

Preliminary Report on Recidivism of Youth Committed to the Juvenile Justice Commission: 2004 Releases

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While the performance and effectiveness of a correctional facility or program can be measured in numerous ways, the bottom line for the public, for government leaders, for the correctional agency, and for most researchers, is whether individuals continue to break the law or reenter the system once released. That is, do they *recidivate*, and at what rate? This report seeks to address that question for New Jersey's Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC).

The JJC operates an array of correctional programs and facilities as a core responsibility within its broader mandate as a juvenile justice agency. These settings include secure care facilities, residential community homes, and day programs. It also contracts for additional programming, including day reporting centers providing transitional care for recently released youth. JJC programs and facilities serve both youth committed to the JJC for a term of incarceration, and youth placed by the court with the JJC while serving a period of probation supervision (i.e., "probationers"). Committed youth released from custody typically receive a period of supervision in the community through the JJC's Office of Juvenile Parole and Transitional Services.

The Research

This preliminary study involved a review and analysis of *committed* juveniles only. A total of 922 youth committed to the JJC were identified through the JJC's Juvenile Information Management System (JIMS) as being released from JJC custody during 2004.¹ These 922 committed youth were the subject of the recidivism analysis.

There are various ways to define and examine recidivism. The most common measure of recidivism utilized in state-level adult and juvenile correctional systems is whether or not incarcerated individuals reenter the state correctional system through a subsequent period of incarceration. The focus, therefore, is on involvement (and continued involvement) in the "deep end" of the justice system. The current study utilized this measure of recidivism, and was meant to answer the question: Do committed youth experience a subsequent commitment to JJC, or to the Department of Corrections (on adult charges), for a new offense? For purposes of this analysis, recidivism was defined as having a

¹ The requested list of 2004 releases excluded committed youth whose admission type was identified as technical parole violator.

new offense date within two years of release from JJC custody that resulted in a term of incarceration in JJC or in State prison.

All 922 youth were tracked after their release from JJC custody, for a period of two full years, to identify subsequent system involvement and to determine recidivism. Recidivism was then examined at five points in time, i.e., within 3, 6, 12, 18, and 24 months of youths' release from JJC custody.

In addition to measuring the rate of recidivism, average time to recidivism was also examined (i.e., the average number of days it took to recidivate). In addition, related analysis was conducted to examine how quickly after release recidivists recidivated. That is, the proportion of reincarcerated youth that reoffended at specific points in time after release, e.g., within six months.

For each of the 922 youth, a search was made of the JJC's Juvenile Information Management System *and* the State Police Criminal Case History (CCH) database, to identify the timing of delinquent/criminal activity and system response subsequent to residents' release from custody, in order to determine recidivism.

Central to the study was a comparison between recidivism results for the 2004 releases and a previous sample of youth released in 1998, the subjects of a 2002 recidivism report by the JJC.² The same methodology was used for both of the studies to foster valid comparisons. Note that the current research involved all committed youth released in 2004, while the earlier research examined a randomly selected sample representing just over 50% of all youth released from JJC custody in 1998. For purposes of comparison, results provided here for those released in 1998 and 2004 are for committed youth only.

The Results

Results of the recidivism analysis are provided below, including the rates of recidivism over time, average time to recidivism, and how quickly recidivism occurred. Comparative results for 2004 and 1998 are provided for each.

Recidivism Rates

As shown in Table 1, 338 of the 922 youth released in 2004 (36.7%) recidivated by the time they were free from custody for two full years. The rate of recidivism within one year was 25.6% (236 youth); and the rate within six months was 16.8% (155 youth). Table 1 also demonstrates that the committed youth released in 2004 had somewhat lower rates of recidivism than the committed youth released in 1998, *at each of the five points analyzed*. In comparison with

² Juvenile Justice Commission. January 2002. *Initial Report on Program & Facility Recidivism: 1998*.

the figures just noted above, 231 of the 592 youth released in 1998 (39.0%) recidivated at the two-year point. The rate of recidivism for the 1998 group within one year was 27.7% (164 youth); and the rate within six months was 17.4% (103 youth).

	3 Months	6 Months	12 Months	18 Months	24 Months
2004 (N=922)	77 8.4%	155 16.8%	236 25.6%	305 33.1%	338 36.7%
1998 (N=592)	57 9.6%	103 17.4%	164 27.7%	212 35.8%	231 39.0%

Average Time to Recidivism

On average, the committed youth released in 2004, took 258 days (close to nine months) to recidivate. The average time is only slightly longer than that of the committed youth released in 1998, 253 days.

How Quickly Did They Recidivate?

Table 2 demonstrates that, for both groups, many of those who recidivated did so relatively soon after release. Among the 338 recidivists from the 2004 group, close to one-quarter (22.8%; 77 youth) had reoffended within the first three months. Close to one-half (45.9%; 155 youth) had reoffended within the first six months. The results for the 1998 group were similar, with that group recidivating, overall, slightly more quickly. Specifically, a somewhat greater proportion of the 1998 group had reoffended within three, twelve, and eighteen months, while a somewhat lower proportion had reoffended at six months.

	3 Months	6 Months	12 Months	18 Months	24 Months
2004 (N=338)	77 22.8%	155 45.9%	236 69.8%	305 90.2%	338 100.0%
1998 (N=231)	57 24.7%	103 44.6%	164 71.0%	212 91.8%	231 100.0%

Conclusion

The study provided an opportunity to examine recent recidivism results (i.e., for JJC committed youth released during 2004) within the context of baseline figures developed on committed youth released in 1998. The present analysis focused on reincarceration in JJC or State prison for a new offense, one important measure of recidivism. The comparative results are somewhat encouraging, with each of the comparisons favoring the more recently released youth. The differences, however, are small.

At the same time, the results revealed that more than one-third of those released in 2004 had a new offense within two years resulting in reincarceration. It is worth pointing out, to provide some context for these recidivism rates, that the juvenile and criminal justice literature reports that juveniles and adults placed in state correctional programs across the country return to offending and to the correctional system at high rates, and often very quickly. In part, this is not unexpected, particularly for youth. Young offenders who have made it to the deep end of the system often arrive encumbered with numerous risk factors (and closely related needs and deficits) that are predictive of continued involvement in law breaking. The extent of identified personal, family and environmental risk factors faced by the JJC's committed youth underscores the challenges to achieving sustained success back in the community.

As the findings in this report demonstrate, many of those who recidivated did so in the early months of their release from JJC custody. This is not an isolated finding, and is common for both juvenile and adult populations released from custody in various jurisdictions. The finding points to the potential value of bolstering transitional and other reentry services for offenders (both prior to and soon after release from custody). Alongside the Commission's efforts to enhance overall rehabilitative efficacy within its programs and facilities, one of the JJC's initiatives in recent years has been to foster collaboration with provider agencies within the community to strengthen the resource options available to youth upon their release from custody. In addition, most recently, the JJC has been contracting with private providers to operate several day reporting centers to enhance both the services and structure available to youth upon traditional release. The hope and expectation is that such initiatives will continue to raise the odds that those released to their communities will be successful.