Recidivism Trend Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to explain a recently detected trend of upward recidivism rates for releases from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions, the present study pursued three lines of inquiry. The first section of the research sought to detect a possible differential impact whereby certain types of inmates or specific inmate characteristics were associated with the increase in recidivism. The differential impact analysis revealed that the typical inmate most closely associated with the increased recidivism was a former resident of the Boston area, black, never married, and who had served an indeterminate sentence at MCI-Concord or MCI-Framingham.

A second section of the research explored the relationship between the level of community reintegration programming and the resultant recidivism rate. In this area, the data clearly demonstrated that neither the level nor the quality of reintegration programming was associated with the rise in the recidivism rate. In fact, evidence demonstrated that reintegration programming may have actually improved during the year in which recidivism increased.

A final area of investigation involved the construction of extended follow-up periods to determine whether or not the detected increase in recidivism persisted over time. The data surprisingly revealed that once the follow-up period was extended to two or more years, the previously documented rise in the recidivism rate no longer existed. That is to say, once the analysis moved beyond a one year follow-up criterion there were no longer any statistically significant differences between the two populations of releases under study.

From these results we conclude that the perceived rise in recidivism rates first detected with the releases from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions in the year 1979 may have been largely the result of a major system change in the Massachusetts criminal justice apparatus, specifically, court reform. A systematic process of reduction of court case backlog may have resulted in the increased probability that an individual would be adjudicated a recidivist in a shorter period of time but without increasing the ultimate number of recidivists.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major priorities of the Department of Correction's Research Unit has been the systematic monitoring of return rates for releases from Massachusetts state correctional institutions. These studies of recidivism have been prepared annually since the year 1971 and provide a major source for trend analysis. In fact, the annual statistical monitoring of the recidivism data has led to the detection of a number of significant trends occurring within the Massachusetts correctional system (LeClair, 1985). Dominant among the detected trends was the occurrence first of a systematic reduction in the recidivism rate during the years 1971 through 1978 and then an increase in the rate for the years 1979 through 1982. For example, in the base year of 1971 the recidivism rate for the combined population of prison releases was 25%; by 1973 it had dropped to 19%; and by 1975 it had dropped to 15%. More recent data however, reveal that a reversal has occurred in this historical trend of decreasing recidivism rates. For the year 1979 a recidivism rate of 26% was recorded. This recidivism rate unfavorably compares with an average rate of 16% over the period 1971 to 1978. Moreover, the recidivism rate for prison releases in year 1979 is the highest in the nine year period and represents the only year for which there was a statistically significant increase in the recidivism rate. Furthermore, the 1980 recidivism rate remained at 26%. Modest drops, though still relatively high rates, were recorded for the years 1981 and 1982, 24% and 23% respectively. A summary of these statistical patterns is provided below in Table I.

Table I

Rates of Recidivism for Releases From State Prisons During the Years 1971 Through 1982

Year of Release	Number of Releases	Recidivism
1971	1107	25%
1972	1550	22%
1973	966	19%
1974	911	19%
1975	806	20%
1976	925	16%
1977	1138	15%
1978	1118	16%
1979	1053	26%
1980	941	26%
1981	1032	24%
1982	1221	23%

Findings of an Exploratory Study on this Issue

An explanation for the reversal of the historical trend of downward recidivism rates as first evidenced in the 1979 releasee cohort became a major research concern, motivating further analyses. A first research effort proposed several possible explanations and utilized the existing recidivism data base as the means of ferreting out the validity of the proposed explanations (LeClair, 1983). The population of releases in the year 1978 (the last year of the declining recidivism rates) and the population of releases in the year 1979 (the first year of the high recidivism rates) were chosen for the purposes of the analysis. Among the proposed possible explanations for increased recidivism were the following:

(1) A higher risk population may have passed through the correctional system.

(2) A policy change may have occurred in the parole releasing process. That is, higher risks were being released on parole.

(3) A policy change may have occurred in the parole revocation process. That is, it is possible that a stricter revocation policy may have been instituted thus leading to more technical violations or to more revocations in general.

(4) A change may have occurred in correctional programming particularly in the level of participation in reintegration programs which are historically linked to an association with lowered recidivism rates. Specifically, it may be possible that a change in the level of participation in the furlough program or in the prerelease program or in the degree of population movement to lower security status prior to release may be associated with the increased recidivism rate.

The study tested the validity of the first proposition, that a higher risk population was passing through the correctional system, by the utilization of Base Expectancy Tables whereby the comparative risk potential between the two samples was assessed. An Expected Recidivism Rate was calculated for each of

two subsamples: the 1978 release cohort and the 1979 release cohort. The comparison between the two expected rates constituted the test of whether or not a change had occurred in the recidivism risk potential of the two populations. The Base Expectancy analysis determined that the two populations exhibited expected recidivism rates that were virtually identical. Thus the analysis concluded that there was no evidence of a differential risk level between the two populations. As additional back-up support to this conclusion the study compared a series of variables known to be associated with differential recidivism risk potential with the characteristics of each of the two populations. Included in the series were variables such as marital status, education, employment history, age, and criminal career pattern. No difference in the risk level of the two populations with respect to these major variables was found. The study concluded that there was clear evidence that the risk level of the two populations was remarkably similar and that, therefore, the rise in recidivism could not be explained by a change in risk level of the population of releases.

The study explored the second proposed explanation for the rise in recidivism, a possible policy change in the parole releasing process, from the vantage point of two separate observations. The first observation was achieved through utilization of Base Expectancy Tables whereby Expected Recidivism Rates were constructed for the sample of parolees in the 1978 and the 1979 cohorts. A comparison was then made between the risk potential of individuals paroled from prison in 1978 (the year with the lower recidivism rate) and those paroled in 1979 (the year with the higher recidivism rate). The comparison between the two expected rates was the test for a possible change occurring in the parole releasing process. The Base Expectancy analysis determined that the expected recidivism rate for the two

samples was virtually identical. Therefore, from this observation, it was concluded that parole release policy was not a factor in the increased recidivism rate.

A second observation used to test the "change in parole release policy" explanation was to separate the parole and discharge populations into subsamples and determine whether the increase in the recidivism rate occurred for both subsamples. That is, if the increase in recidivism was to be explained by a change in the parole releasing process, one would expect that the recidivism rate for the discharges would not increase in a like manner. Indeed the comparison of the recidivism rates of parolees in 1978 and 1979 with the recidivism rate of dischargees in those same years revealed that the recidivism rate increased proportionally for both parolees and dischargees. This was cited as further grounds for rejecting the notion of parole release policy as an explanation for the rise in recidivism.

The research rejected the third proposed explanation - a stricter parole revocation process - on the basis of some of the same material derived for the analysis of the second proposition. That is, because the increase in the recidivism rate applied both to the parolees as well as to the dischargees, a policy change in the parole revocation process does not work as an explanation. Stricter revocation processes cannot explain why an equal increase in the recidivism rate occurred in the non-parolee population.

The fourth explanation proposed by the research focused on the question of whether or not a change may have occurred in the level of participation in community reintegration programs prior to release from prison and, if so, whether or not such a change was associated with higher levels of recidivism.

Departmental research has long established that there is a direct association between involvement in reintegration programs and reduced recidivism. For example, research has documented that individuals released from prison without having participated in the furlough program have more than double the recidivism rate of individuals who had participated in the furlough program. Similar results have been documented with respect to participation in prerelease programs prior to prison release as well as with respect to movement among institutions of descending security level. These results held even when the selection process was controlled through the use of Base Expectancy tables.

The research pointed out that the 1979 releasee cohort represented an increase in the proportion of individuals released from prison without having participated in the furlough program. In fact, the research revealed that the 1979 releasee cohort represented the lowest level of furlough participation since the inception of the furlough program in 1972. It is noteworthy that similar to the case of furlough participation, data also revealed a drop in the proportion of releases in 1979 who had completed their term of incarceration in a prerelease center. However, despite such factors the research pointed out the recidivism rates increased for both furlough participants as well as for non-participants; and that recidivism rates increased for both releases from prerelease centers as well as for releases from other institutions. Similarily, when looking at differential release according to the security level of the institution of release, it was found that recidivism rates increased for all levels of security. Therefore, the level of participation in reintegration programming was rejected as an explanation for the increase in recidivism. The general conclusion of the exploratory research effort was that all of the proposed explanations for the rise in recidivism lacked validity. The data simply did not support any of the contentions.

Purpose Of The Present Study

The present study represents a further attempt at ferreting out an explanation for the observed rise in recidivism rates. Beyond the scope of the prior research effort several remaining areas of explanation for the increased recidivism are explored.

First, there may have been a differential impact in the increased recidivism phenomenon. That is to say, certain types of inmates or particular inmate characteristics may have been more closely associated with the increase in recidivism. For example, did recidivism increase only for a specific age category or offense type? The isolation of a specific characteristic or trait may provide needed insight as to the actual cause of the increase. In order to carry out such an analysis the present study will utilize the existing recidivism data base (for a listing of the specific variables included see Appendix I). Emphasis will be placed on two cohorts: releases in 1978 (the last year of low recidivism) and releases in 1979 (the first year of increased recidivism). However, the analysis will also include the use of the full data base, releases in the years 1971 through 1982.

A second area for further exploration is the reintegration process, a major classification and programmatic component in the Department of Correction. Research has consistently demonstrated that the level and quality of reintegration efforts such as furloughs and prerelease programs strongly correlate with lower levels of recidivism. Despite prior efforts to link the increased recidivism with a change in reintegration programming, a further attempt in this area is made. The present study developed a separate data base for testing the level and quality of reintegration programming. The new data base consisted of two populations: a

random sample of 300 individuals released in the low recidivism year of 1978, and a random sample of 300 individuals released in the high recidivism year of 1979. Variables collected for members of these two samples included detailed furlough histories, detailed institutional movement chronologies, and detailed prerelease participation histories. Additionally four subjective measures of reintegration quality were included. The researcher, upon reading inmate program records, was to make a judgement on the quality of the overall furlough programming, the movement programming, the overall reintegration programming, and the quality of fit between the parole decision of release and the level of reintegration that had been achieved. Comparisons of the two samples, high and low recidivism, were made according to these subjective judgements as a further test of a possible change in reintegration programming.

A specific listing of variables collected for this analysis include those listed below:

Furlough Programming Variables:

1. Number of Furloughs
2. Time served before first furlough
3. Length of furlough history
4. Time span of furlough history
5. Pattern of institutional security level of furlough
6. Quality of furlough programming (subjective rating, 0 to 9)

Movement Pattern Variables:

7. Number of institutional moves along varying security levels
8. Quality of Movement Pattern (subjective rating, 0 to 9)

Overall Ratings

9. Overall quality of reintegration (subjective rating, 0 to 9)
10. Quality of fit between reintegration history and parole decision (subjective rating, 0 to 9)

A third and final area of investigation in the present study involves an extended recidivism follow-up analysis. The main recidivism data base and the initial study of the increased recidivism both utilize follow-up periods of one year. Researchers have cautioned that problems inherent in one year follow-up studies may lead to premature conclusions. For example, some researchers have pointed to the dangers of "cross-over effects" whereby results found in the first year of follow-up are reversed after a second or third year of follow-up. We were first interested in determining whether the initial detection of the increased recidivism rate remained with extended periods of follow-up, or whether a cross-over effect would occur. However, a second concern led to the extended follow-up analysis. Such an analysis would allow us to test the plausibility of court reform as the major factor effecting increased recidivism rates. In the late 1970's, at about the same time that recidivism began to increase, a major court reform effort, specifically directed at reducing court backlog, was put in place in Massachusetts. The 1978 legislation was put into effect in late 1978 and the reduction in court backlog was felt especially during 1979 and 1980. Reduced backlog meant faster handling of court cases and faster handling of court cases increases the possibility of a conviction as well as shortens the time period between commission of an offense and subsequent return to prison. The quicker the return to prison the greater the possibility that an individual will fall into the 12 month follow-up period used in the determination of a recidivist. Presumably extended follow-up to periods of 2, 3 and 4 years will lessen the initial impact of court reform. That is, with extended follow-up, recidivism rates for the high and low years would approach similarity to the degree that court reform is the major explanation for increased recidivism for one year follow-up analysis.

In order to utilize the extended follow-up technique, a random sample consisting of 300 releases in the 1978 population and 300 releases in the 1979 population was drawn and the standard recidivism variables were collected on each sample member. Each individual in the sample was followed for four years from the date of release and we were thus able to vary the recidivism criterion for periods up to a four year follow-up.

Data were derived primarily from the computerized data base developed by the Correction and Parole Management Information System. Additional data were collected from the files of the Department of Correction, the Parole Board, and the Board of Probation. The cooperation of the Probation and Parole agencies greatly facilitated the research. The data were analyzed on the Massachusetts State College Computer Network.

FINDINGS

A. Differential Impact of Increased Recidivism:

The existing Department of Correction recidivism data base, as summarized in Appendix I, was utilized for the differential impact analysis. Attributes of the releases in the year 1978 were compared with attributes of the releases in 1979. The comparison was accomplished by dichotomizing all variables in the data base according to the proportion of recidivists and non-recidivists within each respective year of release. The Chi Square (X^2) statistic was applied to determine whether or not any differences found between the two populations were statistically significant.

The comparison of the two populations along approximately 65 separate variables resulted with six variables yielding statistically significant differences. These variables include:

(1) **Race;** blacks accounted for a significantly larger proportion of increased recidivism.

(2) **Address Prior to Incarceration;** residents of Suffolk County and particularly from Boston accounted for a significantly larger proportion of increased recidivism.

(3) **Length of Sentence Served;** a greater proportion of the increased recidivism was accounted for by individuals serving less than six months on their present sentence.

(4) **Original Commitment Institution;** Noteworthy when comparing the 1978 and 1979 releases is the fact that the increase in recidivism was statistically significant only for MCI-Concord and MCI-Framingham commitments. In contrast, the recidivism rate for MCI-Walpole commitments increased at a smaller proportion and the difference was not statistically significant.

(5) **Marital Status;** significantly more of the increased recidivism was associated with individuals whose marital status was single.

Combining the above five variables allows the construction of a typical profile of the population of releases that disproportionately accounts for the increased recidivism. This profile is as follows: a single black releasee formerly residing in the Boston area serving an indeterminate sentence at MCI-Concord or MCI-Framingham. Typically the individual served six months or less on the present sentence before being released to the community.

B. Analysis of the Level and Quality of Reintegrative Programming

This second area of analysis is specifically concerned with determining whether or not a change in either the level (quantity) or quality of reintegration programming may have been associated with increased recidivism. A random sample of 300 individuals from each population of releases in the years 1978 and 1979 was drawn to serve as the base sample for the analysis. Ten new variables were constructed in an attempt to measure the level and quality of reintegration. Data were collected for each population and comparisons were then made to determine whether or not significant differences existed.

Number of Furloughs:

No statistically significant differences were found to occur between the two populations in terms of the frequency of furloughs during the period of incarceration. If anything, the data suggested that a greater proportion of individuals in the 1979 sample (the high recidivism group) received more furloughs. The proportion of individuals receiving various frequencies of furloughs is summarized below in Table II.

Table II

Number of Furloughs

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
None	52%	51%
One to six	20%	19%
Seven to Twelve	10%	13%
Thirteen or More	10%	11%

We conclude from the data that no significant change in the volume of furloughing can be attributed to a rise in recidivism.

Time Served Before First Furlough:

The second variable considered was the length of time that an individual served in prison before receiving a first furlough. This variable was thought to be an indicator of the degree of reintegration in that presumably the sooner in the prison experience that the reintegration process is begun the more successful the eventual adjustment. If the reintegration process changed for the high recidivism cohort in the direction of a postponement of furloughing until a later stage in the incarceration process, one might expect a higher recidivism rate.

The data, however, revealed that no change occurred in this area. There was no significant difference between the two populations in terms of the stage of incarceration in which furloughs were granted. The proportions of individuals in various categories of time served before first furlough are presented below in Table III, for the low (1978) and high (1979) recidivism cohorts.

Table II

Time Served Before First Furlough

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
No Furlough	52%	51%
Less than 6 months	10%	12%
Six to 11 months	17%	15%
One to 2 years	13%	12%
Two Years or more	8%	10%

Length of Furlough History:

Length of furlough history represented another attempt to measure the quality of furlough programming. Presumably if furloughs occurred throughout the incarceration process - thus a longer furlough history - a stronger reintegration programming would be indicated. A drop in the length of furlough history in the high recidivism year (1979) would be an indication of a possible explanation for the increased recidivism.

The data, however, again revealed no statistically significant differences between the two samples. No evidence of a change in reintegration programming was indicated by this variable. The data for this variable are summarized below in Table IV.

Table IV

Length of Furlough History

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
No Furloughs	52%	51%
One furlough only	7%	9%
One to 3 months	11%	12%
Four to 12 months	15%	14%
More than 1 year	13%	14%

Time Span of Furloughing:

A fourth variable measured the time span over which furloughs were granted. For example, where furloughs were only granted during the last weeks or months of incarceration or where they were evenly distributed over the period of incarceration. The extent to which the time span approximated a situation of even distribution over the entire period of incarceration was used as an indicator of higher quality reintegration. Again, comparisons were made between the two samples and again no statistically significant differences were found.

A summary of the data concerning this variable is presented below in Table V.

Table V

Time Span of Furloughing

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
No Furloughs	52%	51%
One Furlough Only	7%	9%
Furloughs Discontinued	2%	2%
Last 3 months of Incarceration	8%	8%
Last 6 months of Incarceration	7%	6%
Last year of Incarceration	10%	7%
Last half of Incarceration	6%	5%
Evenly Distributed Throughout	11%	12%

Security Pattern of Furlough Institution:

Presumably the most ideal form of the use of furloughs as an aid in the reintegration process would be the situation in which furloughs accompanied movements from maximum to medium to minimum and to prerelease institutions.

In contrast, less desirable would be furloughs only at one stage of reintegration such as at a maximum institution only or at a prerelease institution only.

While there were no statistically significant differences between the two samples on this variable, the data did show a slight tendency for the high recidivism sample to have fewer individuals receiving the ideal situation of furloughing throughout the incarceration process. The data are summarized below in Table VI.

Table VI

Security Pattern of Furlough Institution

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
No Furloughs	52%	51%
Furloughs at Maximum Security Only	1%	1%
Maximum and Minimum Only	11%	11%
Medium and Minimum Only	6%	7%
Minimum and Prerelease Only	6%	7%
Prerelease Only	17%	21%
Furloughs at all Security Levels	11%	9%

Quality of Furlough Programming

This last furlough variable was a subjective measure whereby the researcher read over the entire individual inmate furlough history (central office inmate folder and computer chronology) and then made a judgement as to the quality of the furlough programming in terms of the goals and objectives of the reintegration model. Each sample member in both the 1978 and 1979 cohorts was rated in this manner on a scale of zero to nine, a nine representing the most ideal pattern of furloughing. Scores were grouped into the following categories: Poor, 0 to 3; Average, 4 to 6; Good, 7 to 8; and Excellent, 9.

The result of the subjective scoring measure is presented below in Table VII.

Table VII

Quality of Furlough Programming

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
Poor (0 to 3)	64%	61%
Average (4 to 6)	16%	23%
Good (7 to 8)	18%	11%
Excellent (9)	2%	5%

The data reveal that there was a significant increase in the proportion of individuals receiving an average rating for the 1979 population. Concommitantly there was a significant decrease in the proportion of individuals receiving a good rating. This suggests a modest drop in the quality of furloughing. However, there is is also evidence of a slight improvement in furlough programming during the 1979 period (the higher recidivism year). A lower proportion of the 1979 sample received a poor quality rating and a higher proportion had an excellent quality rating. However, these latter two differences were not statistically significant. No clear pattern emerges from this data and thus the variable cannot be used to explain the increased recidivism.

In summarizing the results of the furlough-specific variables, we must conclude that there is no evidence of a reduction in the quantity or quality of furlough programming between these periods of low and high recidivism. Furlough participation, therefore, cannot be used as an explanation for increased recidivism.

Institutional Movement Pattern:

A second important component of the reintegration model involves the

graduated movement of individuals among institutions in descending levels of security and size. Prior research has consistently demonstrated that the most ideal (lowest recidivism) movement pattern has been the situation in which an individual moves from a maximum security institution to medium to minimum and to prerelease status institutions before receiving a parole. We therefore looked at the data to see if any change in movement chronology patterns existed between the two samples.

The data revealed a statistically significant increase in the number of individuals in the most reintegrative category for the high recidivism cohort. Whereas 7% of the individuals in the 1978 cohort experienced the ideal situation of progressive movement from maximum to medium to minimum to prerelease security institutions, 13% of individuals in the 1979 cohort experienced this ideal situation. Clearly, then one cannot claim a change in movement chronology (or classification procedures) as an explanation for the increased recidivism. Data for this variable are summarized below in Table VIII.

Table VIII

Institutional Movement Pattern

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
No movement at all, (Always in Maximum) Released on Discharge	5%	4%
No Movement at all, (Always in Maximum) Released on Parole	16%	17%
Maximum (lower and return) to Street	16%	10%
Medium (lower and return) to Street	4%	3%
Minimum (lower and return) to Street	2%	2%
Maximum to Prerelease to Street	19%	18%
Medium to Prerelease to Street	9%	8%
Maximum to Medium to Minimum to Prerelease to Street	7%	13%

Quality of Movements

A second variable utilized to assess a possible change in classification movement procedures was a subjective measure whereby the researcher judged each individual in both samples in terms of the quality of movement patterns. Individual case records and classification reports were read and a subjective judgement rating of 0 to 9 points was assigned to each case, 9 representing the highest quality of movement assignments.

Data on this variable are presented below in Table IX.

Table IX

Quality of Movements

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
Poor (0 to 3)	39%	29%
Average (4 to 6)	32%	38%
Good (7 to 8)	25%	19%
Excellent (9)	3%	14%

The data reveal that for the 1979 cohort a statistically significant lower number of individuals received a poor rating and a statistically significant higher number received an excellent rating. Clearly that data reveal an improvement, not a reduction, in movement programming and thus a higher level of reintegration in the 1979 cohort. Therefore, increased recidivism cannot be attributed to movement patterns of the classification process.

Overall Quality of Reintegration:

Another subjective variable that was constructed was a measurement of the overall quality of reintegration. Here the researcher reviewed furlough records,

classification movement and prerelease programming and made a determination of low to high quality on a scale of 0 to 9.

The data revealed that there was no evidence of a reduction in the overall quality of reintegration in the high recidivism year. To the contrary, there was evidence of a slight improvement in reintegration quality. In the high recidivism cohort, releases in the year 1979, a statistically significant lower number of individuals received a rating of poor than in the low recidivism year of 1978. Data for these variables are summarized below in Table X.

Table X
Overall Quality of Reintegration

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
Poor (0 to 3)	50%	42%
Average (4 to 6)	27%	34%
Good (7 to 8)	21%	20%
Excellent (9)	2%	5%

Quality of Fit Between the Parole Decision and the Reintegration Pattern

The last variable that was utilized to determine whether a change had occurred in reintegration programming concerned the perceived degree to which the decision to parole complemented the level of reintegration programming achieved. An ideal situation for parole, for example, would be the case where the individual had attained prerelease status prior to parole and had experienced a significant number of successful furloughs granted throughout the period of incarceration at varying security level institutions. On the other hand, a bad fit would be situations in which individuals were paroled from walled institutions without furloughs and without prerelease programming.

The data revealed that for the high recidivism 1979 cohort, there was a statistically significant higher number of individuals experiencing an excellent fit between reintegration and parole and a statistically significant lower number of individuals receiving a poor fit rating. Again we conclude that the level of reintegration cannot be used as an explanation for the increase in recidivism rates. These data are summarized below in Table XI.

Table XI

Quality of Fit Between Parole Decision and Reintegration Pattern

	1978 Sample	1979 Sample
(Non-Parolees)	23%	25%
Poor (0 to 3)	23%	8%
Average (4 to 6)	28%	38%
Good (7 to 8)	23%	21%
Excellent (9)	4%	8%

As a general conclusion for this section of the report, the data have clearly demonstrated that neither the level nor the quality of reintegration programming is related to the documented rise in the recidivism rate. Our analysis had determined that in fact evidence exists that the level and quality of reintegration programming improved during the year in which recidivism increased.

C. Analysis of Extended Follow-Up Periods:

The third area of inquiry in the present study was the extended follow-up analysis of recidivism rates for a sample of releases in the year 1978 and a sample of releases in the year 1979. Whereas the original recidivism studies for the

releases in the years 1978 and 1979 utilized the traditional one year follow-up period as the criterion for recidivism, the present study utilized extended follow-up periods of two, three, and four years. The purpose of the extended follow-up analysis was to determine whether or not the proportionally increased recidivism rate for the 1979 population over the 1978 population remained when the follow-up periods were extended.

Quite surprisingly, the data revealed that once the analysis moved beyond a one year follow-up there were no statistically significant differences between the two populations. In fact, beyond a two year follow-up criterion the data revealed a lower recidivism rate for the 1979 sample (originally the higher recidivism population) though this difference was not statistically significant. This pattern is summarized below in Table XII.

Table XII

Comparative Recidivism Rates for Extended Follow-Up Periods

Year of Release	Original One Year Recidivism Analysis	Two Year Follow-Up	Three Year Follow-Up	Four Year Follow-Up
1978	16%	39%	46%	49%
1979	26%	38%	43%	48%

One concludes from these findings that there is no evidence of an increased recidivism rate for the 1979 population of releases once the follow-up criterion is extended beyond one year. It appears evident that eventual recidivists were processed and returned at a quicker pace for the 1979 releases but that the eventual number of recidivists was not greater than prior years.

This evidence provides strong support that the previously mentioned major

court reform effort at reducing case backlog accelerated the process of conviction and prison commitment. As stated earlier reduced backlog meant faster handling of court cases and the faster handling of court cases increased the probability of a conviction, as well as shortened the time period between the commission of an offense and subsequent return to prison. Both situations increased the likelihood that an individual would be defined as a recidivist when a one year follow-up period was used. That is, the quicker the return to prison the greater the possibility that an individual would fall into the 12 months follow-up period utilized in the determination of a recidivist. The extended follow-up periods revealed that what appeared as a difference in recidivism rates within a twelve month criterion no longer remained when the criterion was extended to 24 months and beyond.

Conclusion

The present study represented an attempt at uncovering an explanation for the recently detected increase in recidivism rates for releases from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions. The first section of the research focused on an attempt to detect a possible differential impact whereby certain types of inmates or particular inmate characteristics could be associated with the increase in recidivism. A second section of the research explored the relationship between the reintegration process and the resultant recidivism. A final area of investigation involved the construction of extended follow-up periods to determine whether or not the detected increased recidivism persisted over time.

The differential impact analysis revealed that the typical inmate most closely associated with the increased recidivism was a single black former resident of the Boston area who had served an indeterminate sentence at MCI-Concord or MCI-Framingham. Typically, that individual served six months or less on the sentence before being released to the community.

In the second area of analysis, the data clearly demonstrated that neither the level nor the quality of reintegration programming was associated with the rise in the recidivism rate. In fact, evidence actually demonstrated that reintegration programming may have actually improved during the year in which recidivism increased.

The third area of inquiry quite surprisingly revealed that once the follow-up period was extended to two or more years, the previously documented rise in recidivism no longer held. That is to say, once the analysis moved beyond a one year follow-up criterion there were no longer any statistically significant differences between the two populations of releases under study.

From these results we conclude that the perceived rise in recidivism first detected with releases from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions in the year 1979 may have been largely the result of a major system change in the Massachusetts criminal justice apparatus. That is, efforts at court reform through the systematic reduction of court case backlog may have increased the probability that an individual would be adjudicated a recidivist in a shorter period of time but without increasing the ultimate number of recidivists.

Thus, in populations of releases since the court reform movement in Massachusetts a one year follow-up analysis would more likely result in the collection of a greater number of recidivists, whereas longer term follow-up analysis would not result in this manner. It therefore seems evident that the perceived increase in recidivism actually points to a situation in which eventual recidivists are merely being processed back into the system in a more timely fashion. There does not seem to be an increase in the eventual volume of recidivists.

Appendix I

Information Available on Current Residents

A. Identification/Status

- Name
- Commitment Number
- Commitment Date
- Institution Committed To
- Court Committed From
- Institution Currently At
- Temporarily Out of Institution?
- Sex
- Social Security Number

B. Admission Characteristics Offense - Related

- Present Offense (up to 4 charges)
- Number Of Charges in Present Offense
- Sentence (minimum and maximum)
- Type of Sentence
- Days of Jail Credit
- Date of First Parole Eligibility
- Location of Governing Offense
- Type of Weapon
- Date of Governing Offense
- Number of Co-Defendants
- Number of Victims

Social Background

- Current Age (date of birth)
- Race
- Marital Status
- Military Service

- Last Civilian Address Before Commitment
- Emergency Addressee
- Drug Use Code
- Years of School Completed
- Education Code (special classes/GED)
- Occupation Code
- Longest Time Period at Any Job
- Longest Time Period on Most Skilled Job
- Number of Children
- Number of Siblings
- Place of Birth
- Country of Citizenship

Criminal History

- Age at First Court Appearance
- Age at First Court Appearance for Drug Offense
- Age at First Court Appearance for Drunkenness Offense
- Prior Court Appearances
- Prior Charges for Person Offense
- Prior Charges for Sex Offense
- Prior Charges for Property Offense
- Prior Charges for Narcotic Offenses
- Prior Charges for Drunkenness Offenses
- Prior Charges for Escape Offenses
- Prior Incarcerations: Juvenile, County, State/Federal
- Prior Paroles: Juvenile, Adult
- Prior Parole Violations: Juvenile, Adult
- Number of Convictions
- Number of Probations
- Number of Adult Defaults

C. **Record of All Furloughs**

- Type of Furlough
- Date of Furlough
- Hours of Furlough
- Outcome of Furlough
- Institution Furloughed From

D. **Record of All Moves In/Out of MCI's (Since 1/1/72)**

- Date of Move
- Type of Move
- From Where
- To Where