

ISSUE BRIEF

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Measuring recidivism

Recidivism (from Latin *recidivus* "recurring," from *re-* "back" + *cadō* "I fall") is defined as a repeated or habitual relapse, as into crime.¹

Policymakers, the public and corrections professionals are interested in recidivism rates because they are an indicator of the effectiveness of correctional programs.

Tracking recidivism supports OYA's mission by measuring the extent to which agency services have been able to protect the public from further victimization and support youth reformation. Additionally, measuring and reporting recidivism reflects the agency's values of excellence in public service, openness, and accountability to the public.

The challenge of measuring recidivism

Measuring recidivism is complicated. First, it has to be defined: Who is being measured? When is the measurement taken? What is being measured?

Using recidivism to compare populations is tricky – any variable out of sync among populations skews the measurement and causes the comparison to be incorrect.

Essentially, recidivism is calculated using four variables:

- (a) a group of people to track;
- (b) a date to track from;

- (c) an event that indicates *recidivism*; and
- (d) a length of time to track.

How recidivism is defined varies greatly across state and local jurisdictions.

Many state and local jurisdictions use different groups, tracking dates, events, and lengths of time to track. For example, events can be arrests, convictions, or re-incarceration. Given all four variables the possibilities are nearly endless. This makes the definition of recidivism difficult and comparisons across measures needs to be considered carefully.

OYA's analysis

The Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) compiles and analyzes recidivism data on three distinct groups of youth:

- (a) Youth adjudicated in juvenile court and committed to OYA on probation;
- (b) Youth adjudicated in juvenile court and committed to OYA close custody, and subsequently released to OYA parole supervision; and
- (c) Youth who, when released to adult post-prison supervision, had been under Department of Corrections' legal custody and OYA's physical custody, and incarcerated in OYA close-custody facilities.

For OYA, the recidivism clock starts ticking when an individual youth is committed to OYA probation (group a) or is released from a

¹Random House Unabridged Dictionary 2006.

close custody facility to OYA parole (group b) or adult post-prison supervision (group c).

The recidivism indicator is triggered by the first felony adjudication or conviction following commitment to probation or release from close custody. Recidivism rates are calculated at 12, 24, and 36 months.

By defining recidivism in this way, the OYA recidivism rates are computed in a manner comparable to those of the Oregon Department of Corrections, thereby satisfying the criteria suggested by 2003's HB 5058. During the 2003 legislative session, the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Public Safety Subcommittee, expressed a desire for an "additional measure related to recidivism similar to the Department of Corrections measure that tracks felony convictions within three years of release from prison."²

Key Performance Measures

Recidivism is a Key Performance Measure for OYA that is used to gauge the extent to which OYA is protecting the public and reforming youth offenders. Every crime prevented means there is one fewer victim in Oregon's communities.

OYA Recidivism Rates

Cohort	# in Cohort	12 Months Rate	24 Months Rate	36 Months Rate	
Probation (group a)	FY04	455	9.1%	17.6%	27.4%
	FY05	445	9.6%	15.9%	22.9%
	FY06	426	9.9%	16.0%	—
	FY07	398	10.4%	—	—
Parole (group b)	FY04	280	10.4%	24.3%	37.1%
	FY05	311	9.3%	21.9%	33.8%
	FY06	325	7.4%	18.8%	—
	FY07	381	8.7%	—	—
DOC (group c)	FY04	57	1.8%	8.8%	19.3%
	FY05	80	8.8%	16.3%	23.8%
	FY06	74	9.5%	14.9%	—
	FY07	66	10.6%	—	—

Data Source: OYA Research and Evaluation Unit, Juvenile Justice Information System, June 2008.



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² HB 5058 June 5, 2003 OYA Budget Work Session
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