

## Recidivism, Re-Entry, and Special Projects

### Overview of the BJS recidivism statistics

For many years, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) has used official criminal records in the FBI and state criminal history record repositories to study recidivism patterns. BJS recently completed its third and largest prisoner recidivism study to date. While prior BJS recidivism studies tracked inmates for 3 years following release, the new study used a 5-year follow-up period to provide a more complete assessment of the post-release recidivism outcomes of persons who served time in prison.

- BJS partnered with the International Justice and Public Safety Network (Nlets) several years ago to develop a new automated data collection process that reduces the time and resources needed to collect multi-state criminal history records.

- BJS and Nlets also produced software to parse key data elements from individual state and federal criminal history records into a uniform file layout that supports statistical analysis.
- BJS worked with NORC at the University of Chicago to develop a separate software system that converts the state-specific fields extracted from the criminal history records (e.g., offense statutes and disposition codes) into a common national coding structure.
- BJS used this new automated data collection infrastructure to conduct a recidivism study of prisoners released in 30 states in 2005.
- This software system has been used to support criminal career studies of various types of offenders, including persons released from state prisons, persons on federal probation and youth arrested at ages 16 and 17.

### Recent findings

The latest published BJS recidivism study followed a sample of released inmates selected to represent the more than 400,000 persons released from state prisons in 30 states in 2005. These 30 states were responsible for about three-quarters of all inmates released from state prisons in the United States that year.

An estimated two-thirds (68%) of the prisoners released in 30 states in 2005 were arrested for a new crime within 3 years of release from prison, and three-quarters (77%) were arrested within 5 years. Among prisoners released in 2005 in 23 states with available data on inmates returned to prison, about half (50%) had either a parole or probation violation or an arrest for a new offense within 3 years that led to imprisonment, and more than half (55%) had a parole or probation violation or an arrest that led to imprisonment within 5 years.

Among state prisoners released in 30 states in 2005—

- More than a third (37%) of all prisoners who were arrested within 5 years of release were arrested within the first 6 months after release, with more than half (57%) arrested by the end of the first year.

- Two in five (42%) released prisoners were either not arrested or arrested once in the 5 years after their release.
- A sixth (16%) of released prisoners were responsible for almost half (48%) of the nearly 1.2 million arrests of these prisoners that occurred in the 5-year follow-up period.
- About three-quarters (75%) of released prisoners who were arrested once were arrested again during the 5-year period.
- About 25% of the released prisoners had a prior arrest in a state other than the one that released them.
- An estimated 11% of released prisoners were arrested at least once outside the state that released them during the 5-year follow-up period.

Recidivism rates varied with the attributes of the inmate. At the end of the 5-year follow-up period—

- 82% of prisoners who served time for a property offense were arrested for a new crime, compared to 77% of drug offenders, 74% of public order offenders, and 71% of violent offenders.



- Male prisoners (78%) were more likely than female prisoners (68%) to be arrested for a new crime.
- 84% of inmates who were age 24 or younger at release were arrested, compared to 79% of inmates ages 25 to 39 and 69% of those age 40 or older.
- Black offenders had the highest recidivism rate (81%), compared to Hispanic (75%) and white (73%) offenders.
- 61% of former inmates with 4 or fewer arrests in their prior criminal history were arrested, compared to 86% of those who had 10 or more prior arrests (see figure).

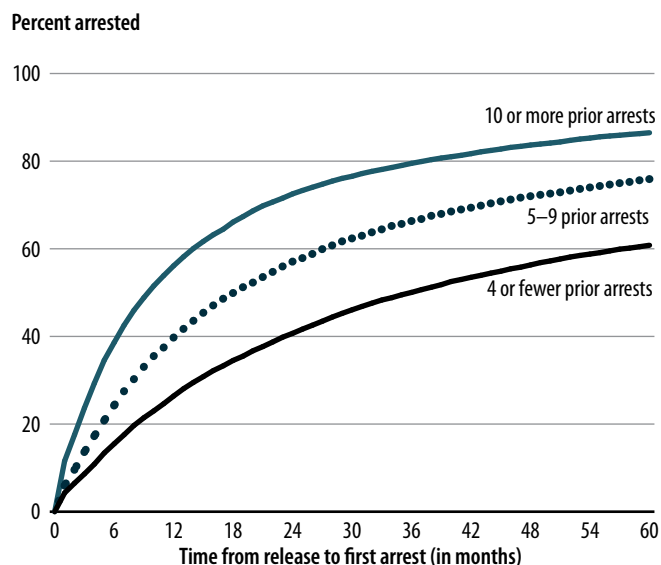
The longer released prisoners went without being arrested, the less likely they were to be arrested at all during the follow up period. For example, 43% of released prisoners were arrested within 1 year of release, compared to 13% of those not arrested by the end of year four who were arrested in the fifth year after release.

**Factors contributing to differences with prior BJS studies**

These findings from the recidivism study on prisoners released in 2005 in 30 states cannot be directly compared to the previous BJS study on prisoners released in 1994 in 15 states due to an increase in the number of states in the study, changes in the demographic characteristics and criminal histories of the U.S. prison population, and improvements made to the quality and completeness of the nation’s criminal history records since the mid-1990s. For example, any improvements made to the nation’s criminal history records likely resulted in more complete offending information collected for the 2005 study. While statistical adjustments can account for some factors known to affect the differences in the studies, more research is needed to better understand the effects of the criminal history record improvements on recidivism statistics over time.

To attempt to compare the recidivism rates of prisoners released in 1994 and 2005, BJS analyzed the post-release arrest rates among inmates released from 11 states in both studies. To control for the compositional differences in the types of prisoners released in these states during 1994 and 2005, BJS standardized the distribution of the demographic characteristics and commitment offenses of the 2005 cohort to the distribution of the 1994 cohort. To control partially for

**Recidivism of prisoners released in 30 states in 2005, by prior arrest history and time from release to first arrest**



Note: Prisoners were tracked for 5 years following release. Prior arrest history includes the number of times the prisoner was arrested prior to his or her date of release.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Recidivism of State Prisoners Released in 2005 data collection.

improvements in the criminal history records, BJS limited its measure of recidivism to only violent crime arrests (offenses that were most likely to be recorded on both sets of criminal history records). This analysis found that the percentage of prisoners who were arrested for a violent crime within 3 years of release did not differ significantly between the 1994 (21%) and 2005 (22%) cohorts.

The stability in the recidivism rates of the 1994 and 2005 cohorts when recidivism is defined as a new arrest for a violent crime and the difference observed when recidivism is defined as a new arrest for any offense raises questions about the comparability of the criminal history records (and therefore recidivism rates) found the 1994 and 2005 studies. For more information on the findings from the 2005 study and the factors that affect the comparability of the 1994 and 2005 cohort estimates, see Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 30 States in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010, NCJ 244205, BJS web, April 2014.



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## Medical Problems of Inmates

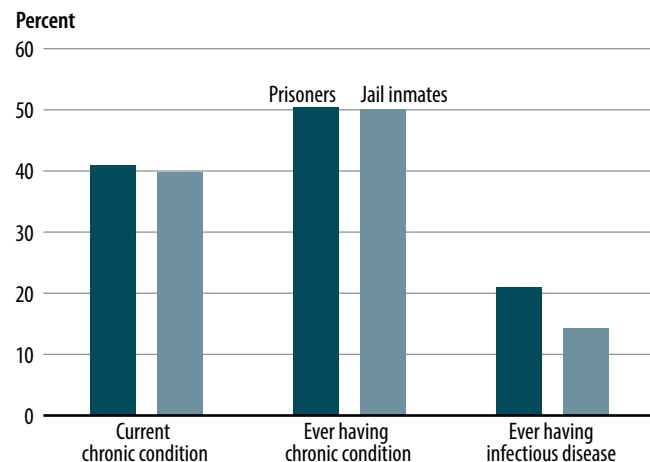
On February 5, 2015, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) released the report, *Medical Problems of State and Federal Prisoners and Jail Inmates, 2011–12* (NCJ 248491). This report examines the prevalence of chronic conditions and infectious diseases among incarcerated populations, including current and history of health problems of state and federal prisoners and jail inmates; medical problems by inmate demographic characteristics; comparisons to the general population; health care services and treatment received by inmates; and inmate satisfaction with health services received while incarcerated. Data are from the 2011–12 National Inmate Survey.

### Highlights

- In 2011–12, an estimated 40% of state and federal prisoners and jail inmates reported having a current chronic medical condition while about half reported ever having a chronic medical condition.
- Twenty-one percent of prisoners and 14% of jail inmates reported ever having tuberculosis, hepatitis B or C, or other STDs (excluding HIV or AIDS).
- Both prisoners and jail inmates were more likely than the general population to report ever having a chronic condition or infectious disease. The same finding held true for each specific condition or infectious disease.
- Among prisoners and jail inmates, females were more likely than males to report ever having a chronic condition.
- High blood pressure was the most common chronic condition reported by prisoners (30%) and jail inmates (26%).
- The majority of prisoners (74%) and jail inmates (62%) were overweight, obese, or morbidly obese.
- While female prisoners and jail inmates were less likely than males to be overweight, they were more likely to be obese or morbidly obese.

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**Prevalence of ever and currently having a chronic condition or ever having an infectious disease among state and federal prisoners and jail inmates, 2011–12**



Note: *Chronic medical conditions* involve persistent health problems that have long-lasting effects and include noninfectious medical problems, such as cancer, high blood pressure, stroke-related problems, diabetes, heart-related problems, kidney-related problems, arthritis, asthma, and cirrhosis of the liver. *Infectious diseases* include tuberculosis, hepatitis B and C, and other sexually transmitted diseases (excluding HIV or AIDS).

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Inmate Survey, 2011–12.

- About 66% of prisoners and 40% of jail inmates with a current chronic condition reported taking prescription medication.
- The majority of prisoners reported having been tested for HIV (71%) and for tuberculosis (94%) since admission. Among jail inmates, 11% had been tested for HIV and 54% for tuberculosis.
- Seventeen jurisdictions reported testing all inmates for HIV during the intake process, 11 reported opt-out testing, and 10 reported opt-in testing.
- More than half of prisoners (56%) and jail inmates (51%) said that they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the health care services received since admission.

### **Difference between ever having and currently having chronic medical conditions**

Estimates of chronic medical conditions among state and federal prisoners and jail inmates are based on self-reported information in the National Inmate Survey (NIS-3). Inmates were asked whether a doctor, nurse, or other health care provider *ever* told them they had select noninfectious medical conditions, which were categorized as chronic conditions. Chronic medical conditions involve persistent health problems that have long-lasting effects and include, but are not limited to, the select conditions that were asked about in the NIS-3. This measure indicated a diagnosis of having the condition at least once in their lifetime, but does not mean that the inmate currently has the medical condition. As a measure of current medical conditions in the NIS-3, inmates were also asked at the time of interview whether a doctor, nurse, or other health care provider had told them they *currently* had select noninfectious medical conditions.

The data show that an estimated 50% of prisoners and jail inmates reported ever having a chronic condition, compared to 40% currently having a chronic condition. The percentage of inmates who reported currently having a chronic condition was lower than those who reported ever having a chronic condition because over time, a past condition may have been resolved, gone into remission, or no longer required treatment. The measure of ever having a chronic medical condition indicates the percentage of inmates who are potentially at risk for future medical problems while the measure of current condition indicates the percentage of inmates who may have needed health care services at the time of interview.

The report was written by Laura Maruschak of BJS, and Marcus Berzofsky and Jennifer Unangst of RTI International. The report, related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at [www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov).



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# Survey of Prison Inmates

## What is the SPI?

- The Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI), formerly known as the Survey of Prisoners in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, has been conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) periodically every 6 to 7 years—since 1974 among state prisoners and since 1991 among federal prisoners.
- Data are collected through face-to-face interviews with the prisoners using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology. With CAPI, the interviewers read the survey questions from the laptop computer screen to the prisoners and enter the responses directly into the computer.

## Why is this survey being conducted?

- The primary purposes of this omnibus survey are to—
  - generate nationally representative estimates of the characteristics of prisoners
  - track changes in the prison population over time
  - conduct studies of prisoners on special topics
  - identify policy-relevant changes in the nation's prison population.

## How will BJS select the facilities and prisoners to be surveyed?

- The sample design for the 2015-2016 SPI will be a two-stage design in which facilities will be selected at the first stage and prisoners will be selected at the second stage.
- The probability of selection for facilities will be proportional to the size of the facilities' prison populations, which means larger facilities will have a higher probability of selection.
- For the 2015-2016 SPI, about 415 state and federal prisons will be sampled. Within those facilities, about 33,000 prisoners will be sampled.

- We expect to sample about 90 inmates per state facility in the 2015-2016 SPI, which is a smaller sample size than the prisoner samples required per facility through the National Inmate Survey (NIS) as part of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).

## What are the differences between SPI and NIS?

- Over the past few years, BJS conducted surveys required by PREA that are known as the NIS.
- The 2015-2016 SPI is not at all related to the purpose of the NIS, which was to collect information on sexual victimization of inmates in prisons and jails.
- The purpose of the SPI is to produce national estimates on a variety of prisoner characteristics.

## What type of questions will prisoners be asked?

The SPI questionnaire builds upon prior surveys and is organized around the concepts of harm, risk, and reentry—

- the harms that prisoners have perpetrated on society, as measured by—
  - the severity of the offense
  - the incident characteristics of the offense
  - criminal history.
- the risk they pose for recidivism, as measured by—
  - harm elements
  - additional risk factors, including ties to the community, family and friends, and mainstream institutions of social integration (e.g., pre-prison employment within the labor market).



- their challenges and expectations for reentry back into the community, as measured by—
  - substance abuse, mental health, and physical health problems
  - treatment received for these problems or programs participated in while in prison
  - motivation (i.e., intrinsic or extrinsic) to participate in treatment or programs.

## When will the SPI occur?

- In the summer of 2013, BJS completed a pilot test of the SPI to evaluate the questionnaire and interviewing procedures. About 480 prisoners were sampled from six prisons: two each from New York, Pennsylvania, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The findings from the pilot test have been used to make important changes to the questionnaire, including reducing the length, and to enhance the procedures for the national study, including minimizing burden on facilities.
- A small pretest will be fielded in the summer of 2015 and the national survey will be fielded in the fall of 2015. Data collection will take about 8 months.
- For the 2015-2016 SPI, RTI International will be the data collection agent.

## When will the data or reports be made available to the public?

- In late 2016, BJS plans to begin to release statistical products on a variety of special topics resulting from the 2015-2016 SPI, such as—
  - firearm use and acquisition by prisoners
  - misconduct and rule violations committed by prisoners while incarcerated
  - physical and behavioral health problems (e.g., mental health and substance abuse) and treatment
  - prisoners soon to be released
  - lifetime likelihood of incarceration
  - severity of attributes of criminal victimization incidents that are punished by incarceration
  - education and employment background of prisoners
  - veterans incarcerated in prison
  - incarcerated parents
  - prisoner participation in programs and motivation
  - women in prison
  - family background and structure of prisoners.
- The SPI data and documentation will be made publicly available at the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD) soon after the first report is released.



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