

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Study on Average Length of Stay

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS  
ON AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY

For All Inmates Released from MSP July 1978 - July, 1979:

1. Average length of stay is 2.2 years on an average sentence of 6.0 years.
2. Two-thirds of those released served less than 2 years.
3. The present release population (those releasees on whom computer records are available) is not representative of the current prison population in terms of length of sentence or percentage of lifers.

Anticipated Trends:

1. As the Armed Robbery and Drug Laws begin to impact on release, average length of stay will increase.
2. As the backlog in the county jails is reduced, the use of shock probation will decline and average length of stay will increase.

CHAPTER I  
Average Length of Stay vs. Average Sentence Length

POPULATION

The computer file contains 1503 inmate records closed during the 13 month period of July, 1978 - July, 1979. The majority of these records were closed by the discharge of the inmate from the penitentiary or county jail. A negligible number (5) were closed by the death of the inmate.

Of the 1503 records, 1140 entered the penitentiary as new commitments\* and the remaining 363 were revoked from community supervision. This is significant in calculating length of stay because for a truly accurate length of stay for the revoked population, each record would have to be reviewed individually to calculate time spent in incarceration. For new commitments it is a simple matter of subtracting exit-date from sentence-begin-date.

AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY

Column 2 of Table 1 reflects average length of stay when controlling for entry type. For new commitments only, the average length of stay is 21.0 months (1.8 years) overall. This is broken down as 22.5 months (1.9 years) for those released in 1978 and 19.9 months (1.7 years) for those released in 1979.

\*New Commitment is not to be confused with first offender. "Received on new commitment" means no other active sentences at present. Such an inmate could have a prior commitment history and thus be a recidivist.

It was anticipated that if the revoked population was included in the computation, with total disregard for time spent in the community (i.e., calculate length of stay from date first sentence began to date of last exit from MSP or county jail), that the average length of stay would increase significantly. This theory is not substantiated by the data.

As shown in Column 4 of Table 1, the average length of stay for all inmates released from MSP from July, 1978 thru July, 1979, for whom there is a computer record\*, is 26.3 months (2.2 years). This is broken down as 26.6 months (2.2 years) for 1978 releasees and 26.1 months (2.2 years) for 1979 releasees.

The data thus shows that although the average length of stay for the total release population is declining only slightly (26.6 months to 26.1 months), for new commitments it is declining significantly (22.5 months to 19.9 months).

Table 2 compares average length of stay to average sentence length for the discharged population. New commitments discharged in the 13 month period of July, 1978 - July, 1979 served an average of 31% of total sentence. Non-lifers in this group served 33% of their sentences while lifers served 21%. This difference is a function of parole eligibility criteria. On sentences of up to 30 years parole eligibility is 1/3 of sentence. From 30 years to life, eligibility is a

\*The inmate computer file was being coded and loaded in July, Aug. and Sept. of 1978, so not all inmates released in that period have a computer record.

straight 10 years.

For the total discharged population, average length of stay represents 37% of average total sentence. Again, it should be noted that the study does not control for time spent in the community for the revoked population. Thus average length of stay for the total discharged population would be expected to be slightly inflated.

Table 2 also shows that the discharged population is not representative of the current active inmate population in terms of average sentence length or percentage of lifers in the population. It would appear that contrary to Departmental expectations, the courts are handing down longer sentences. However, such a conclusion should not be drawn without further study. In partial support of it, however, it should be noted that 35% of the inmates currently serving life sentences were sentenced in the last 3 calendar years (1977 - 1979).

TABLE 1  
AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY

RELEASE MONTH	NEW COMMITMENT DISCHARGES		3 NO.	ALL DISCHARGES
	1 NO.	2 AVG. LENGTH OF STAY IN MONTHS		4 AVG. LENGTH OF STAY IN MONTHS
7/78	24	22.3	29	34.4
8/78	31	18.2	37	21.0
9/78	82	26.2	113	26.7
10/78	127	23.2	158	28.8
11/78	99	22.5	139	29.4
12/78	127	20.4	160	21.8
	490	22.5	636	26.6
1/79	77	18.8	103	25.8
2/79	66	21.0	78	23.3
3/79	69	19.0	108	28.1
4/79	107	22.9	150	31.2
5/79	144	20.8	179	23.6
6/79	63	17.8	89	26.0
7/79	124	17.8	160	24.6
7 mos.	650	19.9	867	26.1
13 mos. TOTAL	1140	21.0 (1.8 years)	1503	26.3 (2.2 years)

TABLE 2

AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY VS. AVERAGE SENTENCE  
FOR INMATES DISCHARGED 7/78 - 7/79

	NEW COMMITMENTS DISCHARGEES			ALL DISCHARGES			CURRENT ACTIVE POPULATION		
	NO.	AVG SENT YRS.	AVG STAY YRS.	NO.	AVG SENT YRS.	AVG STAY YRS.	NO.	AVG SENT YRS.	
Non- Lifers	1125	4.9	1.6 (33%)	1472	5.1	1.9 (37%)	2908	10.0	
Lifers	15	50.0*	10.7 (21%)	31	50.0*	15.6 (31%)	384	50.0*	
TOTAL	1140	5.5	1.8 (31%)	1503	6.0	2.2 (37%)	3292	14.7	

\*An average sentence length of 50 years is assigned to lifers for computational purposes.

CHAPTER II  
Detailed Analysis of Average  
Length of Stay

Tables 3 and 4 show the breakdown of the discharged population by year of discharge and number of years served. Although 13 months of data is insufficient for any trend analysis, some preliminary observations may be made, and areas for further study identified.

Column 1 of both tables looks at inmates released in less than minimum parole eligibility time. This group is comprised of 2 types of inmates: those who qualify for work release (minimum eligibility time equals 3/4 of parole eligibility time) and those whose sentences are modified by the courts to time served with the balance of the original sentence to be served on probation (i.e., shock probationers). An analysis of the figures in Column 1 of Tables 3 and 4 indicates a possible trend toward the increased use of shock probation in the first seven months of 1979 for inmates received on new commitment. This is somewhat contradicted by a slight decrease in the percentage of inmates serving less than 1 year (from 34.1 to 32.9%). Further analysis of exit type and last physical location (i.e., MSP or county jail) would be necessary to confirm this trend.

Some conclusions that can be drawn from Tables 3 and 4 are as follows:

1. 30-35% of inmates discharged in the last year served less than 1 year;
2. 5-6% serve 5 years or more;
3. 75% of inmates received on new commitment will serve less than 2 years.

Because of increased average sentence length for non-lifers in the current population, it is anticipated that the above conclusions will not hold true for the release population over the next several years as the following factors begin to impact on length of stay:

1. The Armed Robbery Law;
2. The mandatory 3 year no-parole on certain drug offenses;
3. The revision of the SER eligibility criteria in July, 1978 to disqualify violent offenders;
4. The reduction of the county jail backlog, thus alleviating the need for increased use of shock probation.

TABLE 3  
 LENGTH OF STAY - NEW COMMITMENT ONLY  
 7/78 - 7/79

	1* LESS THAN 9 MOS.		2 LESS THAN 1 YR	3	4	5	6	7	8
	NO.	%	1-2 YRS	2-3 YRS	3-4 YRS	4-5 YRS	5 + YRS	TOTAL	
1978 Jul	2	8.3	7	13	2	0	0	2	24
Aug	4	12.9	7	18	3	1	1	1	31
Sept	5	6.1	22	35	13	4	4	4	82
Oct	11	8.7	48	43	15	5	6	10	127
Nov	9	9.1	28	43	11	8	3	6	99
Dec	16	12.6	55	41	14	8	2	7	127
TOTAL	47		167	193	58	26	16	30	490
%		9.6	34.1	39.4	11.8	5.3	3.3	6.1	100.0
1979 Jan	8	10.4	23	36	6	5	3	4	77
Feb	11	16.7	20	27	9	5	1	4	66
Mar	10	14.5	25	28	7	5	1	3	69
Apr	2	1.9	21	56	15	8	3	4	107
May	16	11.1	51	52	19	12	8	2	144
Jun	10	15.9	26	22	10	3	1	1	63
Jul	20	16.1	48	52	13	4	5	2	124
TOTAL	77		214	273	79	42	22	20	650
%		11.8	32.9	42.0	12.1	6.5	3.4	3.1	100.0

Almost  
 3/4 serve  
 less than  
 2 yrs.

\*The population in Column 1 is included in Column 2. All other groups are mutually exclusive.

TABLE 4  
 LENGTH OF STAY - ALL DISCHARGES  
 7/78 - 7/79 (INCLUDING REVOCATIONS)

	1* LESS THAN 9 MOS.		2 LESS THAN 1 YR	3	4	5	6	7	8
	NO.	%	1-2 YRS	2-3 YRS	3-4 YRS	4-5 YRS	5 + YRS	TOTAL	
1978 Jul	2	6.9	7	14	4	0	0	4	29
Aug	5	13.5	9	19	3	2	2	2	37
Sept	9	8.0	32	44	16	10	4	7	113
Oct	12	7.6	51	53	22	15	10	7	158
Nov	12	8.6	34	57	17	14	7	10	139
Dec	17	10.6	63	49	22	13	6	7	160
TOTAL	57	9.0	196	236	84	54	29	37	636
%			30.8%	37.1%	13.2%	8.5%	4.6%	5.8%	100.0
1979 Jan	8	7.8	24	45	15	10	5	4	103
Feb	11	14.1	20	32	12	5	5	4	78
Mar	10	9.3	27	39	13	12	9	8	108
Apr	6	4.0	25	66	26	16	5	12	150
May	17	9.5	55	65	22	21	9	7	179
Jun	11	12.4	30	28	13	11	3	4	89
Jul	23	14.4	56	62	14	11	7	10	160
TOTAL	86	9.9	237	337	115	86	43	49	867
%			27.3%	38.9%	13.3%	9.9%	4.9%	5.7%	100.0

2/3 of  
 releasees  
 serve less  
 than 2  
 years

\*The population in Column 1 is included in Column 2. All other groups are mutually exclusive.

**END**