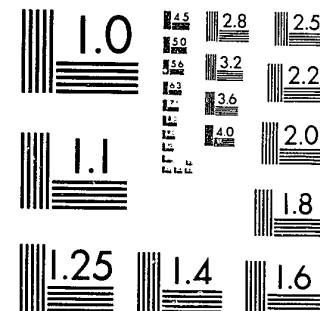


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**RATE OF RECIDIVISM  
A 3-YEAR FOLLOW-UP STUDY  
OF MALE PRISONERS DISCHARGED  
IN 1978**

**CORRECTIONAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

**HONG KONG**



X  
RATE OF RECIDIVISM

A 3-YEAR FOLLOW-UP STUDY  
OF MALE PRISONERS DISCHARGED IN 1978

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In order to gain further insight into recidivism, information contained in prisoners' penal records was examined in an attempt to identify factors related to the reconviction of persons who had served at least one term of imprisonment. The subjects were all prisoners discharged in 1978, and the criterion is whether they were re-admitted to any penal institutions of this department within three years after their date of discharge.

Comparison between the information in this study and success rates of the other three correctional programmes carried out by the Correctional Services Department has not been attempted per se because of basic differences in criteria for defining respective research parameters. The other three correctional programmes relate to Drug Addiction Treatment Centres, Detention Centres and Training Centres; they are ongoing as a matter of routine operation. This study has adopted 'no re-admission' as a success indicator whilst success rates of the other three correctional programmes adopted 'not reconvicted' as the criterion for success. Persons who are subjects of the other three correctional programmes are followed up throughout their statutory period of supervision and subsequent reconvictions during that period are recorded as a matter of course; all is known and there are no imponderables. However, the subjects of this study were not required to undergo a statutory period of supervision upon discharge and the Correctional Services Department itself, at present, has no direct record of the award of non-custodial sentences to such persons upon reconviction. Hence, non-custodial sentences notwithstanding, as they were not re-admitted to a penal institution they have been classified as success cases in this study.

The results of this study are described in the following tables which show the percentage of offenders re-admitted by various characteristics, including socio-economic factors, criminal background and number of disciplinary offences during imprisonment, compared to the overall re-admission rate of 43.8%.

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HONG KONG

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Group I : Percentage of prisoners re-admitted according to different socio-economic attributes

1. Age on Admission	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
14 - 20	156	47	30.1
21 - 24	816	320	39.2
25 - 29	1,237	602	48.7
30 - 34	781	385	49.3
35 - 39	472	204	43.2
40 - 44	408	187	45.8
45 - 49	416	188	45.2
50 - 59	576	202	35.1
60 & over	410	174	42.4
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

2. Marital Status on admission	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
Single	3,409	1,666	48.9
Co-habiting	1	-	-
Married	1,831	635	34.7
Separated / Divorced	22	6	27.3
Widowed	9	2	22.2
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

3. Educational attainment on admission	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
No Schooling / Kindergarten	497	231	46.5
Lower Primary	1,338	669	50.0
Upper Primary	1,625	815	50.2
Lower Secondary	462	205	44.4
Upper Secondary	203	67	33.0
Post-secondary and above	19	4	21.1
Unknown *	1,128	318	28.2
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

\* Information on the educational attainment was not recorded on some penal records

Amongst the socio-economic factors, prisoners who were aged under twenty-one on admission (30.1%), married (34.7%), or with educational attainment higher than lower secondary standard (32.0%) apparently were less likely to be re-admitted than the average (43.8%). The study further reveals that among those young prisoners (prisoners aged under 21) who were classified as Star \* class, the re-admission rate was only 26.4%.

\* "Star" class prisoners are first offenders, or prisoners with previous convictions of a minor nature and have not been in any other category other than the lowest security risk, i.e. "D".

Group II : Percentage of prisoners re-admitted according to different criminal background

The prisoners' criminal background is traced within the following parameters :-

1. Previous conviction(s) before admission
2. Previous institutional sentence(s) before admission
3. Offence on admission
4. Sentence
5. Classification by the prison authority
6. Triad / Gang affiliation
7. Drug dependence

1. Previous convictions before admission

Number of Previous Convictions	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
nil	1,167	119	10.2
1	340	94	27.6
2	331	132	39.9
3 - 5	876	426	48.6
6 - 10	884	504	57.0
11 - 15	476	278	58.4
16 - 19	247	146	59.1
20 and over	881	589	66.9
unknown **	70	21	30.0
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

\*\* Information on the previous convictions records was not available in some penal records.

2. Previous institutional sentences before admission

Number of Previous Institutional Sentences	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
nil	1,424	174	12.2
1	525	186	35.4
2	448	189	42.2
3 - 5	861	478	55.5
6 - 10	756	446	59.0
11 - 15	413	260	63.0
16 - 19	188	121	64.4
20 and over	657	455	69.3
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

3. Offence on admission <sup>1</sup>

Offence	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
Against lawful authority	355	168	47.3
Against public morality	96	20	20.8
Against the person	276	57	20.7
Against property	1,762	873	49.5
Against penal code	126	12	9.5
Against local laws	898	383	42.7
Narcotic offences	1,759	796	45.3
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

4. Sentence

Sentence	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
In default of payment of a fine	46	-	-
Less than 3 months	775	313	40.4
3 months to less than 12 months	2,467	1,248	50.6
12 months to less than 3 years	1,359	560	41.2
3 years and above	625	188	30.1
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

5. Classification by Prison Authority	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
Star	1,729	308	17.8
Ordinary	3,543	2,001	56.5
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

6. Claimed Triad/gang affiliation on admission	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
Yes	3,761	1,983	52.7
No	1,511	326	21.6
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

7. Whether drug dependent on admission *	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage
Yes	3,012	1,691	56.1
No	2,260	618	27.3
Total	5,272	2,309	43.8

\* drug dependency before admission was confirmed by the medical officers in the correctional institutions.

With regard to criminal history, prisoners with fewer previous convictions and previous institutional sentences tended to have a lower re-admission rate after discharge. For example, re-admission rates were 10.2% and 12.2% for prisoners with no previous conviction and those with no previous institutional sentence respectively. These rates are very much below the overall re-admission rate of 43.8%.

It is noteworthy that offenders convicted of offences against public morality (20.8%), the person (20.7%), or penal code (9.5%) had a significantly lower re-admission rate than those convicted of offences against property (49.5%), lawful authority (47.3%), or narcotic offences (45.3%). In particular, Theft/Larceny (60.5%), Burglary/Housebreaking (56.7%), Loitering (57.6%), Possession of Offensive Weapon in Public Place (49.1%), and Simple Possession of Dangerous Drugs (46.8%) had the highest re-admission rates.

It is interesting to discover that no prisoners whose sentences were in default of payment of a fine were re-admitted to any penal institutions within three years after discharge, whilst prisoners sentenced to between 3 months to less than 12 months had the highest re-admission rate (50.6%). A further investigation revealed that this higher re-admission rate might be related to the poor criminal background of this category of prisoners. <sup>2</sup>

In terms of classification on admission, prisoners classified as 'Star' were significantly less likely to be re-admitted (17.8%).

Furthermore, it was noted that prisoners who on admission did not claim affiliation with triads/gangs, or who were not dependent on drugs tended to have a lower re-admission rate (21.6% and 27.3% respectively); the rate is particularly low (16.9%) for those prisoners who were neither affiliated with triads/gangs nor dependent on drugs.

**Group III : Percentage of prisoners re-admitted, grouped according to number of disciplinary offences during their previous term of imprisonment**

Number of Disciplinary Offences	Number of Prisoners	Number Re-admitted	Percentage Re-admitted
nil	4,318	1,876	43.4
1	604	264	43.7
2	196	94	48.0
3	78	42	53.8
4	38	13	34.2
5	15	5	33.3
6	10	8	80.0
7	2	1	50.0
8	3	1	33.3
9 or more	8	5	62.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,272</b>	<b>2,309</b>	<b>43.8</b>

It is apparent that failure to comply with rules as indicated by the number of infractions is not an indicator of likelihood of re-admission.

**Footnotes**

1. The breakdown of these offence groups are as follows :-

Offence Category	Offences
Against Lawful Authority	Unlawful Society and Assembly Affray Possession of Offensive Weapon in Public Place Perjury Escape and Rescue from Lawful Custody Impersonating a Police Officer Breach of Bond Others
Against Public Morality	Rape Indecent Assault on a Female Unlawful Detention of a Female Carnal Knowledge of a Girl between 13 - 16 Incest Bigamy Unnatural Sexual Offences Others
Against the Person	Murder/Infanticide Manslaughter Wounding Serious Assault Abortion Kidnapping Criminal Intimidation Cruelty of child False Imprisonment Others

Offence Category	Offences
Against Property	Robbery/Armed Robbery Burglary/Housebreaking Blackmail Theft/Larceny Obtaining Property by Deception Arson Criminal Damage to Property Loitering at night and unable to give a satisfactory account Embezzlement Others
Against Penal Code	Forgery/Counterfeiting Bribery/Corruption Possession of unexplained Property by being or having been a Civil Servant Possession of arms and Ammunition Conspiracy Others
Against Local Laws	Common Assault Dangerous Goods Gambling and Lotteries Mendicancy Loitering/Soliciting for Immoral Purpose and Brothels Stowaways & Breach of Immigration Regulations Dangerous Driving Offences against Women, Girls and Children Breach of Supervision Order Others

Offence Category	Offences
Narcotic Offences	Manufacturing Importing/Exporting Dealing Possession for Unlawful Trafficking Simple possession Keeping a Divan Smoking/Consuming Possession of instruments for consuming dangerous drugs Others

2. To find out the reasons for the higher re-admission rate of prisoners serving a sentence of 3 to less than 12 months, a number of factors have been examined. The result indicates that the higher re-admission rate might be related to the poor criminal background of this category of prisoners. Details are as follows :-

Criminal background	% of prisoners serving 3 to less than 12 months	% of prisoners serving sentence groups other than 3 to less than 12 months
(a) with previous conviction	85.8	70.9
(b) drug dependent on admission	65.3	49.9
(c) affiliated with triad/gang	75.2	67.9

**END**