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Recidivism Research in the District of Columbia:  
A Review and Status Report

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## SUMMARY

This paper discusses the concept and measurement of recidivism, reviews some of the recidivism research and findings in Washington, D.C. in the last ten years, and suggests ways to improve the utility of recidivism research in the future. Most of the studies considered were done by the D.C. Department of Corrections but others are the work of consultants, the Metropolitan Police Department and the D.C. Bail Agency.

Some findings include that: roughly 30% of adults and 50% of youth return to incarceration of some sort within two years of release, that overall rates for D.C., including new arrests, convictions and technical violations, are lower than the national average while the recidivism rate due to major new convictions is slightly higher in the District, that the recidivism rate of parolees has been increasing since 1973, that approximately half of the workload of criminal justice agencies in the District is attributable to recidivists and 20-25% of MPD's workload involves persons currently under the supervision of a District criminal justice agency (pre-trial release, probation, parole, half-way houses, etc.).

Improvements suggested include computerization of the computation of rates to increase timeliness of results, use of "failure-rate" techniques to increase sensitivity of recidivism measures, routinization of recidivism research, and simultaneous consideration of social, criminal, institutional (programs, disciplinary reports, etc.), and community performance characteristics of groups under study to make the research more useful to correctional practitioners in making classification and release decisions.

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## I. Introduction

Recidivism: what is it and why is it important? The rate of recidivism (return, relapse) is an appropriate and widely used measure of the effectiveness of a correctional agency (as well as other criminal justice and human service agencies) if the agency is charged with changing those with whom it comes into contact in such a way as to reduce their chances of return to crime. The methods of change are usually categorized as either deterrence or rehabilitation, depending on the stated attitude of the change agency toward the offender. Of course, there are additional, legitimate goals of corrections which may well justify administrative decisions not justifiable strictly in terms of impact on recidivism rates, such as security, incapacitation, providing a healthy and humane environment.

### A. Why are recidivism rates important?

Given the effort and expense involved in good recidivism research, given the general confusion in the field, why do we persist? The most obvious reason is accountability. Corrections is charged, by the mayor, city council and the U.S. Congress, in the case of Washington, D.C., with the responsibility for correctional outcomes. Since one of our assigned goals is behavior change to reduce the chances

of repeated victimization, it is appropriate that they demand such figures from us. Recidivism rates, along with escape, assault and medical care figures, can provide the bases for program evaluation, zero-based budgeting, and management by objectives. The availability of recidivism figures should permit more adequate budget justifications, informed resource allocation, and documentation of additional needs.

These explanations of the importance and utility of recidivism research are restatements of the same thing. It will permit rational planning and policy-making, at least with regard to one of correction's goals. The tax-payers revolt has been translated into a demand for public accountability. The legislative bodies have been especially attuned to this demand and are using their power of appropriation to pass on their constituency's concern. Accountability, goal optimization, cost effectiveness, whatever the code-word, it requires program evaluation in terms of outcomes. Recidivism research is one of the most appropriate methods of evaluation and justification in corrections.

B. What is a recidivism rate?

Recidivism is a ratio of failures to risks. A recidivism rate relates this ratio to a specific time period.

Its a three dimensional concept involving failures, risks and time. The specific definitions of these elements vary considerably from one study to another. There is nothing wrong with any of these definitions, so long as all three elements are covered; however, this variation does cause much confusion and discouragement amongst administrators and researchers alike. Defining the risk involves specifying a group of potential failures, e.g., YCA halfway house releasees from January to July 1976, all 1977 parolees, all 1977 parolees who are serving time for violent offenses and had participated in the work/training furlough program, etc.

Defining what will constitute a failure, the second element, involves specifying that event that qualifies as a relapse, or return, e.g., rearrest, reconviction, receiving a new sentence of incarceration in excess of 90 days. Finally, the time at risk must be set; six months, two years, etc. The definition of recidivism employed (rearrest of any 1977 parolees from D.C. Department of Corrections) involves the first two elements: failures and risks. Applying this recidivism measure over a specified time period results in a recidivism rate: of 1200 persons paroled in 1977 (risk) 500 had been rearrested (failure) within 24 months of their release (time)=42%

recidivism rate at two years out. A change in any one of the definitions of the three elements will result in a different rate.

C. Improved measures of recidivism.

There has recently been a general disillusionment with the effectiveness and even the possibility of rehabilitation of offenders. This is based, in large part, on the accumulation of evaluative research which reports no significant program effect on recidivism rates. While there are other reasons for questioning the place of the rehabilitative ideal in a justice system, the efficacy question should by no means be accepted as having been answered in the negative.

"Nothing works" is the cry we hear, but all that has been found is that none of the recidivism research so far has been able to demonstrate that anything works. The fault can as easily be with the research, as with the programs researched. The typical research employs the traditional definition of recidivism used above. This measure, in its disaggregate form, is dichotomous. Either she was rearrested or was not. Two value dependent variables are very limited in the kinds of statistical analyses that can appropriately be applied to them. It is a gross, relatively insensitive measure. It is as if an unmarked



meter-stick were used to measure and compare heights of large samples of men and women, and they were found to be of equal size-one meter. Either one is, or is not, two meters tall.

What may be needed are more accurate, continuous measures of recidivism, providing the techniques which will be sensitive enough to pick up the impact of programs. Several approaches are possible. D.C. Department of Corrections has pioneered in the introduction of the so-called failure-rate method from the field of reliability testing in industrial engineering.

The traditional cohort approach to recidivism rates identifies a group at risk, defines a failure or recidivistic event, then jumps to some specified point in time and sorts the group into successes and failures - as of the point in time. No allowance is made concerning how long - within that time period - members of the group succeeded. Each person is or isn't a success. (Each person is or isn't two meters tall). Failure rates give credit for accumulated days. They are also ratios, like recidivism rates, but unlike recidivism rates, the time dimension is measured more accurately and is incorporated into the ratio. For example, four failures per 2400 man-days in one group versus four failures per 1900 man-days accumulated by a second group of equal size. Traditional cohort recidivism rates could

not distinguish these two groups, but failure-rates can. There are attendant advantages (and disadvantages) to failure-rate analysis. Some of these are discussed in Comparison of Cohort Analysis and Failure Rate Analysis (Hagstad and Allen-Hagen, report A 75-5, August 1975, D.C. Department of Corrections) and in numerous papers and publications by Carl Harris, Ph.D., based on work done for the Department.

There are other measures which incorporate some acknowledgement of the fact that people-changing enterprises, far from being all-or-nothing in their effect, are matters of degree. These include the percent of post-release time spent incarcerated, the average time to recidivism, and specification of the seriousness of repeat offenses. The collection of such information is much more difficult and expensive than traditional data, but where feasible should be pursued.

D. What isn't a recidivism rate?

Many program managers, executives, legislators and researchers become confused or discouraged by the variety of possible definitions of recidivism. Two unfortunate reactions are to fall-back on more indirect and subjective methods of evaluation, or to mistakenly accept other figures for recidivism rate.

Reliance on softer, intermediate measures of effectiveness can only lead to inconclusive results. Correctional

agencies typically justify program staff and equipment in terms of their supposed impact on the program participants' likelihood of return to prison? But program evaluation is frequently conducted in terms of meeting staff and physical standards set up by other agencies in other circumstances, or in terms of the number of program graduates, or altered attitudes, but rarely in terms of a comparison of post-program, post-release performances. The collection and reporting of such intermediate figures is certainly better than total abdication of the responsibility to evaluate program effectiveness; and, in fact, such efforts are necessary to point out potential intervening explanations of observed variations in recidivism rates. The point is, that without the availability of recidivism figures these intermediate measures just beg the question of program effectiveness.

Other measures are sometimes reported, especially by police and correctional agencies, which are clearly not recidivism rates. These typically provide a ratio of returnees to total workload. Thus, the police might report that 50% of all persons arrested for serious offenses in a given year had been arrested before or, even worse if it is mistaken for a recidivism rate, corrections might find that 65% of all incarcerated have served time before. Both of these figures can vary independently of a real

recidivism rate. They may go up while recidivism is declining, or vice versa. If the arrest recidivism rate were increasing, but new arrests were increasing even faster, for examples, in hard economic times, then the ratio of recidivists to the total police workload would drop. In the case of the proportion of incarcerated who are recidivists this problem is further compound by the fact that recidivists tend to be given longer sentences, and are less likely to be released at initial parole eligibility. Therefore, they accumulate in the pool of incarcerated, and always are present in greater proportions than that in which they were sentenced.

These figures (intermediate and workload related) are useful and interesting, but they are not recidivism measures, and cannot serve as adequate substitutes.

## II. Available Indicators

This section contains a review of some of the presently available figures on recidivism in the District of Columbia. It is an attempt to get some idea of the dimensions of the problem, and to see how the District compares to some national figures, and with our own past. True recidivism rates are considered first and then some "related measures." No claim is made that the material covered is exhaustive of the field.

Research of any kind is supposed to be cumulative, to build on what has been done. This argues for the necessity of such a review. Evaluation research is made immeasurably more meaningful when it is conducted on a continuous, systematic basis, providing the kind of routine feedback to managers and administrators that is necessary for rational decision-making. We can learn from the mistakes and deficiencies of previous research, as well as trying to replicate its best features.

### A. Parole Recidivism Rates

Table I includes two daily failure-rates computed for all parolees in 1974 through 1976. The first counts a parolee as a failure if a warrant is requested by the Office of Parole Supervision and the second uses actual Parole Board revocations as the definition of failure. By either measure the failure-rate increased considerably over these three

I. Parole Recidivism 1974 - 1976\*

	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>
Population	2525	2435	2257
Parole Supervision Warrants Requested	880	1187	1505
Daily Failure-Rate	.095%	.134%	.183%
Projected One Year Probability of Failure	34.7%	48.9%	66.8%
Revocations	197	285	315
Daily Failure-Rate	.021%	.032%	.038%
Projected One Year Probability of Failure	7.9%	11.7%	13.9%

\*Figures were computed from data made available by the  
D.C. Board of Parole and Parole Supervision.

years - almost doubling by both measures. The average revocation rate for the three years is about 11%. That is, every parolee has an 11% chance of having failed within one year.

Separate rates for persons sentenced as adults and under the Federal Youth Corrections Act are contained in Table II. The clear conclusion is that, by both definitions of failure (warrant request or revocation) the youth cases are far more recidivistic; they constitute approximately twice the risk.

A more traditional, cohort study of the recidivism rates of youth and adult parolees released in FY 73 again showed youth with a considerably higher recidivism rate. Two youth and two adult release cohorts were identified. Failure was defined as any new conviction or technical violation resulting in return to prison for more than 5 days. The results are contained in Table III and the accompanying chart. The higher rates (at 12 months) compared to tables I & II are the result of a more stringent definition of recidivism. A person can return to prison for more than 5 days and then be reinstated to parole. Thus he/she would not be counted as a recidivist in the earlier tables but would be here.

The general findings were that about half of the youths released to parole, and about a third of the adults, return

II. Comparison of Adult and Youth Recidivism Rates\*  
 (based on figures from 1974 through 1976)

	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Youth</u>
Population	1772	637
Average Number of Warrants Requested Annually	738	455
Daily Failure Rate	.11%	.20%
Projected Annual Rate	40.2%	.73%
<hr/>		
Average Number of Revocations	151	115
Daily Failure Rate	.02%	.05%
Projected Annual Rate	8.5%	18.1%

\*Figures computed from data made available by D.C. Board  
 of Parole and from Parole Supervision.



to prison for more than 5 days within two years of release. The youth findings are about the same as those from a two-year follow-up of youth releasees conducted on a 1963 release cohort. (Pownall and Karachi). Using a slightly less stringent definition of failure (conviction, and sentencing for more than 30 days) they obtained a 46.2% recidivism rate. Glaser's two year follow-up of federal Youth Act cases released between 1954 and 1958 indicated a 51% recidivism rate (any new conviction or parole violation). A two year follow-up of federal YCA cases released in 1961 conducted by the Federal Bureau of Prisons was 57.3% (any new commitment of one day or more or parole violation). Accounting for the slight variations in the definitions used, these are very similar rates for youths released more than 10 years apart.

From the shape of the curves in the chart an additional finding is that, while adults seemed to be leveling off in their likelihood of failure by two years, youth are still failing. If an adult makes it for two years in the community we can feel relatively certain that he will continue in good standing. For youths this is not the case. Presumably the youth also reach a leveling off point - perhaps at three or five years. This indicates that follow-up periods for youth in any future efforts to use recidivism rates to identify program effectiveness should be at least for three years and may need to be longer.

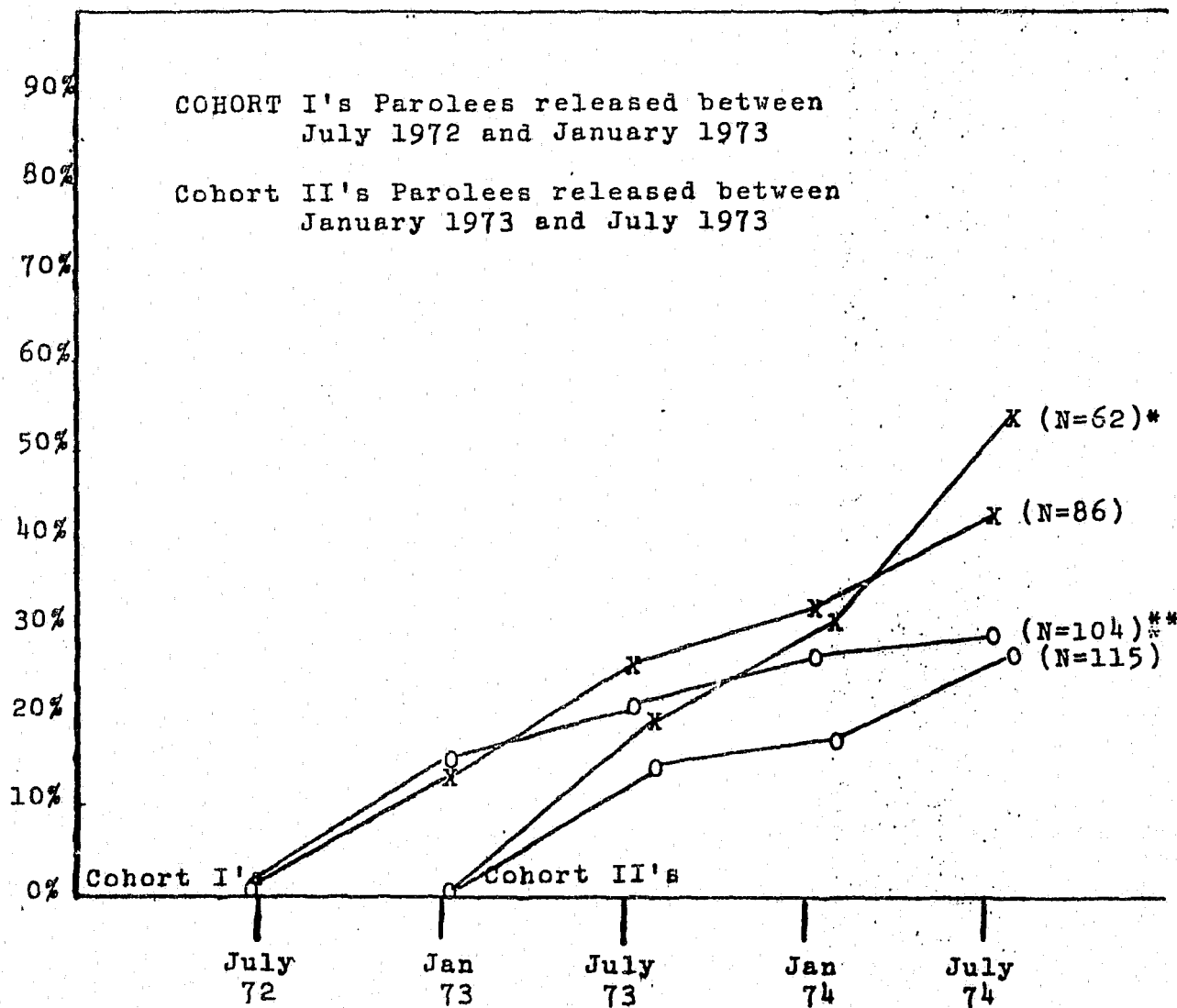
III. Parole Failure Rates For Youth  
and Adult Cohort I  
(released between 7/1/72 - 1/19/73)

Months	Youth N=86		Adult N=104	
	Cumulative No.	%	Cumulative No.	%
6	10	11.6	13	12.5
12	23	26.7	21	20.2
18	27	31.3	27	25.9
24	36	41.8	31	29.8

Parole Failure Rates For Youth  
and Adult Cohort II  
(released between 1/20/73 - 7/18/73)

Months	Cumulative		Cumulative	
	No.	%	No.	%
6	11	17.7	12	10.4
12	17	27.4	17	14.8
18	31	50.0	29	25.2

Parole Failure Rates For Youth  
and Adult Cohorts I & II



\* X= Youth Cohorts  
\*\* O= Adult Cohorts

The National Council on Crime and Delinquency provides data in the Uniform Parole Report which can be used to compare the performance of D.C. parolees with that of a national average. They collect and report data on one, two and three year follow-ups of all persons reported to them as having been granted parole in a given year. The figures offered in Tables IV & V are averages of other averages and should not be pushed too far. Nonetheless, some clear conclusions can be drawn.

The overall (new conviction, technical violations, absconds) parolee recidivism for District parolees is consistently lower than the average rates reported to NCCD, though this difference decreases over time. At one year's exposure, D.C. parolees have failed at only about half the national average. This is somewhat surprising in view of D.C.'s comparatively liberal parole policies, its unusually high general incarceration rate (prisoners per 1000 city residents) and its 100% urban status, with all the criminogenic factors associated therewith. At three years exposure the difference is considerably less but still favors the District.

Using a more restricted definition of recidivism (recommitted to prison with a new major conviction) D.C. recidivism rates are higher than the national norm. This difference increases as exposure increases, unlike the deteriorating one favoring D.C. in the overall rates. As

IV. Comparison of Total D.C. and U.S. Parolees  
Recidivism Rates 1971 - 1974

	Years in Follow-up		
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
D.C.	11	20	23
U.S.	19	26	28

V. Comparison of Major New Convictions and  
Return to Prison Recidivism Rates for  
D.C. and U.S. Parolees

	Years in Follow-up		
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
D.C.	5	9	11
U.S.	4	7	8

mentioned, it should not surprise anyone that DC parolees would have a higher recidivism rate than the national norm. The fact that the major reconviction rate is higher for DC while the overall recidivism rate is lower would seem to indicate a lower concern, in DC, with the technical conditions of parole.

In summary, parole recidivism rates are increasing in D.C. in recent years. Youth generally perform considerably worse than adults, though no worse than comparable federal youth cohorts studied almost 20 years ago. Specific figures vary with the definitions of failure employed, but in general, about 30% of adults return within two years of release, versus 50% for youth. Total D.C. parole recidivism rates (technical, short-term returns etc.) compare favorably with the national average, while DC rates for the more narrowly defined recidivism rates (return to prison with a major new conviction) are slightly higher than the national average.

B. Effects of Halfway Houses

Several studies of the recidivism rates of halfway house releasees have been done since 1970 and one is in the process of development into a routinely produced report providing continuous feedback. The first to be reviewed here was a consultant-conducted evaluation of Community Correctional Centers in D.C. and offered a comparison of

post-release performance of institutional vs CCC releasees (Informatics). (Table VI). These were persons released during fiscal 1972 and they were followed-up until 4/2/73. The two groups did not have equal average exposure times (10.3 months for institutional and 11.6 months for CCC parolees), but the bias favors the institutional releasees, so that any differences found favorable to CCC parolees should be even more convincing.

CCC parolees were involved in fewer total incidents, and fewer arrests but were convicted and reincarcerated more often, proportionately. (Only the total incident and arrest differences was statistically significant at the .05 level however). The institutional releasees were found to include a higher proportion of recidivists to begin with (74% vs 67%), a higher proportion of whites (10.5% vs 3%), and to have served less time (25 vs 32 mo).

The most useful point to be learned for future studies is to include several definitions of recidivism. Simple rearrest figures favored one group (CCC) but reconviction rates showed no difference and return to prison rates may actually favor the other group (institutional parolees). One other point should be mentioned. Anyone recidivating during his stay in the CCC is not included here as a failure. This additional community risk time is part of the CCC program and should have been included.

VI. Comparison of Parole Performance of Parolees  
Released from Institutions and from CCCs  
(FY 72)

	<u>Institutions</u>	<u>CCCs</u>
Total	219	251
%Total Incidents	37.0	22.7
%Arrested	26.5	15.5
%Convicted	4.6	4.8
%Incarcerated	7.3	8.8

1  
4  
1  
6  
2  
8



A projected rearrest failure proportion for the two groups did include arrests during the in-house exposure period (table VII).

VII. CCC and Institutional Parolees' Cumulative Projected Proportion Arrests

<u>Months Exposure</u>	<u>Institutional Parolees</u>	<u>CCC</u>
6	14.1	12.9
12	24.6	20.5
18	32.7	26.2

The difference in post-program performance originally was 26.5% vs 15.5% rearrested (in slightly unequal exposure times). By mathematically correcting exposure times and including in-program arrests of CCC residents the original difference in performance is somewhat reduced.

Another section of the Informatics study related the proportion of CCC releasees or terminations (FY 72) who were failures by several definitions. These figures were also available by referral source. CCCs accept intake from the courts, from the Parole Board and directly from the Department of Corrections. (see table VII).

Looking at all releasees or terminations almost half (43%) are less than satisfactory, though only 9% were due to arrests. A comparison of in-program performance, by referral source again indicates the need to consider more than one definition of failure. Considering all incidents

VIII. In-Program Failures by Referral Source: FY 72

	<u>Total Termination</u>	<u>% Total Incidents</u>	<u>% Arrested</u>
Court	272	43.8	6.6
Parole Board	278	39.6	12.9
Department of Corrections	228	37.7	9.6
Total	1020*	43.0	9.0

\*Total does not add up due to incomplete information as to referral source for some releasees.

(arrests, abscond, technical violations), court referrals perform the worst. (Note that the administrators of the CCC program cannot exercise any further screening on court cases whereas they can and do for other referrals). However, looking only at rearrests while in the halfway house, court referrals do the best and Parole Board referrals the worst.

A subsequent analysis of this same data updated through 1/1/74 (from 6/15/71) and using the failure-rate techniques instead of the traditional cohort approach, revealed no statistically significant differences in the post-program performance of 1). youths released through CCC vs straight parole, 2). narcotic users vs non-users released from CCCs, 3). female offenders released from the Washington Halfway House for Women to parole (or even probation) vs unconditional, unsupervised releasees, and 4). male halfway house releasees vs female halfway house releasees. There were some observed differences in the daily failure rates but, due to the relatively small number of observations, none could reach significance. It did verify a difference in post-release performance of CCC and straight parole releasees (Harris, 1974).

In January 1971 the Department of Corrections began a special Youth Crime Control Project which was designed to compare the effectiveness of a completely community-based alternative (and making some claims to the therapeutic community idea) to the traditional incarceration cum gradual

reentry to the community approach. Participants were randomly assigned (202 assigned to the experimental and 202 to the control groups). Psycho-social and demographic characteristics were checked for comparability and were found to be "essentially alike." Violent and notorious offenders had been removed from the initial selection pool. Intake was terminated on 4/1/74.

The experimentals had a higher in-program failure rate (56% vs 20%) and a lower parole attainment rate (31% vs 50%). The rest were still in program at the end of the study (13% of experimentals vs 30% of controls). There was no significant difference between the overall parole performance after 24 months of exposure (nor at 6, 12, or 18 months minimum exposure). Of those returned to incarceration for in-program failures and subsequently re-released to the community (55% of experimentals vs 54% of controls) the experimentals had a lower proportion of failures (56% vs 73% of those re-released). This finding presents a dilemma. Should the superior re-release performance of failed experiments be attributed to delayed benefits of the impact of the more intensive program, or is it more likely that the much higher technical termination rate of the experimental program (46% vs 15%) was washing out a significant number of persons who could have succeeded in the traditional gradual re-entry program.

If we focus strictly on new convictions (both in-program and post-program to reasonably account for the additional

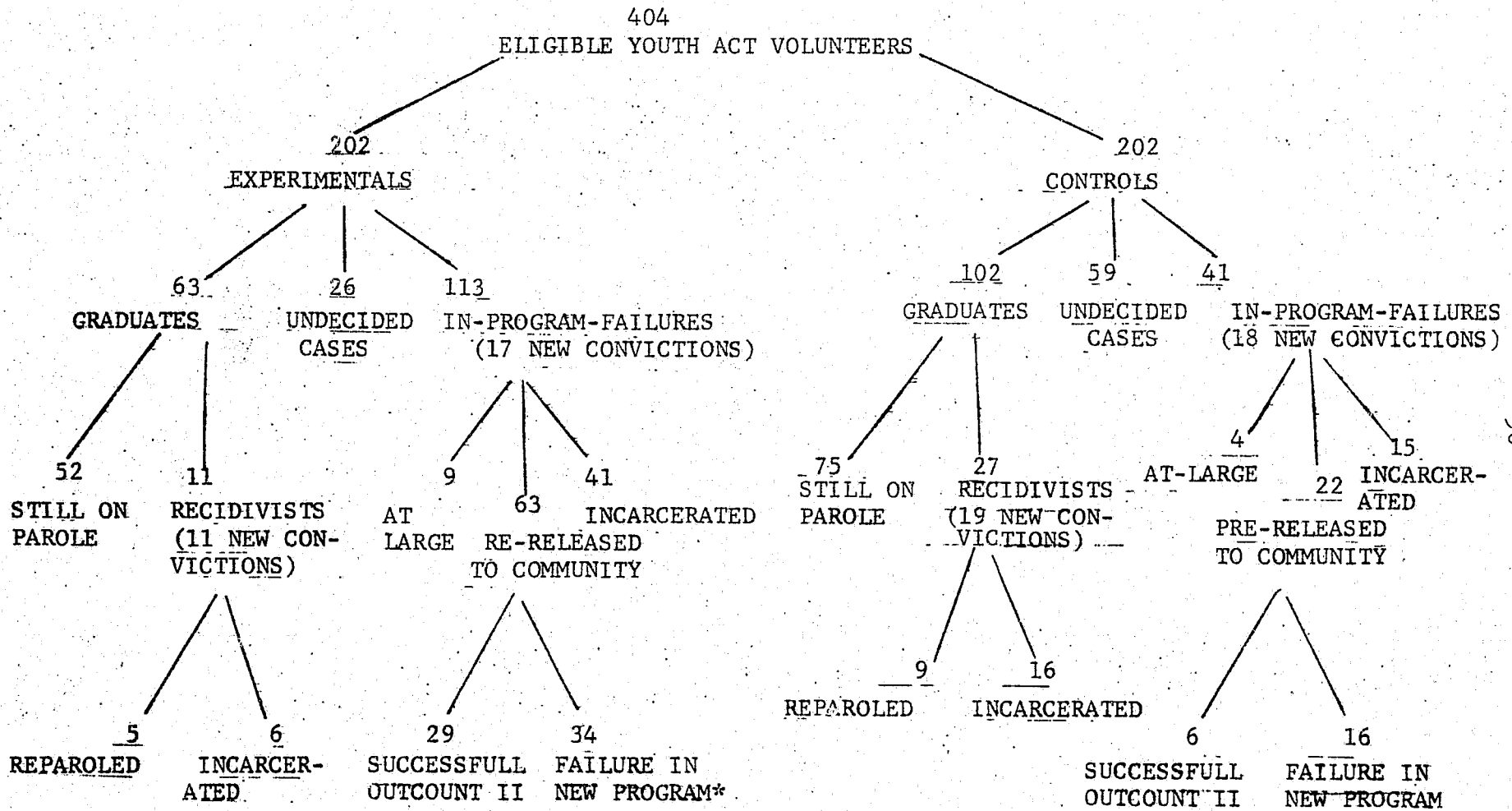
time at risk of the experimentals), a different result is obtained. Only 14% of the experimentals were reconvicted over the course of the study (8.5% in-program and 5.5% post-program) vs 18% of the controls (9% in-program and 9% post-program). Obviously, the more ready use of program expulsion for technical rule violations noted above (46% vs 15%) produced some of this 4% difference in new convictions. "Program effects" presumably contributed the rest.

Put another way, YCCP managed to avoid 10 additional convictions (verified victims in the community) through the impact of the therapeutic community approach and by expelling 46 additional people for rule violations (most of whom were unqualified successes upon subsequent re-release). One conclusion might be that, whatever success the YCCP project had in protecting the community may well have been due to a high security orientation rather than to any special rehabilitation orientation.

By the end of the program 78% of the original experimentals and 81% of the controls were functioning in the community. No figure was offered for the number of days spent incarcerated during the study period.

The final analysis of CCC release recidivism rates is that contained in the quarterly CCC Report, (Allen-Hagen). The report contains much else by way of program description (input, referral sources, termination by reason etc.). Only

Chart I. COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS ON OVERALL PROGRAM STATUS  
 JANUARY 1971 to APRIL 1974



\*Failure = IPF or Recidivism in new program.

(from Youth Crime Control Project: A Final Report, Allen-Hagen, 3-75)

two of these reports have been completed to date. They cover an average post-program exposure period of 8.5 months. The recidivism rate at this relatively short time of exposure is 14% (arrested or reincarcerated for a parole violation). Female and youth releasees had the highest recidivism rate (25% and 24% respectively). But again, due to the small numbers, no statistically significant differences were observed. The projected one year youth CCC releasee recidivism rate was 27% - exactly the same as the one year 27% recidivism rate of all youth parolees in the two youth 6 month release cohorts. (Boyd). Adult CCC releasees were projected to have a one year recidivism rate of 17% compared to the 17.5 rate for adult parolees in the Boyd study.

In summary, no conclusive or consistent finding in favor of halfway houses has been found. This is especially surprising in view of the screening process which one assumes precedes halfway house placement. Reports using failure rate techniques (Harris, et al) are better able to distinguish outcomes and do indicate significantly better post-program performance for CCC releasees.

C. Recidivism Related Measures

As mentioned, several figures related to a recidivism rate (and occasionally referred to as recidivism rates) are available in the District. Typically they relate figures on the proportion of total workload (arrests, prosecutions, commitments to prison) who are "recidivists," by whatever definition. Properly understood, these figures are useful. They give a feel for the impact, or cost, of the phenomenon.

The Metropolitan Police Department produces a Quarterly Recidivism Report. It contains the number of arrests for specific "serious offenses" and the number of arrestees who were "recidivists." A recidivist, according to this report, is anyone on pre-trial release, on probation or parole, in a halfway house, or on furlough who is arrested. This is actually a conservative definition, from a police point of view, in the sense that numerous arrested persons who have been previously arrested, but are not currently in one of these statuses, are not counted as recidivists.

According to police figures (see Table IX) between a fifth and a quarter of all serious arrests are of persons in some sort of release program run by, or sanctioned by, criminal justice agencies. A naive interpretation (and not one suggested by MPD) is that the complete (and unconstitutional) elimination of all pre-trial release could reduce our serious arrests by 14-15%, or that the closing down of all halfway



IX. Police Recidivism Reports (serious offenses only)

	1975		1976	
	#	%	#	%
Total Arrests	13707		11958	
#of Recidivist	3163*	23	2625*	22
Pre-Trial	1980	14	1757	15
Probation	908	7	952	8
Corrections	714	5	609	5

\*The total number of recidivists cannot be arrived at by adding the pre-trial, probation and corrections sub-totals because some persons were in more than one status.

houses, work and educational furlough programs and all of parole would eliminate one of every twenty serious crimes. (I repeat, this is not the suggestion, implied or otherwise, of the Metropolitan Police Department). Allowance of these crimes is justified in terms of the prominence of law and due process over crime repression, in the case of pre-trial release, and the presumed net benefit to community security of gradual reentry to the community by inmates who would shortly be released anyway.

A point to note from Table IX is that, even though the number of persons on pre-trial and corrections release status who were arrested declined considerably (-9% and -15% respectively), use of the percent of the total who were recidivists type of figure indicated a stable or worsening circumstance because of the sizeable decline in serious arrests overall.

While MPD specifically eschews any intention to evaluate the programs of other agencies, some comparisons of true recidivism rates can be made if, with the permission and cooperation of the agencies concerned, one can obtain figures on the average daily population for the comparable time periods (Table X). In 1976 a pre-trial releasee was twice as likely to be arrested for a serious offense as a corrections releasee. This is hardly surprising given the fact that pre-trial release is a right while corrections

X. Comparison of Performance of Persons  
on Pre-Trial and Correctional Release  
Programs: 1975 - 76

	<u>Average Daily Population</u>	<u># Arrested for Serious Offenses</u>	<u>Daily Failure-Rate</u>
Pre-Trial*			
1975	3250	1980	.167%
1976	3500	1757	.138%
Corrections			
1975	2720	714	.0719%
1976	2540	609	.0657%

\*The pre-trial average daily population is an estimate.

release is a privilege, earned only after extensive observation and programming in prison. What is surprising is that the Bail Agency was able to improve the performance of its caseload so much in one year. A move from a daily failure probability of .167% to .138% may not seem too comprehensible, much less impressive, until projected, for example, to a percent failing after three months time on release status (15% vs 12.5%).

The D.C. Bail Agency recently released a report on 1975 activities. It indicates that 40% of papered cases processed in the most common offense categories had at least one prior adult conviction, and that 22% had more than one prior adult conviction. These cases were about evenly split between being on pre-trial and post-time (parole and probation) release status (21% each with 1% being in both statuses).

Bail Agency figures on parolees showing up in the group formally charged would indicate a .157% daily failure rate, or a 57% projected, one year recidivism rate. This is comparable to the 49% warrant request rate (Table I) but, obviously, at least some parolees are formally charged without having a parole violation warrant requested. This study includes a comparison of some characteristics of recidivists and non-recidivists. Recidivists, as a group, are younger, blacker, twice as likely to be drug involved, more likely to be unemployed, less well educated and with a more extensive criminal justice history.

One curiosity is how the Bail Agency identified 1430 cases involving corrections releasees who were formally charged in 1975 while the police only reported arresting 714. Apparent discrepancies such as this are usually explainable in terms of different definitions and "ways of counting." A greater emphasis on outcomes and a willingness to share data and reports would accelerate the process.

The D.C. Department of Corrections keeps track (again on a quarterly basis) of the number of commitments to its detention facilities who have previously been committed. This does not mean that they were ever previously found guilty or sentenced to serve time. It probably comes closest to a rearrests: total arrests definition of recidivism. As can be seen from Table XI, over the past four calendar years roughly 50% of all commitments were recidivists in this sense. Note that, if a person is committed, then makes bail or receives some other pre-trial release status, and then returns (for a violation, or conviction, or another charge) he is counted as a recommit - or "recidivist."

While the absolute number of recommitments has been rising, it haven't kept pace with the rise in new commitments to the Department, so that the proportion of all commitments to detention who have been seen before has declined. From the last two rows of Table XI we see that, while the male commitments' percent recidivists is higher than females generally, it is steadily declining, while the female rate was rising steadily until 1976.

XI. % of Detention Commitments who are Recidivists\*

	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>
Total Commitments	4978	5435	6167	8005
Recommitts	2794	2861	3233	3307
<u>%Recidivists</u>	<u>56%</u>	<u>53%</u>	<u>52%</u>	<u>41*</u>
Male %Recidivists	59%	55%	53%	43%
Female %Recidivists	28%	33%	45%	28%

\*In this case, recidivism is defined as recommitment to D.C. Department of Corrections. No recidivism rate is offered here - only a % of cases processed which involved recidivists.

The final piece of information on recidivism related figures for the District of Columbia comes from the U.S. Prosecutor's Office's PROMIS system, and the Interim Reports published by the Institute for Law and Social Research (INSLAW). Of all arrests and prosecutions recorded in PROMIS between 1/1/71 and 8/31/75 over 50% involved persons who had previously been arrested or prosecuted previously within that same time period (Table XII). Of course, if data were available going back further in time an even higher percentage would qualify as recidivists. Only 35% of all those convicted had previously been convicted (within the 56 months of study). In addition to the conservative bias mentioned for arrest and prosecution figures, it should be realized that some portion of these convicted were sent to prison where their opportunities for recidivating were reduced or delayed, though not entirely removed, as can be seen in Table XIII. 3% of all convictions involved people who had been convicted at least 4 times before within the 56 month period, one out of every four arrests involved someone with three priors. And one in three prosecutions were of persons prosecuted at least two times previously.

The PROMIS data base could be used to supply true cohort recidivism rates as well as approximations of daily failure rates. These in turn should be useful as continuous, systematic feedback on the impact of various policy or organizational changes (particularly if adequate

XII. Comparison of Arrest, Prosecution and Conviction  
Recidivists\* (based on data from Jan 1, 1971 to  
Aug 31, 1975)

	<u>Arrest</u>	<u>Prosecution</u>	<u>Conviction</u>
Total	72,610	58,116	18,650
%Recidivists	56%	53%	35%

\*Data from INSLAW "Highlights Interim Findings and  
Implication," PROMIS Research Project, Report #1.



controls for social and economic characteristics could be introduced). Offense specific impacts could be assessed. Even the more sensitive measures (because they are continuous variables) of time to recidivism, frequency of repeat, or seriousness of new offense could be developed from this data base.

In summary the "related measures" from the bail agency, D.C. Detention and INSLAW seem to indicate that roughly 50% or more of the workload of D.C. criminal justice agencies consists of repeaters. The more restricted definition used by the police indicates that 20-25% of their arrest workload involves persons currently under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system. Beyond the substantive findings, it is also true that the currently available figures have the potential to be even more useful if shared on a routine basis.

XIII. Extent of Recidivism for Arrests, Prosecutions, and Convictions\* (based on data from Jan 1, 1971 to Aug 31, 1975).

	<u>Arrests</u>	<u>Prosecutions</u>	<u>Convictions</u>
**at least 1 prior	56%	53%	35%
at least 2 priors	36%	32%	15%
at least 3 priors	24%	20%	6%
at least 4 priors	16%	13%	3%

\*Data from INSLAW "Highlights of Interim Findings and Implication," PROMIS Research Project, Report #1.

\*\*The figures represent the percent of all arrests (cases filed or convictions) which were accounted for by defendants having at least the indicated number of prior arrests (cases filed or convictions).

### III. Conclusion

#### A. Critique

This paper has, for the most part, avoided esoteric, methodological criticisms of the recidivism research reviewed. This section does not include detailed or individual critiques, but rather a set of general observations about the weaknesses of what has been done. There are three bases for the decision to avoid a more academic and rigorous review: 1. the guiding credo for all agency research (eschew obfuscation!), 2. the premise that the highest virtues of traditional research (experimental design, generalizability, internal validity, quality of data, theoretical underpinnings) should not necessary be the highest priorities for evaluation research conducted in operating agencies (continuous feedback, relevance, utility of data, timeliness), and 3. the fact that most of the research reviewed is so grossly inadequate for organizational needs as to make a detailed critique unnecessary (not to mention demoralizing).

The first step in improving the general utility of recidivism research would be to link failure data with demographic, social and criminal characteristics of offenders. Every one of the studies includes some such information, even if only the fact that one group was sentenced under the FYCA while the other received adult sentences. The detailed

characteristics of the Bail Agency's one year study, or the YCCP experimental project should serve as examples in this regard. For institutional releasees it is essential that program data (participated in group therapy for two years, completed G.E.D. program, etc.) be included to allow for program evaluation in terms of post-program outcome. The simultaneous availability of data on offender characteristics, program participation and post-releases performance will provide a foundation from which to develop base expectations, screening for success tools, and detailed program justifications. Such an approach would allow for optimal program resource allocation, identifying which programs have the most impact on which groups of offenders. The only project which had a data base adequate for evaluation in terms of cost-effectiveness was the YCCP Final Report. This kind of analysis requires the availability of information on characteristics and program participation in recidivism research.

Two other general criticisms, which don't necessarily apply to each project reviewed, are the lack of timeliness and continuity. These factors are crucial for the practical utility of outcome research. Becoming overly concerned with formal, rigid research design (for example, the classic before-after with control group design) produces, at best, relevant information for answering yesterday's problems.

The most ambitious and in many ways the most admirable of the studies in corrections was on the YCCP project, but the project had been closed for a full year by the time that the evaluation's results were available. The decisions had already been made. Given the thoroughness of the report and the limited staff assigned to its preparation, completion even in one year is surprising.

The models, in this respect, are the MPD Quarterly Recidivism Report and the original intent of the quarterly Community Corrections Centers Report. Computerized data storage and analysis supplied the timeliness requirement for the CCC Report. Given the general availability of computers to criminal justice agencies today, resort to hand tabulation or even card-sorters bespeaks an obsolete attitude and lack of sophistication about modern research techniques, or results from a lack of planning for the research enterprise.

The need for replication of research is part of the coda of academic research. In an operating agency this criteria becomes much more important. Replication must become continuous repetition. It's the difference between the informational content of a snap-shot and a live television picture. Even the simplest of goal or task oriented automata need some form of feedback to avoid complete disaster or circular movement, and to most efficiently and accurately reach its goal. Can responsible management of a people-changing bureaucracy be any less demanding in its informational requirements?

Additional criticisms include use of dichotomous recidivism criteria (yes/no), an apparent reluctance to rely on sampling instead of whole counts, and reliance of follow-up periods of short duration.

#### B. Recommendation

The D.C. Department of Corrections should begin at once to develop a capacity for the routine, timely, computerized production of recidivism rates. Several alternative definitions of failure should be used (recommitment, revocation, new sentence) on a follow-up period of at least three years. Both cohort and failure-rate techniques should be used for analysis. Computer programs are needed that will produce separate figures for different risk groups, as defined by sex, sentence type (adult, FYCA), offense and type of release (straight parole, parole from a CCC, conditional or mandatory), as well as for any combination of these selection criteria (e.g., adult, female larcenists released via straight parole). This would be a decent start.

In anticipation of more sophisticated applications of recidivism research, information on offender characteristics, program participation, release types and dates and failure types and dates should all be located in one file. The amount and quality of social characteristics needs to be expanded and improved.

Examples of the kinds of data considered important,  
and the possible lay-out of a computerize recidivism report  
are included in appendix A.

Appendix A

Institutional	Community
<u>Programs</u>	<u>Release</u>
Participated (date in, date out) Academic (specific) Vocational ( " ) Therapy ( " ) Medical ( " ) Self Help ( " ) Furlough ( " ) Reason for Termination of each (completed, transfer, quit, expelled, disciplinary)	next parole eligibility date (new or rehearing) CR date Expiration date Outcome of last hearing (denial, parole, CCC, other jurisdiction) recommendation of classification committee C&P officer
<u>Escapes</u> (date out, date return)	<u>Community Performance</u>
type method of return	Furlough (date in, out) escaped? (date) new arrest (date)
<u>Disciplinary</u>	CCC (date in, out) house escaped VHR new arrest revocation paroled
# reports (percent incarcerated) (list most recent 8 charges with dates)	Parole (date in, out) escape rule violation new arrest revocation new conviction status (close, med., max., min., inactive) status date parole officer
<u>Work</u>	
present job assignment performance rating date of assignment most recently assigned: Institution (date in, out) C&P Officer	



Appendix A

Social	Criminal
<u>Demographic</u>	<u>Current</u>
sex age (d.o.b.) race birthplace D.C. address	charge (most serious) date of arrest date of committment conviction date of conviction plea
<u>Employment</u>	sentence type (regular, YCA, NARC, etc.) sentence (min., max.) date of sentence # other charges solitary or group offense outstanding charges ... local other
at arrest history (job titles & dates) # jobs in last 3 years GATB score income	Pre-Trial Status bond amount type of hold
<u>Education</u>	<u>History</u>
SAT scores attendance level	age at first record # prior arrests # prior conviction total incarceration time to date
<u>Family</u>	most recent 5 charges escape history
stability birth order # siblings	# prior probation # prior probation revoca- tion # prior paroles # prior parole revocation
<u>Health</u>	
Psychological IQ Personality Inventory Initial Recommendation	
Physical Drugs Alcohol Other	



Appendix B

Recidivism Report: Date: 1/1/78

Failure Definition: new conviction Sex: male Sentence Type: YCA Release Type: thru CCC Offense: al

Release Period	#Release	Percent Failing & Accumulated Man-days in:				Totals as of 1/1/78		Failure Rat
		6 mon.	1yr.	2yr.	3yr.	Failures	Man-days	
1973 1-6	56	3/10020	5/19790	7/35006	12/48988	13	78,509	.017
1973 7-12	47	3/ 9760	6/16972	9/30011	13/45001	12	67,933	.018
1974 1-6	52	4/ 9912	7/18990	9/32927	14/47940	13	55,546	.023
1974 7-12	48	2/ 9875	6/18703	8/30978	12/46673	11	48,757	.023
1975 1-6	60	3/11067	6/19077	8/36875		9	36,385	.025
1975 7-12	63	3/12012	5/21002	7/38989		7	24,989	.028
1976 1-6	41	2/ 9213	5/17075			3	19,477	.015
1976 7-12	44	4/ 9549	5/17776			2	14,796	.014
1977 1-6	56	3/10012				2	9,180	.022

Appendix C

Resources in Recidivism Research in Washington, D.C.

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Welsh, J. Daniel and Deborah Viets, The Pre-Trial Offender in the District of Columbia: 1975, D.C. Bail Agency and the Office of Criminal Justice Plans and Analysis, 1977.

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Appendix D. Findings of Fifteen Cohort Recidivism Studies

paper	group size	sex	sentence	release	special	failure definition	% failing in x months					
							6	12	18	24	30	36 +
Pownall 1966	160	M	YCA	Parole		*1.					66	
						*2					54	
Adams#7 1968	39	M	YCA	CCC		1	36					
						2	26					
						48			38			
									31			
						58				55		
										43		
						46					57	87
					41	60						
	15				1							
					2							
Adams#8 1968	4	M	YCA	Parole		1	15					
						2	12					
						13			40			
									19			
						18				62		
										28		
						14					54	
					35							
	19				1					51		
					2					32		
Adams#11 1969	432	M	Adult	All		1	8	13	20	25	35	44
						2	4	8	12	15	22	27
Adams#13 1969	156 125	M	Felons Misd.	CCC		1		22				
						1	24					

paper	cohort size	sex	sentence	release	special	failure definition	%	failing in x months						
								6	12	18	24	30	36, +	
Adams#16 1969	36	M	Adult (NI)	Parole	Drug Treatment	1	28							
	57		"	Parole	No Treat- ment	1	28							
	49		"	Exp.	"	1	45							
Adams#21 1970	37	M	YCA	Parole		1							41	
						2							32	
Adams#36 1970	214	M	YCA	Parole		2	15	25	34	44	51	38		
	154			CCC	2	17	28	34	38	55	65			
Heaton#15 1969	101	M	Adult	Parole		1	5	11	17	20	21	29		
					2	2	5	7	8	9	12			
	205			C.R.	1	9	13	19	24	33	43			
						2	4	7	11	15	21	27		
	126			Exp.		1	10	16	24	32	49	57		
						2	7	11	17	23	34	39		
Barros#31 1970	116	F	Adult	All		1	21	29	36					
						2	5	12	17					
Hecht 1971	120	M	All	CCC		1		28						
						2		12						
						1		44						
						2		23						
						1		38						
(97)		Felons	All		1		7							
					2		35							
(142)			Misd.		1		23							
					2									

paper	cohort size	sex	sentence	release	special	failure definition	% failing in x months						
							6	12	18	24	30	36	+
Caldwell 1969	165	M	All (NI)	All	absti- nence	1	56						
						2	12						
						1 2	37 10						
	31				Methadone	1 2	26 6						
Informatics 1973	219	M/F	All	Parole		1	37						
						2	5						
	251			CCC		1 2	23 5						
Allen-Hagen YCCP Project 1975	202	M	YCA	-	Exp.	1	61						
						2	14						
	202			All	Control	1 2	34 18						
Boyd 1975	219 148	M	Adult YCA	Parole		1	11						
						1	14						
							17	26	30				
							27	39	42				

\*1 e.g., arrest, recommitment

\*2 e.g., new conviction, parole revocation, stay of 30 days or longer in confinement



**END**