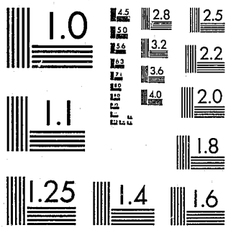
If you have issues viewing or accessing this file contact us at NCJRS.gov.

National Criminal Justice Reference Service

ncjrs

This microfiche was produced from documents received for inclusion in the NCJRS data base. Since NCJRS cannot exercise control over the physical condition of the documents submitted, the individual frame quality will vary. The resolution chart on this frame may be used to evaluate the document quality.



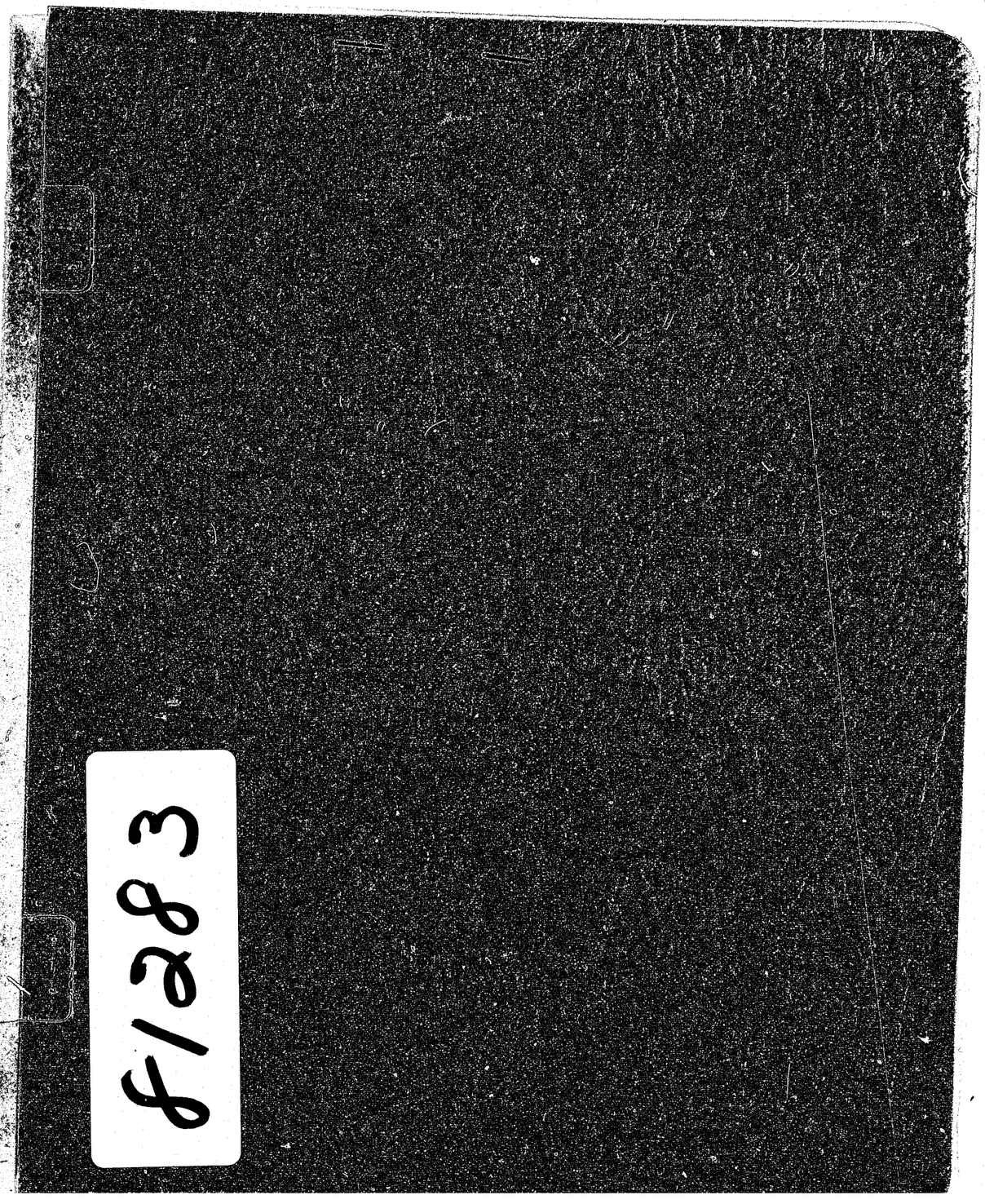
MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS-1963-A

Microfilming procedures used to create this fiche comply with the standards set forth in 41CFR 101-11.504.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the author(s) and do not represent the official position or policies of the U. S. Department of Justice.

4-8-82

National Institute of Justice
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20531



U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this ~~copyrighted~~ material has been granted by

Paul Stageberg, Iowa
Statistical Analysis Center

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the ~~copyright~~ owner.

MF-1

RECIDIVISM RESEARCH IN IOWA

by

Daryl Fischer

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS CENTER
IOWA OFFICE FOR PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING
523 E. 12th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1973, spurred by favorable evaluations of the pioneering Des Moines community corrections project, the Iowa General Assembly authorized local supervision of convicted felons and appropriated funds for a statewide expansion of the Des Moines project model. In conjunction with the funding legislation, the General Assembly mandated "a continuous program effectiveness evaluation" of adult corrections programs in the state. Beginning in 1974, a statewide data collection system for community corrections was instituted in Iowa. From 1974 through mid-1979, this system provided detailed offender background and case outcome data on all adults placed in community corrections facilities or on probation or parole, and on all adults interviewed for release prior to trial.

In late 1979, community corrections data collection was incorporated with the Offender-Based State Corrections Information System (OBSCIS), which had served state correctional institutions since mid-1978. With the addition of OBSCIS data on imprisoned offenders, and of prisoner data previously collected by the adult corrections division, researchers have had access to near complete data on adults placed in corrections programs in the state from 1974 through 1979.

Beginning in late 1974, the responsibility for evaluation of adult corrections programs was housed in the Bureau of Correctional Evaluation of the Iowa Department of Social Services. During its tenure, the Bureau published several major reports and began what was to be a long-term study of correctional recidivism in Iowa. In early 1978, with the dissolution of the Bureau, responsibility for community corrections data collection was transferred to the OBSCIS unit of the Social Services department. While official responsibility for correctional evaluation has remained with the department, much of the activity in this area has shifted to the Statistical Analysis Center, which became operational in the Iowa Office for Planning and Programming in March of 1978. Since that time, this author has continued with corrections research instituted within the Bureau of Correctional Evaluation in early 1975.[1] This paper thus summarizes a five-year study of correctional recidivism in Iowa. The findings clearly illustrate the advantages and potential

---

[1] The author wishes to express his deepest appreciation to Teresa Lacsina, who provided invaluable assistance in data processing during the course of this project.

of a statewide data collection system for supporting corrections research at the state level.

II. THE DATA BASE

The data base for the Iowa recidivism study consists of three distinct files of offender information.

The first concerns case outcomes for approximately 14,000 adults released from probation and parole caseloads and community residential facilities - either favorably or unfavorably - during the six-year period 1974-1979. Both misdemeanants and felons were represented.

The second concerns 2231 offenders released from adult correctional institutions in Iowa - by parole or expiration of sentence - between July 1, 1973 and December 31, 1976.

The third file consists of records on all adults directly sentenced for felonies in Iowa during 1974-1978, and was accessed to inter-relate empirical recidivism results and existing sentencing policies in the state.

In all three cases, detailed current offense, criminal history, and socio-demographic data were available for analysis. In the first of the three files, recidivism data consisted of directly reported instances of new criminal charges and release violations during the term of supervision. In the second, directly reported data were supplemented by a four-year follow-up based on a number of external data sources.

During the course of the study, a wide range of recidivism and related information was generated. Analyses were completed with assistance from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Numerous created variables were added to the data base with the data modification capability of SPSS. Research summarized below is currently being extended and refined by the Statistical Analysis Center.

III. METHODOLOGY

To study the recidivism phenomenon in Iowa, numerous "recidivism rates" were examined, with the choice dictated by the particular circumstances at hand. In some cases, length of follow-up was a factor, while in others total time under supervision was used. In many cases, the seriousness of new charges was considered, and on occasion seriousness-weighted rates were defined. In some situations, technical violations, absconders, and revocations of release conditions were counted. Whenever programs or conditions were compared for correctional effectiveness, efforts were made to control for "the a-priori risk of recidivism" based on offender characteristics, and recidivism results for comparable periods of supervision or street time were examined. Great pains were taken to reduce the likelihood that extraneous variables were responsible for observed differences in recidivism rates.

In the area of risk assessment, which has been a major concern in this study, literally thousands of categories of data were examined in an effort to pinpoint characteristics of high and low risk offenders. Due to the size of the data base, staff had the flexibility to rely heavily on configural techniques, and thus seldom utilized regression or unit weighting. A new method of "configural dimensions" was used to develop a device for controlling risk-related differences among the groups under study. In addition, similar systems were developed for direct application in criminal justice decision-making.

IV. BASIC OBSERVATIONS

According to the Iowa study, many common perceptions and beliefs about corrections and recidivism are in error. For example, frequent reference is made to recidivism rates of 60% or 70% for the nation's prisons, and "much lower rates" for alternatives to incarceration.[1] The obvious conclusion here is that prisons create worse criminals and are a threat to society. Proponents of community corrections argue that rehabilitation is more likely to occur in a community setting, and that reduced recidivism is an added benefit to the obvious cost savings of community alternatives. The Iowa study casts grave doubts on these arguments for the following reasons:

1) Even after four years of follow-up, no more than 32% of ex-prisoners in Iowa have been charged with a new felony in the state and no more than 10% with a new felony against persons. Furthermore, after four years, just 29% have returned to prison as parole violators or on new sentences, and just 7% for new felonies against persons. Even if new misdemeanors and technical parole violations are considered in addition to new felonies, no more than 45% of ex-prisoners can be counted as recidivists after four years of follow-up.

2) Recidivism rates for parolees from state correctional institutions in Iowa are 15-20% lower than for comparable offenders released on probation by the court. This suggests that whatever the negative effects of incarceration, they are more than counteracted by positive influences of the prison and parole system. Further study indicates that parolees and probationers have equal chances of recidivism if employed for comparable periods while under release supervision. Indeed, the lower rates for parolees are accounted for by a 30% higher rate of employment at release.

3) Among the correctional alternatives studied, pre-institutional residential corrections facilities have the highest recidivism rates in Iowa. The Iowa study found, for example, that during a 2 3/4 year follow-up period, the pioneering Fort Des Moines residential corrections program had a 50% higher

[1] These "much lower rates" are typically the result of short follow-up periods and restricted definitions of recidivism that are common to many evaluations of special community programs.

felony recidivism rate than the state prison system. While this result can be explained in large part by the sentencing practices of judges in the Des Moines area, it still points to a common error in thinking about correctional alternatives.

In line with the comments above, the Iowa study found that most of the variation in recidivism rates among correctional alternatives, treatment programs, service delivery systems, and geographical areas in Iowa is due to the characteristics of the offenders served, and not to any specific benefits of the intervention employed. Stated otherwise, the screening decisions of presentence investigators, judges, and parole and work release board members - given constraints as established under the criminal law - dictate almost completely the nature and extent of recidivism within the Iowa corrections system.

Recidivism rates, then, are directly contingent on the ability or willingness of criminal justice decision-makers to identify those offenders most prone to recidivism, and to prevent them from fulfilling this potential through direct means of incapacitation.

Contrary to statements of those advocating "desert" models of sentencing and corrections, there are efficient and equitable means available to identify those offenders most prone to recidivism. Furthermore, the incapacitation of such individuals can substantially reduce correctional recidivism rates.

While risk assessment and incapacitation appear to hold the greatest potential for reducing recidivism rates in Iowa, the current study does indicate some reductions associated with rehabilitative endeavors. The five sections below summarize the major findings in this area. The last of these sections, dealing with length of incarceration, provides a lead-in to a discussion of age as a factor in recidivism, and to a description of an empirical basis for risk assessment discovered during the course of the study.

V. INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES

The Iowa recidivism study indicates the presence of some marginal benefits associated with prison programs in the state. In particular, benefits of work release and educational programming appear to reduce recidivism rates by 15-20% during the first 18 months of release, but appear to have little or no long-term effect.

In contrast, recidivism rates are estimated to be 10-15% lower after 18 months of release for those who participated in vocational training programs in the prisons.

Currently, however, these reductions have only a slight effect on overall recidivism rates for the prison system.

VI. COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Iowa study took a close look at the delivery of services in the state's probation and parole system. As is the case with prison programs, those who receive some form of special assistance while on probation or parole in Iowa have higher recidivism rates than those who do not receive such assistance. This is explained in large part by the fact that those offered assistance have a greater potential for recidivism.

When the characteristics and recidivism potential of probationers and parolees are considered, we find that those who are offered the benefits of rehabilitative resources in the community have marginally lower rates of program failure and recidivism than comparable offenders not receiving such benefits. For example, unemployed probationers and parolees who receive job placement assistance while under supervision have approximately 10% lower recidivism rates than comparable unemployed offenders not offered this type of assistance.

It is true, however, that those individuals who successfully complete probation or parole are more frequently employed, and have better skills and educational experience, than was the case at the time of release.

VII. LEVEL OF SUPERVISION

Many studies of probation and parole systems across the country have attempted to determine whether or not level of supervision has any effect on success rates and recidivism. Not atypically, the Iowa study found that probationers and parolees who receive maximum supervision - which involves at least one weekly contact with the supervising officer - are no less prone to rearrest than are comparable offenders placed under lower supervision levels.

Likewise, those who are placed under minimum supervision - which typically involves one contact with the supervising officer each three months - are no more likely to be rearrested while under supervision than are comparable offenders supervised more closely.

In all, little association is seen between level of supervision and recidivism. However, higher rates of revocation for technical violations of release conditions occur among those more closely supervised. The data suggest that many more offenders may be placed under minimum supervison - or left unsupervised - than is currently the case. By the same token, better methods of supervision, including more frequest use of residential facilities and halfway houses for high risk probationers and parolees, is recommended.

VIII. PAROLE VERSUS DISCHARGE

The Iowa study supports the continuation of release supervision, as currently embodied in parole statutes, in that parolees show lower recidivism rates than comparable offenders released without supervision. For parolees, a 30% recidivism reduction after six months falls to 23% after a year, 22% after 18 months, 16% after two years, and 14% after 30 months. The data seem to support the

presence of early release benefits of parole supervision.

IX. LENGTH OF INCARCERATION

Of all the factors and conditions studied, the largest reductions in recidivism were seen to associate with extended terms of imprisonment. When compared with otherwise comparable offenders who serve less than two years, those who serve more than two years before release by parole or expiration of sentence have 30% lower recidivism rates after one year of release, 25% lower rates after two years, and 20% lower rates after three years. This substantial reduction in recidivism is due in large part to the reduction of criminal tendencies with increasing age - which is commonly referred to as "the burn-out effect."

Closer study indicates that many offenders convicted of more serious crimes are not released until their chances of recidivism are substantially reduced, and - in fact - not until the risk they pose upon release is much less than the norm. This finding, coupled with similar findings concerning age and recidivism, suggests that Iowa's prison population - which is currently nearing capacity - can be safely reduced by releasing many older inmates at earlier dates than normal.

X. RISK ASSESSMENT

As previously indicated, the Iowa study clearly supports the validity and utility of risk assessment and recidivism prediction in criminal justice. While no study, including the present, has offered an etiology of crime sufficient to explain the sources of recidivism and how to deal with it effectively, nonetheless, methods are available to narrow the range of the problem significantly.

Statistical methods have been developed to isolate large segments of the offender population consisting of individuals who are either much more - or much less - prone to recidivism than are offenders in general. In Iowa, we can isolate about one-sixth of convicted offenders as being at least three times as prone to recidivism as offenders in general, and about two-fifths as being less than a third as prone as all offenders.

For those familiar with the statistical measure of predictive efficiency called the Mean Cost Rating (MCR), we have obtained MCR's as high as .65 with prediction instruments developed from Iowa data, including MCR's as high as .55 on validation samples.

Currently, there are prediction devices being used in release decision-making outside of Iowa with MCR's in the .20 - .35 range. The failure of devices such as these to explain recidivism variation with greater efficiency has supported the arguments of those favoring the use of "desert" principles in setting criminal sanctions. The Iowa study indicates, on the contrary, that recidivism can be predicted with sufficient accuracy to establish the validity of incapacitation as a crime control measure and as a method of controlling and reducing recidivism rates.

More will be said about incapacitation in a section to follow. First, I would like to discuss some of the facets of empirical risk assessment in the Iowa system. I believe that the Iowa data are of sufficient generality to guide similar efforts in other states. A review of existing literature in the field supports this contention, as most studies of a similar nature show close correspondences with features of the Iowa study.

XI. BASELINE RESEARCH

In the material to follow, I summarize some of the more visible aspects of that component of the study which deals with the experiences of 6337 Iowa probationers and parolees.

The 6337 served an average (mean) of 11.7 months on probation or parole, and - as a group - were charged (at rearrest) with 2168 new crimes during the supervision period. To study the recidivism phenomenon within this group, recidivism (new charge) rates were defined as the number of new charges - of a particular type - per 100 offender-years of probation/parole supervision. Thus all rates reflect the time-based frequency of new criminal charges. The overall rate for the study population - considering all new charges - was 35.2.

To provide more detailed and usable information on recidivism, new charge rates were computed for seven categories of crime, including the following. Each category is given with a seriousness weighting attached.

NEW CHARGE CATEGORY[1]	SERIOUSNESS WEIGHTING
PART I VIOLENT	4
PART I PROPERTY	3
PART II VIOLENT	3
PART II PROPERTY	2
DRUG-RELATED	1
ALCOHOL-RELATED	1
MISCELLANEOUS	1

[1] Part I violent crimes include murder/manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, and Part I property crimes burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft. Part II violent crimes include all non-Part I crimes against persons or involving weapons. Part II property crimes include all non-Part I crimes of this type, such as bad checks, forgery, embezzlement, stolen property, vandalism, and arson. Drug-related crimes cover all possession and delivery charges, and alcohol-related crimes intoxication and driving under the influence. Miscellaneous crimes include all crimes not otherwise categorized, such as morals crimes, escape, failure to appear, disorderly conduct, and motor vehicle offenses.

The seriousness weightings are based on the general perception that violent crimes are more serious than non-violent crimes, that Part I crimes are more serious than Part II crimes, and that public order crimes (drugs, alcohol, miscellaneous) are less serious than violent and property crimes. The weightings are general enough to be computable from most offense coding structures, yet are detailed enough to add a useful dimension to recidivism research. I recommend that anyone contemplating such research consider the incorporation of seriousness-weightings of this type.[1]

To compute a weighted new charge rate that incorporates both the frequency and seriousness of new charges:

1) Compute (unweighted) new charge rates as above for each of the seven new charge categories,

2) compute the weighted sum of the seven new charge rates,

3) divide the result of 2) by 1.92, which is the average weight of all 2168 new charges in the study population.

The weighted new charge rate is determined in such a manner that it agrees with the overall unweighted rate (35.2) when the group in question is the total study population. For subgroups of the population, the two rates will normally disagree as new charges within the group are either more or less serious than normal.

Between two groups with an equal frequency of new charges - and thus equal overall unweighted rates - the group with the greater average seriousness weighting of new charges will have the greater weighted new charge rate. Accordingly, the weighted rate is sensitive to both new charge frequency and seriousness, and is the preferred rate for purposes of general risk assessment research. Since rates are computed for seven individual categories as well, information is available to assess more specialized types of risk - such as for violent or Part I crimes.

For the total 6337-member study population, the distribution of new charges, the seven individual new charge rates, composite rates for Part I and Part II crimes, and overall unweighted and weighted rates, are as follows:

[1] The Wolfgang-Sellin index is an example of a seriousness-weighting scheme that requires more detailed information than is frequently available in data systems. For information on the Wolfgang-Sellin index, see T. Sellin, M. Wolfgang, The Measurement of Delinquency, New York, Wiley, 1964.

NEW CHARGE CATEGORY	TOTAL CHARGES	NEW CHARGE RATE
PART I VIOLENT	126	2.0
PART I PROPERTY	501	8.1
ALL PART I	627	10.1
PART II VIOLENT	145	2.4
PART II PROPERTY	320	5.2
DRUG-RELATED	230	3.7
ALCOHOL-RELATED	383	6.2
MISCELLANEOUS	463	7.5
ALL PART II	1541	25.1
ALL CRIMES		
-UNWEIGHTED	2168	35.2
-WEIGHTED	2168	35.2

In the immediate sections to follow, the most important results of the risk assessment component of the project are discussed. All material is based on an analysis of new charge rates defined as above. Every effort was made to isolate offender categories within the study population with either high or low recidivism rates. In addition, several rating systems were developed that serve to scale offenders according to the risk of recidivism.

Due to the size and representative nature of the study population, I believe that the results shed substantial light on general propensities for recidivism among persons charged with or convicted of criminal offenses in the state of Iowa. Five years of research support the existence of a common "dimension of risk" that is virtually independent of processes, treatments, and decision patterns in criminal justice. In particular, I feel that the results to follow are - for the most part - free of the screening effects that accompany sentencing and parole release decisions. Accordingly, they can and will be tied directly to policy issues across the broad spectrum of criminal justice.

XII. AGE AND RECIDIVISM

Researchers in criminal justice have long pointed to higher recidivism rates among younger offenders. This is generally associated with higher arrest rates in the general population among teenagers and young adults, and with a phenomenon called "the burn-out effect" that results in a reduction in criminal activity with increasing age.

Table 1 on the next page itemizes all new charge rates within the study population for seven age categories of probationers and parolees. Table 2 on the page following provides overall arrest rates in the general population of Iowa during 1975-1977, to provide a basis for comparison with Table 1.

Table 1 indicates a significant association between age and types of new charges. Part I property crimes, and drug-related and miscellaneous offenses associate with younger offenders, while other crimes are more evenly distributed among age groups. Alcohol-related offenses,

TABLE 1

RECIDIVISM RATES FOR CONVICTED OFFENDERS IN IOWA
1974-1976
BY AGE AT PROBATION/PAROLE RELEASE

NEW CHARGE RATES	AGE AT PROBATION/PAROLE RELEASE						
	18	19	20	21-24	25-29	30-44	45+
TOTAL CASES	691	728	628	1706	982	1083	519
PART I VIOLENT	1.1	2.0	2.1	2.5	3.1	1.5	0.8
PART I PROPERTY	21.3	11.9	9.1	7.7	6.4	3.1	1.0
PART I TOTAL	22.4	13.9	11.2	10.2	9.5	4.6	1.8
PART II VIOLENT	3.0	3.6	1.5	2.8	2.0	2.1	0.8
PART II PROPERTY	7.4	5.7	5.1	5.8	4.8	4.6	2.2
PART II DRUGS	6.5	5.7	6.9	4.2	2.2	1.5	0.2
PART II ALCOHOL	5.5	7.7	6.4	4.8	5.4	7.6	8.5
PART II MISCELLANEOUS	13.4	10.4	8.0	6.8	7.6	5.6	1.8
PART II TOTAL	35.9	33.3	27.8	24.4	22.0	21.4	13.5
UNWEIGHTED RATE	58.3	47.2	39.0	34.6	31.5	26.0	15.3
WEIGHTED RATE	61.5	46.9	37.5	36.0	32.6	23.7	12.3

TABLE 2

AGE-BASED ARREST RATES[1] IN THE GENERAL POPULATION OF IOWA
1975-1977
UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS

ARREST RATES	AGE						
	0-10	11-12	13-14	15	16	17	18
PART I VIOLENT	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2
PART I PROPERTY	0.1	0.9	2.1	3.0	3.3	2.8	2.3
PART I TOTAL	0.1	0.9	2.1	3.1	3.4	3.1	2.6
PART II VIOLENT	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5
PART II PROPERTY	0.0	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8
PART II DRUGS	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.8	1.0	1.0
PART II ALCOHOL	0.0	0.0	0.2	1.0	2.4	3.3	3.1
PART II MISCELLANEOUS	0.0	0.3	0.7	1.2	1.5	1.6	2.5
PART II TOTAL	0.1	0.3	1.8	3.6	5.9	7.1	7.9
UNWEIGHTED RATE	0.2	1.2	3.9	6.6	9.3	10.2	10.5
WEIGHTED RATE	0.3	2.2	5.4	8.4	10.6	10.8	10.4

ARREST RATES	AGE					
	19	20	21-24	25-29	30-44	45+
PART I VIOLENT	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.0
PART I PROPERTY	1.6	1.2	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.1
PART I TOTAL	1.9	1.4	0.9	0.5	0.3	0.1
PART II VIOLENT	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.0
PART II PROPERTY	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.0
PART II DRUGS	0.8	0.7	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0
PART II ALCOHOL	2.8	2.6	2.0	1.6	1.3	0.6
PART II MISCELLANEOUS	2.2	2.0	1.3	0.8	0.4	0.1
PART II TOTAL	7.0	6.3	4.6	3.2	2.1	0.7
UNWEIGHTED RATE	8.8	7.7	5.5	3.7	2.4	0.8
WEIGHTED RATE	8.6	7.3	5.1	3.5	2.0	0.6

[1] ARREST RATES WERE COMPUTED AS THE NUMBER OF ARRESTS PER 100 CITIZENS DURING A YEARS TIME.

although not significantly higher among older offenders, account for a much higher percentage of new charges within these groups. In all, we see a clear association of age with the probability of recidivism. Younger offenders, and especially teenagers, have much higher recidivism rates than do older offenders.

Note the abnormally high Part I property (21.3), unweighted (58.3), and weighted (61.5) rates for 18-year-olds. While there is little variation in recidivism through the twenties age groups, rates fall sharply after 30, and are about a third of the overall rate for offenders 45 or over.

Table 2 was constructed to allow a comparison of new charge rates for convicted offenders with arrest rates within the general population of the state. The rates in the two tables are directly comparable in that they give the number of charges (Table 1) and arrests (Table 2) per 100 individuals during a year of probation/parole supervision (Table 1) or normal daily activity (Table 2). The only difference is that the former is based on individual charges (at arrest), while the latter is based on the most serious charge only. To allow a more direct comparison, the figures in Table 2 can be multiplied by 1.2 (to account for multiple charges at arrest).

As with Table 1, Table 2 shows a clear association of age with general arrest rates in the state. According to the figures, which are derived from arrest statistics reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 16, 17, and 18-year-olds are the most frequently arrested in Iowa. Sixteen year-olds are most frequently arrested for Part I crimes and 18-year-olds for Part II crimes. Overall, 17-year-olds show the highest weighted arrest rate (10.8), which reflects both the frequency and seriousness of the most serious charge at arrest.

If we use the 1.2 correction factor, we find that 16, 17 and 18-year-olds in the general population pose about the same overall threat to society (as measured by the weighted rate) as all convicted offenders of age 45 or over. Namely, we find a corrected weighted arrest rate of 12.7 for the former, and a weighted new charge rate of 12.3 for the latter. Likewise, 16, 17, and 18-year-olds in the general population pose about the same threat for Part I crime (3.6 corrected) as all convicted offenders of age 30 or over (3.7).

To ascertain the relative risk posed by citizen age groups and offender age groups, we can compare rates across the board for 18-year-olds and up.

AGE GROUP	WEIGHTED RATE	
	CITIZEN	OFFENDER
18	12.5	61.5
19	10.3	46.9
20	8.8	37.5
21-24	6.1	36.0
25-29	4.2	32.6
30-44	2.4	23.7
45+	0.7	12.3

In a way, the above information provides a general perspective on criminality in Iowa and, in particular, it allows one to gain a feeling for the extent to which convicted offenders pose a threat to the wellbeing of society.

XIII. CRIMINAL CAREERS AND RECIDIVISM

In accord with previous studies, Iowa findings highlight the utility of criminal history indicators as correlates of recidivism. Based on the evidence accumulated to date, it is safe to say that at least 80% of our ability to explain recidivism variation derives from a careful analysis of criminal history characteristics. I cannot adequately emphasize the importance of this type of analysis as a backdrop to effective risk assessment in criminal justice. Recent analyses indicate a strong quantifiable relationship between the length of an individual's prior criminal record and his or her chances of recidivism. To accurately assess this relationship, however, it is necessary to control for age.

Without age - or a strong correlate of age - prior criminal record is a good predictor, but is not of sufficient strength - in its own right - to support effective risk assessment. With age, prior record is a strong predictor that can reduce the need to resort to other "soft" factors, such as socio-economic background, sex and race.

To illustrate the combined utility of age and prior record as predictors, we've constructed (next page) a graphical representation of recidivism rates among probationers and parolees in Iowa, with age at release and total lifetime arrests (prior plus current arrests) as predictors. A table of rates and numbers of cases appears on the page following the chart.

According to the table and chart, recidivism rates increase as the number of lifetime arrests increases, i.e., offenders with longer arrest records are more likely to be rearrested than are offenders with shorter records. Furthermore, as expected, there is a strong association of recidivism rates with age for offenders with any given volume of lifetime arrests.

The surprising feature of these data is the extent of recidivism among young previously arrested offenders - especially 18 and 19-year-olds. Younger offenders with few lifetime arrests have recidivism rates that are higher - and in some cases much higher - than rates for older offenders with many more lifetime arrests.

For example, 18-year-olds with 2-3 lifetime arrests (1-2 prior arrests), and 19-year-olds with 4-5 lifetime arrests, have much higher recidivism rates than over 30 offenders with 9 or more lifetime arrests, and higher rates than 20-29 year-olds with 6-8 lifetime arrests.

Note also the proportional spacing and parallel nature of the recidivism curves among the over 20 age groups. The chart indicates a steady decrease in recidivism rates with age for any fixed lifetime arrest category, and approximately the same increases in rates with increasing lifetime arrests - although the rate of increase is (proportionately) less for older offenders.

RECIDIVISM (WEIGHTED NEW CHARGE) RATES
FOR CONVICTED OFFENDERS IN IOWA
1974-1976
BY AGE AT RELEASE AND TOTAL LIFETIME ARRESTS

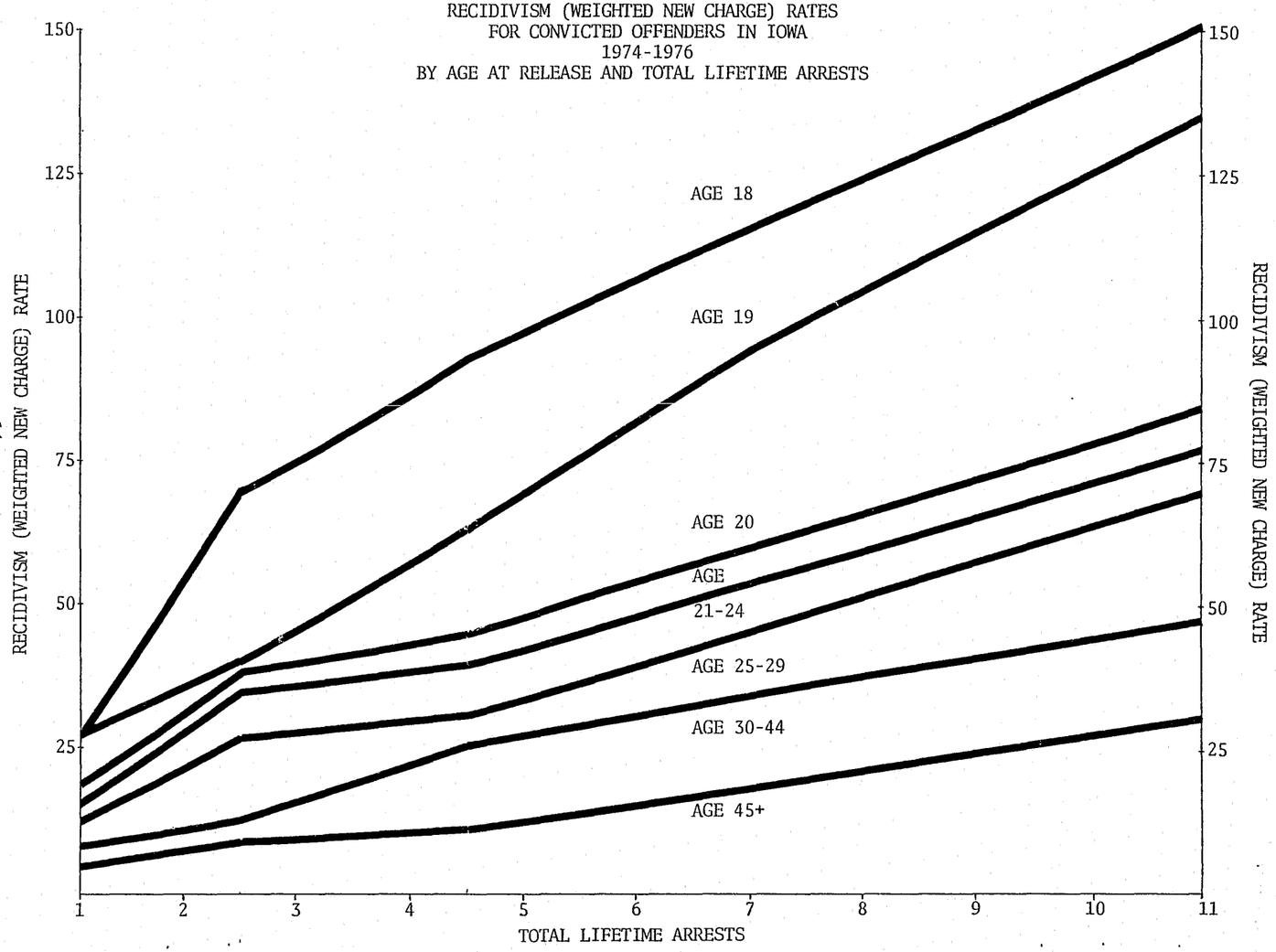


TABLE 3

WEIGHTED NEW CHARGE RATES FOR CONVICTED OFFENDERS IN IOWA
1974-1976
BY AGE AT PROBATION/PAROLE RELEASE AND TOTAL LIFETIME ARRESTS

AGE AT PROBATION/ PAROLE RELEASE	TOTAL LIFETIME ARRESTS					ALL OFFENDERS
	1	2-3	4-5	6-8	9+	
18	26.3	69.1	92.0	114.3	159.2	61.5
	(318)	(191)	(76)	(51)	(55)	(691)
19	26.0	39.4	62.2	94.3	146.8	46.9
	(359)	(187)	(85)	(38)	(59)	(728)
20	19.2	37.9	45.5	59.4	92.1	37.5
	(262)	(188)	(69)	(44)	(65)	(628)
21-24	15.6	34.3	38.4	55.1	83.4	36.0
	(607)	(486)	(270)	(176)	(167)	(1706)
25-29	12.3	26.5	30.7	45.2	77.6	32.6
	(293)	(253)	(159)	(115)	(162)	(982)
30-44	7.8	12.1	22.1	32.2	48.6	22.3
	(357)	(239)	(142)	(110)	(235)	(1083)
45+	4.4	8.3	10.3	18.0	31.5	12.8
	(198)	(121)	(51)	(41)	(108)	(519)
ALL OFFENDERS	16.2	32.6	40.7	53.4	73.0	35.2
	(2394)	(1665)	(852)	(575)	(851)	(6337)

The Iowa study provides direct evidence of predictable decreases in arrest frequency with advancing age, and thus supports the validity of "the burn-out effect."

To allow further comparison, linear equations were developed that approximate the relationships between lifetime arrests (A) and recidivism rates (R) for the seven age categories. The equations - which are quite accurate for lifetime arrests of two or more - are as follows:

AGE	PREDICTION EQUATION
18	R = 9A + 50
19	R = 11A + 20
20	R = 6A + 18
21-24	R = 6A + 13
25-29	R = 6A + 4
30-44	R = 4A + 5
45+	R = 3A - 3

$A \geq 2$

According to the equations, a typical over 45 offender would need to have at least 33 lifetime arrests to have the same expectation of recidivism as an 18-year-old with five lifetime arrests. To maintain the same - or higher - expectancy of recidivism throughout his twenties, an offender would have to record at least three arrests during this period (R=6A+18 at age 20; with A+3 arrests at age 30, R=6(A+3)= 6A+18).

To illustrate the dual roles of age and prior arrest record from another angle, consider the following simplified version of Table 3, which compares weighted new charge rates between those who did have - and those who did not have - a prior arrest record.

AGE AT RELEASE	WEIGHTED NEW CHARGE RATE NO PRIORS	PRIOR(S)
18	26.3	90.2
19	26.0	64.7
20	19.2	51.5
21-24	15.6	45.9
25-29	12.3	41.5
30-44	7.8	29.7
45+	4.4	17.4

From the data at hand, it is possible to show that 18 and 19-year-olds with prior arrests (2+ lifetime arrests) constitute 12% of the study population, yet carry 26% of the burden of recidivism. On the other extreme, over 30 offenders with no prior arrests constitute 9% of the study population, yet carry only 2% of the burden of recidivism.

The fact that a disproportionate share of recidivism-prone offenders are young repeaters suggests the importance of examining juvenile records when assessing risk. We found, for example, that among the 25% of offenders in the study population who would rate as the highest risk[1] - over 80% had a juvenile arrest record, over 65% were found guilty of some criminal offense as a juvenile, and over 50% had one or more juvenile commitments. Of the "high risks," nearly a third were first arrested before the age of 15, and nearly a half before the age of 16.

At the very least, this study raises serious questions concerning the utility of many of the current restrictions on the use of juvenile arrest and conviction data. Without this type of information, our ability to identify high risk offenders is severely muted, and consequently risk assessment becomes a most difficult process indeed.

Some concerned parties who have learned of the Iowa study have expressed a concern that many of the offenders whom we have identified as "high risk" are classified as such because they are young, and possibly because they are unemployed, or are lacking in skills or education, or are single or black. On the contrary, most of our ability to identify high risk offenders rests on analyses of prior arrest, conviction, and incarceration records. Age was considered to the extent necessary to get an accurate reading of criminal histories. Most of the young "first" offenders - whom such parties view as good candidates for community corrections - would not be rated as "high risk" according to the Iowa data.

For example, within the high risk group (25%), all have prior arrest records, over 90% have a prior conviction, and over 70% a prior incarceration. On the average, such offenders have 6.5 prior arrests, 3.8 prior convictions, and 2.3 prior incarcerations. Fifty-five percent have been on probation in the past.

---

[1] As previously indicated, a number of rating systems were developed that efficiently scale individual offenders according to the probability and seriousness of recidivism. While such systems - individually - have peculiar strengths and weaknesses, they exhibit a commonality of experience that signifies the "dimension of risk" mentioned previously. One such system, developed in 1977 and termed the Probation Risk Assessment Scoring System, ranks about 25% of the study population as HIGH RISK, and about 33% as LOW RISK. The HIGH RISK group exhibited a weighted new charge rate of 78.9, and the LOW RISK group a rate of 7.1. Remaining offenders, classified as MEDIUM RISK, constituted about 42% of the study population, and exhibited a weighted rate of 32.0.

Most likely because of their young age and serious prior records, most high risk offenders in the study population were not well situated in society. Nearly half were unemployed at the time of arrest, 78% had no H.S. diploma, two-thirds had never worked at a job requiring a degree of education, skill, or training, and 82% were unmarried. Furthermore, nearly a half had a known history of drug abuse, and nearly 60% used alcohol regularly. About 20% were known narcotics users.

The Iowa findings agree quite closely with those of the Institute for Law and Social Research (INSLAW) and the Rand Corporation.[1,2] INSLAW researcher Kristen Williams offers this profile of the typical "career criminal:"[3]

> *A young person in his late teens or early twenties who is arrested for robbery or burglary, who has compiled a long criminal history during only a few years on the street, who is unemployed, and who uses drugs.*

Based on a study first begun in 1975, Rand offers this profile of a career criminal:[3]

> *A male who begins committing crimes in his youth, as early as 14, reaches a career peak in his early 20's, and then tapers his activity until 30 when his career typically ends. He is heavily involved with drugs - both as a buyer and a user. He is not married. He has been employed occasionally, if at all. And he is motivated to commit crimes not from "economic duress" - like the less active career criminal - but because of what Rand calls his desire for "high living."*

Perhaps the best individual predictor in the Iowa data is AGE AT FIRST ARREST. The fact of an early age at first arrest is a strong indicator of a potential recidivist among all offenders under age 30. In fact, there are two simple profiles based on AGE AT RELEASE, PRIOR ARRESTS, and AGE AT FIRST ARREST that cover many of the offenders who would rate as "ULTRA-HIGH RISK" according to the Iowa data (see table on next page).

AGE 18-20/6+ LIFETIME ARRESTS/FIRST ARREST BEFORE AGE 16

AGE 21-29/9+ LIFETIME ARRESTS/FIRST ARREST BEFORE AGE 15

---

[1] Kristen M. Williams, The Scope and Prediction of Recidivism, Institute for Law and Social Research, Washington, D.C., 1978.

[2] P. Greenwood, Rand Research on Criminal Careers: Progress to Date, The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California, 1979.

[3] See LEAA Newsletter, December, 1979 - January, 1980.

TABLE 4

RECIDIVISM RATES FOR HIGHLY RECIDIVISM-PRONE OFFENDERS IN IOWA 1974-1976

NEW CHARGE RATES	AGE 18-20/6+ LIFETIME ARRESTS/ FIRST ARREST BEFORE AGE 16	AGE 21-29/9+ LIFETIME ARRESTS/ FIRST ARREST BEFORE AGE 15
TOTAL CASES	218	116
PART I VIOLENT	6.0	18.3
PART I PROPERTY	38.6	24.1
PART I TOTAL	44.6	42.4
PART II VIOLENT	10.3	6.9
PART II PROPERTY	15.1	9.2
PART II DRUGS	7.8	6.9
PART II ALCOHOL	15.1	10.3
PART II MISCELLANEOUS	22.9	25.3
PART II TOTAL	71.2	58.6
UNWEIGHTED RATE	115.8	101.0
WEIGHTED RATE	128.6	118.4

These two profiles - which are good examples of the kinds of configurations we attempt to discover in the research effort - cover offenders who would qualify as virtually "pure recidivists." Among the 6337 offenders in the study population, 218 satisfy the first profile and 116 the latter. Together, such offenders constitute about 5% of the offender population in Iowa, yet account for nearly 20% of the burden of recidivism. It would seem that such a group could easily be a prime target for incapacitation - both through more vigorous prosecution, and through more frequent and lengthier incarceration. From the data in the table, it is readily apparent that such offenders are especially prone to violent and Part I property crime, which are precisely the crimes that citizens are most concerned about.

I might note in passing that effective risk assessment depends on the ability of system personnel to obtain accurate criminal history records. It is likely that with better information - especially on juvenile arrest records - we could isolate a higher percentage of offenders as "high risk," and do so with greater overall precision. As it is, I would expect a number of high risk offenders to remain undetected due to incomplete data on early arrests. Thus, with better data, the 5% group described above might contain a significantly larger share of the offender population. To the extent that this is the case, incapacitation would hold even greater potential as a preventive measure.

Before going on to discuss incapacitation in detail, I would like to comment on one other factor that has been found to differentiate the high risk from the low risk repeater in Iowa - namely the frequency of arrests over time. We have found that many of the young (higher risk) repeaters have more frequent arrests during the span of their criminal careers than older (lower risk) repeaters. We refer here to the "intensity" rather the "length" of the arrest record.

For example, if we define "arrest frequency" as the number of arrests per year of time since the first arrest, then the young high risk repeater has an arrest frequency which - on the average - is about twice that of the older repeater. We find, in addition, that a much higher percentage of older repeaters have lengthy arrest-free periods between the last of their prior arrests and the current arrest. In fact, arrest-free years is a strong predictor of recidivism across the board for repeat offenders.

For the "high risk" repeater, a more intense arrest record, and a higher frequency of "recent" arrests, is consistent with a greater propensity to be rearrested. In fact, the data indicate that many of these individuals are simply continuing a pattern of criminal activity established very early in life, and sustained through their young adult years.

The fact that older repeaters have less intense arrest records and longer arrest-free periods is consistent with the hypothesis that offenders "burn-out" with increasing age. Thus the Iowa data provide yet further support for the validity of this effect.

XIV. INCAPACITATION

One of the most startling conclusions of the Iowa recidivism study has been the thoroughly documented finding that the risk of recidivism has little association with the severity of sentences handed down by the states' District Court judges. In other words, sentencing policy in Iowa pays little heed to the factors that distinguish high risk from low risk offenders.

> *Current imprisonment policies in Iowa abjectly fail to serve the interests of incapacitation. The common perception that sentencing judges incarcerate the most "dangerous" or recidivism-prone offenders at high rates is in error.*

We found, for example, that just 29% of "high risk" convicted felons were imprisoned by the courts during 1974-1976. The remainder were placed on some form of probation. As a result, most of the high risk offender population in Iowa has been absorbed into the state's community corrections system. I say "absorbed" since probation is by far the most frequent disposition in felony cases in Iowa, with just 21% of sentences leading to imprisonment.

On the other extreme, we found that over half (54%) of the convicted felons who were directly sentenced to state prisons during 1974-1976 would have rated as "medium" or "low" recidivism risks, and would have been - for the most part - good candidates for probation.

The Iowa findings thus establish the reality of a shaky link between felony sentencing practices and the goal of incapacitation through imprisonment. Except for non-violent first offenders (no prior arrest), and 25-40 year-old offenders with long prison records, <u>there is virtually no correlation whatsoever between the risk of recidivism and the probability of imprisonment in Iowa</u>. This lack of association seems to hold for that portion of the convicted felon population who are <u>not</u> consensus picks for either probation or imprisonment, and for lower risk violent and drug offenders who are imprisoned at high rates because of the seriousness of the crime.

We can identify the following profiles - among others - as falling largely in the "gray" areas of high risk offenders with lower imprisonment rates and lower risk offenders with higher imprisonment rates.

A. 18-19 YEAR-OLD PROPERTY OFFENDERS WITH PRIOR ARRESTS (High risk and low rate of imprisonment.)

B. 20-29 YEAR-OLD PROPERTY OFFENDERS WITH LONG ARREST RECORDS BUT NO PRIOR IMPRISONMENT (High risk and medium rate of imprisonment.)

C. VIOLENT AND DRUG OFFENDERS OVER AGE 20 WITH NO PRIOR IMPRISONMENT (Low to medium risk and higher rate of imprisonment.)

D. 18-20 YEAR-OLD VIOLENT OFFENDERS WITH NO PRIOR ARREST (Low to medium risk and higher rate of imprisonment.)

E. OFFENDERS OVER AGE 20 WITH ONE PRIOR PRISON TERM (Low to medium risk and higher rate of imprisonment.)

F. OFFENDERS OVER AGE 30 WITH TWO OR THREE PRIOR IMPRISONMENTS
(Generally medium risk and high rate of imprisonment.)

The data suggest that to further the aims of incapacitation through imprisonment, more of the offenders in categories A and B should be imprisoned, and fewer of those in categories C through F. To accomplish the latter, current restrictions on the use of probation for violent and drug offenders should be eased, and more of such offenders who have lesser prior records should be placed in community programs. Likewise, more offenders who have been in prison once previously - and more older (over 30) offenders who have been in prison 2-3 times previously - should be granted probation. Both current sentencing policies and legislatively mandated prison terms provide barriers to the incapacitative aims of imprisonment in Iowa.

> *Under current sentencing policy, and under constraints imposed by law, there is no association whatsoever between the risk of recidivism and the probability of imprisonment for violent, drug and previously imprisoned offenders.*

To fully appreciate the current potential for improving the incapacitative function of sentencing, it is necessary to understand that most of the recidivistic offenders coming through the courts are young repeat offenders. We contrast this type of offender, who typically was first arrested at an early age and has a more intense arrest record, with the older violent or repeat offender who was typically first arrested at a later age and has a less intense record or no prior record at all.

> *In reaching sentencing decisions aimed at incapacitation, the Iowa study suggests the utility of allowing equal weight to juvenile and adult records for offenders under age 30 - and giving more weight to more recent justice system involvement for those 30 and over.*

Aside from incarceration, the Iowa data show that residential facilities in the community reduce the likelihood of rearrest by 60-70% during the period of residence, and thus offer a degree of incapacitation not present with straight probation or parole. This finding provides support for the continued existence of pre-institutional community corrections facilities in the state.

Another component of the Iowa study, which was dedicated to an analysis of recent sentencing practices in Iowa, shows that such facilities are being used primarily as alternatives to straight probation and county jail placement, instead of to imprisonment, as was expected by many who are concerned with rising prison populations and deinstitutionalization.

This study indicates that the community residential programs play a vital part in protecting the community from the large number of higher risk offenders currently awarded probation. This occurs both through direct incapacitation during residence, and through an increased rate of employment upon release.

The Iowa data clearly establish that employment is a key factor in the success of probationers and parolees, and - in fact - accounts for a higher rate of success among parolees from state prisons than among comparable probationers.

> *Current study results recommend that the three main emphases of local corrections authorities should be 1) greatly reducing the number of lower risk offenders served on probation/parole caseloads, 2) concentrating on improving the employment circumstances of higher risk offenders placed on probation or parole, and 3) using residential programs for incapacitative purposes during phases of unemployment for the highest risk offenders.*

Based on the Iowa study results, it's incorrect to conclude that state prisons harbor uniformly dangerous individuals who pose a threat to society. Most are imprisoned because they've committed a more serious crime, or because they've been previously imprisoned, or because they were sentenced in a particular county or by a particular judge.

> *Analyses of sentencing statistics show that current or past violence, and a prior prison record, are the primary comcomitants of imprisonment in Iowa. Beyond general policies based on these factors, and the agreement that non-violent first offenders (no prior arrest) should receive probation, there is very little agreement as to which offenders should be imprisoned. In fact, analyses indicate that more than half of the 1586 offenders directly sentenced to state prisons in Iowa during 1974-1976 would not have received prison sentences had they been sentenced by a different judge.*

This inconsistency or disparity in sentencing suggests the need for sentencing guidelines. The fact of disparity is particularly alarming when it results in the imprisonment of lower risk offenders who could just as well be served in community-based programs. The Iowa data suggest that the prison population could be reduced by at least 20% if more lower risk offenders were placed in community programs, and by much more than 20% if term lengths were reduced for those individuals.

A citizen's group appointed in 1976 to study the state's prison population problem came to this same conclusion, but identified a group that consisted mainly of higher risk inmates, including many probation and parole violators. A well-conceived set of sentencing guidelines, based on objective, proven methods of classification, could achieve the aim of safe deinstitutionalization for many who would otherwise be imprisoned.

> *The sentencing disparity problem - which has resulted in an extensive overlap in the characteristics of prisoners and probationers - and the fact of a generally lower risk profile of prison inmates than would normally be expected, both support the imposition of much shorter prison terms than are the case under current parole policy.*[1]

[1] During the 1973-1977, offenders released from state prisons by parole or expiration of sentence served an average (median) of around 23 months before release.

It makes little sense to imprison an offender for two or three years when many comparable non-recidivistic offenders serve no time at all. The present barrier is a lack of knowledge on the operating level of the kinds of facts that are outlined in this paper.

One common misconception is that imprisonment increases the probability of recidivism due to harsh conditions in the prisons, contact with hardened criminals, and disadvantages upon return to society. As previously stated, the Iowa study provides no support whatsoever for this phenomenon, which has been termed "prisonization" by some. The examination of hundreds of comparative outcomes of probationers and parolees, with considerable care taken in the process, shows conclusively that the prison experience does not lead to an increased likelihood of arrest upon release. In fact, an imprisoned offender is less likely to be rearrested for two reasons, 1) he or she has grown older during the period of imprisonment and has moved into a less crime-prone age category (unless the term is short), and 2) he or she is more likely to have a paying job at release than at the time of conviction.

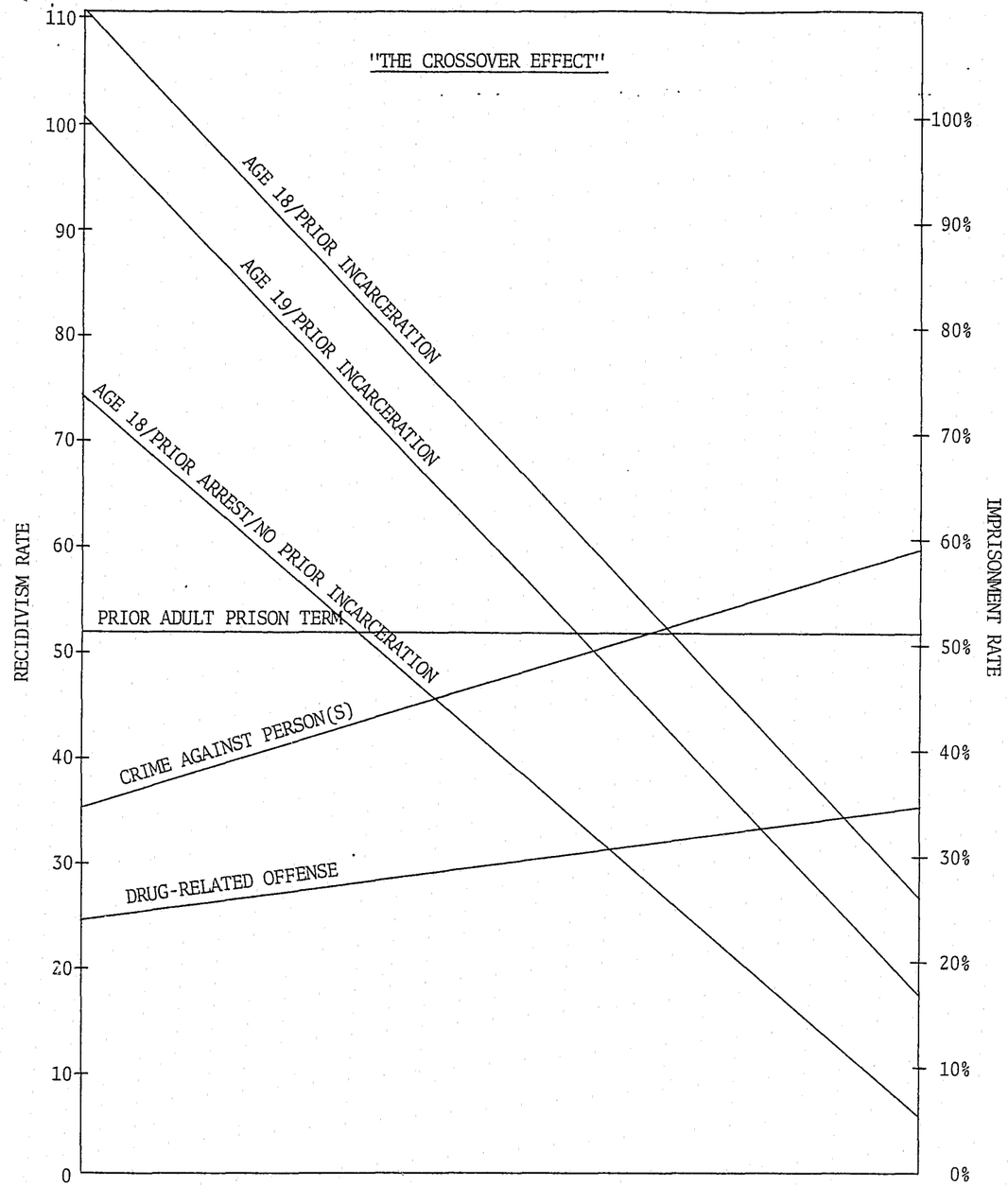
I might note again that recidivism rates decrease substantially through the 18-20 age range. Accordingly - due to the size of the group - even a year or two of incapacitation for 18 and 19 year-old repeaters could markedly reduce observed recidivism rates in the state. This is merely an observation, since such a policy, without a counterbalancing effort to deinstitutionalize lower risk offenders, would require the addition of at least 1000 beds to the current capacity of the prison system.

XV. A CONFLICT OF INTEREST

One of the most significant findings of the Iowa study is that the goal of incapacitation is frequently in direct conflict with traditional punitive and retributive functions of the criminal sanction. Indeed, many of those who would be prime targets for incapacitation - namely young repeat offenders - are convicted of less serious property crimes, and have not been previously imprisoned as adults. Consequently, few are imprisoned under current policies that emphasize the seriousness of violent crimes and the fact of a prior prison record.

It is precisely the violent offenders and the "ex-cons" who are currently imprisoned at comparatively high rates as punishment or retribution for the seriousness of past and present conduct. Statistics clearly establish that the vast majority of such individuals are not sufficiently prone to recidivism that current levels of incarceration serve the best interests of incapacitation. Thus the classic assumption that we must punish these people and confine them for protection of society is frequently in error.

The chart on the following page highlights this basic conflict of interest, which we term "the crossover effect." The chart compares the observed rate of imprisonment in Iowa during 1974-1976 with recidivism (weighted new charge) rates from the current study for six selected categories of convicted offenders. The rates reflected on the chart are as follows:



A COMPARISON OF RECIDIVISM RATES AND IMPRISONMENT RATES FOR SIX CATEGORIES OF CONVICTED OFFENDERS IN IOWA

OFFENDER CATEGORY	RECIDIVISM RATE	IMPRISONMENT RATE
AGE 18/PRIOR ARREST/NO PRIOR INCARCERATION	73.7 (229)	6.3% (371)
AGE 18/PRIOR INCARCERATION	110.2 (188)	26.1% (431)
AGE 19/PRIOR INCARCERATION	101.1 (181)	17.2% (297)
CRIME AGAINST PERSON(S)	35.7 (704)	59.3% (1102)
DRUG-RELATED OFFENSE	23.7 (1215)	34.9% (470)
PRIOR ADULT PRISON TERM	52.1 (694)	51.2% (990)

The Iowa data are clear on the following point:

> *To imprison any substantial fraction of the most recidivism-prone among convicted felons in Iowa, it would be necessary to provide the equivalent of a major new prison in the state or to significantly reduce the amount of time served by many lower risk offenders who are imprisoned for purposes of punishment or retribution. The latter could be accomplished through the combined actions of the legislature, sentencing judges, and the Iowa Board of Parole.*

Furthermore, the data indicate that current discrepancies of the type signified by the "crossover chart" are broad enough that the move to enhanced incapacitation could be accomplished without a new prison and without "depreciating the seriousness of criminal offenses." By the latter, I mean that imprisonment rates for more serious offenses could be reduced but still kept at a substantially higher level than for less serious crimes.

XVI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Based on results of the Iowa recidivism study, several recommendations for the improvement of criminal justice systems across the country appear to be in order:

1) Recognize that - for the most part - crime is a phenomenon of youth, and that the large bulk of recidivism-prone offenders in the justice system are teenagers and young adults. Don't ignore the existence of juvenile records in assessing the need for incapacitation of young adult offenders.

2) Institute career criminal prosecution programs aimed at the conviction and incapacitation of those individuals who are the most prone to recidivism. Rely on empirically derived methods of identification rather than the perceived seriousness of the offender's prior record, or historic assumptions connecting the severity of an offense and the need for protection of society. Many older offenders with serious prior records have become much less recidivistic with advancing age.

3) Rely on shock probation and preinstitutional residential facilities for a higher percentage of younger high risk offenders who are not judged to be "dangerous."[1] Consider greater use of probation and preinstitutional facilities for older "ex-cons" and offenders against persons. Ensure through screening processes that new alternatives to incarceration are not used for lower risk offenders who would normally receive straight probation.

4) Recognize that the common belief that prisoners are uniformly "dangerous" is in error and that many offenders are currently imprisoned for factors other than "dangerousness." Recognize also that most of the high risk offender population resides in the community, and that a large share of current prisoners can be safely released. The obvious exception is that those individuals who are the most prone to recidivism - and especially to violent crime - should not be released until the risk of recidivism has been reduced to safe levels. The well-documented "burn-out effect" dictates that extremely long prison terms - such as for five years or more - would not be necessary to achieve this aim in most cases.

5) Encourage the repeat of mandatory sentence provisions prohibiting probation or establishing minimum prison terms for selected classes of violent, drug, and repeat offenders. Such are not necessary to serve the interests of public protection.

6) Install systems of sentencing, parole, custody, supervision, and pre-trial release guidelines to ensure greater degrees of consistency and purpose in criminal justice decision-making. Incorporate risk assessment in such systems to the extent necessary or appropriate to further the aims of incapacitation.

XVII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECIDIVISM RESEARCH

The successes of certain features of the Iowa study recommend a general strategy for those contemplating recidivism research:

1) If at all possible, conduct research on a broad scale, with periods of follow-up of at least 18 months, and with a sample (or population) of offenders representative of all those convicted in a given state (or jurisdiction) during a fixed interval of time. Research on just parolees, or just probationers, provides no direct link to key issues in the area of sentencing and parole policy.

[1] By "dangerous" we mean prone to violent crime. Recent research indicates that violence can be predicted with reasonable accuracy.

2) Recidivism data should cover all new criminal charges, and - secondarily - violations of probation or parole serious enough to lead to revocation. Incorporate seriousness weightings of new charges into criterion variables - with greater weight given to crimes against persons and Part I crimes. Charges may also be weighted according to the maximum sentence allowed by law for the crime in question.

3) Avoid defining a single rate that "best" reflects recidivism in the study sample. Instead, generate an array of recidivism rates based on the type and seriousness of new charges, on severity of new sanctions (arrest only, conviction, imprisonment, etc.), and on the length of follow-up. This will clarify the actual mechanics of the recidivism phenomenon and will divert misplaced emphasis on "the rate."

4) When comparing recidivism rates across programs, conditions, or treatments, be sure to control for risk-related differences that can disallow direct comparisons. Devote effort at the start to the development of an efficient risk assessment system to control for risk, or incorporate an existing system into the data base. The former is generally preferable, but the latter is better for a study with tight time constraints.

5) When assessing risk, assess both general risk and the risk of violence. General risk should be based on seriousness weightings such as those given in this paper. Use a simple system that can allow an interface with other sources of information, such as the Uniform Crime Reports. UCR categories are the best in this case.

6) With a large data base (1000+ cases), use configural methods as a base for risk assessment. Use unit weighting to establish multi-factor indices as predictors. With a small data base, stepwise regression and unit weighting are about equally effective. Use the Mean Cost Rating (MCR) to measure the efficiency of the final result, and where feasible check MCR for a validation sample.

7) Based on the Iowa study results, age should be considered as a base for risk assessment. This is best accomplished by doing separate analyses on five to eight age groups. Distinguish teenagers from older offenders.

8) Spend the majority of development time on determining the role of criminal history in recidivism prediction. The most predictive power should fall in this area - in conjunction with age. Criminal history is preferable to socio-economic factors, sex and race, since the latter are given less heed in actual decision processes. Type of convicting offense is also worthy of consideration.

9) If data elements can be selected ahead of time, include age, number of prior arrests by offense type, prior convictions and incarcerations, prior probation/parole revocations, age at first arrest, arrest-free years, prior prison terms, current offense type, employment record and status at release, educational and skill levels, marital status, history of - and current - drug or alcohol abuse, and criminal justice status at the time of arrest.

10) Be sure to make recidivism results relevant to key issues in criminal justice. If possible, develop a data base to study sentencing and parole decisions. The incorporation of risk scores or ratings into a data base will allow the study of incapacitative features of decision-making.

11) Avoid giving too many technical details in writing reports for general consumption. Too much sophisticated statistical jargon will deter a large portion of your audience. Technical reports and appendices can always be written for researchers and others concerned with methodology.

12) Don't assume that policy-makers will translate your work into their language. Find out how they think and then state your results and recommendations accordingly. Cull out errors in thinking about key issues and correct them.

END