A Study of Reconviction Rates of Discharged Inmates from the Connecticut Department of Correction

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to Public Act 04- 234, *An Act Concerning Prison Overcrowding*, the Connecticut Department of Correction requested that faculty from the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Central Connecticut State University conduct a recidivism study of all inmates that were discharged from DOC facilities or supervision in 2000. This report presents the findings of this study.

The present study assessed reconviction rates by utilizing data collected electronically from the Department of Correction and the Connecticut Judicial Branch. Data were collected for the 9,501 inmates who were released from Department of Correction facilities and supervision between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2000. A list of these inmates was obtained from the Department of Correction along with their inmate numbers, SPBI numbers, demographical information, DOC needs scores, and offense and sentencing data. Court data was obtained by matching the SPBI numbers provided by the Department of Correction to court records. Of the 9,501 inmates, court records were returned for 8,221 (an 87% match) of them.

Over one-half of the inmates (64%) were discharged because it was the end of their prison sentence. Fifteen percent of the inmates were released to parole, 8% were released to transitional supervision, and 9% were released to furloughs or halfway house programs. Three percent were released from DOC facilities but were sent to other state or federal agencies (these cases were not included in this study). The average age was almost the same across the type of release (approximately 30 years old). The majority of inmates were male (90%) and were unmarried (86%). Overall, 45% of the study group was African-American, 29% were white, and 26% were Hispanic.

The overall reconviction rate was 39%, end of sentence inmates had the highest (47%) and the DOC-Community inmates the lowest (24%). Parolees had a 31% reconviction rate and transitional supervision inmates had a 35% reconviction rate. The average days to rearrest (that led to a new conviction) was 255 with inmates released to DOC-Community being out the longest (343 days) and end of sentence inmates averaging the shortest (238 days) amount of time prior to rearreest.

End of sentence inmates were most likely to be rearrested and reconvicted within the first six months of their release (Figure 2). For instance, all of the end of sentence releases, 21% were rearrested in six months or less, 16% were rearrested between 7 and 12 months, 8% between 1 and 2 years, and 1% over two years. This pattern is the same for end of sentence inmates, end of sentence paroled inmates, and end of sentence transitional supervision inmates.

The final analysis looked at the effect of split sentence probation on reconviction rates. For this analysis, only end of sentence inmates were included because they were the only group being supervised by probation officers following their release from prison (parolees and transitional supervision inmates were excluded). Over one-third of all

inmates released at the end of their sentence had to serve a term of probation (36%). For the three types of end of sentence inmates, the reconviction rates were significantly lower for split sentence probationers than nonsplit sentence probationers. Overall, the reconviction rate was 14% higher for inmates who were released from prison following the completion of their sentence who did not have a term of probation to follow (46% to 32%).

This study had three primary findings. First, the reconviction rate of inmates who were released following the completion of their prison sentence (47%) was consistent with national (47%) and Connecticut research (46%). The reconviction rates of parolees and inmates released to transitional supervision were found to be lower than the Program Review and Investigations (2001) recidivism study. Second, inmates who left prison and went on probation had a lower likelihood of being reconvicted than end of sentence inmates who left prison without supervision. Third, even though the analyses were not presented above, few factors were found that would predict which inmates would be reconvicted following their release from prison. The most significant factors were the type of release (end of sentence inmates had a higher rate of reconviction and whether the inmate had a probation term following prison).

INTRODUCTION

In response to Public Act 04- 234, *An Act Concerning Prison Overcrowding*, the Connecticut Department of Correction requested that faculty from the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Central Connecticut State University conduct a recidivism study of all inmates that were discharged from DOC facilities or supervision in 2000. This report presents the findings of this study. The report begins with a summary of prior research on recidivism of inmates and is followed by a description of the methodology used to conduct the present study. Next, the study's findings are presented and the report ends with the study's conclusions and recommendations for additional research of this topic.

INMATE RECIDIVISM RESEARCH

National

National research on recidivism rates of prisoners is somewhat dated, but provides useful information. For instance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2002)[1] studied four measures of recidivism (rearrest, reconviction, reincarceration with a new sentence, and reincarceration without a new sentence) across 15 states (Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Virginia). They found that within three years of release: 68% were rearrested for a new offense, 47% were reconvicted of a new crime, 25% were resentenced to prison for a new crime, and 52% were reincarcerated.

State

In Connecticut, there have been two inmate recidivism studies released in the past five years. First, the Connecticut General Assembly's Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee (2001) analyzed the rate of recidivism for two different cohorts of offenders (probationers and inmates) who were placed on probation or released from prison in 1997[2]. The probationer cohort group consisted of 10,402 adults who were convicted of a felony and sentenced to probation or other sanctions that did not involve incarceration. In the inmate group, rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration data were collected for 4,006 inmates who were discharged from prison after:

- serving the maximum prison term imposed by the court and upon release were no longer under the custody or supervision of a criminal justice agency (end of sentence offenders);
- serving the maximum prison term imposed by the court and upon release began a period of probation under the supervision of the Connecticut Judicial Branch (split sentenced offenders);

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[1] Langan, P.A., & Levin, D.J. (2002). Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1994. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice.
[2] Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee. (2001). Recidivism in Connecticut. Hartford, CT: Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, Connecticut General Assembly.

- serving at least 50% of the court-imposed prison term and were paroled by the Board of Parole;
- serving at least 50% of the court-imposed prison term and granted early release to a Connecticut Department of Correction community-based program (e.g., transitional supervision, halfway house, community supervision, or re-entry furlough.

Three measures of recidivism (rearrest for a new felony or misdemeanor offense, reconviction on new charges, and reincarceration) were used in this study and both groups were tracked three years following their probation sentence or prison release. The recidivism rates for the inmate group were: 69% were rearrested, 46% were reconvicted, and 22% were reincarcerated (18% received a nonprison sentence of probation, an alternative sanction, or fine).

Second, Cox, Bantley, and Roscoe (2006)[3] studied inmate recidivism as part of their evaluation of the Probation Transition Program and Technical Violation Unit (two programs implemented by the Court Support Services Division of Connecticut's Judicial Branch). They specifically looked at split sentenced felony offenders from five Connecticut cities (Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford, New London, and Waterbury).[4] They found that this group has a rearrest rate of 55%, a reconviction rate of 30%, and a reincarceration rate of 13%.

Table 1 summarizes the recidivism findings of these three studies. The reconviction rates were similar for the Program Review study (46%) and the national BJS study (47%). It was not surprising that the reconviction rate of the Cox et al., (2006) study (30%) was close to the Program Review study of felony probationers (32%). The Program Review study did assess reconviction rates by the type of prison release. It found that DOC releasees participating in community-based programs (re-entry furloughs, halfway house placement, community supervision) had the highest reconviction rates (48%), followed by inmates who were released at the end of their sentence with no supervision (45%)

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[3] Cox, S.M., Bantley, K.B., & Roscoe, T. (2006). Evaluation Of The Court Support Services Division's Probation Transition Program And Technical Violation Unit. Wethersfield, CT: Court Support Services Division, Connecticut Judicial Branch.

[4] Split sentenced offenders are sentenced to a prison term and are also required to serve a probation term following their release from prison.

Table 1. Prior Studies of Reconviction Rates

Study	Year of Sample	Sample	Reconviction Rate
Program Review	1997	Felony Probationers	32%
		Felony Inmates	46%
		End of Sentence	*45%*
		Parole	*42%*
		Trans. Supervision	*41%*
		DOC Release	*48%*
Cox, Bantley, and Roscoe	2004	Split Sentenced Probationers	30%
Bureau of Justice Statistics	1994	Inmates	47%

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

The present study assessed reconviction rates by utilizing data collected electronically from the Department of Correction and the Connecticut Judicial Branch. Data were collected for the 9,501 inmates who were released from Department of Correction facilities and supervision between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2000. This particular year was selected because it allowed for a five year time frame to collected follow-up information.

A list of these inmates was obtained from the Department of Correction along with their inmate numbers, SPBI numbers (used by Connecticut State Police to record arrest information), demographical information (age, sex, race/ethnicity, marital status, number of dependents, DOC needs scores (mental health, alcohol/drug use, and sex offender), offense data, and sentencing data. Court data was obtained by matching the SPBI numbers provided by the Department of Correction to court records. Of the 9,501 inmates, court records were returned for 8,221 (an 87% match rate) of them. While this match rate is not perfect, it is acceptable for the purposes of this study.[5]

Description of Sample

A total of 8,821 inmates were included in this study. Table 2 provides a summary of these inmates. Almost one-half of the inmates (49%) were discharged because it was the end of their prison sentence. Fifteen percent of the inmates were also discharged for end of sentence, however, 6% were discharged after completing parole and 9% were discharged after completing transitional supervision. Fifteen percent of the inmates were released to parole, 8% were released to transitional supervision, and 9% were released to furloughs or halfway house programs. Three percent were released from DOC facilities but were sent to other state or federal agencies (these cases were not included in this study).

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[5] The 13% missing court records was commonly attributed to data entry errors across the three agencies providing data (Department of Correction, the Division of Public Safety, and the Judicial Branch).

The average age was almost the same across the type of release (approximately 30 years old). The majority of inmates were male (90%) and were unmarried (86%). Overall, 45% of the study group was African-American, 29% were white, and 26% were Hispanic.

Table 2. Demographic Information Across Study Groups

	Number	Age	Percent Male	Percent Unmarried	Dependents	Percent African-American
End of Sentence	3996 *(49%)*	31	91%	86%	1.4	43%
EOS – Parole	514 *(6%)*	29	88%	84%	1.4	47%
EOS – TS	734 *(9%)*	30	82%	85%	1.3	40%
Parole	1233 *(15%)*	29	92%	84%	1.5	52%
TS	643 *(8%)*	29	85%	87%	1.3	45%
DOC - Community	768 *(9%)*	30	87%	88%	1.4	50%
Other Discharge	115 *(1%)*					
Other Non-release	218 *(3%)*					
Total	8221	30	89%	86%	1.4	45%

The majority of inmates served two years or less prior to their release from a DOC facility (Table 2). Specifically, 39% served one year or less and 32% served between one and two years. Less than 1% of the released inmates had served over ten years in prison prior to their release.

Table 3. Time Served Prior to Release

	Number	Percentage
One year or less	3206	39%
One to Two years	2593	32%
Three to Five years	2032	25%
Six to Ten years	351	4%
Over Ten years	39	.5%
Total	8221	100%

Table 4 presents the sentencing and offense data across the various reasons inmates were released from DOC facilities. End of sentence parolees and inmates released to parole had served the most time prior to release. End of sentence parolees had served an average of 44 months prior to release and inmates released to parole had served and average of 32 months. These lengths of prison stay far exceed the other release types. For instance, end of sentence inmates had served the next highest time of 22 months, with the lowest being transitional supervision inmates (10 months). The large time difference between parole and transitional supervision was not unexpected given the nature of each type of post-incarceration supervision.[6]

Furthermore, the average inmate served 68% of his/her sentence prior to their release. End of sentence transitional supervision inmates had the highest average of time served (88%) while DOC-Community had the lowest (46%).

Table 4. Offense and Sentencing Data Across Study Groups

	Sentence Length (Months)	Time Served (Months)	Offense Seriousness	Violent Instant Offense
End of Sentence	28	22	5	22%
EOS – Parole	54	44	6	21%
EOS – TS	17	15	5	8%
Parole	57	32	6	11%
TS	20	10	5	7%
DOC - Community	41	19	5	12%
Total	34	23	5	17%

The Department of Correction need scores were fairly similar across study groups (Table 5)(1 is the lowest possible need score for all three needs scores). That is, a small portion of released inmates had mental health problems (highest for the end of sentence group), alcohol and drug problems were more prevalent for inmates in all of the study groups (highest for parole and DOC-Community), and very few were sex offenders (no sex offenders were placed in to transitional supervision or DOC-Community supervision programs).

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[6] Inmates with prison sentences under two years are eligible for transitional supervision while inmates with prison sentences over two years are eligible for parole.

Table 5. DOC Needs Scores Across Study Groups*

	Mental Health	Alcohol/Drug	Sex Offender
End of Sentence	1.56	2.75	1.29
EOS – Parole	1.41	2.80	1.05
EOS – TS	1.33	2.60	1.00
Parole	1.38	2.94	1.07
TS	1.35	2.68	1.00
DOC - Community	1.44	2.94	1.00
Total	1.47	2.78	1.16

*The higher the need score the most serious the need

Figure 1 presents the offense types by the reason for release. The most common offense type across the study groups were drug offenses (53% of parolees and 23% of end of sentence inmates were drug offenders). Weapon offenses, motor vehicle offenses, and sex offenses were the least common offense types.

Figure 1. Offense Type by Release Type
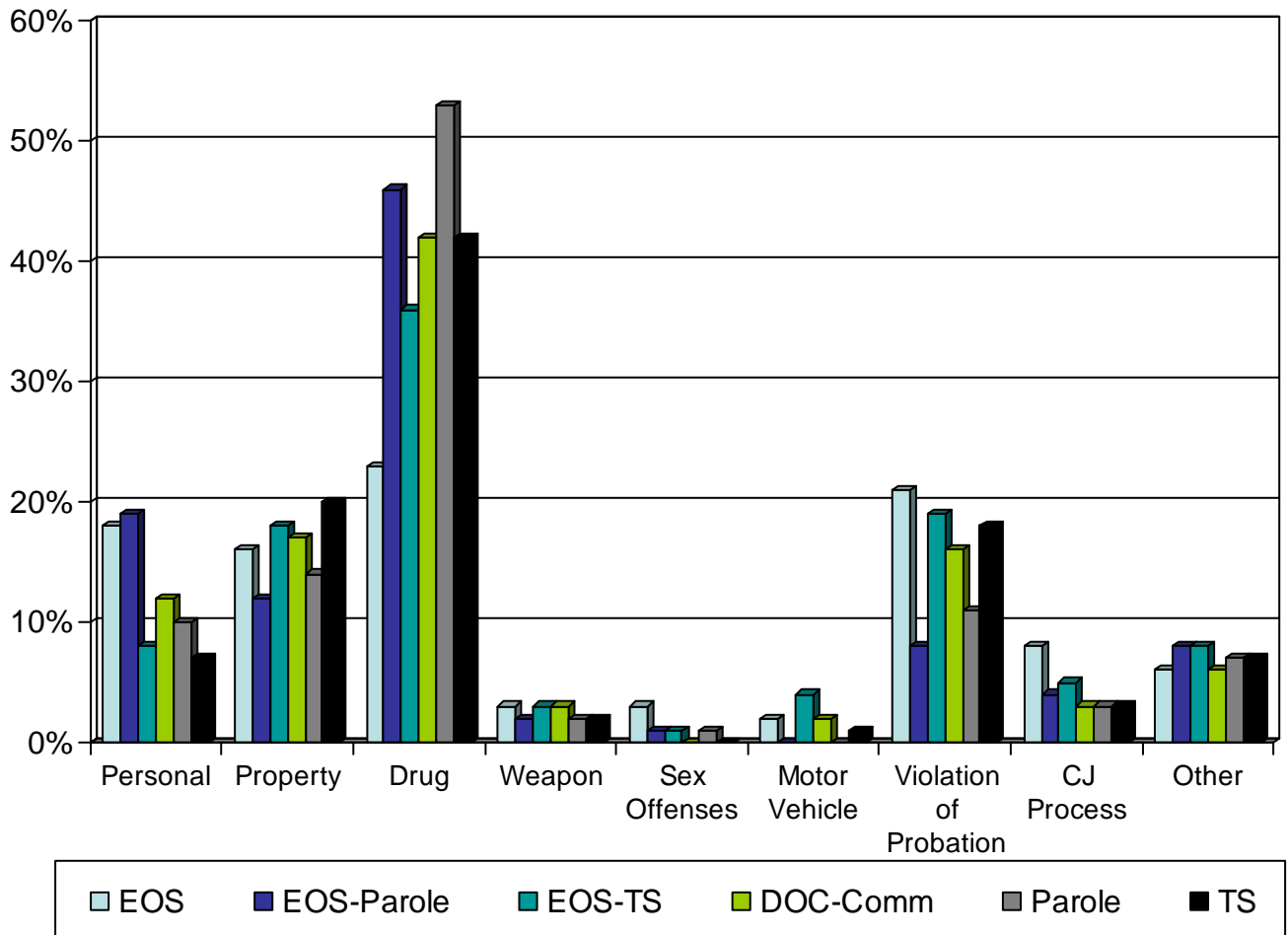
Reconviction Rates

For the purpose of this study, reconviction rates were used at the measure of recidivism. Reconviction rates were selected because they were believed to be the most accurate information available. While arrest data is commonly used as a measure of recidivism, it may not always be accurate. For example, if a person is arrested and the charge receives a *nolle*, the record of this arrest will be erased after one year.

Table 5 presents the reconviction rates by release type. The overall reconviction rate was 39%, end of sentence inmates had the highest (47%) and the DOC-Community inmates had the lowest (24%). Parolees had a 31% reconviction rate and transitional supervision inmates had a 35% reconviction rate. The average days to rearrest (that led to a new conviction) was 255 with inmates released to DOC-Community being out the longest (343 days) and end of sentence inmates averaging the shortest (238 days) amount of time prior to rearreest.

Table 5. Reconviction Rates Across Study Groups

	Reconviction Rate	Days to Rearrest
End of Sentence	47%	238
EOS – Parole	27%	242
EOS – TS	37%	255
Parole	31%	293
TS	35%	273
DOC - Community	24%	343
Total	39%	255

End of sentence inmates were most likely to be rearrested and reconvicted within the first six months of their release (Figure 2). For instance, all of the end of sentence releases, 21% were rearrested in six months or less, 16% were rearrested between 7 and 12 months, 8% between 1 and 2 years, and 1% over two years. This pattern is the same for end of sentence inmates, end of sentence paroled inmates, and end of sentence transitional supervision inmates.

The pattern is different for inmates on parole or transitional supervision at the time of their rearrest. A slightly higher percentage of parolees (12% to 11%) are rearrested in the 7 to 12 month range than the 1 to 6 month range. Whereas, 13% of transitional supervision inmates are rearrested at the 1 to 6 month interval and the 7 to 12 month period.

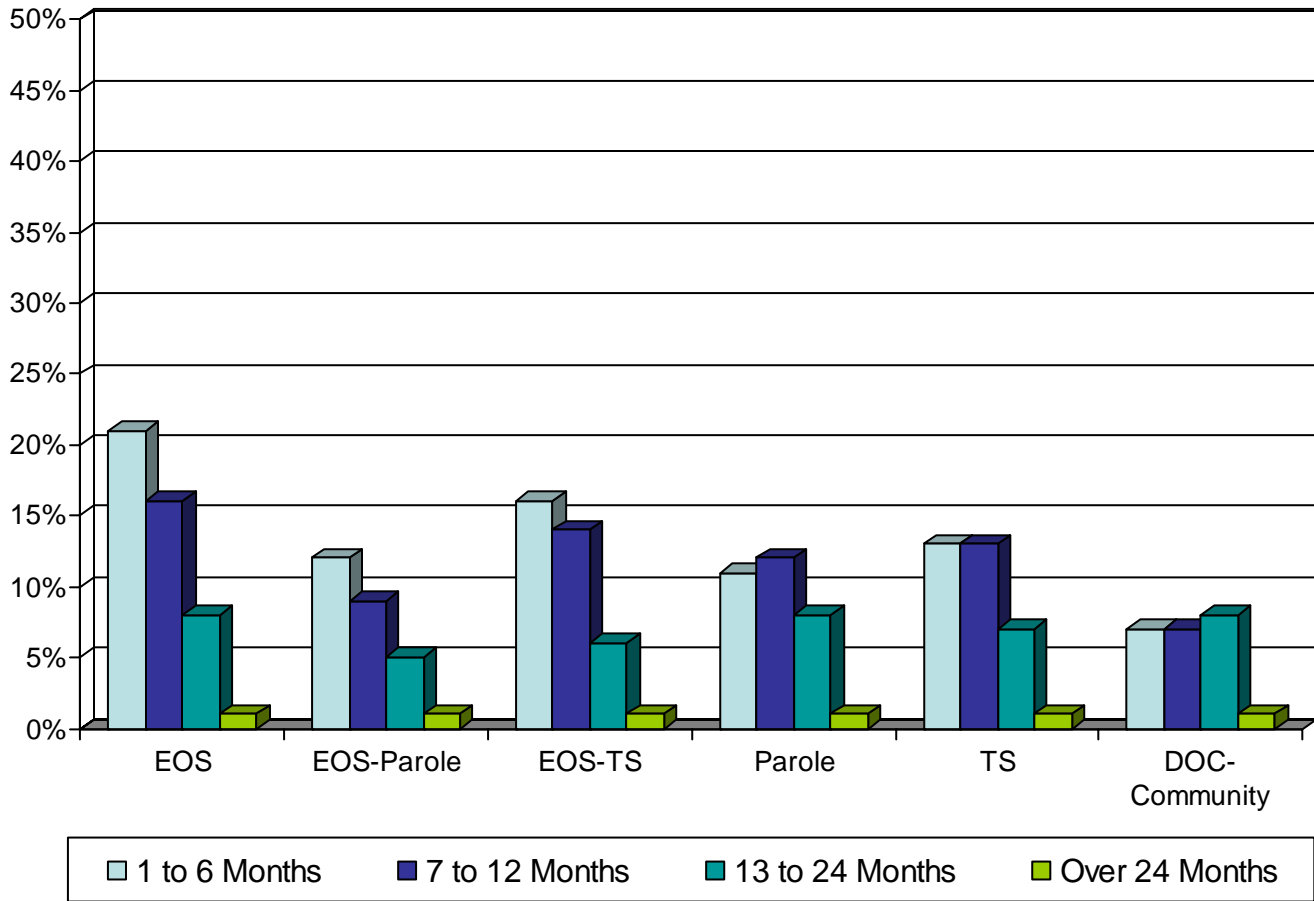Figure 2. Time to Rearrest by Type of Release

Figure 3 shows the reconviction rates by offense types. Property offenders and those offenders incarcerated for criminal justice process offenses have the highest reconviction rates (45%).[7] These were followed by violation of probation (42%), weapon offenses (41%), personal offenses (38%), and drug offenses (36%). The offense types with the lowest reconviction rates were motor vehicle offenses (31%) and sex offenses (22%).

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[7] Criminal justice process offenses consist of charges such as failure to appear for court, contempt of court, criminal impersonation, tampering with evidence, interfering with a police officer.

Figure 3. Reconviction Rates by Offense Types
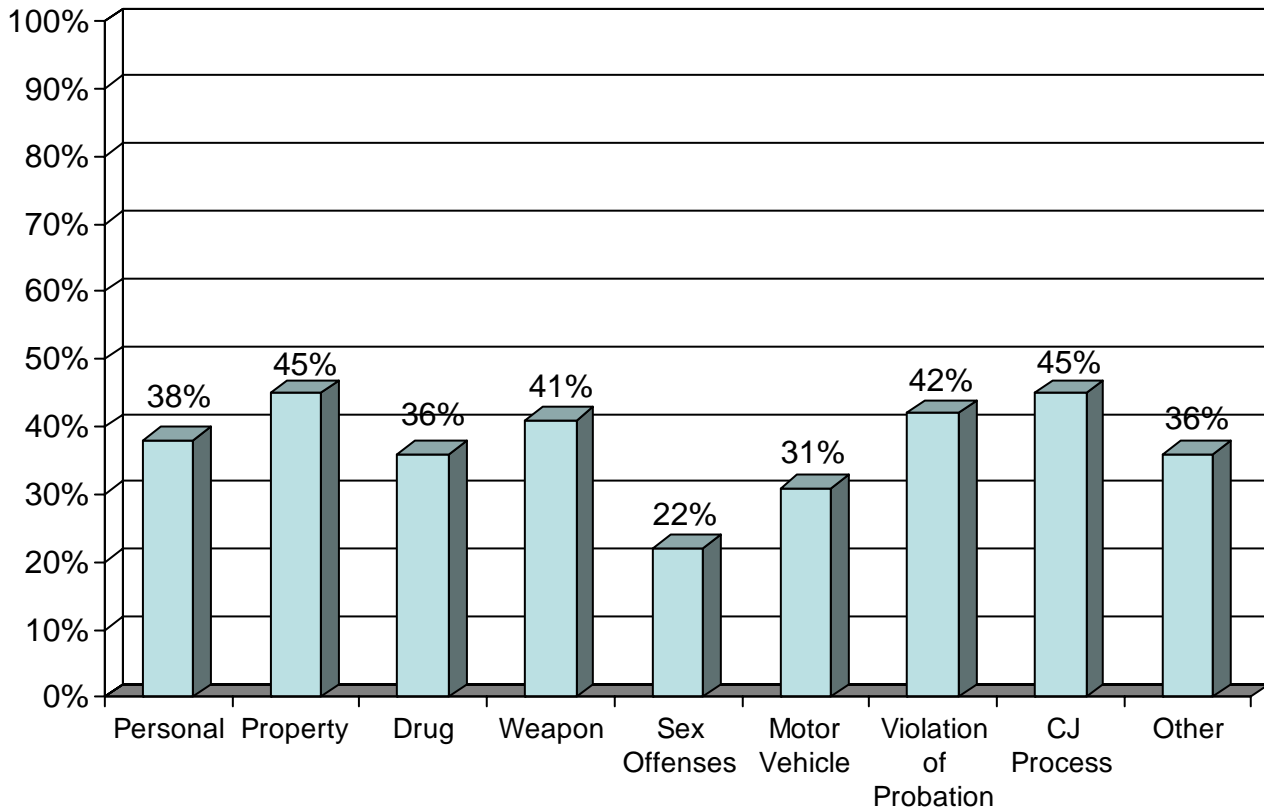
The final analysis looked at the effect of split sentence probation on reconviction rates (Table 6). For this analysis, only end of sentence inmates were included because they were the only group being supervised by probation officers following their release from prison (parolees and transitional supervision inmates were excluded). Over one-third of all inmates released at the end of their sentence had to serve a term of probation (36%).

For the three types of end of sentence inmates, the reconviction rates were significantly lower for split sentence probationers than nonsplit sentence probationers. Overall, the reconviction rate was 14% higher for inmates who were released from prison following the completion of their sentence who did not have a term of probation to follow (46% to 32%).

Table 6. Reconviction Rates for Split Sentenced Probationers Across Study Groups

	Percentage	Non Split Sentenced Probationers		Split Sentenced Probationers	
		Reconviction Rate	Days to Rearrest	Reconviction Rate	Days to Rearrest
End of Sentence	34%	52%	236	37%	242
EOS – Parole	41%	32%	249	21%	226
EOS – TS	43%	43%	257	29%	251
Total	36%	46%	248	32%	247

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This study had three primary findings. First, the reconviction rate of inmates who were released following the completion of their prison sentence (47%) was consistent with national (47%) and Connecticut research (46%). The reconviction rates of parolees and inmates released to transitional supervision were found to be lower than the Program Review and Investigations (2001) recidivism study. Second, inmates who left prison and went on probation had a lower likelihood of being reconvicted than end of sentence inmates who left prison without supervision. Third, even though the analyses were not presented above, few factors were found that would predict which inmates would be reconvicted following their release from prison. The most significant factors were the type of release (end of sentence inmates had a higher rate of reconviction and whether the inmate had a probation term following prison).

It is suggested that the next steps in studying inmate recidivism include calculating reincarceration rates. While reconviction rates were valuable in assessing inmate behavior following their release from prison, incarceration rates would allow for determining the effect of this behavior on the prison population. Additionally, this study was unable to identify significant factors that could explain why inmates were being reconvicted. This was not unexpected given that the DOC need scores were given as the inmate entered DOC and not at the time of discharge. In determining why some inmates succeed after their release from prison and why some inmates do not, some type of assessment data would need to be collected as inmates are being discharged.