
Many Adult Felons Commit New Offenses

SUMMARY

Many of Minnesota's convicted felons subsequently commit new offenses, according to a study by the Legislative Auditor. The study examined recidivism rates of nearly 9,000 offenders released from prison or sentenced to probation in 1992.

The study found that 59 percent of prisoners were **rearrested** in Minnesota for new felonies or gross misdemeanors in the three years following their release, and an additional 5 percent were rearrested in another state. Forty-five percent of released prisoners were **reconvicted** of felonies or gross misdemeanors within three years. Forty percent of prisoners were **reimprisoned** within three years--28 percent for new crimes and the remainder for "technical violations" of their prison release conditions. These rates were within a broad range of recidivism rates that have been reported in studies conducted elsewhere.

Felons sentenced to probation had somewhat lower recidivism rates than released prisoners. Within three years of sentencing, 42 percent of probationers were rearrested in Minnesota for

new felonies or gross misdemeanors, 28 percent were reconvicted, and 15 percent were imprisoned for new crimes or violating the conditions of probation. Differences in the prior criminal records of probationers and prisoners appear to account for much of the difference in their recidivism rates.

Among prisoners and probationers, property offenders were more likely to be rearrested or reconvicted than violent offenders. For example, 81 percent of car thieves released from prison were rearrested within three years, and 57 percent of car thieves sentenced to probation were rearrested. In contrast,

homicide offenders and sex offenders had the lowest recidivism rates. For instance, 30 percent of sex offenders released from prison were rearrested for a felony or gross misde-

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Key findings:

- Among prisoners released in 1992, 59 percent were rearrested in Minnesota, 45 percent were reconvicted, and 40 percent were reimprisoned.
- Among felons placed on probation in 1992, 42 percent were rearrested in Minnesota, 28 percent were reconvicted, and 15 percent were imprisoned.
- Property offenders had higher recidivism rates than violent offenders.
- Minnesota's main criminal history information system is incomplete.

Recommendation:

- The Department of Corrections should regularly report on statewide recidivism rates.

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meanor within three years, including 10 percent for a new sex offense.

Offenders sent to prison for violent, property, and drug crimes were about equally likely to be rearrested for a violent felony after their release from prison. In contrast, offenders placed on probation for a violent felony were more likely than other probationers to be subsequently arrested for a violent felony.

Probationers and released prisoners in Hennepin and Ramsey counties had higher recidivism rates than offenders in most other counties. In addition, the study found higher recidivism rates among men, non-whites, and young offenders.

Since 1980, Minnesota courts have used a system of sentencing guidelines for felons, partly to reserve prison space for more serious offenders. Judges sometimes depart from the sentences that are presumed appropriate by the guidelines. The study found that property offenders placed on probation instead of receiving prison sentences recommended by the guidelines were more likely to be rearrested than other felony property offenders placed on probation.

Minnesota prisons offer a variety of treatment, education, and work programs that are intended to keep offenders busy and provide opportunities for rehabilitation. Such programs account for about 13 percent of prison operating costs. The study did not isolate the impact

of programs from other factors, but it found that the recidivism rates of participants in selected programs were often similar to the rates of non-participants.

The study also found serious weaknesses in the state's official criminal history information system. Officials from law enforcement, courts, and agencies conducting background checks rely on this system to provide complete histories of offenders' felony and gross misdemeanor convictions. However, the study found that many convictions are not recorded on the system, often because law enforcement agencies have not provided the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) with offender fingerprints.

The report recommends that the Minnesota Department of Corrections regularly monitor a variety of statewide offender recidivism rates. It also recommends that the BCA continue efforts to improve its criminal history database and make comprehensive conviction data more accessible.

Copies of the report, *Recidivism of Adult Felons*, may be obtained from the Office of the Legislative Auditor. A summary may be found on the World Wide Web at <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/pe9701.htm>. For further information, contact Joel Alter or Roger Brooks at the Office of the Legislative Auditor (612/296-4708).



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