

Hey everyone, welcome to my presentation, titled "Don't Blink!". My topic is prison recidivism, and it started out as a study on if unemployment specifically has an impact on prison recidivism rates. But it quickly turned into a study of more than just unemployment effects on recidivism. A little background about me, my name is Ashton Minor, and I have an undergraduate degree in Government and International Politics from George Mason. I graduated in the Spring of 2011 with honors, and I concentrated heavily in the political development of the middle east and north africa, as well as global terrorism. I am a defense contractor, and I also have my own business as a consultant in the private sector (totally unrelated to defense). My interests are adventure, gardening, and social equality. I picked this topic not because of my professional background, but because I, like millions of other Americans, have multiple family members who have cycled through the criminal justice system on a continual basis.

There are a few definitions that I think will be useful for everyone for this project that are on the screen now.

Incarceration-

Recidivism-

War on Drugs-

Mandatory Minimum Sentencing-

Now as you may or may not know, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the entire world. The closest developed nation in comparison to the United States has a rate that is half that of the United States. A major difference between the US prison system and other developed nations is that we use a punitive system. Our criminal justice system focuses primarily on punishment, instead of rehabilitation. This is important to remember for later in this presentation.

Some important background information on recidivism to note is first, the incarceration rate in the US has increased 500% in the last 40 years. Why has it gone up? A few factors contributing to the skyrocketing rate are the War on Drugs- where we criminalized addiction, Disparities in sentencing targeted to specific groups of the population, and mandatory minimum sentencing. As you may remember from the previous slides, mandatory minimum sentencing occurs when a state legislature sets a minimum sentence for a crime across the board, and the sentencing judge is required to use it as a starting point when using sentencing guidelines. For example, the minimum sentence for a probation violation might be 3 months, but according to sentencing guidelines a judge could extend that sentence from the required 3 months to 3 years.

Another important piece of information is that the United States currently has 2 million people in jails, prisons, or other form of detention. The population of the United States is only 332,915,073. In a study conducted by Cornell University pre-CoVid, 45% of respondents were found to have a close family member who either is currently or has been incarcerated. That's almost half of the sample.

What are some of the factors used to predict recidivism?

Well, the factors used by the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Prisons specifically to identify the risk of reoffending prior to release from custody are:

- Identification of criminogenic behaviors

- Education level

- Age of offenders

- Familial support and healthy relationships

- Ability to acquire new job skills.

To summarize, if you have numerous prior offenses, you don't complete highschool, you were a youth offender, or you don't have familial support, you are more likely to reoffend.

According to the Bureau of Justice, 62% of offenders released from 34 states in 2012 were arrested within 3 years, and 71% of offenders were arrested within 5 years. Let me just pause there so you can really think about those statistics. That means that if you were released in 2012, your chances of success are between 29-38%.

Continuing on, you see here that 11% of offenders were arrested within 5 years outside of the state that released them, so a change in environment wasn't the answer for them because they still went back to prison.

And finally, here is where age comes in to play with recidivism. 81% of prisoners 24 or younger at the time of their release were rearrested within 5 years of release. 74% of prisoners ages 25-39 were rearrested within 5 years of release, and 61% of prisoners ages 40 and up were rearrested. At no point did that percentage drop below 50%.

To complete this project, I collected my data primarily from The Sentencing Project, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Corrections Reporting Program, Kaggle data on recidivism, and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. I also listened to podcasts available on Spotify called "Reducing Recidivism", and read through studies from Cornell University, the United Nations, and the US Department of Justice archives. All of this data is readily available to the public.

I started by importing my data to Visual Studio Code running python in Jupiter Notebook. I used pandas and numpy primarily for this. I turned my data into a dataframe, took out the rows that were unnecessary, and got rid of the missing and/or corrupted data.

After I was finished with python, I saved my new data to a csv and switched over to R. I used R to find averages, recode, join, and create plots. The data that I wrangled using python and R I moved into Tableau for some of the tables that you are going to see in the next few slides.

I looked at recidivism vs. level of supervision (meaning the level of probation or parole of an offender), and I found that the level of supervision was not important to how long it took for an individual to reoffend.

I looked at recedivism vs. the original crime that the offender was incarcerated for, and my findings were the same. Neither level of supervision or original conviction impacted the length of time it took for an individual to reoffend, across the board the average was 3 years.

Next, I wanted to see if race or ethnicity had an impact on recidivism. What I found was that 10% of white individuals reoffended, 18% of black individuals, and 11% of hispanic individuals reoffended and went back to prison.

Since I had already looked at whether or not the initial crime impacted the length of time to recidivism, I wanted to know if the original crime and prison admission after recidivism corralated. And the answer was yes, and very specifically property crimes were more likely to return to prison than other crimes. Property crimes would be theft, burglary, etc. Close runner ups in this were drug crimes and assault.

So with all of this data, what would it take for an offender to not reoffend? Well, according to the United Nations, recidivism can only be prevented when an offender desists from crime, and the biggest factors in desistance are employment, acquisition of skills, and significant relationships.

Additionally, according to GTL (a company that contracts with jails and prisons to provide services), education is the key to reducing recidivism. I'm starting to see a theme here. GTL is a company that literally profits from recidivism, and according to their own data, education can prevent that. Not only will education prevent recidivism, but education is the KEY to getting the recidivism rate to almost 0. Vocational training brings your risk under 30%, an Associates degree under 14%, a Bachelors degree under 6%, and if an offender gets a Masters degree either during or after incarceration, the chances of recidivism for that individual drop to almost 0.

To summarize, there are several factors that will both prevent and influence recidivism.

First of all, AGE is a huge factor. While the data sets that I used do not have age as data that was collected, there are study after study that show that your risk of recidivism is higher if you start as a youth offender, and does not begin to drop until middle age. Part of the issue with age and criminogenic behavior is the school to prison pipeline. Students missing school are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior, miss learning time and thus fall behind. Additionally, in states like my current one (Virginia), school suspensions are consistently on the rise. For the 2015-2016 school year, Virginia schools issued over 130,000 out of school suspensions to over 70,000 students. So not only are students being suspended more, but really some students are consistently being suspended.

As we previously mentioned, education is KEY to preventing future criminal behavior at any age. For every \$1 spent on education, that's \$4 less spent on recidivism.

Opportunity is the third huge factor playing into recidivism. In most states, one of the main questions on job applications is whether or not you have a criminal background. Additionally, once you are released from incarceration, you haven't fulfilled your obligation. Most offenders can't qualify for housing because of criminal history, can't vote, can't own firearms, all while paying taxes in their state of residence. On the podcast, "Reducing Recidivism" that I previously mentioned, the host spoke with two individuals, both named Marcus. The first Marcus was in prison for 8 years for stealing a car. After prison, he applied for 41 jobs before he was given an application that only required 7 years of criminal history. He was able to say no to this question because his crime was 8 years ago, and he got a job mixing paint. He moved up from that job to starting a business, and today employs other former offenders, and bids and works on contracts for airports, colleges, and hospitals. He had to get rejected 41 times from gainful employment before he finally got an opportunity. Marcus was driven enough to continue applying, and he had familial support. However, not everyone is a Marcus. For some, especially those whose original crimes were property related, going back to a familiar, easy way of making money is more favorable than taking 41 rejections. The other Marcus was discussing opening up employment to be attainable to all Americans, regardless of background. The point he made was that there are 131,000,000 people in the US with some kind of criminal background ranging from a traffic ticket to murder. The US only has a population of 330,000,000, so that equates to be roughly 1/3 of the population. That means 1/3 of the US population are potentially unemployable regardless of skill set or skill level based on past choices.

Finally, criminal justice reform is the last integral part to recidivism. As we have seen from the statistics, our criminal justice system disproportionately sentences minorities, and in many instances minorities wind up serving more time more frequently. Part of this is based on mandatory minimum sentencing (crack vs cocaine sentences, for example), some of it is environment which can be traced back to predatory lending and socio economics, and some of it is just simply racial disparity.

And that is all I have for you, and I will open it up to questions. Thank you for your time!

