

STUDY TO DETERMINE THE  
RECIDIVISM RATE  
FOR THE  
SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS'  
CALENDAR YEAR 1972 RELEASEES

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ACQUISITIONS

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## RECIDIVISM RATE OF SCDC CY 1972 RELEASEES

### Introduction

The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals recommends that recidivism be measured by "(1) criminal acts that resulted in conviction by a court, when committed by individuals who are under correctional supervision or who have been released from correctional supervision within the previous three years, and by (2) technical violations of probation or parole in which a sentencing or paroling authority took action that resulted in an adverse change in the offender's legal status." (CORRECTIONS, P. 513)

It has been the practice of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) to report three types of recidivism rates: one for the entire population, one for inmates involved in pre-release, work-release and study-release programs, and one for inmates sentenced under the Youthful Offender Act. These rates vary, but generally are about 21%, 15% and 14%, respectively. The rate for the entire population is based on previous commitments of offenders presently incarcerated in SCDC, and the rate for the pre-release, work-release and study-release programs reflects the percent of releasees who returned to SCDC at any time after their release. Therefore, these recidivism rates are not comparable to rates developed under the Commission's definition because they do not adhere to the recommended three-year follow-up period. The Youthful Offender rate was developed under the Commission's definition, but of course does not represent the entire population.

### Objective and Definition

In order to establish department-wide recidivism data more comparable to the National Advisory Commission's guidelines, this study was undertaken by the Planning and Research Division in mid-December, 1975 to develop the recidivism rate for all calendar year 1972 releasees, adhering to the three-year follow-up criteria. Because of the limitation of data resources, and the requirement for completion within three months, this study is restricted to utilizing internal follow-up data. As time and resources permit at a later time, the scope of this study may be expanded to other components of the Criminal Justice System.

Therefore, in this report, a 1972 SCDC releasee is identified as a recidivist if he subsequently returned to the South Carolina Department of Corrections within three years.<sup>1</sup> The recidivism rate for CY 1972 releasees as concluded in this study is the percentage of the number of inmates released in CY 1972 that returned to SCDC within three years.

### Methodology

Since the recidivism rate to be developed is the percentage of CY 1972 releasees who subsequently returned to SCDC within three years because of reconviction or parole violation, the initial step in this study involved the

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<sup>1</sup>A similar approach was adopted by the Florida State Correctional System although its study limits their internal follow-up to a two-year period.

development of master rosters of inmates released from SCDC in CY 1972, and of those admitted to SCDC in CY 1972, 1973, 1974 and 1975,<sup>2</sup> utilizing both manual and computerized SCDC records. Besides the inmates' names arranged in alphabetical order, the master rosters also contain other available key information, i.e., the inmates' race, sex, age or date of birth, admission date and release date (if applicable). This information, supplemented as necessary by other details obtained from the Inmate Movement Journal and individual inmate records in SCDC Records Office was used to identify those 1972 releasees that also appeared in the 1972-75 admission roster. These inmates, labelled as "recidivists," were further examined to ensure that their readmission date was no more than three years after their release date in 1972. After their total number was counted, it was computed as a percentage of the total number of inmates released.

## Result

### Numbers Released in CY 1972

From both computerized and manual sources, 2,080 inmates were identified as SCDC's 1972 releasees. Of this number, 1,071 were whites (51.5%) and 1,009 blacks (48.5%). Females numbered 141 as compared to 1,939 males.

### Total Number and Percentage Recidivated Within Three Years

A comprehensive examination of SCDC 1972-1975 admission data reveals 394 inmates had recidivated within three years. This number constitutes 18.9% of the total number released in 1972. Therefore the total recidivism rate, as defined in this study, for SCDC 1972 releasees was 18.9%.

### Comparison of Recidivists by Race and Sex

Of the 394 recidivists identified in this study, according to the three-year follow-up criteria, 185 (47%) were whites and 209 (53%) were blacks. While male recidivist numbered 386, only eight female releasees recidivated. The recidivism rates for white and black, male and female releasees, therefore, vary and are presented in the following tables:

Table 1 - Recidivism Rates for SCDC 1972 Releasees by Race

	Number Released from SCDC in 1972	Number Recidivated and Returned to SCDC within 3 years	Recidivism Rate
Whites	1,071	185	17.3
Blacks	1,009	209	20.7
Total	2,080	394	18.9

<sup>2</sup>Since an inmate may be released in early 1972 and return in the same year, it is necessary to examine the 1972 admissions.

Table 2 - Recidivism Rates for SCDC 1972 Releasees by Sex

	Number Released from SCDC in 1972	Number Recidivated and Returned to SCDC within 3 years	Recidivism Rate
Male	1,939	386	19.9
Female	141	8	5.7
Total	2,080	394	18.9

Time Gap Between Release and Readmission

For the 394 recidivists, the average time gap between release and readmission was 18.2 months. As shown in the following table, 36.3% of the readmissions occurred within 12 months after release. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the readmissions occurred within 24 months after release. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest that readmission is more likely to follow closely after release. The following table also illustrates that if the follow-up period had been shortened to two years, the number of recidivists would be reduced to 264 and the recidivism rate would have been 12.7% ( $264 \div 2,080 \times 100$ ).

Table 3 - Time Gap Between Release and Readmission of SCDC 1972 Releasees  
Recidivated within Three Years

Time Gap Between Release and Readmission To SCDC	Number of Recidivists	Percent
0 - 6 months	88	22.3%
7 - 12 months	55	14.0%
13 - 18 months	57	14.5%
19 - 24 months	64	16.2%
25 - 30 months	67	17.0%
31 - 36 months	63	16.0%

### Concluding Comments

It is interesting to note that the rate of 18.9% derived from this study is not too far off from the percentage of inmates currently in SCDC (as of March 19, 1976) who have a record of previous SCDC commitment--14.3%. Also of interest is that, for the 1972 releasees, recidivism occurred evenly over the three-year period following release. Male inmates released in 1972 has a considerably higher recidivism rate (19.9%) than females released in the same time period (5.7%). Black releasees' recidivism rate, on the other hand, was only slightly higher than that of their white counterparts; 20.7% for the former as compared to 17.7% for the latter. Further analyses of the characteristics of the recidivists, and their comparison to those of all releasees will be conducted at a later date.

While this study has defined and derived a recidivism rate for SCDC's 1972 releasees, this rate should be interpreted as the rate for a cohort of releasees based on internal follow-up only. This effort will be continued for other cohorts of inmates released after 1972. It is only when such data is developed continually for six-month cohorts or one-year cohorts that a more representative rate can be established to more meaningfully reflect one aspect of the system's (or SCDC's) performance. Moreover, it is desirable that follow-up should be extended to data sources in other components of the criminal justice system. Presently, these sources are being explored. If there should be concrete and manageable data to enable external follow-up, the results of this study may be further elaborated. Such being the case, this study marks the preliminary effort towards establishing one indicator of success/failure of the system's performance.

**END**

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