



Improving Recidivism Research: Considering the Environment Where Prisoners Are Released

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Introduction

- **Punishment policies in the U.S. over the past 30 have resulted in an unprecedented growth in our prison populations to over 1.5 million inmates.**
- **Over 600,000 prisoners are released to communities every year.**
- **Attention to prisoner re-entry has accelerated considerably in recent years.**
- **One reason for this attention is the high levels of recidivism, as reported by BJS in their report, Prisoner Released in 1994, which shows the following:**
 1. **67.% are rearrested within 3 years**
 2. **46.9% are reconvicted**
 3. **51.8% are returned to prison**
 4. **Rearrest and reconviction rates increased from 1983 to 1994**

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Individual Level Recidivism Studies

- Researchers have been studying individual level characteristics of ex-prisoners for several decades.
- Purposes of this large body of research include:
 1. Identify the individual level predictors of recidivism:
 - ✓ Gender
 - ✓ Race
 - ✓ Age
 - ✓ Offense types (murder, sex, property, drug, etc.)
 - ✓ Prior criminal record
 - ✓ Length of incarceration
 - ✓ Employment
 - ✓ Educational level

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Individual Level Recidivism Studies

2. Study the effectiveness of various intervention strategies to reduce recidivism:
 - ✓ Educational programs
 - ✓ Vocational programs
 - ✓ Substance abuse programs
 - ✓ Post-release employment
 - ✓ Prison visitation
- Statistical Methods
 1. Logistic Regression – Probability of recidivism within 1,2,3,etc. years post-release
 2. Survival Analysis – Probability and timing of recidivism

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Contextual Level Recidivism Studies

- A very recent approach to further understanding the predictors of recidivism.
- Driven by the idea that the social ecology of re-entry locations may also impact the likelihood of recidivism.
- Also, that contextual characteristics may differentially effect the likelihood of recidivism across different individual level characteristics, such as; gender, age, and race.
- Statistical Method – Hierarchical Linear Modeling (Multi-level analysis) – includes individual and contextual level variables.
- Can determine if significant variations in recidivism occurs across location of release (state, county, city, neighborhood) when controlling for individual level characteristics.

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Contextual Level Recidivism Studies

What contextual characteristics of location of release may be relevant?

- Employment levels
- Economic conditions
- Arrest and judicial practices
- Racial inequality
- Level or re-entry services

Why would we want to know the impact of these ecological conditions?

- To better quantify the unique effects of interventions on individuals as well as the conditions where they return.
- To influence policies at the state, city, county, or neighborhood level that would improve reentry success.

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What studies have examined the impact of individual and contextual characteristics on recidivism?

1. Mears, Wang, Hay and Bales, Criminology (2008)
2. Reisig, Bales, Hay and Wang, Justice Quarterly (2007)
3. Kubrin and Steward, Criminology (2006)



Purposes of the study:

1. Determine if recidivism varies significantly across the counties which ex-prisoners return.
2. Determine if resource deprivation in the county effects the likelihood of recidivism, net of individual level characteristics. Like studies of crime, it was expected that recidivism would be higher in more economically deprived locations.
3. Test the expectation that ex-inmates returning to locations with higher levels of racial segregation will be more likely to recidivate, as studies of crime level indicate.



Summary of Mears, et. al Study

4. Test the hypothesis that higher levels of resource deprivation and racial segregation will adversely effect younger non-white males more so than younger whites or older ex-prisoners.

Data and Methods:

- Examined 49,420 male inmates released from Florida prison between 1998 and 2001 to 67 counties.
- Recidivism measures include re-conviction for a new felony crime within two years after release by type of crime – violent, property, and drug.



Summary of Mears, et. al Study

Data and Methods (continued):

- Individual level variables:
 1. Young (<30)
 2. Non-white
 3. Criminal record
 4. Incarceration Profile – factor score from custody level, disciplinary infractions, time in prison.
 5. Post-release supervision



Summary of Mears, et. al Study

Data and Methods (continued):

- County level variables:
 1. **Resource Deprivation** – factor score from median family income, percent female-headed households, percent poverty, and percent receiving public assistance.
 2. **Index of Racial Dissimilarity** – White/black
 3. **Criminal Justice Resources** – factor score from police presence and per capita spending on public safety.



Summary of Mears, et. al Study

Findings:

1. There are significant variations in the likelihood of recidivism across the 67 counties after controlling for individual level effects. In other words, where ex-prisoners return does influence recidivism probabilities.
2. Higher levels of Resource Deprivation counties resulted in higher levels of violent recidivism.
3. No evidence of a direct effect of the level of Racial Segregation.
4. Did not find that young non-white males were effected more by higher levels of Resource Deprivation or Racial Segregation.



Concluding Remarks

- **More studies using individual level variables and contextual characteristics of location of release are needed to obtain a richer understanding of recidivism.**
- **These types of studies could influence social, educational and economic policies as well as the level of funding for re-entry programs, especially in areas with high concentrations of ex-prisoners, to reduce our high levels of recidivism rates.**