

Massachusetts Department of Correction
Review of Current Research - 1982

Prepared By:

Dallas H. Miller
Research Unit

Massachusetts Department of Correction

Michael V. Fair
Commissioner

June, 1983

PUBLICATION 313308 - 20 - 250 - 8/83 - CR

Approved by Daniel Carter, State Purchasing Agent

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Introduction

This report presents a review of research reports published by the Massachusetts Department of Correction Research Unit during 1982. Findings of these reports are abstracted in this report and organized into five research areas: Community Reintegration Reports, Evaluative and Operational Studies, Trend Analysis Reports, Annual Statistical Reports and Information Bulletins.

The Massachusetts Department of Correction closely monitors the impact of its community reintegration programs on recidivism rates, and research examining the Massachusetts efforts to ease the prisoner's reentry into the community is grouped in the section on Community Reintegration Reports. The first of these reports examines the institutional experience and recidivism rates of men released directly from maximum security for 1977 through 1980. The second of these reports tests the methodological validity of abbreviated follow-up periods in recidivism research.

The research unit regularly publishes reports aimed at improving both its research methods and state correctional programs. Two of these evaluative and operational studies were published during 1982. The first report continues a series of youthful offender studies with an analysis of bind over youthful offenders committed to the state correctional system from 1968 to 1979. The second is a follow-up evaluation of decisions made under a previous classification system.

The third research area is concerned with detecting, describing and analyzing trends in the Massachusetts correctional system. The first of these trend analyses is a description of women committed to the state system from 1970 to 1980. The second examines trends in post-conviction disposition patterns from Superior Courts from 1972 to 1980. The third further extends the examination of Superior Court convictions to include data for 1981.

The fourth research area consists of a series of statistical reports concerning various aspects of the Massachusetts Department of Correction. Among these are reports covering 1981 data for commitments to both state and county authority, state releases, state furloughs and state population movements. Recidivism reports were published covering all 1980 releases and separately covering 1980 releases from each specific pre-release facility. A report describing all residents of Massachusetts Correctional Institutions on January 1, 1982 was published as well.

The fifth area contains an information bulletin detailing past trends and future projections for the inmate population of the state. This bulletin and any of the studies described in this report may be obtained by writing:

Research Unit
Massachusetts Department of Correction
100 Cambridge Street
Boston, MA 02202

Men Released Directly From Maximum Security

An Update

#236

January, 1982

Lawrence T. Williams

This paper examines the men released directly from maximum security in Massachusetts from 1977 to 1980 inclusive. Included in this report is a description of the sample according to the type of institutional experience, a description of recidivism rates for this sample by the type of institutional experience, as well as information on recidivism rates according to length of time spent in maximum security. A discussion of policy implications of the findings is also presented in the report.

In the past four years, 497 men have been released from Walpole to community. This represents 11% of the total Department of Correction releases over this period. A summary of the correctional history of these 497 releases from Walpole is as follows: 10% of these men spent their entire incarceration at Walpole without receiving furloughs; 16% had at least one medium security placement and were returned to Walpole prior to release; 22% had at least one pre-release or forestry camp placement and were returned to Walpole prior to release; and 49% of these men had been placed on parole and were returned to Walpole as parole violators prior to being released again.

Varying Time Criteria in Recidivism Follow-Up
Studies: A Test of the "Cross-Over Effects" Phenomenon

#249

November, 1982

Daniel P. LeClair

The Massachusetts Department of Correction routinely collects and publishes annual recidivism studies. For the purposes of these reports, a recidivist is defined as a return to prison within one year of release. Though subject to limitations, the one-year follow-up period allows feedback to planners and administrators in a reasonable time frame. For example, a series of one year recidivism follow-up studies has been used to provide quantitative input into the decision-making process concerning the retention and expansion of graduated reintegration programming.

Some researchers contend, however, that problems inherent to one year follow-up studies may lead to faulty conclusions. Specifically, researchers warn of a phenomenon known as "cross-over effects" whereby results detected in a one year follow-up become reversed in the second or third year. To the extent that such a phenomenon may have occurred in the Massachusetts system, administrative decision making could have proceeded on a faulty basis.

Our concern that theoretical limitations of shortened follow-up periods could cast doubt on the validity of our research findings prompted a replication of an earlier study of prison releases which used a one year follow-up period to see if emerging trends had remained consistent after five years. Comparisons between findings of the two time criteria - a one year follow-up and a five year follow-up-constituted the measure of "cross-over effects". Analysis has revealed that all trends remained unchanged upon five years of follow-up, denying a significant role to "cross-over effects".

This paper was presented at the American Society of Criminology, Annual Meeting in Toronto Canada, November, 1982.

Youthful Offenders Evaluation Volume II: Bind
Overs Committed to the Massachusetts Department
of Correction 1968 to 1979

#228

January, 1982

Lawrence T. Williams

This report is the second volume of a five volume series on youthful offenders committed to the Massachusetts Department of Correction from 1968 to 1979. This particular volume is concerned with the subset of this population consisting of all youthful offenders (youths who were seventeen years or younger at their commitment to prison) who were bound over from the original jurisdiction of the juvenile court to the adult criminal court and were subsequently sentenced to the state correctional system.

The analysis in this report has indicated that the bind over youthful offenders were more serious offenders than the non-bind overs. This is reflected in the fact that bind overs received more Walpole sentences and longer maximum sentences than did the non-bind overs. The bind overs received more maximum security placements and served longer periods of time in prison before their release. Bind overs had more extensive prior juvenile justice experiences than did non-bind over youthful offenders. Bind overs had more prior court appearances in juvenile court and more commitments to the Department of Youth Service and had their initial juvenile court appearance at a younger age than did the non-bind overs. Finally, bind overs were more likely to be poor, black offenders from multi-problem families than were the non-bind overs.

When comparing bind overs over the twelve years of the study, there were nine variables that indicated significant differences. Bind overs presently being committed are receiving longer sentences (as are all offenders) and have penetrated deeper into the juvenile justice system prior to their state prison commitment. Bind overs and non-bind over youthful offenders exhibited approximately equal recidivism rates. Bind overs had a recidivism rate of 29% and non-bind overs a rate of 30% when utilizing a one-year follow-up and rates of 40% and 47% respectively when utilizing a two-year follow-up period.

Classifying Offenders For Lower Security: A Follow-Up
Study of Correctional Decision Making

#246

August, 1982

Linda K. Holt
Lawrence T. Williams

This report is the third and final part of an evaluation of the Area Board Classification System formerly used in the Massachusetts Department of Correction. This study reports on a six-month follow-up of those offenders recommended for and placed in a lower security setting. Overall, 75 percent of these placements were determined to be successful. An analysis found eight variables that distinguished successful and unsuccessful placements: minimum sentence length, time to serve before parole eligibility, maximum sentence length, area board seen, committing institution, age at first arrest, number of charges for drug offenses and age at incarceration. An analysis was also done that compared offenders recommended for no placement change with successful lower security placements. In general offenders recommended for no change in current placement were younger, had problems during their present incarceration and were rated as having motivational and attitudinal problems. Half of the group recommended to remain at current status were moved to a lower security setting during the six-month follow-up period, and 82 percent of those placements were successful. This group of individuals recommended to remain at current level was more like the successful lower placements than the unsuccessful in terms of those variables that seemed to determine success. In general the classification system had a high success rate in its lower security placements. There was a large group of offenders not recommended for lower security placements who were successful as well.

Women Committed to the Massachusetts
Department of Correction, 1970 to 1980

#237

February, 1982

Linda K. Holt

This report describes women who were committed to a term of incarceration at MCI-Framingham during the period 1970 to 1980. This description focuses on a discussion of the offenses for which they were committed, their personal background characteristics and their criminal history. Changes in the number of women committed and changes in characteristics of that population are also discussed. From 1970 to 1974 there was a decrease in the number of women committed to Framingham. From 1974 to 1980 there has been a steady annual increase in the number of commitments. This increase is accounted for mainly by the commitment of women with county sentences to MCI Framingham. The implications for programs of this rapid increase in female commitments is addressed in this report.

1980 Statistics for Convictions in
Massachusetts Superior Courts

#238

March, 1982

Charles Metzler

This report documents the total number of convictions and their dispositions in Massachusetts Superior Courts from 1972 to 1980. The data are categorized according to twenty-four different offenses selected on the basis of both seriousness and frequency.

Comparative statistics for 1972 to 1980 are given for total number of convictions, incarceration rates, probation rates, rates of filed cases, rates of fines, average 1972-1980 dispositions and detailed comparisons of all dispositions for 1980 convictions.

1981 Statistics for Convictions in
Massachusetts Superior Courts

#250

July, 1982

Charles Metzler

The purpose of this report is to document the total number of convictions and their dispositions from the Massachusetts Superior Courts from the years 1972 to 1981. The data are categorized according to twenty four different offenses which were selected based on seriousness and frequency. The statistics in this report reflect only Massachusetts Superior Courts, not lower courts.

One noteworthy pattern emerges from the data. The 1981 incarceration rates for all crimes has either remained the same or is higher than the 10 year average indicating that Superior Court judges were sentencing convicted offenders to prison at a relatively higher rate during 1981.

1981 Court Commitments to the
Massachusetts Department of Correction

#240

June, 1982

Linda K. Holt

This report is a statistical description of the 1695 individuals committed by the courts to a term of incarceration in the Massachusetts Department of Correction during 1981. Reported is information on the nature of the present offense, the personal background characteristics and the criminal history of these individuals.

The overall number of commitments increased by 37% over the number for 1980, reflecting increases in commitments at each committing institution. The median age at commitment was 24 years; the median age at first court appearance was 16 years; and the median education level was eleventh grade. The breakdown of background characteristics is as follows: almost two-thirds white, almost two-thirds single, 16% military veterans, one-third with prior drug use, and 45% serving their first incarceration.

Commitments to Massachusetts
County Facilities During 1981

#241

March, 1982

Charles Metzler

This report is a description of court commitments to the Massachusetts county facilities (houses of correction) during 1981. Included is information concerning operating expenditures, average populations, institution of commitment, month of commitment, present offense, sentence, age at commitment, sex, marital status, education and court of commitment.

During 1981, 6246 individuals were sentenced to Massachusetts county facilities, an increase of 15% over 1980 commitments. The majority (83%) of commitments were for non-person offenses: property (48%), including the most common offense, burglary (21%); drug (5%); and other offenses (29%). Half of all commitments (51%) were for sentences of three months or less, including commitments in lieu of fines, and most commitments (87%) came from District Courts. Only three percent served weekend sentences.

The individuals sentenced were mostly single (72%) and male (98%). The median education level was eleventh grade, and the median age was 23 years.

A Statistical Description of Releases From the
Massachusetts Correctional Institutions During 1981

#242

May, 1982

Lawrence T. Williams

This report presents a statistical description of the characteristics of releases to the street from the Massachusetts Department of Correction during 1981. Contained in the report is information on the present offense, background characteristics, criminal history, furlough participation and release variables for all individuals released to the streets from the state correction system. During 1981, 1118 individuals were released to the street from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions, a 10% increase over the 1980 figure.

Over half of the releases (55%) spent some time in jail awaiting trial for their current offense. The majority of the releases (66%) served an indeterminate minimum sentence. More than half (54%) served a maximum sentence of seven years or less. Twelve individuals (1%) had been serving Life sentences. The majority of releases (61%) had been serving sentences for violent offenses (54% person and 8% sex). Armed robbery (27%) was the single most common offense committed by the releases.

The majority of releases (76%) were male. The racial characteristics were as follows: 33% black and 66% white, with 3 Native Americans two Asiatics, and 5 hispanics (with no race specified). Twenty-one individuals were listed as white hispanics and twenty-six as black hispanics. The median education level for all releases was tenth grade.

Most of the releases (88%) had at least one prior court appearance; a majority had court appearances for person offenses (83%) and for property offenses (82%). Overall, 52% of the releases had served some adult time for a prior offense; 38% served time in a house of correction and 27% in a state or federal institution. In all, 29% of the releases had been paroled at least once prior to their current release; 13% had had juvenile paroles; and 23% had had adult paroles.

A majority of the releases (59%) had never received a furlough during their present incarceration. A breakdown of percent receiving furloughs by security level of release is as follows: 30% of maximum security releases had at least one furlough, 14% of medium security releases, 48% of minimum releases and 73% of pre-release releases.

The majority of the releases (73%) were released on parole, while only 15% received good conduct discharges and 12% were expired sentences (almost entirely short-term women released from MCI-Framingham). Eight percent of the releases were from maximum security compared to 45% from medium, 9% from minimum and 38% from pre-release centers. The median age at release was 26 years.

1981 Yearly Statistical Report of the
Furlough Program

#243

May, 1982

Lawrence T. Williams

The furlough program has been in operation by the Massachusetts Department of Correction since November 6, 1972. A total of 75,515 furloughs were granted from inception of the program until December 31, 1981. During that period, 573 of those furloughs resulted in escapes (a resident failing to return to his/her correctional facility within two hours of his/her designated time), yielding an overall escape rate of 0.8%. The present report contains a statistical description of the furlough program for the year 1981 as well as a trend analysis of the program since its inception in 1972.

From January 1, 1981 to December 31, 1981, a total of 8,196 furloughs were granted. The number of individuals furloughed in 1981 was 1,248. The escape rate by furloughs granted during 1981 was 0.4% and the escape rate by individual furloughed was 2.7%.

A Statistical Description of Residents of the
Massachusetts Correctional Institutions
on January 1, 1982

#244

June, 1982

Lawrence T. Williams

This report is a statistical description of characteristics of the residents in each correctional facility on January 1, 1982. This point-in-time profile contains information on present offense, personal background, criminal history and furlough participation. On January 1, 1982, there were 3690 individuals incarcerated in the state correctional system,* a 20% increase over the number on January 1, 1981.

There were 687 individuals (19%) housed in maximum security institutions, 2108 (57%) in medium security, 416 (11%) in minimum security and 479 (13%) in pre-release facilities. Nearly half of the residents were sentenced from two of the Superior Courts - Suffolk (31%) and Middlesex (15%). The majority of residents (69%) were committed to Walpole. The majority of the residents (55%) were serving maximum sentences of twelve years or less; fourteen percent were lifers; and five percent were serving maximum sentences of two years or less in prison. The majority of residents (78%) were serving sentences for either person or sex offenses. The most frequent committed offense of the population was armed robbery (27%).

The overwhelming majority (95%) of the population was male. The racial breakdown was 31% black, 5% hispanic, 63% white, with three Native American individuals and six Asiatic individuals. The median education level of the population stood at tenth grade. Of those residents, 60% had nine or more prior court appearances. A majority had prior arrests for person offenses (91%) and for property offenses (84%). Twenty-seven percent of the population were committed to the Department of Youth Services as a juvenile. Forty-five percent had prior house of correction incarcerations, and 30% had prior incarcerations in state or federal correctional institutions. Overall, 58% had served some prior adult time. Most individuals (79%) had not received furloughs during the calendar year 1981. Only 3% of these in maximum security institutions had received a furlough compared to 10% of those in medium, 52% of those in minimum and 71% of those in pre-release. Of the total population on January 1, 1982, 68% had not received furloughs from the day of their commitment to January 1.

*The number of individuals in the report does not include patients at Bridgewater State Hospital nor individuals awaiting trial. Further, it does not include those individuals who were sentenced to the DOC and were confined in houses of correction on January 1, 1982 awaiting transfers to DOC facilities. Also, DOC offenders who have been transferred to House of Correction to serve their sentences are not included in the statistics.

Population Movements in the Massachusetts
Department of Correction During 1981

#245

June, 1982

Lawrence T. Williams

This annual movement report is a compilation of all admissions and releases during 1981. It presents information by type of admission or release including new court commitments; paroles; returns or parole violations; discharges; escapes; deaths; transfers to other correctional facilities, both in and out of state; and trips to hospitals and courts.

At the beginning of 1981 the population of all Massachusetts Department of Correction facilities was 3231; by the end of the year the population had risen to 3777, an increase of 17%. All figures in this report exclude 7 individuals sentenced to the Department who were awaiting places, 22 women awaiting trial at MCI-Framingham and any Bridgewater State Hospital placements.

The total of 9267 admission movements of all types into institutions during 1981 was a 26% increase over the number in 1980. The number of returns on parole violations in 1981 was 354, an 8% decrease from the previous year. New court commitments showed a 39% increase from 1208 in 1980 to 1678 in 1981, reflecting increases in commitments to each committing institution. There was a 44% decrease in the number of individuals received on a from and after sentence, from 32 in 1980 to 18 in 1981. The number of returns from escapes increased by 26% from 169 in 1980 to 213 in 1981.

The 8721 movements out of institutions during 1981 were a 25% increase from the previous year. A large increase came in inter-institutional transfers, a 30% increase in one year. The number of paroles remained stable (818 in 1980 to 825 in 1981). There were 6 deaths in Department of Correction facilities during the year: one death by homicide, two by suicide, and three by natural causes. There was a 36% increase in the number of escapes, from 176 in 1980 to 239 in 1981.

Four types of movements to and from houses of correction are described in this report. The first is a Department of Correction inmate transferring to a county institution, of which there were 60 in 1981. The second type is a Department of Correction inmate returning from a county facility, with 29 such returns in 1981. The third type of move is a county inmate transferring to a Department of Correction facility, with 22 such admissions in 1981. The fourth type of move is releases of Department inmates to a county facility on a from and after sentence, with 32 such releases in 1981.

There were 96 transfers from Department of Correction facilities to prisons in other states, including 85 Department inmates and 12 non-Department inmates. Almost three-fourths of these offenders were transferred to other New England states. The 104 transfers from other states during 1981 included 79 Department offenders and 25 non-Department offenders. Most of these offenders (76%) were admitted from other New England states.

Statistical Tables Describing The Background
Characteristics and Recidivism Rates for Releases From
Massachusetts Correctional Institutions During 1980

#247

August, 1982

Lawrence T. Williams

This research report is a statistical description of characteristics of offenders released to the streets from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions during 1980 with corresponding recidivism rates.* The statistics are available for men released from Walpole, Concord, Norfolk, Southeastern Correctional Center, Framingham, Plymouth, Warwick, Northeastern Correctional Center, Bay State Correctional Center, Lemuel Shattuck and Bridgewater State Hospitals, and an aggregate of five drug programs and thirteen pre-release centers. Statistics are also available for women released from Framingham and three combined pre-release centers.

A total of 941 offenders (799 males and 162 females) were released from the correctional facilities listed above. A recidivist is defined as any offender who returns to a state or federal correctional institution, or to a house of correction or jail for 30 days or more within one year from the date of the individual's release to the community. Information contained in this report includes statistics on recidivism rates associated with individual characteristics with regard to release variables, nature of present offense variables, personal background characteristics, criminal history variables, furlough participation variables and release follow-up variables.

The overall recidivism rate for individuals released during 1980 was 26%. This is identical to the rate for 1979 releases.

* A companion study providing the same information for offenders released from pre-release facilities follows.

Statistical Tables Describing the Background
Characteristics and Recidivism Rates for Releases From
Massachusetts Pre-Release Facilities During 1980

#248

August, 1982

Lawrence T. Williams

This research report is a statistical description of characteristics of offenders under the supervision of the Department of Correction who were released from pre-release facilities during 1980 with corresponding recidivism rates. The statistics are available for offenders released from five drug programs (Concilio, Meridian, Share, Third Nail, Project Turnabout), from thirteen pre-release centers (577 House, 699 House, Temporary Housing Project, Shirley, Boston State, Coolidge House, Brooke House, South Middlesex, Park Drive, Lancaster, Charlotte House, Hillside, and Norfolk Pre-Release) and from an aggregate of an eleven non-pre-release institutions. A total of 941 offenders (779 males and 162 females) were released from the correctional facilities listed above. A recidivist is defined as any offender who returns to a state or federal correctional institution, or to a house of correction or jail for 30 days or more within one year from the date of the individual's release to the community.

Information contained in this report includes statistics on recidivism rates associated with individual characteristics with regard to release variables, nature of present offense variables, personal background characteristics, criminal history variables, furlough participation variables and release follow-up variables.

The overall recidivism rate for individuals released from pre-release status in 1980 was 15%. This was 11 percentage points lower than the 1980 rate for all releases and 1 percentage point lower than the 1979 rate for pre-release status releases.

DOC Population Trends and Projections

November, 1982

Francis J. Carney

This information bulletin focuses on the overcrowded condition of state prisons, places the state system in relation to both national and Massachusetts county system trends and explores possible explanations for the accelerated increase in the prison population.

Factors examined include the effect of court reform, the increase in the population at risk and the trend in the Commonwealth toward longer sentences. Finally, population projections are made for the Department of Correction based on existing sentencing statutes.