OPM - Criminal Justice Policy & Planning Division
Recidivism, 2017-release cohort

Highlights

- OPM CJPPD's February 2020 recidivism report compared the 12-month cumulative return-to-prison rates of the 2017 release cohort to 2015 release cohort. For this report, OPM extends the analysis to a 36-month follow-up period.

- In 2017, state correctional facilities released or discharged 9,293 sentenced people. This year's analysis of recidivism trends found extremely similar return-to-prison rates over 36 months for the 2017 cohort as for 2015.

- During the 36-month follow-up period, 49% of people returned to prison to face new charges, to begin another sentence, or because of a remand. For comparison, the 2015 release cohort differed by only one percentage point: 50% returning to correctional facilities over the same number of months.

- Consistent with previous reports, the number of prior sentences served at correctional facilities remains highly predictive of recidivism (see chart 4.) 65% of those with the most substantial histories returned to prison within 36 months. In contrast, just under a third (32%) of those completing their first sentence returned to prison within 36 months.

Returns-to prison within 36 months of release

The OPM Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division (OPM CJPPD) is required by statute to produce annual reports on recidivism among Connecticut correction population. Prior analyses have focused on one release cohort or subgroups of offenders released or discharged from correctional facilities. For example, in 2019, OPM CJPPD analyzed recidivism among pretrial detainees released from jails in 2014. In this report, OPM CJPPD resumes a comparative study of recidivism for sentenced individuals discharged or released from DOC facilities in two cohort years: 2015 and 2017. While the 2020 report focused on returns to prison within 12 months of release, this report examines the return-to-prison rates over a 36-month period for sentenced prisoners released or discharged from a correctional facility in 2015 and 2017.

In previous reports, OPM has calculated four measures of recidivism, including 1) new arrests 2) new convictions 3) returns-to-prison for any reason, and 4) returns-to-prison to begin a new prison sentence. For this year's report, to simplify the comparison between two distinct cohorts, OPM CJPPD uses returns to prison. Connecticut is one of six states to have a unified correction system, in which prisons and jails are both state-administered, and both pretrial detainees and sentenced prisoners comprise the correction population. Therefore, a return to a correctional facility for any reason can be captured, providing a reliable indicator of when an individual returned to a correctional facility from the community, whether to be held in the pretrial or sentenced population and for a remand or a new sentence. Subsequent references to "recidivism" will be defined as the rate at which sentenced people released from a Connecticut correctional facility are readmitted within an assigned number of months.

In this report, we continued analyzing recidivism among sentenced population discharged or released from a correctional facility in 2015 and 2017. We then calculated the cumulative 36-month return-to-prison rates for each release cohort (see Chart 1 on the following page).

Last year's recidivism report found remarkable similarity in the 12-month return-to-prison for the 2015 and 2017 cohorts. When observed for 36 months, as for this report, the similarities again persist across most of the observation period. Both cohorts had a 30% return-to-prison rate by the 12th month, 38% by the 18th month, and nearly 44% by the 24th month. Only over the final twelve months of observation do the cohorts begin to diverge noticeably, albeit with a one percentage point difference. By the 36th month, 50% of the 2015 cohort had returned to a correctional facility, while 49% of the 2017 cohort had returned.

Comparing two cohorts

Table 1: Changes in study population, 2015 to 2017

| | Release Year | | Change |
	2015	2017	%
DOC Population on July 1st	16,025	14,333	-10.6%
Release/Discharged Study pop.			
Sentenced	10,361	9,293	-10.3%
Male	9,103	8,055	-11.5%
Female	1,258	1,238	-1.6%
Under the age of 25	2,098	1,647	-21.5%

The July 1, 2017 correction population was nearly 11% smaller than two years prior. Similarly, over that period, the number of sentenced individuals released or discharged fell by a comparable amount (-10%).

For this report, OPM CJPPD excluded people released from correctional facilities following holds for federal charges, interstate compacts, or the reinstation of special parole. (Astute readers may have noted the difference in this year's report compared to prior editions.) This change reduced the 2015 and 2017 cohorts by -838 and -1,097 respectively. OPM made this methodological decision to focus our 2021 analysis on people terminating a state prison sentence with a higher likelihood of returning to Connecticut communities. As shown in Table 2, even with this change, the cohorts' general composition does not differ substantially from our previous analysis.

Table 2: Cohort characteristics, 2015 & 2017
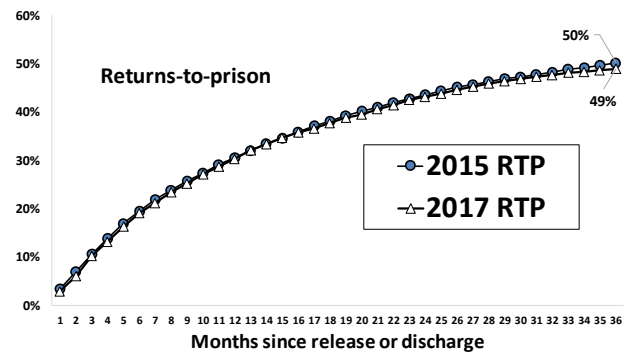
2015 release cohort - 10,361 offenders

| | Total | | Female | | Male | |
	#	%	#	%	#	%
15 to 25	2,098	20.2%	203	16.1%	1,895	20.8%
26 to 31	2,284	22.0%	293	23.3%	1,991	21.9%
32 to 37	1,921	18.5%	262	20.8%	1,659	18.2%
38 to 47	2,105	20.3%	264	21.0%	1,841	20.2%
48 and Older	1,953	18.8%	236	18.8%	1,717	18.9%
Total	10,361		1,258		9,103	

2017 release cohort - 9,293 offenders

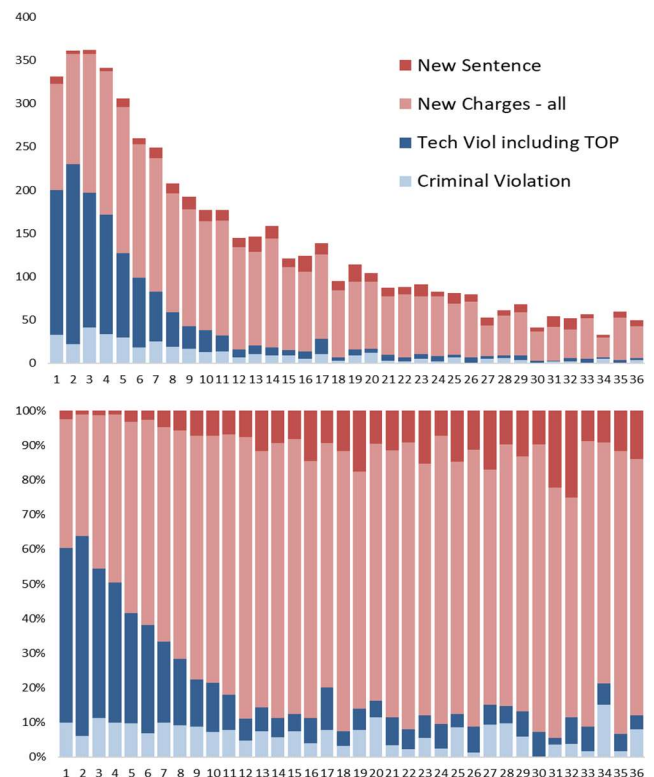| | Total | | Female | | Male | |
	#	%	#	%	#	%
15 to 25	1,647	17.7%	155	12.5%	1,492	18.5%
26 to 31	2,109	22.7%	308	24.9%	1,801	22.4%
32 to 37	1,795	19.3%	289	23.3%	1,506	18.7%
38 to 47	1,970	21.2%	265	21.4%	1,705	21.2%
48 and Older	1,772	19.1%	221	17.9%	1,551	19.3%
Total	9,293		1,238		8,055	

Recidivism rates

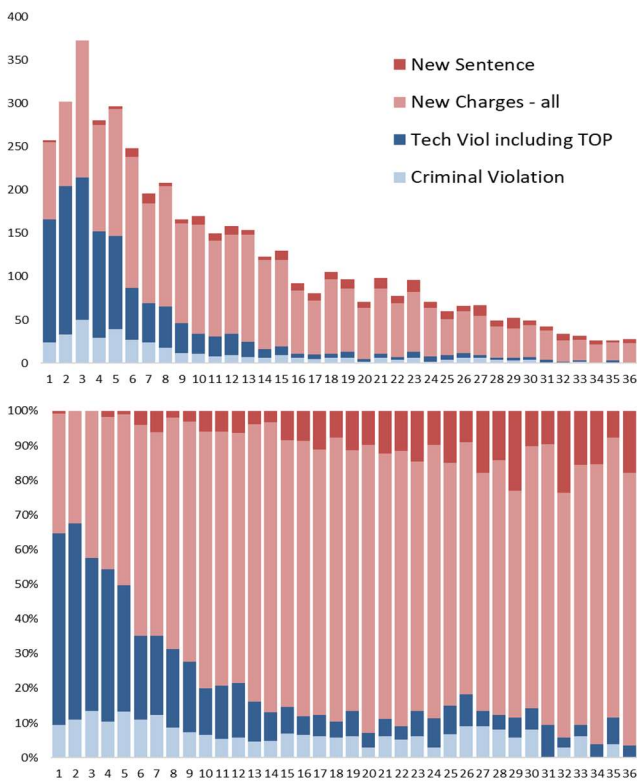### Chart 1: Returns-to-prison, 2015 & 2017 cohorts

As depicted in Chart 1, cumulative recidivism rates begin to diverge only after 24 months. Importantly, the 36-month observation of the 2017 cohort overlaps with the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, through July 2020. More precisely assessing the impact of the pandemic on recidivism rates will require additional months to track the population. With the limited period available for this report, the recidivism rates still look remarkably similar to the 2015 cohort. Will future cohorts exhibit more dramatic shifts in recidivism? OPM will continue to keep an eye on the pandemic's effects in future analyses.

Chart 2: Types of returns-to-prison, 2015 cohort

The pattern in readmission factors observed in last year's analysis extended with the longer follow-up period. Again, remands due to technical violations drove many returns observed within the initial months of release or discharge (see Charts 2 and 3). For both cohorts, over 50% of returns observed within the first three months of release were due to technical violations, while only 38% were due to new charges (criminal violations comprise between 9 and 11%, and a small number of new sentences account for the rest). In subsequent months, individuals increasingly returned to prison due to new charges. By month 12, 75% of observed returns-to-prison owe to new charges. This proportion remains relatively consistent up to 36 months observed from release. As Charts 2 and 3 highlight, despite 2017's smaller cohort size, the distribution of return types looks nearly identical to the 2015 cohort's pattern.
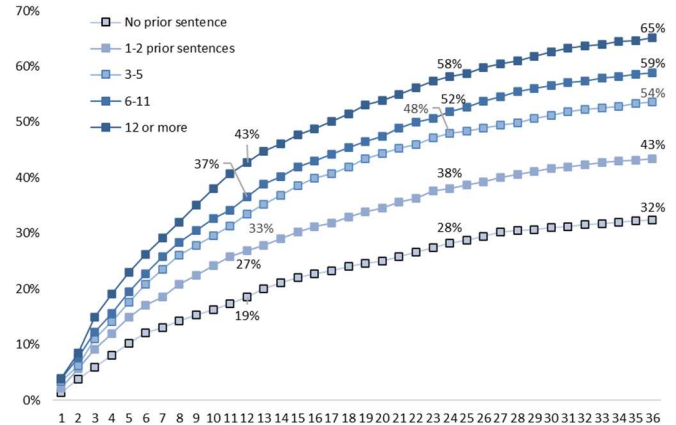
Chart 3: Types of returns-to-prison, 2017 cohort

Chart 4: Returns-to-prison by sentence history, 2017 cohort

Consistent with prior reports, larger number of prior sentences correlates with a higher likelihood of recidivism. Chart 4 shows that only 32% of people with no prior sentences returned to a correctional facility by the 36-month mark. As the number of prior sentences for each subgroup increases, so do recidivism rates. At the extreme end, rates for people with 12 or more prior sentences (65%) are twice those of people with no prior sentences.

Sentence History

There was a range of prior sentence histories among people released from a correctional facility in 2017. For the report, we grouped people into roughly equally sized categories. 22% were released or discharged with no prior sentences, 24% had 1 to 2 prior sentences, and 21% between 3 and 5 sentences, and 13% had 12 or more at release or discharge from a correctional facility.