



Research at a glance

Rates of Recidivism for Women Offenders

KEY WORDS: *women offenders, recidivism*

Why we did this study

Recidivism rates are used as a benchmark. That is, in order to examine whether a correctional intervention was effective, we need to know the baseline level of recidivism. So far, however, estimates of the rates of recidivism for women offenders have varied widely – from 4% to 47%.

Such a broad range of rates can be confusing. One of the reasons that previous estimates have varied so widely is because studies have used different methods and measurement approaches. Sometimes the methods used to produce estimates are not fully described. Explicit description of research methods and measurement approaches is necessary so that estimates of rates of recidivism can be compared across studies.

In this context, we decided to conduct a study to provide an updated estimate of rates of recidivism for federally sentenced women offenders. The report includes a thorough discussion of our methodology so our estimate can be compared with others.

What we did

We examined the rates of recidivism for all women released in a two year period, with each year examined separately. Using information from the Correctional Service of Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we examined recidivism occurring within two years of release. Three definitions of recidivism were used:

1. any revocation of conditional release (i.e., for technical reasons or due to a new offence);
2. any new conviction; and,
3. any new conviction for a violent offence.

What we found

Our estimates of the rates of recidivism for women offenders fell between the two extremes noted earlier. Rates for each definition of recidivism are presented below:

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Definition of Recidivism	Year 1	Year 2
Any revocation	37%	38%
New conviction	28%	30%
Violent offence	4%	5%

We also looked at differences in rates of recidivism for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women were more likely to have a revocation of their supervised release or a new conviction, but equally likely to have a new conviction for a violent offence.

What it means

These findings provide an up-to-date estimate of the rates of recidivism for women offenders. These estimates will be useful in a number of contexts, including examinations of whether correctional interventions produce changes in recidivism.

For more information

Gobeil, R. & Barrett, M. (2008). *Rates of recidivism for women offenders*. Research Report R-192. Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada.

<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rsrch/reports/r192/r192-fra.shtml>

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