convicted, the underestimate would be at most 15%.

Recidivism and time on parole

Within 6 years after their release from prison in 1978, an estimated 69% of the 11,347 young parolees had been rearrested; 53% had been reconvicted; and 49% were reincarcerated (figure 1). Recidivism rates were the highest in the first 2 years for all three measures. Nearly a fifth of those paroled were rearrested in the first 6 months, a third in the first year, and nearly half by the end of the second year. Of all those who were rearrested during the 6-year followup period, more than two-thirds were arrested by the end of the second year.

Approximately a fifth of all parolees were incarcerated within a year of their release from prison; nearly a third, within 2 years. Of all those who were reincarcerated within 6 years of parole, 62% were reincarcerated by the end of the second year.

These rates of recidivism are similar to those reported in recent single-State studies (see Appendix).

¹For a discussion of problems with other measures of recidivism, see Maltz, M.D., *Recidivism* (Orlando, Fla.: Academic Press, 1984).

Volume of crime

The 11,347 young inmates entering parole in 1978 were rearrested an estimated 25,383 times and charged with 36,726 new offenses. More than 6,700 of the new charges were violent offenses, including an estimated 324 murders, 231 rapes, 2,291 robberies, and 3,053 assaults (table 1).

More than half of the new charges were for property offenses (51%). These parolees were arrested for approximately 6,600 burglaries, 5,590 larcenies, and 2,300 forgery and fraud offenses. Almost a third of the new charges were for drug offenses (9%), public-order offenses (18%), and other unspecified felonies (3%).

An estimated 10,832 (29%) of the new arrest charges occurred before parolees were first eligible for discharge from parole. For each parolee a date was established by the paroling agency indicating when the offender was first eligible for complete discharge from supervision, that is, removal from parole, assuming successful completion of the terms of parole. Thus about 3 in 10 of the new arrest charges are estimated to have occurred while the individuals were still on parole, and about 37% of the parolees were rearrested while still on parole. (Whether an individual was actually on parole at the time of rearrest was not systematically reported in the criminal history files. It is possible that in some cases the parole period was extended beyond the original discharge date or, less likely, shortened.)

A small fraction of offenders were responsible for a disproportionate number of new offenses. An estimated 19% of the new offenses were charged to 5% of the rearrested parolees; 49% of the offenses were charged to 20% of the rearrested parolees. Expressed as a percentage of all those paroled rather than only those parolees rearrested, approximately 10% of the parolees were arrested for 40% of the subsequent offenses.

Multi-State offenders

These new offenses occurred not only in the States in which the prisoners were paroled but in other States as well. One of every five rearrests were made in States other than the paroling State during the 6-year followup period. An estimated 10% of all persons paroled were rearrested only in States other than those in which they were paroled. An additional 11% of the parolees were rearrested both in their paroling State and in another State.

Table 1. The number of new arrest charges for young adults paroled in 1978, by type of offense

| Rearrest charge | Number of charges for which parolees were arrested within 6 years of release | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| | Total | Before minimum eligible discharge date ^a |
| All charges ^b | 36,726 | 10,832 |
| Violent offenses | 6,753 | 2,259 |
| Murder | 324 | 132 |
| Rape | 231 | 55 |
| Robbery | 2,291 | 882 |
| Assault | 3,053 | 906 |
| Property offenses | 18,904 | 5,528 |
| Burglary | 6,620 | 1,916 |
| Fraud | 2,300 | 770 |
| Larceny | 5,590 | 1,533 |
| Drug offenses | 3,244 | 884 |
| Public-order offenses ^b | 6,735 | 1,757 |
| Other offenses | 1,090 | 404 |

^aThe date when the offender is first eligible for complete discharge from all correctional supervision, including deductions for time credits and other factors affecting this date.
^bExcluding violations of probation, parole, and warrants.

Table 2. Recidivism rates of young adults paroled in 1978, by parolee characteristics

| | Number paroled | Percent of parolees who within 6 years of release were: | | |
|------------------------|----------------|---|-------------|----------------|
| | | Rearrested | Reconvicted | Reincarcerated |
| All parolees | 11,347 | 69% | 53% | 49% |
| Sex | | | | |
| Male | 10,761 | 70% | 54% | 50% |
| Female | 524 | 52 | 40 | 36 |
| Race and ethnic origin | | | | |
| White non-Hispanic | 6,540 | 64% | 49% | 45% |
| Black non-Hispanic | 4,206 | 76 | 60 | 56 |
| Hispanic | 374 | 71 | 50 | 44 |
| Other | 143 | 75 | 65 | 63 |
| Education | | | | |
| Less than high school | 8,937 | 71% | 55% | 51% |
| High school graduate | 1,922 | 61 | 46 | 43 |
| Some college | 167 | 48 | 44 | 31 |

Note: Subcategories may not add to total because of exclusion of missing data.

Hence, a total of 21% of those paroled may be classified as multi-State offenders. If data on rearrests had been restricted to the paroling States only, which is typical of most recidivism studies, the overall rearrest rate would have been estimated at 59% rather than the actual 69%.

Demographic characteristics

Men were more likely than women to be rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated after their release from prison (table 2). The recidivism rates were 14 to 18 percentage points greater among men than among women.

Blacks had higher recidivism rates than whites—11 to 12 percentage points higher for each measure. Parolees of Hispanic origin, regardless of their race, had rates that were 5 to 12 percentage points lower than those among blacks. Recidivism rates for other racial groups, primarily American

Indians, were as high or higher than those for blacks.

The amount of prior education the parolee had received was related to the likelihood of rearrest—parolees who had graduated from high school or had some college education had lower recidivism rates than those who had failed to finish high school. An estimated 48% of the parolees who had attended some college were rearrested, compared to 61% of the high school graduates and 71% of those who had not completed high school.

Paroling offense

Those paroled for property offenses had higher recidivism rates than those paroled for violent or drug offenses (table 3). Almost three-quarters of the property offenders paroled in 1978 were rearrested within 6 years compared to about two-thirds of the violent offenders and nearly half of the drug offenders. Property offenders also had a higher rate of reconviction and reincarceration than did other types of offenders.

Parolees whose only or most serious offense was a drug offense had the lowest rates of recidivism—49% were rearrested, 36% reconvicted, and 25% reincarcerated. Drug offenders were about 15 percentage points less likely than violent offenders to be rearrested and returned to prison. They were 24 percentage points less likely than property offenders to be rearrested and 31 percentage points less likely to be reincarcerated.

Recidivism was high among persons paroled for "other" offenses—primarily weapons offenses, nonviolent sex offenses, and other public-order offenses. The percents rearrested, reconvicted, and reincarcerated among these offenders were surpassed only by those among property offenders. (See Methodology for further discussion of offense categories.)

Rearrest offense

Parolees were often rearrested for the same type of crime for which they had served time in prison; for example, 41% of the paroled burglars, more than any other group of parolees, were arrested for burglary within the 6-year period (table 4).

For other types of parolees as well, those paroled for a particular crime were more likely to be rearrested for that crime than were those paroled for other crimes. Thus, paroled murderers were more likely than other parolees to be rearrested for murder (6%), and paroled robbers were more likely than

other parolees to be rearrested for robbery (18%). This was also true among those paroled for larceny (35%), fraud (29%), and drug offenses (27%).

Despite the tendency of parolees to be rearrested for the same crime for which they were released from prison, parolees were often arrested for other crimes as well. Property offenders were as likely as violent offenders to be arrested for a violent crime after their release from prison (32% and 33%, respectively). Property offenders were, however, much more likely than violent offenders to be arrested for a new property offense (59% vs. 35%). With the exception of those paroled for a drug offense, 28% or more of each type of parolee were subsequently arrested at least once for a violation of parole or probation, a weapons violation, or another public-order offense.

Prior arrest record

Recidivism rates were highest among parolees with the longest criminal records. Offenders with several adult arrests prior to their parole were more likely to be rearrested and were rearrested sooner than parolees with fewer prior adult arrests. (An adult arrest is one that occurred when the individual was of adult age, as defined by State law, or when the individual was a juvenile but was charged or tried in court as an adult.) Among those with 6 or more previous adult arrests, 93% were rearrested within 6 years (table 5); 72% were reincarcerated (table 6). Among these rearrested parolees, the average (mean) time before their first rearrest was 11 months. Half of these parolees, however, were rearrested within 7 months (their median time).

Table 3. Recidivism rates of young adults paroled in 1978, by most serious offense at parole

| Most serious offense for which paroled | Number paroled | Percent of parolees who within 6 years of release were: | | |
|--|----------------|---|-------------|----------------|
| | | Rearrested | Reconvicted | Reincarcerated |
| All offenses | 11,347 | 69% | 53% | 49% |
| Violent offenses | 2,433 | 64 | 43 | 39 |
| Murder | 116 | 70 | 25 | 22 |
| Robbery | 2,075 | 64 | 45 | 40 |
| Assault | 111 | 72 | 51 | 47 |
| Property offenses | 6,884 | 73 | 60 | 56 |
| Burglary | 4,525 | 73 | 60 | 56 |
| Fraud | 526 | 74 | 59 | 56 |
| Larceny | 1,184 | 71 | 61 | 55 |
| Drug offenses | 736 | 49 | 30 | 25 |
| Other offenses | 1,294 | 62 | 50 | 44 |

Table 4. Percent of young adults paroled in 1978 who were rearrested, by most serious offense at parole and charge at rearrest

| Rearrest charge | Percent of parolees rearrested within 6 years of release whose most serious offense at time of parole was: | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--------|---------|---------|----------|----------|-------|---------|-------|-------|
| | Violent | | | | Property | | | | | |
| | Total | Murder | Robbery | Assault | Total | Burglary | Fraud | Larceny | Drugs | Other |
| All charges | 64% | 70% | 64% | 72% | 73% | 73% | 74% | 71% | 49% | 68% |
| Violent offenses | 33 | 26 | 33 | 38 | 32 | 35 | 29 | 21 | 13 | 31 |
| Murder | 4 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | — | 2 |
| Robbery | 17 | 8 | 18 | 8 | 13 | 13 | 15 | 10 | 3 | 13 |
| Assault | 16 | 17 | 16 | 28 | 18 | 20 | 12 | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Property offenses | 35 | 34 | 36 | 55 | 59 | 58 | 63 | 58 | 26 | 43 |
| Burglary | 15 | 21 | 19 | 40 | 38 | 41 | 28 | 29 | 9 | 23 |
| Fraud | 5 | — | 5 | 5 | 10 | 7 | 29 | 12 | 5 | 7 |
| Larceny | 18 | 11 | 19 | 18 | 30 | 27 | 42 | 35 | 15 | 26 |
| Drug offenses | 16 | 6 | 18 | 8 | 15 | 14 | 9 | 13 | 27 | 13 |
| Public-order offenses | 36 | 30 | 39 | 28 | 36 | 36 | 31 | 34 | 24 | 37 |
| Parole or probation violation | 10 | 7 | 11 | 6 | 13 | 13 | 12 | 10 | 6 | 8 |
| Weapons | 12 | 9 | 12 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 9 |

Note: The numerator for each percent is the number of persons rearrested for a new charge, and the denominator is the number

paroled for each type of offense. Detail may not add to totals because persons may be

rearrested for more than one type of charge. — Less than 0.5%.

Table 5. Percent of young adults paroled in 1978 who were rearrested and time before first rearrest, by number of arrests prior to parole

| Number of adult arrests prior to parole* | Number paroled | Percent of parolees who were rearrested | | Time before first rearrest | |
|--|----------------|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| | | Within 6 years of release | Within 1 year of release | Median | Mean |
| 1 arrest | 3,141 | 59% | 23% | 17 months | 23 months |
| 2 | 3,083 | 64 | 26 | 17 | 23 |
| 3 | 2,248 | 70 | 32 | 15 | 22 |
| 4 | 1,366 | 77 | 41 | 11 | 19 |
| 5 | 614 | 82 | 49 | 9 | 15 |
| 6 or more | 895 | 93 | 67 | 7 | 11 |
| All parolees | 11,347 | 69% | 32% | 14 months | 21 months |

Note: The times before first rearrest were based only on parolees who were rearrested. The median time before first rearrest indicates that half of the rearrested parolees were rearrested before the median value and half were rearrested after the median.
*An "adult arrest" is one that occurred when the individual was of adult age, as defined by State law, or when the individual was a juvenile but was charged or tried in court as an adult.

Table 6. Percent of young adults paroled in 1978 who were reincarcerated, by number of arrests prior to parole

| Number of adult arrests prior to parole* | Percent of parolees who were reincarcerated | |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| | Within 6 years of release | Within 1 year of release |
| 1 arrest | 42% | 13% |
| 2 | 45 | 13 |
| 3 | 49 | 20 |
| 4 | 57 | 27 |
| 5 | 52 | 22 |
| 6 or more | 72 | 39 |
| All parolees | 49% | 19% |

Note: Reincarceration is defined as return to prison after revocation of parole or a new sentence to jail or prison after the date of parole.
*See note, table 5.

In contrast, among parolees with one previous arrest, 59% were rearrested within 6 years, and 42% returned to prison. In addition, "first-time offenders" who were rearrested averaged 23 months before their rearrest, more than twice the time of parolees with the longest criminal records. Their median time before rearrest was also much longer—half were rearrested within 17 months.

Recidivism rates were systematically related to the number of prior adult arrests: each additional prior arrest increased the likelihood of rearrest by between 5 and 11 percent-

age points. Moreover, for each 6-month interval during the followup period, the cumulative percent of those rearrested was higher for those with more prior arrests (figure 2). Within 1 year, for example, parolees with 6 or more prior arrests were three times as likely as those with one arrest and nearly twice as likely as those with three arrests to have been rearrested and reincarcerated. Although the relative rates changed somewhat in each period, the higher the number of prior arrests, the greater the cumulative percent of parolees rearrested.

Failure rates, defined as the number of parolees rearrested within a 6-month period divided by the number not yet rearrested (that is, "surviving") at the beginning of the period, were consistently higher in the first 3 years among parolees with 4 or more prior arrests than among those with fewer prior arrests. Length of prior record had no impact on the failure rate only among those surviving 4 or more years after their release from prison.

Cumulative percent of young adults paroled in 1978 who were rearrested, by number of arrests prior to parole, at 6-month intervals

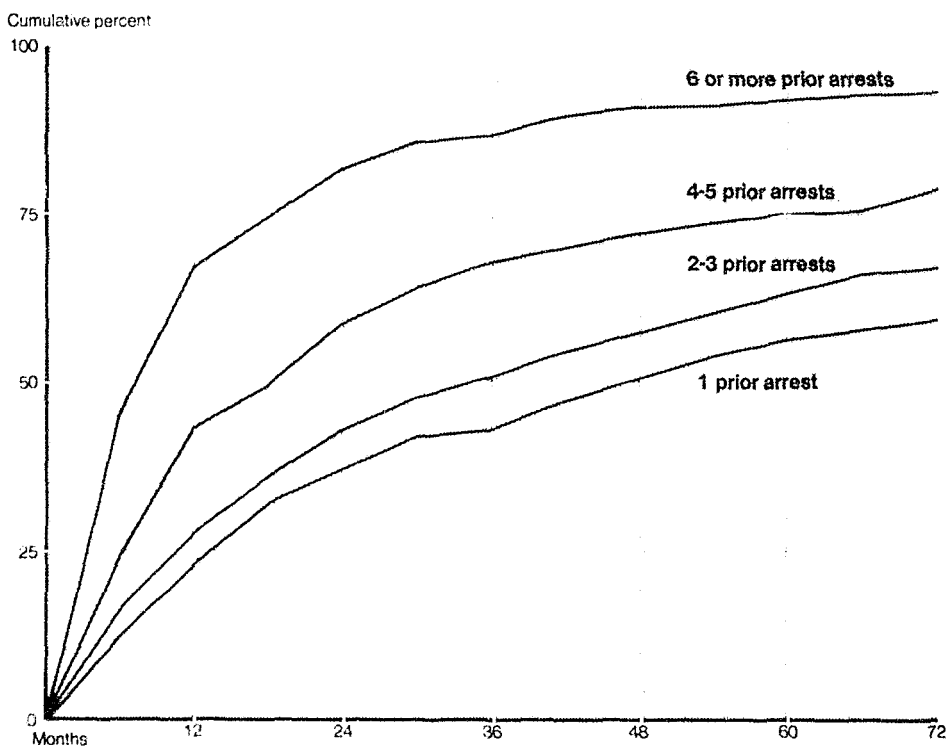


Figure 2

Age when paroled

Recidivism was higher among offenders who were paroled at a young age. More than 75% of those age 19 or younger when paroled were arrested during the followup period (table 7). For each of the other age groups, the percent rearrested was lower: 66% of those age 20, 64% of those age 21, and 72% of those age 22 were rearrested.

The most consistent and largest differences in recidivism among age groups were among parolees with one prior adult arrest. More than 70% of the first-time offenders who were age 19 or younger when paroled were rearrested compared to 49% of those age 22. However, among parolees with 6 or more prior arrests, the percents rearrested among those 19 and 22 years old differed by only 3%, which was not statistically significant (see Methodology).

Regardless of the age when paroled, recidivism rose with the number of prior adult arrests. Although the percent rearrested within each age group increased with the number of prior arrests, the greatest increases were in the oldest groups. Among parolees who were 22 when released from prison, those with the longest arrest records were nearly twice as likely to be rearrested as those with the shortest records.

Age at first adult arrest

Recidivism was inversely related to the age of the parolee when first arrested and charged as an adult: the younger the age at first arrest, the higher the rate of recidivism. (See Methodology for coverage of juvenile arrest records.) Among parolees 16 years old or younger when they were first arrested, 79% were rearrested within 6 years of their release from prison. Among those age 20 or older at first arrest, 51% were rearrested (table 8).

In general, both age at first adult arrest and the number of prior arrests were related to recidivism. With the exception of those with 6 or more prior arrests, for each category of prior arrests the younger the parolees at first arrest, the greater the percent rearrested. Further, within each age group the likelihood of rearrest increased as the number of prior arrests increased.

Table 7. Percent of young adults paroled in 1978 who were rearrested, by age when paroled and number of arrests prior to parole

| Number of adult arrests prior to parole* | Percent of parolees rearrested within 6 years of release by age when paroled: | | | | |
|--|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | 17-18 years old | 19 years old | 20 years old | 21 years old | 22 years old |
| All parolees | 75% | 77% | 66% | 64% | 72% |
| 1 arrest | 71 | 73 | 56 | 48 | 49 |
| 2-3 | 77 | 75 | 67 | 60 | 73 |
| 4-5 | 96 | 89 | 73 | 72 | 85 |
| 6 or more | — | 96 | 89 | 94 | 93 |
| Number paroled | 948 | 1,807 | 3,035 | 3,797 | 1,761 |

— Fewer than 20 cases. *See note, table 5.

Table 8. Percent of young adults paroled in 1978 who were rearrested, by age at first adult arrest and number of arrests prior to parole

| Number of adult arrests prior to parole* | Percent of parolees rearrested within 6 years of release by age at first adult arrest:* | | | | |
|--|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| | 16 years old or younger | 17 years old | 18 years old | 19 years old | 20 years old or older |
| All parolees | 79% | 72% | 69% | 65% | 51% |
| 1 arrest | 73 | 68 | 56 | 57 | 45 |
| 2-3 | 73 | 69 | 67 | 68 | 53 |
| 4-5 | 90 | 74 | 81 | 72 | — |
| 6 or more | 89 | 91 | 97 | — | — |
| Number paroled | 1,000 | 3,434 | 4,072 | 1,852 | 905 |

Note: Cases with missing data on age at first arrest were excluded. — Fewer than 20 cases. *See note, table 5.

Table 9. Percent of young adults paroled in 1978 who were rearrested, by time served in prison, the number of arrests prior to parole, age when paroled, and age at first adult arrest

| | Percent of parolees rearrested within 6 years of release by time served in prison ^a | | | | |
|--|--|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| | 1-6 months | 7-12 months | 13-18 months | 19-24 months | 25 months or longer |
| All first releases | 64% | 66% | 73% | 67% | 69% |
| Number of arrests prior to parole | | | | | |
| 1 arrest | 56% | 60% | 61% | 57% | 62% |
| 2-3 | 60 | 62 | 72 | 66 | 71 |
| 4-5 | 76 | 84 | 80 | 74 | 70 |
| 6 or more | 99 | 81 | 99 | 96 | 95 |
| Age when paroled | | | | | |
| 17-18 years old | 60% | 79% | 72% | 89% | 87% |
| 19 | 76 | 70 | 85 | 91 | 65 |
| 20 | 69 | 63 | 70 | 61 | 64 |
| 21 | 55 | 59 | 68 | 61 | 70 |
| 22 | 56 | 71 | 82 | 68 | 73 |
| Age at first adult arrest^b | | | | | |
| 16 years old or younger | 74% | 81% | 87% | 76% | 72% |
| 17 | 75 | 65 | 79 | 71 | 74 |
| 18 | 68 | 71 | 70 | 66 | 66 |
| 19 | 64 | 61 | 68 | 69 | 64 |
| 20 or older | 37 | 58 | 62 | 42 | — |
| Number of first releases | 1,404 | 2,841 | 2,258 | 1,639 | 2,039 |

^a All data refer only to "first releases," that is, new court commitments paroled for the first time on their current offense. Approximately 90% of the parolees in this study were first releases.
^b — Fewer than 20 cases. See note, table 5.

Time served in prison

The amount of time served in prison by parolees for their previous offenses was not associated with their chances of being rearrested (table 9). Differences in the likelihood of rearrest

among those who served varying amounts of time in prison were inconsistent and not statistically significant.

Despite controls for the effects of prior record, age when paroled, and age when first arrested as an adult, no rela-

tionship between recidivism and length of time served in prison was found among these parolees. Although the average time served and the percent rearrested varied for each type of offender (violent, property, drug, and other offenders), no consistent relationship was found between time served and rearrest. In addition, within each prior arrest group and age group time served was not related to the likelihood of rearrest among parolees.

The number of prior adult arrests remained a strong predictor of recidivism among the parolees, regardless of the length of time they had served in prison. The rearrest rates of parolees with six or more prior arrests and those of parolees with only one prior arrest differed by 21 to 43 percentage points, depending on the category of time served. Further, the percent of parolees rearrested within each category of time served increased with the number of prior arrests.

The age of the parolees when they were released from prison also remained associated with recidivism, though the relationship with age was not as consistent nor as strong as the relationship with the number of prior arrests. Within each category of time served, parolees who were age 18 or younger when released from prison were more likely than those 22 years old to be rearrested, with the exception of those serving 13 to 18 months in prison.

The age of the parolees when they were first arrested and charged as an adult was also strongly related to recidivism, regardless of the amount of time they served in prison. Within each category of time served, the percent of parolees rearrested among those first arrested at age 16 or younger was higher than among those first arrested at age 20 or older. The difference in the likelihood of rearrest between the youngest and oldest age groups ranged from 8 to 37 percentage points, depending on the amount of time served.

Table 10. Percent of young adults paroled in 1978 who were rearrested, by most serious offense at parole and record of arrests prior to parole

| Most serious offense at parole and prior arrest record | Percent of all parolees | Percent of parolees rearrested within 6 years of release for: | |
|--|-------------------------|---|------------------|
| | | All offenses | Violent offenses |
| Violent offense | 21% | 64% | 33% |
| Prior violent arrest | 9 | 68 | 38 |
| Prior nonviolent arrest only | 8 | 67 | 31 |
| No prior arrests | 5 | 51 | 27 |
| Property offense | 61% | 73% | 32% |
| Prior violent arrest | 10 | 80 | 43 |
| Prior nonviolent arrest only | 43 | 72 | 29 |
| No prior arrests | 8 | 72 | 30 |
| Other offense | 18% | 61% | 24% |
| Prior violent arrest | 6 | 62 | 33 |
| Prior nonviolent arrest only | 11 | 61 | 21 |
| No prior arrests | — | * | * |
| All parolees | 100% | 69% | 31% |

Note: The offenses for which the offender was paroled were excluded from the prior arrest record. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.
 — Less than 0.5%.
 *Fewer than 20 cases.

Recidivism and prior violent arrests

Recidivism rates and the offenses for which parolees were rearrested were related to the prevalence of violence in their prior records. Regardless of the offense category for which they were paroled, persons with a prior arrest for a violent offense had a greater likelihood of arrest for another violent offense than other parolees (table 10).

Property offenders with a prior arrest for a violent offense had higher overall rearrest rates than property offenders without a prior violent arrest. For violent and other offenders the differences between the rearrest rates for those with a prior violent arrest and those without one were not statistically significant.

Property offenders with a prior arrest for a violent offense (10% of all parolees) had the highest rates of rearrest. An estimated 80% of the released property offenders who had a previous arrest for a violent crime were arrested for a new offense within the 6-year period—43% for a new violent crime. Among property offenders without any previous arrests and those with arrests

for nonviolent offenses only, 72% were rearrested—approximately 30% for a violent offense.

Persons paroled for violent offenses were less likely to be rearrested than property offenders, regardless of the prevalence of violence in their criminal records. Violent offenders who had no previous arrests were the least likely of all offender types to be rearrested (51%).

Methodology

Data sources and coverage

A sample of persons paroled in 1978 was obtained from records submitted by participating States in the Uniform Parole Reports (UPR). Individual parole records were linked with Records of Arrest and Prosecution (RAP sheets) collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The sample was restricted to States that reported FBI numbers on the parole records. To ensure maximum coverage of computerized criminal history data, the sample was limited to offenders born between 1956 and 1960.

Twenty-two states were represented in the sample: Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wyoming.

RAP sheets were found for 3,995 parolees—approximately 79% of the 5,028 sampled UPR records. The persons for whom RAP sheets were found closely resembled all those in the total UPR sample. The percentages for each sex, racial or ethnic group, and educational category were nearly identical among those with and without RAP sheet information. The UPR group and the sample with RAP sheets also had similar distributions of offenses and sentence lengths. There was no evidence of any systematic biases resulting from the absence of RAP sheets for 21% of the parolees.

To adjust for differences among States in the coverage of RAP sheets and for differences in the sampling procedures adopted by States participating in the UPR, a series of weights was introduced. The weights were applied so that individuals in each State were properly represented in the combined sample. By summing the weights the number of parolees born between 1956 and 1960 was estimated for each State. The 22-State total in 1978 was 11,347. With the introduction of weights all findings were representative of young adults paroled in the 22 reporting States in 1978. (For a description of the demographic and criminal history characteristics of these parolees, see the Appendix table.)

Additional details on the sampling procedures and properties of the sample are available upon request. Unless otherwise noted, differences cited in the text between groups of parolees were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Coverage of criminal history files

Criminal history information maintained by the FBI includes "serious and/or significant offenses." These include all felonies and serious misdemeanors, but exclude arrests and court actions involving charges such as drunkenness, vagrancy, disturbing the peace, curfew violation, loitering, false fire alarm, unspecified charges of suspicion or investigation, and traffic violations (except manslaughter, driving under the influence of drugs or liquor, and hit and run, which are included in criminal history files).

Information on offenses committed by juvenile offenders is also not reported in the FBI RAP sheets unless the offender was charged or tried in court as an adult. Consequently, all figures presented in this report refer to adult arrests only.

Arrests for serious offenses are not always reported to the FBI. To correct for this underreporting, incarceration records lacking prior arrest records were counted as arrests in the calculations of rearrest rates, time to first rearrest, and the number of prior arrests.

Offenses

The offenses reported in the FBI criminal history files were recoded following the definitions outlined in BJS Crime Definitions, which is available upon request. Attempts and conspiracies were included with completed offenses; however, attempted murders and conspiracies to commit murder were classified as assaults.

Offense categories in the Uniform Parole Reports differed somewhat from BJS standards. The "other" offense category, reported for the paroling offenses only, was made up of offenses coded "all other" on the parole reports and selected public-order offenses. A separate public-order category could not be reported.

Appendix table. Characteristics of young adults paroled in 1978

| | Percent of young adults paroled in 1978 |
|---|---|
| Sex | 100% |
| Male | 95 |
| Female | 5 |
| Race and ethnic origin | 100% |
| White non-Hispanic | 58 |
| Black non-Hispanic | 37 |
| Hispanic | 3 |
| Other | 1 |
| Education | 100% |
| Less than high school | 81 |
| High school graduate | 17 |
| Some college | 2 |
| Age when paroled | 100% |
| 17-18 years old | 8 |
| 19 | 16 |
| 20 | 27 |
| 21 | 33 |
| 22 | 16 |
| Age at first adult arrest^a | 100% |
| 16 years old or younger | 9 |
| 17 | 30 |
| 18 | 36 |
| 19 | 16 |
| 20 years old or older | 8 |
| Most serious paroling offense | 100% |
| Violent offenses | 21% |
| Murder | 1 |
| Robbery | 18 |
| Assault | 1 |
| Property offenses | 61% |
| Burglary | 40 |
| Fraud | 5 |
| Larceny | 10 |
| Drug offenses | 6% |
| Other offenses | 11% |
| Number of adult arrests prior to parole^a | 100% |
| 1 arrest | 28 |
| 2 | 27 |
| 3 | 20 |
| 4 | 12 |
| 5 | 5 |
| 6 or more | 8 |
| Time served in prison on current offense^b | 100% |
| 1-6 months | 14 |
| 7-12 | 28 |
| 13-18 | 22 |
| 19-24 | 16 |
| 25 months or longer | 20 |

Note: Percentages are based on cases with reported data. Percentages may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

^aSee note, table 5.

^bData refer only to "first releases," that is, new court commitments paroled for the first time on the current offense.

For parolees released after serving time in prison for more than one offense, the most serious was selected as their paroling offense. Violent crimes were considered the most serious and were followed in order of seriousness by property offenses, drug offenses, and other offenses.

Appendix Comparisons with other studies

Similar rates of recidivism have been found in recent studies of prison release cohorts in individual States, despite differences in data sources, coverage, and methodology. The Repeat Offender Project, conducted by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, found that 60% of a sample of 539 inmates released from Illinois prisons between April and June of 1983 were rearrested after 27 to 29 months.² The Illinois study included inmates of all ages, conditional and unconditional releases, and arrests for misdemeanors as well as felonies.

A similar study of prisoners released in three States, conducted by the Rand Corporation, found that after 3 years the percent rearrested was 76%, 60%, and 53% in California, Texas, and Michigan, respectively.³ A study conducted in Delaware found that more than half (51.4%) of a sample of persons released from confinement between 1980 and 1982 were rearrested by September 30, 1983.⁴

The reincarceration rates for young adults paroled in 1978 were also similar to the rates reported in other studies. About a third (32.7%) of the inmates released from North Carolina prisons in fiscal year 1979-80 were returned to those prisons within 3 years because of a new prison sentence or a revocation of parole.⁵ A previous BJS Special Report, Returning to Prison, found that close to a third of the prisoners in 14 States were returned to prison within 3 years; the median percent returned for the 14 States was 31.5%.⁶ Despite differences among these States in those admitted to and released from prison, the percentages of released prisoners varied little from State to State. Finally, based on the 1979 Survey of Inmates in State Facilities, the rate of return to prison was estimated nationwide to be 29.4% within 3 years and 39.9% within 6 years.⁷

Previous recidivism studies have relied either on official records or on criminal history data obtained from interviews of prisoners. Because of the difficulties and costs of tracking offenders over time, inmate surveys are less frequently used than official records. In general, recidivism rates based on inmate reports of their criminal activities are higher than those based on official records; however, both sources of data yield similar rates of return to prison. From the interviews of inmates in State facilities in 1979, the estimated rate of return among inmates age 18 to 24 at the time of their most recent release from prison was 49.4% within 6 years. Based on the official records examined in the current report, the rate of return for parolees age 17 to 22 was almost identical: 49% within 6 years.

Bureau of Justice Statistics special reports are prepared principally by BJS staff under the direction of Joseph M. Bessette, deputy director for data analysis. This report was written by Allen J. Beck and Bernard E. Shipley. It was edited by Frank D. Balog. Marianne Zawitz provided assistance in data presentation. Report production was administered by Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, with assistance from Betty Sherman, Jeanne Harris, Arlene F. James, and Joyce A. Hartman.

This study was possible due to the support and assistance of William H. Garvie, Margaret R. Owens, and Dianna L. Olson of the FBI's Identification Division. The Regional Justice Information Service (REJIS), located in St. Louis, Missouri, provided technical and data processing support in converting the RAP sheets to a machine-readable format for use in this analysis. The specifications and software for converting the RAP sheets are available upon request.

May 1987, NCJ-104916

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the criminal and juvenile justice activities of the following program Offices and Bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office of Victims of Crime.

²Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, The Pace of Recidivism in Illinois, Research Bulletin, Number 2, April 1986.

³Klein, S., and M. Caggiano, The Prevalence, Predictability, and Policy Implications of Recidivism (Santa Monica, Calif.: The Rand Corporation, 1986).

⁴Delaware Statistical Analysis Center, Recidivism in Delaware—A Study of Rearrest After Release From Incarceration, December 1984.

⁵Clarke, S., and L. Crum, Returns to Prison in North Carolina (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, Institute of Government, 1985).

⁶Wallerstedt, J., Returning to Prison, BJS Special Report, NCJ-95700, November 1984.

⁷Greenfeld, L., Examining Recidivism, BJS Special Report, NCJ-96501, February 1985.

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