



National Crime Prevention Council

Research and Evaluation Department

Research Brief – August 11, 2008

Recidivism of Young Offenders

Summary: The purpose of this study, which was reported in *Criminology and Public Policy* in 2007, was to add to recidivism research by focusing on serious male offenders. “Serious” offenders were defined as those youths who were in prison due to a gun violence conviction. Specifically, the researchers wanted to find out if there was a relationship between the timing of reconviction and the offender’s involvement with gangs, guns, and drugs. Recidivism was defined in the study as “the time (in months) between the release from prison and a new conviction.”

Sample: The sample consisted of 322 serious male offenders between the ages of 17-24, who were incarcerated for less than 18 months in a Midwestern prison, and who were released between June 1996 and September 2005. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the researchers in this study used data from a previous study. The data were collected in 1996.

Key Findings:

- Offenders who were affiliated with a gang or were involved with drugs prior to conviction recidivated more quickly than those not affiliated with gangs or drugs. These offenders also had higher reconviction rates.
- Those involved with gangs and/or drugs were also more likely to have unstable relationships, live in and return to disadvantaged communities, and have poor self-esteem.
- The researchers also found that misconduct while incarcerated was a predictor of recidivism and reconviction timing.
- An unexpected finding was that owning/carrying a gun did not have any effect on recidivism or the timing of reconviction.

Recommendations for Future Work:

- Due to the fact that gang affiliation, drug involvement, and prison misconduct are strong predictors of recidivism, the researchers recommend that treatment services be provided to address these three areas to help prevent cyclical recidivism.
- The researchers also recommend that the work being done currently to break up prison gangs be enhanced and supported more, and that more help be given to prisoners transitioning to society before their release, making reentry smoother and possibly preventing the offender from falling into old habits.
- Lastly, the researchers recommend that release of offenders back into the community be supervised to help prevent them from recidivating.

Implications for Crime Prevention Practitioners: Crime prevention practitioners should pay close attention to what the researchers recommend and perhaps attempt to build programming, or enhance current programming, to address the issues that were highly correlated with recidivism.

Source: Huebner, Beth M., Sean P. Varano, & Timothy S. Bynum. “Gangs, guns, and drugs: Recidivism among serious, young offenders.” *Criminology and Public Policy* 6, no. 2 (2007): 187-222.