

An Analysis of Recidivism Rates
Among Residents Released From
Massachusetts Correctional Institutions
During the Years 1978 and 1979

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an analysis of recidivism rates for individuals released from Massachusetts correctional institutions in the years 1978 and 1979. The purpose of the study is to provide an overview of the recidivism data and to make comparisons between the current findings and trends discerned in prior recidivism research. The data show that a recent historical trend of an overall reduction in recidivism rates since the year 1971 remained consistent for the 1978 cohort but was reversed in the 1979 cohort. The 1979 data represent the first statistically significant increase in recidivism rates in the nine year period. Consistent with past studies, the data show a positive relationship between furlough participation and lower rates of recidivism, and a positive relationship between prerelease participation and rates of recidivism. This was true for both the 1978 and the 1979 populations. The data also show an association of lower recidivism rates for releases from lower security institutions and higher recidivism rates for releases from higher security institutions. The finding fits into a previously discerned pattern and is consistent in both cohorts.

A section of the report explores a variety of possible explanations for the significant increase in the recidivism rate for the 1979 releases. However, the data revealed that none of these explanations are correct. It is suggested, therefore, that there is a need for future research on this interesting and important policy question.

A final section of the study focuses on the identification of specific variables found to distinguish between individuals who recidivate and those who do not. The findings generally fit into prior studies which have isolated variables such as marital status, education, employment history, age, type of offense and criminal career pattern as the principle predictors of recidivism. Additionally, furlough participation and successful completion of prerelease placements, as in the past, were the strongest predictors of non-recidivism.

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An Analysis of Recidivism Rates Among Residents Released From
Massachusetts Correctional Institutions During the Years 1978 and 1979

The Massachusetts Department of Correction's Research Division routinely collects and publishes on an annual basis data on rates of recidivism. In these reports a series of descriptive variables on all individuals released from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions is correlated with rates of recidivism. Comparisons between current findings and trends discerned in prior studies are made. Additionally, comparisons between specific correctional institutions of varying security levels and comparisons between varying modes of correctional programming are also made. The state correctional institutions include maximum, medium and minimum security facilities as well as state run prerelease centers and sub-contracted privately operated halfway houses. Data currently available and included in this report are for the population of releases in the years 1978 and 1979.

Traditionally recidivism studies are published as yearly release cohorts. However, because a striking and significant increase in the rate of recidivism occurred between 1978 and 1979, there was felt to be a value in including both cohorts in a single report.

Thus, the purpose of the present report is to provide an overview of recidivism data derived from an analysis of prison releases in the years 1978 and 1979 as well as to explore possible explanations for the rise in recidivism detected in the 1979 release cohort.

Overview of Prior Recidivism Data

Annual statistical monitoring of recidivism data since the year 1971 has led to the detection of a number of significant trends occurring within the Massachusetts correctional system. Dominant among these trends was the occurrence of a systematic reduction in the recidivism rates from 1971 through to 1977. For example, in the year 1971 the recidivism rate for the combined population of state prison releases was 25%; in 1973 it had dropped to 19%; and in 1976 it had dropped to 16%. By 1977, the recidivism rate was 15%.

A second major trend concerned the home furlough program in the Massachusetts correctional system, a program begun and expanded subsequent to the year 1971. Recidivism studies demonstrated that inmate participation in the furlough program may be an important variable in accounting for the systematic reduction in recidivism rates occurring in Massachusetts. The data revealed that those individuals who had experienced a furlough prior to release from prison had significantly lower rates of recidivism than did individuals who had not experienced a furlough prior to release. When selection factors were controlled, the relationship remained positive. This trend continued in a consistent pattern for the five successive years for which data were available.

Recidivism studies have also revealed that participation in prerelease programs prior to community release leads to reduced rates of recidivism. Again, when selection factors were controlled the relationship remained constant.

A final documented trend that has emerged from the recidivism studies focuses on the process of graduated movement among institutions in descending level of security and size. Analyses revealed that individuals released from prison directly from medium or minimum security institutions (including prerelease centers

and halfway houses) had significantly lower rates of recidivism than do individuals released directly from a maximum security institution.

When follow-up periods were extended from one to five years, the above findings with respect to furloughs, prerelease centers, and security level of releasing institution remained constant.¹

The major findings of the research were collectively interpreted as tentative evidence of a positive effect of the reintegrative community based correctional programming. That is, correctional programs operating in the Massachusetts system which are geared to maintain, to establish, or to reestablish general societal links such as family, economic, political, and social roles may be associated with a subsequent reduction in recidivism. Also associated with the reduction in recidivism is the graduated societal reintroduction of the offender. This is accomplished through a series of movements among institutions in descending levels of security and size along with the awarding of increased increments of community contacts through participation in furloughs, education release, and work release programs.

The present report is part of a continuing effort at monitoring the development of the above mentioned trends. It represents the most recent recidivism data on the Massachusetts correctional system.

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For data on the five year studies see the following two reports: LeClair, Daniel P., "Rates of Recidivism: A Five Year Follow-Up", Massachusetts Department of Correction, Report No. 232, October, 1981; and LeClair, Daniel P., "Varying Time Criteria in Recidivism Follow-Up Studies: A Test of the Cross-Over Effects Phenomenon", Massachusetts Department of Correction Report No. 249, February, 1983.

Method

Definition of Recidivism: A recidivist was defined as any subject who was returned to a state or federal correctional institution, to a county house of correction, or to a jail for a period of 30 days or more during the period of follow-up.

Follow-Up Period: The follow-up period was one year from the date of each subject's release to the community.

Variables Collected: For the analysis that follows in this report, four categories of variables were collected: (1) current offense commitment variables; (2) personal background characteristics variables; (3) criminal history variables; and (4) recidivism variables. Data was collected from the files of the Department of Correction, the Board of Parole, and the Board of Probation.²

Base Expectancy Rates: At several important junctures in the analysis, it is necessary to conduct a test for possible differences in the recidivism risk potentials of two populations. Such a test is important when comparing the 1978 cohort with the 1979 cohort, as well as when comparing sub-populations within these cohorts. Base Expectancy tables are used in the study for this purpose. The table chosen was developed and validated on a population of releases from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions in the year 1975.³ From the table, Expected Rates of Recidivism are derived and the chi square test is used to determine whether any differences found between populations are statistically significant. Thus, a base line for such comparisons is provided.

²For the specific breakdown of the variables collected and their corresponding recidivism rates see the following Massachusetts Department of Correction publications: Williams, Lawrence T., Statistical Tables Describing the Background Characteristics and Recidivism Rates of Releases from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions for Releases in 1978 and 1979, Publication Numbers 210 and 235.

³For a copy of the specific Base Expectancy Table, a description of the method of construction, and listing of the variables utilized, see: Metzler and Wittenberg (December, 1978), "The Development of Validated Base Expectancy Tables", Massachusetts Department of Correction Publication Number 160.

Findings

The report contains four sections of findings. The first section contains the general overview of the recidivism analysis of the current data- the 1978 and the 1979 releases. The second section provides an analysis of the relationship of past recidivism research and the findings of the current data. The third section contains an exploration of the possible reasons for the recent increase in the recidivism rate in 1979. The final section contains an overview of specific variables in the current data found to be predictive of recidivism, and compares those variables to prior recidivism research.

A. General Overview:

In the year 1978 there were 1,118 individuals released from state correctional institutions. Of the 1,118 individuals, 936 were not returned to custody within one year of release. The remaining 182 were reincarcerated for at least 30 days within one year of their release. Thus, the overall recidivism rate with a one year follow-up period was 16%. This rate of 16% is relatively low and fits into a consistent pattern of reduced recidivism rates over the past eight years. Table 1 summarizes this trend.

In the year 1979 there were 1,053 individuals released from correctional institutions. In terms of a one year follow up, 277 of those individuals were reincarcerated for at least 30 days. Thus the overall recidivism rate was 26%. This rate is significantly higher than the rate in recent years. It compares with an average rate of 16% over the past eight years for which recidivism rates have been calculated. Table 1 provides a summary of the recidivism rates for releases in the past nine years. As evident from the table, the recidivism rate for the 1979 releases is the highest rate in the nine year period.

Table 1

Comparative Rates of Recidivism For Releases From
State Prisons During the Years 1971 Through 1979

| Year of Release | Number of Releases | Recidivism Rate |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1971 | 1107 | 25% |
| 1972 | 1150 | 22% |
| 1973 | 966 | 19% |
| 1974 | 911 | 19% |
| 1975 | 806 | 20% |
| 1976 | 925 | 16% |
| 1977 | 1138 | 15% |
| 1978 | 1118 | 16% |
| 1979 | 1053 | 26% |

Consistent with prior recidivism research findings, analysis revealed that the recidivism rates varied considerably among individual releasing institutions. For example, in the year 1978 recidivism rates for individual institutions ranged from a low of 6% (Forestry Camps) to a high of 27% (MCI-Concord). Similarly, rates for releases in the year 1979 ranged from a low of 0% (Bay State) to a high of 43% (MCI-Concord). These figures are summarized below in Table II.

Table II
Recidivism Rate by Releasing Institution

| Institution | 1978 Recidivism | | | 1979 Recidivism | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-------|-----|-----------------|-------|-----|
| | N | (%) | RR | N | (%) | RR |
| MCI-Concord | 199 | (18) | 27% | 158 | (15) | 43% |
| MCI-Norfolk | 121 | (11) | 23% | 124 | (12) | 31% |
| Southeastern Correctional Center | 39 | (3) | 23% | 46 | (4) | 33% |
| MCI-Walpole | 136 | (12) | 21% | 134 | (13) | 31% |
| Northeastern Correctional Center | 53 | (5) | 15% | 61 | (6) | 20% |
| MCI-Framingham | 114 | (10) | 14% | 118 | (11) | 33% |
| Bay State Correctional Center | - | - | - | 2 | (0) | 0% |
| Prerelease | 408 | (37) | 9% | 365 | (35) | 16% |
| Forestry | 35 | (3) | 6% | 42 | (4) | 12% |
| TOTAL RELEASES | 1118* | (100) | 16% | 1053** | (100) | 26% |

* For this table the total sum for each of the institutions will equal 1,105 rather than 1,118 as reflected in the total column. The total column includes 6 individuals released from the RDC (Reception Diagnostic Center) and 7 individuals from Bridgewater.

** For this table the total sum for each of the institutions will equal 1050 rather than 1053 as reflected in the total column. The total column includes 3 individuals released from the RDC (Reception Diagnostic Center).

In general, recidivism rates tend to be related to the security rating of the releasing institution. That is, higher recidivism rates occur for individuals released directly from maximum and medium security institutions and lower recidivism rates occur for individuals released from minimum security institutions and pre-release centers. These figures are summarized below in Table III.

Table III
Security Level of Releasing Institution by Recidivism Rate

| Security Level | 1978 Recidivism | | | 1979 Recidivism | | |
|------------------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|
| | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
| Maximum Security | 142 | (13) | 20% | 137 | (13) | 31% |
| Medium Security | 480 | (43) | 22% | 449 | (43) | 36% |
| Minimum Security | 88 | (8) | 11% | 105 | (10) | 16% |
| Prerelease | 408 | (36) | 9% | 362 | (34) | 16% |
| TOTAL | 1118 | (100) | 16% | 1053 | (100) | 26% |

In the Massachusetts criminal justice system, the courts make direct commitments solely to three institutions. Women are committed to MCI-Framingham, and men are committed to either MCI-Concord or MCI-Walpole. In the case of men sentenced to MCI-Concord, there is no minimum sentence and the maximum sentence is set by the judge. The Parole Board determines the parole eligibility date according to the maximum sentence and the prior incarceration record of the inmate.

In the case of men sentenced to MCI-Walpole, the judge must fix both a minimum and a maximum term (except for life sentences and sentences for habitual offenders). The minimum must not be for less than two and a half years, the

maximum not more than that established by statute.

Inmates are not committed directly by the courts to MCI-Norfolk, Southeastern Correctional Center, Northeastern Correctional Center, Forestry Camps, or prerelease centers. Instead, they are received on transfer from the higher security commitment institutions after having been carefully screened as eligible and suitable for a lower security status.

The releasee samples were analyzed in terms of differential recidivism rates according to institution of original commitment. For the 1978 cohort, 125 women had been originally committed to MCI-Framingham. They had a recidivism rate of 14%. A total of 541 men had been originally committed to MCI-Concord and had a recidivism rate of 19%. A total of 392 men had been originally committed to MCI-Walpole and had a recidivism rate of 15%. Additionally, a total of 60 individuals had originally been committed outside the state jurisdiction from county houses of correction and had been transferred into the state system. These individuals had a combined recidivism rate of 3%. The relatively high recidivism rate for the MCI-Concord commitments is consistent with past research.

A summary of these statistics is provided in Table IV below:

Table IV

Recidivism Rate by Committing Institution, 1978 Cohort

| Institution | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
|-----------------------------|--------|---------|-----------------|
| MCI-Framingham | 125 | (11) | 14% |
| MCI-Concord | 541 | (48) | 19% |
| MCI-Walpole | 392 | (35) | 15% |
| County Houses of Correction | 60 | (5) | 3% |
| TOTAL | 1118 | (100) | 16% |

The data for the 1979 cohort, summarized below in Table V, follows a similar pattern though rates for the individual commitment institutions are all higher than the 1978 cohort.

Table V
Recidivism Rate by Committing Institution, 1979 Cohort

| Institution | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
|----------------|--------|---------|-----------------|
| MCI-Framingham | 121 | (11) | 31% |
| MCI-Concord | 516 | (49) | 31% |
| MCI-Walpole | 416 | (40) | 19% |
| TOTAL | 1053 | (100) | 26% |

Noteworthy when comparing the 1978 and 1979 releasee cohorts is the fact that the increase in the recidivism rate in 1979 was significant only for the Concord and Framingham commitments. In contrast, the recidivism rate for Walpole commitments increased at a smaller proportion and the difference was not statistically significant.

Table VI

Comparative Recidivism Rates by Commitment
Institution, 1978 and 1979 Cohorts

| Commitment Institution | Recidivism Rate, 1978 | Recidivism Rate, 1979 | Statistical Significance |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Walpole | 15% | 19% | Not Significant ($P < .05$) |
| Concord | 19% | 31% | Statistically Significant ($P < .001$) |
| Framingham | 14% | 31% | Statistically Significant ($P < .001$) |
| TOTAL | 16% | 26% | Statistically Significant ($P < .001$) |

It is interesting to look at the recidivism rate differential for individual populations in terms of the variable, institution of release. That is, individuals in the separate commitment populations (Concord, Walpole, and Framingham) move during their stay in prison among a series of other institutions of varying levels of size and security. Thus the institution of commitment and the institution of release are not usually the same. Analysis, therefore, next focused on the relationship of these differential movement patterns to the recidivism rate. Tables VII through IX below summarize the data in this area.

Generally, the most interesting pattern that emerges is from the data for MCI-Concord commitments. Earlier in this paper it was pointed out that the increase in recidivism for the 1979 releases was disproportionately attributable to the MCI-Concord commitments. Here, the data further reveal that a disproportionate number of the recidivists are the Concord commitments that are subsequently released from maximum and medium security institutions.

Table VII

Recidivism Rate of Walpole Commitments by Institution of Release

| Releasing Institution | 1978 Releases | | | 1979 Releases | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-------|-----|---------------|-------|-----|
| | N | (%) | RR | N | (%) | RR |
| Walpole | 110 | (28) | 22% | 105 | (25) | 30% |
| Concord | 12 | (3) | 33% | 14 | (3) | 50% |
| Norfolk | 51 | (13) | 24% | 51 | (12) | 24% |
| Southeastern Correctional Center | 25 | (6) | 20% | 20 | (5) | 15% |
| Bridgewater | 3 | (1) | 0% | 1 | (1) | 0% |
| Framingham | 1 | (1) | 0% | 2 | (1) | 50% |
| Forestry Camps | 20 | (5) | 5% | 24 | (6) | 13% |
| Northeastern Correctional Center | 6 | (1) | 0% | 12 | (3) | 25% |
| Bay State Correctional Center | - | - | - | 2 | (1) | 0% |
| State Prerelease Centers | 113 | (29) | 4% | 131 | (32) | 8% |
| Contract Prerelease Centers | 50 | (13) | 14% | 54 | (13) | 17% |
| TOTAL | 391 | (100) | 15% | 416 | (100) | 19% |

Summary Data: Recidivism by Releasing Institution's Security Level

| | 1978 Releases | | 1979 Releases | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | Number | Recidivism Rate | Number | Recidivism Rate |
| Maximum Security | 110 | 22% | 105 | 30% |
| Medium Security | 92 | 23% | 88 | 26% |
| Minimum Security | 26 | 4% | 38 | 16% |
| Prerelease Centers | 163 | 7% | 185 | 11% |
| TOTAL | 391 | 15% | 416 | 19% |

Table VIII

Recidivism Rates of Concord Commitments by Institution of Release

| Releasing Institution | 1978 Releases | | | 1979 Releases | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-------|-----|---------------|-------|-----|
| | N | (%) | RR | N | (%) | RR |
| Walpole | 26 | (5) | 15% | 28 | (5) | 39% |
| Concord | 187 | (35) | 26% | 144 | (28) | 42% |
| Norfolk | 76 | (14) | 22% | 76 | (15) | 34% |
| Southeastern Correctional Center | 12 | (2) | 33% | 26 | (5) | 46% |
| Bridgewater | 6 | (1) | 17% | - | - | - |
| Framingham | 1 | (1) | 0% | 8 | (2) | 25% |
| Forestry Camps | 15 | (3) | 7% | 22 | (4) | 18% |
| Northeastern Correctional Center | 47 | (9) | 17% | 49 | (10) | 18% |
| State Prerelease Centers | 113 | (21) | 10% | 107 | (21) | 19% |
| Contract Prerelease Centers | 58 | (11) | 17% | 56 | (11) | 25% |
| TOTAL | 541 | (100) | 19% | 516 | (100) | 31% |

Summary Data: Recidivism by Releasing Institution's Security Level

1978 Releases

1979 Releases

| | Number | Recidivism Rate | Number | Recidivism Rate |
|--------------------|--------|-----------------|--------|-----------------|
| Maximum Security | 26 | 15% | 28 | 39% |
| Medium Security | 282 | 25% | 254 | 40% |
| Minimum Security | 62 | 15% | 71 | 18% |
| Prerelease Centers | 171 | 12% | 163 | 21% |
| TOTAL | 541 | 19% | 516 | 31% |

Table IX

Recidivism Rates of Framingham Commitments
by Institution of Release

| Releasing Institution | 1978 Releases | | | 1979 Releases | | |
|--------------------------|---------------|--------|-----|---------------|--------|-----|
| | N | (%) | RR | N | (%) | RR |
| Framingham | 112 | (90) | 14% | 111 | (92) | 32% |
| Charlotte House | 11 | (9) | 9% | 5 | (4) | 40% |
| Brooke House | 2 | (1) | 0% | 5 | (4) | 0% |
| TOTAL | 125 | (100) | 14% | 121 | (100) | 31% |

B. The Relationship Between the 1978-1979 Data and Prior Recidivism Trends:

As noted earlier in this report, prior recidivism research has identified four major trends occurring within the Massachusetts correctional system. These trends include: (1) a systematic reduction in recidivism rates; (2) an association with furlough participation and reduced recidivism; (3) an association with prerelease participation and reduced recidivism; and (4) an association of lower security institution at release and reduced recidivism. Analyses next moved to a review of the 1978-1979 data in terms of their relationships to these trends.

While the data for the releasee cohort in the year 1978 clearly fit within the recent historical downward trend of reduced recidivism rates, the data for the releasee cohort in the year 1979 clearly do not. In fact, the recidivism rate of 26% for the 1979 releases unfavorably compares with an average rate of 16% over the past eight years for which recidivism rates have been calculated (See Table I, on page 6 of this report). Moreover, the recidivism rate for prison releases in the year 1979 is the highest in the nine year period and the only year for which

there was a statistically significant increase in recidivism.

The data show that the positive relationship between furlough participation and lower rates of recidivism held for both the 1978 and the 1979 releasee cohorts. For the 1979 data, despite the dramatic increase in the recidivism rate, individuals released from prison not having participated in the furlough program had more than double the recidivism rate of individuals who had participated in the furlough program. These data are summarized in Table X below.

Table X
Recidivism Rate Differentials by
Furlough Program Participation

| Category | 1978 Cohort | | | 1979 Cohort | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|
| | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
| Furlough Participants | 547 | (49) | 8% | 467 | (44) | 14% |
| Non-Participants | 571 | (51) | 24% | 586 | (56) | 36% |
| TOTAL | 1118 | (100) | 16% | 1053 | (100) | 26% |

It is interesting to note that the 1979 releasee cohort represents an increase in the proportion of individuals released from prison without having participated in the furlough program. In fact, the 1979 releasee cohort represents the lowest level of furlough participation since the inception of the program in 1972. Table XI below summarizes this data. At a later point in this paper, the reduction in the level of furlough participation for the 1979 cohort will be explored as a possible explanation for the increased recidivism rate that occurred that year.

Table XI

Yearly Recidivism Rate Differentials by Furlough Program Participation, 1971 Through 1979

| Year of Release | Total Number of Releases | Percentage Furloughed Before Released | Recidivism Rate For Furlough Participants | Recidivism Rate for Non-Participants | Recidivism Rate for Total Population |
|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1971 * | 1107 | 0% | - | - | 25% |
| 1972 * | 1550 | 0% | - | - | 22% |
| 1973 | 966 | 69% | 16% | 25% | 19% |
| 1974 | 911 | 74% | 14% | 31% | 19% |
| 1975 | 806 | 59% | 14% | 30% | 20% |
| 1976 | 925 | 51% | 9% | 25% | 16% |
| 1977 | 1138 | 50% | 7% | 23% | 15% |
| 1978 | 1118 | 49% | 8% | 24% | 16% |
| 1979 | 1053 | 44% | 14% | 36% | 26% |

* Furlough program not operational for these years.

Similar to the case for furlough trends, the data on prerelease releases were also consistent with prior recidivism trends. For both the 1978 and the 1979 releasee cohorts, individuals released from prerelease centers had a statistically significant lower rate of recidivism than other releases. Again, the increase in recidivism that occurred for the 1979 cohort did not contradict the trend. Despite the higher recidivism rate, those released from prerelease programs still had significantly lower recidivism rates than their counterparts not released from these programs. These results are summarized in Table XII below.

Table XII

Recidivism Rate Differential by
Prerelease Program Participation

| Releasing Institution | 1978 Cohort | | | 1979 Cohort | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|---------|--------------------|-------------|---------|--------------------|
| | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
| Prerelease | 408 | (36) | 9% | 365 | (35) | 16% |
| Non-Prerelease | 710 | (64) | 21% | 688 | (65) | 32% |
| TOTAL | 1118 | (100) | 16% | 1053 | (100) | 26% |

Again, it is noteworthy that similar to the case of furlough participation, the data reveal a drop in the proportion of releases in 1979 who had completed their term of incarceration in a prerelease center. Whereas in the 1978 cohort 36% of the population was released directly from a prerelease center, in the 1979 cohort 35% were so released. This represents a rather small decrease and is therefore probably not associated with the rise in recidivism for the 1979 cohort. Nevertheless, this variable as a possible factor when interrelated with other factors will be further explored later in this report.

Table XIII below summarizes the relationship between recidivism rates and the proportion of the population released from prerelease centers over the past nine years. Two things are revealed through this data. First, there is an association between the proportion of the population released through prerelease centers and the rate of recidivism. That is, the higher the proportion of prerelease releases the lower the recidivism rate. Secondly, in recent years there has been a gradual decline in the proportion of releases being released from prerelease centers.

With respect to the fourth trend, an association of lower recidivism rates for releases from lower security institutions, both the 1978 and 1979 data fit the historical pattern. That is, releases from minimum security institutions and prerelease centers had lower recidivism rates; releases from maximum and medium security had higher rates. This material has been previously reported in this report (see page 8, and Table III above) and thus the reader is directed to the former discussion for further details.

Table XIII

Yearly Comparison of Recidivism Rates
By Prerelease Participation

| Year of Releases | Number of Releases | Percent of Population Released Pre-release Centers | Recidivism Rate: Prerelease Participants | Recidivism Rate: Non-Participants | Recidivism Rate: Total Releases |
|------------------|--------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1971 | 1107 | 0% | ---* | 25% | 25% |
| 1972 | 1550 | 1% | ---* | ---* | 22% |
| 1973 | 966 | 11% | 12% | 20% | 19% |
| 1974 | 911 | 25% | 12% | 21% | 19% |
| 1975 | 806 | 28% | 14% | 22% | 20% |
| 1976 | 925 | 40% | 9% | 21% | 16% |
| 1977 | 1138 | 42% | 8% | 19% | 15% |
| 1978 | 1118 | 36% | 9% | 21% | 16% |
| 1979 | 1053 | 35% | 16% | 32% | 26% |

* Figures not available for sub-samples in this year.

C. Review of Possible Factors Associated with the Increased Recidivism Rate:

At this stage in the analysis an attempt was made to explore a variety of possible explanations for the significant rise in recidivism rate of the 1979 releasee cohort. Among some of the possible explanations were the following:

(1) A higher risk population may be passing through the correctional system.

(2) A policy change may have occurred in the parole releasing process.

That is, higher risks may have been released on parole.

(3) A policy change may have occurred in the parole revocation process.

That is, it is possible that a stricter revocation policy may have been instituted thus leading to more technical violations or more revocations in general.

(4) A change in the level of participation in the reintegration model.

That is, it may be possible that a change in the level of participation in the furlough program or in prerelease programs or in the movement to lower security status prior to release may be associated with the increased recidivism rate.

In order to test the first category, that a higher risk population was passing through the correctional system, base expectancy tables were used to access the comparative risk potentials of each of the two releases cohorts. Thus an Expected Recidivism Rate was calculated for the 1978 and for the 1979 releasee populations. A comparison between the two rates would constitute a test whether or not a change had occurred in the risk level of the two populations. If the expected recidivism rates for the two populations were similar it would be concluded that the rise in recidivism was not due to an increased risk population. However, if the expected recidivism rate for the 1979 cohort was significantly higher than the expected rate for the 1978 cohort, it would be concluded that the rise in recidivism was due to an increased risk population.

The Base Expectancy analysis determined that the two populations exhibited expected recidivism rates that were virtually identical. Calculations revealed an expected recidivism rate of 23.8% for the 1978 releases, and an expected recidivism rate of 23.9% for the 1979 releases. The difference is not statistically significant and there is therefore no evidence of a differential risk level between the two populations.

Not only are the Base Expectancy results highly conclusive but there is also additional evidence clearly in support of the rejection of the notion of differential risk level between the two populations. Prior recidivism research has isolated a series of variables known to be associated with differential recidivism risk potential. Included in this series are variables such as marital status, education, employment, age, and criminal career pattern. As summarized in Appendix I of this report, the 1978 and the 1979 cohorts display no differences in the risk levels of the two populations with respect to these major variables. Thus, there is clear evidence that the risk levels of the two populations are remarkably similar and that, therefore, the rise in recidivism cannot be explained by a change in the risk level of the population of releases in 1979.

The second proposed explanation for the rise in the recidivism rate in 1979, a possible policy change in the parole releasing process, was explored from the vantage points of two different observations. The first observation was achieved through the utilization of Base Expectancy Tables whereby expected recidivism rates were constructed for the subsamples of parolees in the 1978 and the 1979 cohorts. That is, individuals who had not been paroled from prison but who had instead received a general discharge were excluded from the analysis. A comparison was then made between the risk potential of individuals paroled from prison in 1978 (the year with the lower recidivism rate) and those paroled in 1979 (the year with the higher recidivism rate). The examination of the expected rates was the test for a possible change occurring in the parole releasing process.

The second observation used in testing the "change in parole policy explanation" under review was to separate the parole and discharge populations into sub-samples and determine whether or not an increase occurred for both sub-samples. That is, if the increase in recidivism is to be explained by a change in the parole releasing process, one would expect that the recidivism rate for the discharges would not increase in a like manner.

The Base Expectancy analysis determined that the expected recidivism rate for the two samples were virtually identical. Individuals released on parole in 1978 had a combined expected recidivism rate of 20.6%; individuals released on parole in 1979 had an expected recidivism rate of 20.9%. Because of the fact that there is no significant difference between these two populations, it cannot be concluded that parole release policy is a factor for the increased recidivism rate in 1979.

In terms of the second observation, the comparison of the recidivism rate of parolees in 1978 and 1979 with the recidivism rate of discharges in those years revealed that recidivism increased proportionally for both parolees and discharges. This is further grounds for rejecting the notion of parole release policy as an explanation for the rise in recidivism. The data are summarized in Table XIV below:

Table XIV

Differential Recidivism Rates by Type of Release

| Category | 1978 Cohort | | | 1979 Cohort | | |
|-----------|-------------|---------|-----------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|
| | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
| Parole | 971 | (87) | 18% | 922 | (88) | 27% |
| Discharge | 147 | (13) | 6% | 131 | (12) | 20% |
| TOTAL | 1118 | (100) | 16% | 1053 | (100) | 26% |

The third proposed explanation - a stricter parole revocation process - was also rejected on the basis of some of the material derived above. Because the increase in the recidivism rate applied both to the parolees as well as to the discharges, a policy change in parole revocation process does not work as an explanation. That is, stricter revocation processes cannot explain why an equal increase in the recidivism rate occurred in the non-parolee population.

The fourth proposed explanation focused on the question of whether or not a change may have occurred in the level of participation in the reintegration model prior to release from prison and, if so, whether or not such a change is associated with higher levels of recidivism. Clearly in the year 1979 a greater number of inmates were released from prison without having participated in the furlough program when compared to previous years (for a discussion of this issue and supportive data, see page 15 of this report). It is also evident that a reduction has occurred in the proportion of individuals released from prison through prerelease centers and halfway houses than was the case in prior years (for a discussion of this issue see pages 17 and 18 of this report). However, despite such factors it must be pointed out that recidivism rates increased for both furlough participants as well as non-participants; and that recidivism rates increased for both releases from prerelease centers and releases from other institutions. Similarly, when looking at differential release according to security level of institution of release, recidivism rates increased for all security levels.

It is therefore necessary to reject the reduction in participation in reintegration programming as a primary explanation for the increased recidivism rate. Though an indirect association may still be at play explaining at least some portion of the increased rates, the analysis could uncover no such evidence. For a summary overview of the data relating to reintegration participation and recidivism rates see Table XV below.

Table XV

Differential Participation in Reintegration Model
and Rates of Recidivism

| Category | 1978 Cohort | | | 1979 Cohort | | |
|--|-------------|--------|-----|-------------|--------|-----|
| | N | (%) | RR | N | (%) | RR |
| A. Recidivism Rate Differentials by Furlough Program Participation: | | | | | | |
| Furlough Participants | 547 | (49) | 8% | 467 | (44) | 14% |
| Non-Participants | 571 | (51) | 24% | 586 | (56) | 36% |
| B. Recidivism Rate Differential by Prerelease Program Participation: | | | | | | |
| Prerelease | 408 | (36) | 9% | 365 | (35) | 16% |
| Non-Prerelease | 710 | (64) | 21% | 688 | (65) | 32% |
| C. Security Level of Releasing Institution by Recidivism Rate: | | | | | | |
| Maximum Security | 142 | (13) | 20% | 137 | (13) | 31% |
| Medium Security | 480 | (43) | 22% | 449 | (43) | 36% |
| Minimum Security | 88 | (8) | 11% | 105 | (10) | 16% |
| Prerelease | 408 | (36) | 9% | 362 | (34) | 16% |
| TOTAL | 1118 | (100) | 16% | 1053 | (100) | 26% |

It is necessary to reject each of the four proposed explanations for the rise in the recidivism rate in the year 1979. The data simply do not support any of these contentions. At least three further possible explanations remain but are beyond the scope and data of the present study. A first remaining explanation is that the reduction in the court backlog achieved during the late 1970's was a contributing factor. Faster handling of court cases would increase the possibility of a conviction as well as shorten the period of time between the committing of an offense and subsequent return to prison. The quicker the return to prison the greater the possibility that an individual would fall into the 12 month follow-up period used in the determination of a recidivist.

A second remaining explanation would be a change in the economic structure of the larger society. Recession and related unemployment could be a significant explanation for the increased recidivistic behavior of the prison releasee.

A final factor, related to the economic situation discussed above but wider in scope, may be a general change in the outside support systems available to the returning inmate. To the extent that outside societal institutions - educational, political, economic, religious, social, etc. - are less sympathetic to the returning inmate, we might expect recidivism to increase. Clearly, further research is required in all three of the above mentioned areas.

D. Overview of Specific Variables Associated with High and Low Recidivism Rates:

This final section on findings focuses on the identification of specific variables found to distinguish between individuals who recidivate and those who do not. Prior recidivism research on the Massachusetts system has generally determined nine categories of variables found to distinguish between the incidence of recidivism and non-recidivism (See complete bibliography at end of this report). These categories are summarized in the following outline:

- I. Marital Status
- II. Military History
- III. Education
- IV. Employment History
- V. Known History of Drug Use
- VI. Criminal Career Pattern
 - (1) Number of Prior Court Appearances
 - (2) Prior History of Property Offenses
 - (3) Prior Juvenile Incarcerations
 - (4) Prior Adult Incarcerations
 - (5) Age at First Arrest
 - (6) Age at Present Incarceration
 - (7) Age at Release
- VII. Type of Offense
- VIII. Furlough Participation
- IX. Release from Lower Security Status

Individuals who were married at the time of incarceration had significantly lower recidivism rates when released than those not married. Individuals who had previously served in the armed services had significantly lower recidivism rates than those who had not experienced military service. In terms of the variable, Educational Attainment, it was found that those individuals who had completed at least 10 grades of formal education exhibited lower recidivism rates. Individuals who had worked at any one job for longer than one year prior to their incarceration had disproportionately lower rates of recidivism than individuals who had not held a job for at least one year. Whether or not an individual had a known history of drug use influenced the rate of recidivism. A known history of drug use was associated with higher recidivism rates.

The category criminal career pattern seemed to reveal the strongest indicator of high and low recidivism risk. Those individuals deeply embedded in a criminal career consistently had the highest rates of recidivism. This was measured by seven sub-categories. First, individuals who had longer records as measured by prior court appearances were higher recidivists. Second, individuals whose prior court records contained a larger number of property offenses had higher rates of recidivism. Third, those individuals who began their criminal careers as juveniles and had juvenile commitments had higher recidivism rates. Fourth, the fact that an individual had previously served one or more prior state or federal incarcerations increased the chances of recidivating. Three final indicators of the criminal career pattern were associated with the age variable - age at first arrest, age at incarceration, and age at release. Those individuals who began their officially recorded criminal careers at the age of 16 or younger

had a higher recidivism rate than those who began their criminal careers after the age of 17. Those individuals incarcerated above the age of 20 and those released above the age of 27 had significantly lower recidivism rates. When all measures of criminal career are added together it becomes evident that the length and seriousness of criminal career clearly delineate a high risk recidivism potential. The variable, Age at Time of Incarceration, clearly points to the fact that the younger career offender is the higher recidivism risk.

For the category, Type of Offense, the data revealed that individuals originally committed for Murder I, Murder II, Manslaughter, or Rape had the lower recidivism risk potential. Property offenders, drug violation offenders, and offenders sentenced for escaping from a previous sentence had the higher recidivism risk potential.

The last two categories, those containing the furlough participation and security level of release variables, point to the trends discussed earlier in this report and need not be related here. Furthermore, the full presentation of data from which this discussion is derived are produced in the appendix of the report.

It should be pointed out here that two variables not discussed above but significant in distinguishing high and low recidivism risk potential appeared in the 1979 cohort. These include sex and commitment institution. For the 1979 recidivism cohort high recidivism risk was additionally associated with female commitments and with commitments to MCI-Concord. Commitments to MCI-Walpole had significantly lower rates. Since the dramatic increase in recidivism first occurred with the 1979 release cohort this relationship gains additional significance. That is, it becomes important to focus on a possible association between the rise in recidivism in general with the specific change in the recidivism rate for female

offenders and the change in the recidivism rate for Concord commitments. This is an important area for further research. The data supporting the change in the sex and commitment variables for the 1979 cohort are presented below in Table XVI.

Table XVI
Trend Changes in Differential Recidivism for
Sex and Commitment Institution Variables

| | 1978 Cohort Recidivism Rate | 1979 Cohort Recidivism Rate |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <u>Sex</u> | | |
| Male | 17% | 26% |
| Female | 14% | 32% |
| TOTAL | 16% | 26% |
| <u>Commitment Institution</u> | | |
| Walpole | 15% | 19% |
| Concord | 19% | 31% |
| Framingham | 14% | 32% |
| TOTAL | 16% | 26% |

Summary and Conclusions

The present study consists of an analysis of rates of recidivism for all individuals released from Massachusetts' state correctional institutions. The specific population upon which the analysis was conducted consisted of all releases from these institutions during the years 1978 and 1979. The follow-up period was one year.

The purpose of the study is to provide an overview of the recidivism data, to make comparisons between the current findings and trends discerned in prior recidivism studies, and to explore possible explanations for a recent rise in the recidivism rate first associated with the 1979 cohort.

The data show that the historical trend of an overall reduction in recidivism since the year 1971 remained consistent for the 1978 cohort but reversed itself with the 1979 cohort. The 1979 data represent the first statistically significant increase in recidivism rates in the nine year period. The data show that the positive relationship between furlough participation and lower rates of recidivism held for both the 1978 and the 1979 cohorts. Similarly, the data on prerelease participation and recidivism rates were also consistent with prior recidivism studies, and this was true for both the 1978 and the 1979 populations. It is important to note that the significant association of furloughs and prerelease centers with recidivism has held even though there was a general rise in recidivism. That is, despite the across-the-board increase in recidivism rates for furlough participants and prerelease participants, as well as non-participants, those participating in the furlough program and those ending their term of prison in prerelease centers still had significantly lower recidivism rates than their counterparts not participating in these programs.

With respect to the association of lower recidivism rates with releases from lower security institutions, both cohorts fit the historical pattern. That is, releases from minimum security institutions and prerelease centers had lower recidivism rates; releases from maximum and medium security institutions had higher rates. Again, despite the overall increase in recidivism in 1979, the pattern remained.

A section of the report explores a variety of possible explanations for the significant increase in the recidivism rate for the 1979 releases. Four main explanations were pursued: (1) the possibility of a higher recidivism risk population currently passing through the correctional system; (2) a possible policy change in the parole releasing process; (3) a possible policy change in the parole revocation process; and (4) a change in the level of participation in corrections' reintegration model. The analysis revealed that it is necessary to reject each of the proposed explanations for the rise in recidivism. The data simply do not support any of these contentions.

It is suggested that there is a need for future research on this interesting and important policy question. A remaining possible explanation is that the reduction in court backlog achieved during the late 1970's may be a contributing factor. Additionally, it is suggested that recent economic changes in the outside society and possible changes in social support systems available to the returning inmate may also be factors. These areas, beyond the scope and data of the present study, require future research.

A final section of the analysis focuses on the identification of specific variables found to distinguish between individuals who recidivate and those who do not. The findings generally fit into prior historical patterns which have isolated variables such as marital status, education, employment history, age,

type of offense, and criminal career pattern as the principle predictors of recidivism. Additionally, furlough participation and successful completion of prerelease placements, as in the past, were the strongest predictors of non-recidivism.

Two variables, however, not identified in prior studies were found to be associated with higher recidivism in the 1979 cohort. These were sex and commitment institution. For the 1979 recidivism cohort high recidivism risk was associated with female commitments and with commitments to MCI-Concord. Commitments to MCI-Walpole had significantly lower rates. It was pointed out in the analysis that since the significant increase in the recidivism rate first occurred with the 1979 cohort this finding gains additional importance. That is, it appears that the explanation for the increase in recidivism may be related to the change in recidivism for females and for Concord commitments. Future research should focus on this point.

These findings may be of value to the current policy and decision-making processes of the correctional apparatus in Massachusetts. The determined sustained effectiveness of the "Reintegration Model", demonstrated consistently for its ten years of operation, is compelling. Clearly this finding deserves a place in the decision-making processes. Similarly, the recent detection of the significant increase in the recidivism rate is both interesting and important in view of policy and decision-making. Further research, currently planned in the Department, must focus on system changes in the court networks, in the economy, and in the general society support systems as possible explanations. Changes in the processing of female commitments and Concord commitments must also be explored.

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Appendix

Appendix

Variables Associated With
Differential Recidivism Rates

| Variable | 1978 Cohort | | | 1979 Cohort | | |
|---|-------------|---------|-----------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|
| | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
| 1. <u>Sex</u> | | | | | | |
| Male | 992 | (89) | 17% | 932 | (89) | 26% |
| Female | 126 | (11) | 16% | 121 | (11) | 32% |
| 2. <u>Race</u> | | | | | | |
| White | 729 | (65) | 16% | 692 | (66) | 25% |
| Non-White | 389 | (35) | 16% | 361 | (34) | 30% |
| 3. <u>Marital Status</u> | | | | | | |
| Married | 218 | (20) | 10% | 204 | (19) | 16% |
| Otherwise | 900 | (80) | 18% | 849 | (81) | 29% |
| 4. <u>Military Service</u> | | | | | | |
| None | 917 | (82) | 17% | 875 | (83) | 28% |
| Some | 201 | (18) | 11% | 178 | (17) | 20% |
| 5. <u>Time on Job of Longest Duration</u> | | | | | | |
| Less Than 12 Months | 527 | (47) | 22% | 524 | (50) | 28% |
| 12 Months or More | 591 | (53) | 11% | 529 | (50) | 25% |
| 6. <u>Last Grade Completed</u> | | | | | | |
| 9th Grade or Less | 531 | (48) | 19% | 495 | (47) | 31% |
| 10th Grade or More | 587 | (52) | 14% | 558 | (53) | 23% |
| 7. <u>Known History of Drug Use</u> | | | | | | |
| None | 491 | (44) | 13% | 440 | (42) | 24% |
| Some | 627 | (56) | 19% | 613 | (58) | 28% |
| TOTAL SAMPLE | 1118 | (100) | 16% | 1053 | (100) | 26% |

Appendix

Variables Associated With
Differential Recidivism Rates

| Variable | 1978 Cohort | | | 1979 Cohort | | |
|---|-------------|---------|-----------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|
| | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
| 8. <u>Number of Court Appearances</u> | | | | | | |
| 16 or Less | 842 | (75) | 13% | 800 | (76) | 25% |
| 17 or More | 276 | (25) | 27% | 253 | (24) | 32% |
| 9. <u>Prior Court Appearances for Property Offenses</u> | | | | | | |
| 6 or Less | 698 | (62) | 13% | 651 | (62) | 22% |
| 7 or More | 420 | (38) | 22% | 402 | (38) | 33% |
| 10. <u>Prior Juvenile Incarcerations</u> | | | | | | |
| None | 830 | (74) | 12% | 782 | (74) | 23% |
| Some | 288 | (26) | 27% | 271 | (26) | 35% |
| 11. <u>Prior House of Correction Incarcerations</u> | | | | | | |
| None | 688 | (61) | 14% | 628 | (60) | 26% |
| Some | 430 | (39) | 21% | 425 | (40) | 26% |
| 12. <u>Prior State or Federal Incarcerations</u> | | | | | | |
| None | 847 | (76) | 15% | 781 | (74) | 26% |
| Some | 271 | (24) | 21% | 272 | (26) | 29% |
| 13. <u>Age at First Arrest</u> | | | | | | |
| 16 or Less | 624 | (56) | 20% | 603 | (57) | 32% |
| 17 or More | 494 | (44) | 11% | 450 | (43) | 19% |
| TOTAL SAMPLE | 1118 | (100) | 16% | 1053 | (100) | 26% |

Appendix

Variables Associated With
Differential Recidivism Rates

| Variable | 1978 Cohort | | | 1979 Cohort | | |
|---|-------------|---------|-----------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|
| | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
| 14. <u>Age at Incarceration</u> <u>(Present Offense)</u> | | | | | | |
| 19 or Less | 198 | (18) | 21% | 166 | (16) | 45% |
| 20 or More | 920 | (82) | 15% | 887 | (84) | 23% |
| 15. <u>Age at Release</u> | | | | | | |
| 26 or Less | 656 | (59) | 20% | 586 | (56) | 32% |
| 27 or More | 462 | (41) | 11% | 467 | (44) | 19% |
| 16. <u>Type of Offense</u> | | | | | | |
| Person | 635 | (57) | 17% | 623 | (59) | 27% |
| Sex | 83 | (7) | 18% | 80 | (8) | 19% |
| Property | 239 | (21) | 18% | 220 | (21) | 29% |
| Drug | 105 | (9) | 11% | 73 | (7) | 16% |
| Other | 56 | (5) | 13% | 57 | (5) | 28% |
| 17. <u>Committing Institution</u> | | | | | | |
| Walpole | 391 | (35) | 15% | 416 | (39) | 19% |
| Concord | 541 | (48) | 19% | 516 | (49) | 31% |
| Framingham | 125 | (11) | 14% | 121 | (12) | 32% |
| Other | 61 | (6) | 3% | - | - | - |
| 18. <u>Number of Furloughs</u> | | | | | | |
| Some Furloughs | 547 | (49) | 8% | 467 | (44) | 14% |
| No Furloughs | 571 | (51) | 24% | 586 | (56) | 36% |
| TOTAL SAMPLE | 1118 | (100) | 16% | 1053 | (100) | 26% |

| Variable | 1978 Cohort | | | 1979 Cohort | | |
|--|-------------|---------|-----------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|
| | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate | Number | Percent | Recidivism Rate |
| 19. <u>Security of Releasing Institution</u> | | | | | | |
| Maximum | 149 | (13) | 20% | 138 | (13) | 30% |
| Medium | 473 | (42) | 22% | 446 | (42) | 36% |
| Minimum | 88 | (8) | 11% | 103 | (10) | 17% |
| Prerelease | 408 | (37) | 9% | 366 | (35) | 16% |
| TOTAL SAMPLE | 1118 | (100) | 16% | 1053 | (100) | 26% |