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AN ANALYSIS OF RECIDIVISM  
AMONG RESIDENTS RELEASED FROM MCI BRIDGEWATER  
DURING 1971 - 1975

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ABSTRACT

To assess the success and failure rates of its correctional institutions, the Massachusetts Department of Correction has been using recidivism statistics as one measure of effectiveness. Although the Department of Correction has conducted extensive recidivism analyses for all state correctional facilities, MCI Bridgewater was consistently excluded from that research, particularly due to small sample size from that institution. The purpose of the present study is to supply the necessary recidivism data for MCI Bridgewater in order to complete the relevant recidivism research for the years 1971-1975. Overall recidivism rates for releasees from Massachusetts correctional institutions were found to decrease from 1971 to 1973, level off in 1974, and increase slightly in 1975, although the increase was not statistically significant.

An analysis was conducted on the 162 individuals who were released from MCI-Bridgewater into the community during the five year period of 1971-1975. The overall recidivism rate for that period was calculated to be 27%. When compared with the overall recidivism rates for all state correctional institutions during the same period, it was concluded that the inclusion of MCI Bridgewater in recidivism analyses neither raises nor diminishes the total rates of recidivism for all state institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

With the recurring evidence that the impact of correctional programs can be measured through recidivism data<sup>1</sup>, Massachusetts has been utilizing recidivism statistics to help assess the success and failure rates of its correctional institutions. The Massachusetts Department of Correction Research Unit has completed recidivism analyses for 1971-1975 on all state correctional institutions with the exception of MCI Bridgewater.<sup>2</sup> Due to this gap in the Department of Correction recidivism literature, i.e., missing recidivism data for Bridgewater, this particular study is an attempt to fill in needed information to complete the Massachusetts Department of Correction files on recidivism research.

DISCUSSION OF RECIDIVISM MATERIAL

Perhaps the most pressing need in the area of recidivism research is the need for a standardized definition of recidivism. The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals emphasizes important issues that must be considered before an accurate description of recidivism can be utilized.<sup>3</sup> The Commission asks for attention to primarily be directed at the Criminal Justice System itself, a system which emphasizes and presumes innocence over guilt, as its necessary and foremost major component. This dilemma of objectives stands within the Criminal Justice System; i.e., police and corrections. If corrections research is basically the measurement of its failure or success rate, the reduction of crime equals the reduction of recidivism (with recidivism being that which is sought after to measure). A satisfactory count which must be obtained comes from either arrest rates reported by the police or conviction rates reported by the courts.

Arguments by the police are based on their presumption that arrests represent observed behavior, that is, an illegal behavior which should be incorporated into a recidivism measurement.

Correctional administrators advocate the utilization of convictions alone as a valid quantifier for recidivism. They refute police opinion and argue that recidivism should be measured solely by convictions. Since many arrests of illegal behavior do not result in convictions, arrests alone cannot be considered a verification of guilt. Court action via the guaranteed rights of due process should be utilized. Therefore, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals upholds that recidivism must be measured by re-convictions.

The Commission offers the following operational definition of recidivism as a means of reliable research.

Recidivism is measured by:

- (1) Criminal acts that resulted in conviction by a court, when committed by individuals who are under correctional supervision or have been released from correctional supervision within the previous three years, and by
- (2) Technical violations of probation or Parole in which a sentencing or paroling authority took action that resulted in an adverse change in the offender's legal status.<sup>4</sup>

More explicit in its interpretation is Massachusetts' definition of recidivism.

A recidivist is defined as any subject who has returned to a Federal or State Correctional Institution or to a county house of correction or jail for 30 days or more.<sup>5</sup>

Minor offenders, and those arrested but not convicted are excluded by this definition. Included are most parole violators. The definition applies to persons on probation if they are convicted of a new charge and subsequently incarcerated, and in those cases in which probation would be revoked and a previously suspended sentence carried out.<sup>6</sup>

Massachusetts Department of Correction researchers have tested the definition and found it to be instrumental when applied to an incarcerated population. It is therefore, referred to as the state's official definition, and has been approved as standard for use in all recidivism studies.

A summary of the comparative recidivism rate for the years 1971-1975 is presented below in Table I.

Overall recidivism rates for releases in Massachusetts Correctional Institutions decreased during the years 1971-1973. Total statistical rates exhibit a fall from 25% to 22% in 1972, and still a further reduction to a 19% recidivism rate in 1973.

The Department of Correction attributes the reduction to two major system changes that affect Massachusetts Corrections, (both of these incidently took effect in 1972): the Correctional Reform Act, and the implementation of the Morrissey vs. Brewer decision.<sup>7</sup>

The Correctional Reform Act of 1972 introduced to Massachusetts' corrections a wide variety of changes. The act created the establishment of pre-release centers, halfway houses, and a home furlough program. Also included in the act, is the provision for expansion of work and education release programs.<sup>8</sup>

A change in the parole revocation process was brought about by the U.S. Supreme Court decision of Morrissey vs. Brewer. Due to Morrissey vs. Brewer, a parolee is now granted two parole revocation hearings before final revocation action can be taken. The Massachusetts Department of Correction (LeClair, 1974) states that it is safe to assume the decrease in the number of revokes for reason of a technical infraction of



TABLE I

COMPARATIVE RECIDIVISM RATES FOR THE YEARS 1971 - 1975

<u>INSTITUTION</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>
Concord	24%	27%	26%	27%	26%
Walpole	27%	21%	21%	22%	27%
Norfolk	18%	15%	14%	19%	12%
Framingham	29%	18%	17%	12%	18%
Pre-Release	-	-	12%	12%	14%
Forestry	14%	14%	14%	7%	15%
TOTAL	25%	22%	19%	19%	20%

parole rules may be interwoven with the effects of the application of the Morrissey vs. Brewer decision in Massachusetts.<sup>9</sup>

Overall recidivism rates after 1973 show a leveling off period with a slight increase for 1975. Cumulative rates begin to stabilize for 1974, but specific institutions indicate a moderate rise in recidivism rates. Statistical analyses have proven that although measurement exhibits a minimal upward fluctuation, none of the rate increases was statistically significant.

A major finding that proved significant in the Massachusetts recidivism literature, is that of the correlation of the security level of the institution, and its recidivism rate. LeClair (1974), has found that individuals released from minimum security institutions and pre-release centers have a significantly lower probability of recidivating than the individuals released directly from maximum and medium security institutions. Individuals directly released from maximum security institutions have the highest probability of recidivating.<sup>10</sup>

Massachusetts' Department of Correction is using recidivism statistics as one measure of effectiveness. Small sample size has been the major causal factor for the Department of Correction's elimination of MCI Bridgewater in its recidivism literature. To include Bridgewater in past analyses would have projected a false picture of recidivism trends at the institution. During 1971, MCI Bridgewater legitimately released one person, the number increased to N=25 in 1972, and continued its pattern of uprise to N=26 in 1973, N=49 in 1974, and N=61 in 1975. Although only a few residents were actually released in 1971 and 1972, the releasee population actually increased substantially, with the total number of 1971-1975 releases equalling 162. In order to further study the trends of Massachusetts institutional recidivism, the present paper will provide an addition to the current state Department of Correction literature, through statistical analyses of MCI Bridgewater releasees, in an effort to determine their rate of recidivism.

MCI BRIDGEWATER

First an almhouse for paupers (1855), later becoming the state workhouse (1877), and even later assuming its present title of Massachusetts Correctional Institution (1965), MCI Bridgewater is the largest in population and area of all correctional institutions in the state.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike other state correctional institutions, MCI-Bridgewater has gained little in attention with respect to statistical reports. This omission is a result of the diverse types of residents housed at this facility.<sup>12</sup>

The resident population is extremely distinct in regards to its breakdown; it consists of two groups: patients, and prisoners. Confinement at Bridgewater as a result of a civil or voluntary commitment deems the label of patient. The prisoners are the convicted offenders in custody of the Department of Correction, who have been transferred from other Massachusetts Correctional Institutions or County facilities for a variety of purposes: i.e., psychiatric services, specialized medical treatment, protective custody, etc. The prisoner population at Bridgewater is small in comparison with the total number of patient residents. As of December 29, 1975, there were 105 prisoners vs. 642 patients.<sup>13</sup>

During the years 1971 to 1975, the Bridgewater facility consisted of three separate departments: the Addiction Center which provides treatment for alcoholics and drug addicts; the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane; and the Sex Treatment Center for sexually dangerous persons.

This statistical report will focus on the prisoner population of Bridgewater, as these are the men in the custody of the Department of Correction. Two distinct groups make up the prisoner population: court committed drunkenness cases and transfers.

Until 1973, any individual convicted of the charge of drunkenness who received a sentence of more than 30 days was committed to MCI Bridgewater. However, the Alcoholism Treatment and Rehabilitation Law of 1971 abolished the crime of drunkenness as of July 1, 1974.<sup>14</sup>

Transfers consist of residents who were originally committed to other Massachusetts Correctional Institutions, but later transferred to MCI Bridgewater.

Farrington and Mackey (1974) of the Department of Correction have researched trends in population at Bridgewater and have

found that a profile of prisoners at Bridgewater would exhibit a constant decline for all drunkenness charges from 1969 until a cease in 1973, and a steady dramatic rise in the transfer population at Bridgewater during the span of 1969-1974.<sup>15</sup>

### METHODOLOGY

The anticipated result of my analyses is to answer the following questions:

- (1) What is the recidivism rate for sentenced inmates released from MCI Bridgewater?
- (2) How does MCI Bridgewater's recidivism rate compare with other Massachusetts Correctional Institutions?

### DEFINITION

The aforementioned definition will be used:

A recidivist is defined as any subject who has returned to a Federal or State Correctional Institution or to a House of Correction or Jail for 30 days or more.

### FOLLOW UP PERIOD

The follow-up period is measured one year from the date of the subject's release into the community.

### POPULATION STUDIED

The chosen population to survey were all legitimate releases to the street, i.e., parole, expiration of sentence, and good conduct discharges, during the years 1971-1975 from MCI Bridgewater. The total number of releases for each year is as follows: 1971, N=1; 1972, N=25; 1973, N=26; 1974, N=49; and 1975, N=61.

### DATA COLLECTED

For the analyses that follow in this report 14 variables primarily related to recidivism were collected. A listing of the variables is given in Appendix I. The data was collected from the files of the Department of Correction, the Parole Board, and the Board of Probation. All data was analyzed on the Massachusetts State College Computer Network.

FINDINGS

A total of 162 individuals were released to the street from Massachusetts Correctional Institution-Bridgewater during the 5 year period of 1971-1975. Of the 162 released, 118 (73%) were not returned to a correctional institution within one year of their release. The remaining 44 individuals (27%) were reincarcerated for at least 30 days within one year of their release. Thus, the overall rate of recidivism during 1971-1975 at MCI Bridgewater, was 27%.

Recidivism rates for each year range from a high of 32% in 1972 to a low of 0% in 1971. A breakdown of recidivism rates for each year is summarized below in Table II.

TABLE II

RECIDIVISM RATE BY YEAR, 1971-1975

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NUMBER OF RELEASEES</u>	<u>RECIDIVISM RATE</u>
1971	1	0%
1972	25	32%
1973	26	23%
1974	49	29%
1975	61	26%
TOTAL	162	27%

Overall recidivism rates for all state correctional institutions during 1971-1975, including MCI Bridgewater, are depicted below in Table III.\*

TABLE III

COMPARATIVE RECIDIVISM RATES FOR YEARS 1971-1975

<u>INSTITUTION</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>
Concord	28%	27%	26%	27%	26%
Walpole	27%	21%	21%	22%	27%
Norfolk	18%	15%	14%	19%	12%
Framingham	29%	18%	17%	12%	18%
Pre-Release	-	-	12%	12%	14%
Forestry	14%	14%	14%	7%	15%
Bridgewater	0%	32%	23%	29%	26%
TOTAL	25%	22%	19%	19%	20%

A major finding the table portrays is that the inclusion of MCI Bridgewater in recidivism analyses neither raises nor diminishes the total rates of recidivism for all state correctional institutions. These statistics demonstrate the reduction of recidivism for all state correctional institutions. These statistics demonstrate the reduction of recidivism rates during the years 1972 and 1973.

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\* Table III is actually a reproduction of Table I, but with the inclusion of recidivism rates for MCI Bridgewater.

SPECIFIC CATEGORY OF RECIDIVISM FOR MCI BRIDGEWATER RELEASES DURING  
1971-1975

While researching recidivism, it is important to take note, and examine the specific categories of return covered under the term recidivism. Of those who were recidivists during the five year period, 17 or 39% of the total 44 recidivists in the sample were reincarcerated for reason of a technical infraction of their parole conditions. These individuals did not have a new arrest associated with their parole violation. Sixteen individuals or 36% of the total 44 recidivists were reincarcerated because a new arrest was associated with their parole violation. Sixteen individuals, or 36% of the total 44 recidivists were reincarcerated as a result of a new conviction; i.e., received a new sentence from the court. These figures are summarized in Table IV below.



TABLE IV

RECIDIVISM BREAKDOWN FOR 1971-1975 RELEASES BY CATEGORY OF RETURN

MCI-BRIDGewater

	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
	<u>N</u> <u>%</u>	<u>N</u> <u>%</u>	<u>N</u> <u>%</u>	<u>N</u> <u>%</u>	<u>N</u> <u>%</u>	<u>N</u> <u>%</u>
Non Recidivists	1 (100)	17 ( 68)	20 ( 77)	35 ( 71)	45 ( 74)	118 ( 73)
<u>RECIDIVISTS</u>						
Parole Violation, Technical	0 ( 0)	4 ( 16)	3 ( 11)	5 ( 10)	5 ( 8)	17 ( 10)
Parole Violation, New Arrest	0 ( 0)	2 ( 8)	2 ( 8)	5 ( 10)	7 ( 11)	16 ( 9)
New Court Commitments	0 ( 0)	2 ( 8)	1 ( 4)	4 ( 8)	4 ( 7)	11 ( 7)
TOTAL	1 (100)	25 (100)	26 (100)	49 (100)	61 (100)	162 (100)

RECIDIVISM RATES BY COMMITTING INSTITUTION:

In the Massachusetts Criminal Justice System, the courts commit men to two institutions, MCI Concord or MCI Walpole. A Concord commitment can best be profiled as a younger offender with a relatively short record of criminal convictions. The state court system gives an indeterminate sentence to those committed to MCI Concord. In the case of men sentenced to MCI Walpole, the judge must fix both a minimum and maximum term (except for life sentences and sentences for habitual offenders.)<sup>16</sup>

The exception to an MCI Walpole or MCI Concord commitment, is a maximum sentence of not more than two and a half years to a house of correction.

In the case of this study all subjects were released from MCI Bridgewater. This means that MCI Walpole, MCI Concord, and house of correction commitments were transferred to MCI Bridgewater after having been carefully screened as both eligible and suitable for the variety of services this institution offers, i.e., treatment, protective custody, and/or a minimum security status.

The MCI Bridgewater 1971-1975 releasee sample was analyzed in terms of the institution to which each sample member was originally committed. Of the total 162 releases during the five year period, 60 individuals had been originally committed to MCI Walpole and had a recidivism rate of 15%; 92 had been originally committed to MCI Concord and had a recidivism rate of 37%; and 10 had been originally committed to houses of correction and had a recidivism rate of 10%. These results are summarized in Table V below.

From the results presented in Table V, two patterns which have been previously documented should be pointed out: first, more than half (57%) of the total 1971-1975 releasee population had been originally sentenced to MCI Concord, and secondly, the MCI Concord commitments had the higher recidivism rate.

RATES OF RECIDIVISM BY NEW OFFENSE

Recidivists are technical parole violators, parole violators with new arrests, and those individuals with new court commitments who fall under the Commonwealth of Massachusetts standardized definition of recidivism. Table VI profiles those individuals who have been labeled recidivists by the state definition and have committed a new offense. Of the 23 recidivists (14%) who did

TABLE V  
RECIDIVISM RATE BY COMMITTING INSTITUTION  
MCI BRIDGEWATER RELEASES

<u>INSTITUTION</u>	<u>1971</u>			<u>1972</u>			<u>1973</u>			<u>1974</u>			<u>1975</u>			<u>TOTAL N</u>	<u>TOTAL N RECIDIVISTS</u>	<u>TOTAL RECIDIVISM RATE</u>
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>RR</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>RR</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>RR</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>RR</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>RR</u>			
MCI Walpole	0	( 0)	0%	9	( 36)	0%	12	( 46)	25%	19	( 39)	11%	20	( 33)	20%	60	9	15%
MCI Concord	1	(100)	0%	16	( 64)	50%	14	( 54)	21%	30	( 61)	40%	31	( 51)	36%	92	34	37%
House of Correction	0	( 0)	0%	0	( 0)	0%	0	( 0)	0%	0	( 0)	0%	10	( 16)	10%	10	1	10%
<b>TOTAL</b>	1	(100)	0%	25	(100)	32%	26	(100)	23%	49	(100)	29%	61	(100)	26%	162	44	27%

commit a new offense, 8 individuals (32%) were returned to custody on the charge of armed robbery. Twenty percent or 5 persons were reincarcerated for burglary offenses. These figures are summarized in Table VI below.

TABLE VI  
RECIDIVISM RATE BY NEW OFFENSE\*

MCI BRIDGEWATER

YEAR	ASSAULT & BATTERY		ARMED ROBBERY		ASSAULT WITH INTENT TO RAPE		BURGLARY		UNARMED ROBBERY		ASSAULT & BATTERY DANGEROUS WEAPON		MOTOR VEHICLE OFFENSE		ASSAULT WITH INTENT TO ROB		RECEIVING STOLEN GOODS		POSSESSION OF BURGLARIOUS TOOLS		COMMON NIGHT WALKER		CONTROLL SUBSTANCE	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
1971																								
1972			2	( 25)	1	( 13)	1	( 13)																
1973				( 33)			1	( 17)																
1974			3	( 21)			1	( 7)	1	( 7)	1	( 7)	1	( 7)										
1975	1	( 6)	1	( 6)			2	( 13)					2	( 13)	1	( 6)	1	( 6)	1	( 6)	1	( 6)	1	( 6)
TOTAL	1	( 4)	8	( 32)	1	( 4)	5	( 20)	1	( 4)	1	( 4)	3	( 12)	1	( 4)	1	( 4)	1	( 4)	1	( 4)	1	( 4)

\* The rates shown represent only those recidivists who committed a new offense.

CONCLUSION

Five years of recidivism analyses by the Massachusetts Department of Correction have documented findings for all state correctional institutions with the exception of MCI Bridgewater. These research studies have uncovered a series of patterns which Massachusetts associates to be the implications of correctional policies adopted by the state.

Massachusetts' two major policies of influence are the Morrissey vs. Brewer decision, a modification of the parole revocation process, and the Correctional Reform Act of 1972, which provides for work and education release, and implemented the furlough program in Massachusetts.

The overall effect of MCI Bridgewater as an addition to the state recidivism literature reinforces the Department of Correction stand that the total state recidivism rate began falling in 1972, until it eventually stabilized to a rate of 20% in 1975. The major finding of the research, therefore, is that the inclusion of MCI Bridgewater in recidivism analyses neither raises nor diminishes the total rates of recidivism for all state correctional institutions.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lipton, Martinson, and Wilks, "The Effectiveness of Correctional Treatment", in Criminal Justice Research and Development: National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, L.E.A.A., Washington, D.C., p. 118.
2. Daniel P. LeClair, An Analysis of Recidivism Among Residents Released from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions During 1974, Massachusetts Department of Correction Research Publication #136, September, 1977. See also LeClair, 1975 Recidivism Statistics, Massachusetts Department of Correction Memo, October 17, 1977.
3. L.E.A.A., Criminal Justice Research and Development: National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (Washington, D.C.) p. 512.
4. Ibid., p. 513.
5. LeClair, Supra.
6. Paul McGerigle, Recidivism Studies, Massachusetts Department of Correction Memo, April 19, 1977.
7. LeClair, Supra.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid, p. 12.
10. Ibid, p. ii.
11. Edwin Powers, The Basic Structure of the Administration of Criminal Justice in Massachusetts (Boston: Massachusetts Correctional Association, 1973).
12. Faye Farrington and Christopher Mackey, Population Trends at MCI Bridgewater, Massachusetts Department of Correction Research Publication #92, November, 1974.
13. Monthly Statistical Report of Massachusetts Correctional Facilities, December 29, 1975.

14. Massachusetts General Laws; Chapter 111B.
15. Farrington and Mackey, Supra.
16. LeClair, Supra p. 13.



APPENDIX

APPENDIX I

VARIABLES

A. COMMITMENT VARIABLES

1. Institution of Original Commitment
2. Date of Incarceration
3. Date of Release
4. Type of Release
5. Institution Released From

B. RECIDIVISM VARIABLES

1. Date Returned to Custody
2. Date Re-Released
3. Type of Return
4. New Offense
5. Date Parole Warrant Issued
6. Disposition of New Arrests
7. Most Serious Parole Violation
8. Lesser Violation of Parole
9. IRH Result

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