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Profile of State Prison Inmates, 1986

by
Christopher A. Innes, Ph.D.
BJS Statistician

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Results from the 1986 Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities indicate that, despite a period of rapid growth in the size of the inmate population, its composition has remained stable. Comparisons of results from the 1986 survey to a nearly identical one in 1979 show that the demographic characteristics and offense distribution of the State inmate population have changed little. There was a small but significant increase in the percentage of those identified as Hispanic, and the inmate population was somewhat older, less educated, and less likely to have been in military service in 1986 than in 1979.

Specific findings from the 1986 survey include the following:

- Over four-fifths of State prison inmates were recidivists—they had previously been sentenced to probation or incarceration as a juvenile or adult. More than 60% had been either incarcerated or on probation at least twice; 45%, three or more times; and nearly 20%, six or more times.
- Two-thirds of inmates in 1986 were serving a sentence for a violent crime or had previously been convicted of a violent crime. Most of these—55% of all inmates—had a current violent offense.
- The 11% of inmates whose current offense was nonviolent but who had previously been convicted of a violent crime

This Special Report presents the findings from BJS' most recent survey of inmates in State prisons. The survey, conducted every 5-7 years, is part of our ongoing effort to provide useful and timely data on the correctional system in the United States. The interviews with inmates were conducted in 1986, and they provide a wealth of new data on State prisoners.

This report examines the criminal histories of inmates, their use of drugs and alcohol, their personal backgrounds, and, for violent offenders, their victims. It should be of interest to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers interested in the question of who goes to prison and why.

We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of State prison officials who make this survey possible.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

had the longest prior records of all recidivists—72% had three or more prior convictions.

- More than half (53%) of all inmates were recidivists with a record of at least one violent conviction.
- Of the one-third of inmates with no record of violence, 84% (29% of the total State inmate population) were recidivists. Only 5% of State prison

inmates in 1986 were nonviolent offenders with no previous convictions. Over half of these were convicted of drug trafficking or burglary.

- About 13% of the inmate population were first-time offenders in for a violent crime. Over half of these had been convicted of murder (including nonnegligent manslaughter) or robbery.
- Just over a third (35%) of all inmates said they were under the influence of a drug at the time of their offense, and 43% said they were using drugs daily in the month before the offense.
- More than half of inmates (54%) reported that they were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of the offense.
- Most of the victims of State prison inmates incarcerated for a violent crime were male, about two-thirds were white, and over one-fourth were well known to the offender.
- One-third of murderers and nearly half of those convicted of negligent manslaughter said their victims were well known to them. Similarly, a third of rapists and almost two-thirds of those sentenced for other types of sexual assault reported that their victims were well known to them.

State prison inmate surveys

In 1974, 1979, and 1986, the Bureau of Justice Statistics sponsored surveys of nationally representative samples of inmates of State correctional facilities. The Bureau of the Census carried

**Criminal history summary
of State prison inmates**

The two most important measures for summarizing the criminal history profile of State prison inmates are whether an inmate is a recidivist (defined in this report as having previously been sentenced to probation or incarceration as an adult or juvenile) and whether the inmate has a record of violence (the current or past offense). If these two factors are considered in combination, then the inmate population in 1986 can be divided into four groups (table A): (1) violent recidivists (52.5% of the total); (2) nonviolent recidivists (29%); (3) violent first-timers (13.2%); and (4) nonviolent first-timers (5.3%). Violent offenders totaled nearly two-thirds of all inmates; recidivists totaled more than four-fifths.

Based on these proportions, the following relationships hold:

- Of the recidivists, 64.4% were violent offenders and 35.6% were nonviolent.
- Of the first-timers, 71.3% were violent offenders and 28.7% were nonviolent.
- Of the violent offenders, 79.9% were recidivists and 20.1% were first-timers.
- Of the nonviolent offenders, 84.5% were recidivists and 15.5% were first-timers.

Although there is no single standard for determining the seriousness of the criminal history of offenders in prison, many would consider violent offenders more serious as a group than either nonviolent first-timers or nonviolent recidivists. Moreover, all else being equal, recidivists are generally considered to be more serious offenders than first-timers. Thus, it is possible to construct a

simple seriousness hierarchy of those in prison of the following type (table B): (1) those with both current and prior convictions for a violent offense (19.3% of all inmates); (2) those with a current violent conviction only who are also recidivists (22.1%); (3) those with a prior violent conviction only (recidivists by definition) (11.1%); (4) those with a current violent conviction who are first-timers (13.2%); (5) nonviolent offenders who are recidivists (29%); and (6) nonviolent offenders who are first-timers (5.3%). (Note that these categories correspond to those in table 5, although in a different order.) Nearly 95% of all offenders have a record of violence or are recidivists.

Table A. Criminal history summary of State prison inmates: Recidivism by record of violence, 1986

Record of violence	Percent of inmates who are:		
	Recidivists	First-timers	Total
Violent offenders*	52.5%	13.2%	65.7%
Nonviolent offenders	29.0%	5.3%	34.3%
Total	81.5%	18.5%	100.0%

*Includes current or prior offense.

Table B. Criminal history summary of State prison inmates: Offenders grouped by seriousness, 1986

Criminal history	Percent of inmates	Cumulative percent
Violent offenders		
Current and past	19.3%	19.3%
Current only, recidivist	22.1	41.4
Prior only, recidivist	11.1	52.5
Current only, first-timer	13.2	65.7
Nonviolent offenders		
Recidivists	29.0	94.7
First-timers	5.3	100.0

out the data collection in each survey. In 1974, 9,040 inmates were interviewed; in 1979, 11,397 were interviewed; and in 1986, 13,711 were interviewed. In each survey, inmates were interviewed concerning their background, employment record, criminal history, drug and alcohol use, and, in 1986, on their victims.¹

¹For analysis of previous inmate surveys see *Profile of State Prison Inmates*, LEAA National Prisoner Statistics Special Report, NCJ-58257, August 1979; *Prisons and Prisoners*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-80697, January 1982; and *Examining Recidivism*, BJS Special Report, NCJ-90501, February 1985. Also see note 5.

This report examines the results of the 1986 survey and compares the demographic characteristics and offense distribution of inmates in 1986 with those in 1979. (For details of sampling, estimation, and analysis of data, see *Methodology*.)

Inmate populations in 1979 and 1986

By any measure, the American corrections system is changing. When interviews were conducted in February and March of 1986 there were an estimated 450,416 inmates in State correc-

tional facilities, compared with an estimated 274,563 inmates in 1979. Similar increases in the jail population and in the number of people on probation or parole have also been recorded.² As a result of these increases, expenditures for corrections by all levels of government grew 116% from 1979 to 1985, not adjusted for inflation.³ In fiscal year 1985 these expenditures totaled over \$13 billion.

One significant question is what changes in the composition of the inmate population, if any, have occurred during this period of rapid growth. At issue is whether this growth is the result of substantial changes in the administration of justice.

A comparison of the 1979 and 1986 surveys shows that the composition of the inmate population has remained stable, despite its growth. The inmate population in both years was overwhelmingly male, and about half the inmates were white (table 1). There was a small increase in the percentage of Hispanics. The inmate population also was older in 1986 than in 1979, with the median age increasing from 26 to 28 years old. Other notable changes were a larger percentage of inmates who had less than 12 years of education and a smaller percentage of veterans.

Inmates in 1986 were about as likely as in 1979 to have been employed at the time of their arrest—about 7 in 10 had jobs—though a smaller percentage of them were working full-time (table 2). In 1986, 57% of inmates said they were employed full-time when they committed their current offense, compared with 60% in 1979. In 1974, 62% of inmates said they had been employed full-time. About three-fifths of inmates in 1986 who were free in the community at least a year prior to arrest reported annual incomes of less than \$10,000. (Income figures were reported in ranges in the 1979 and 1986 surveys and have not been adjusted to constant dollars.)

²*Jail Inmates 1986*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-107123, October 1987; *Probation and Parole 1985*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-103683, January 1987.

³*Justice Expenditure and Employment 1985*, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-104469, March 1987.

As with the characteristics of the inmate population, the distribution of offenses has also remained essentially stable (table 3). The percentage of persons serving time for a violent crime in 1986 (55%) was slightly lower than it had been in 1979 (58%). In both years almost three-fifths of those convicted of a violent crime were serving sentences for robbery or murder. Property offenders were about 31% of inmates in both years, with over half serving sentences for burglary. Drug offenders were a higher percentage of inmates in 1986 than in 1979 (9% vs. 6%). This increase perhaps reflects the greater emphasis on drug enforcement in recent years. There was a small increase in the number of public-order offenders, from 4% to 5%. In 1974, 52% of inmates were serving sentences for a violent offense, 33% for a property crime, 10% for a drug offense, and 5% for a public-order offense.

Characteristic	Percent of prison inmates	
	1986	1979
Sex		
Male	95.6%	96.0%
Female	4.4	4.0
Race		
White	49.7%	49.5%
Black	46.9	47.8
Other	3.4	2.6
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	12.6%	9.9%
Non-Hispanic	87.4	90.1
Age^a		
Less than 18	.5%	.8%
18-24	26.7	35.6
25-34	45.7	42.4
35-44	19.4	13.8
45-54	5.2	5.1
55-64	1.8	1.7
65 or older	.6	.5
Marital status		
Married	20.3%	22.4%
Widowed	1.9	2.3
Divorced	18.1	16.9
Separated	6.0	6.6
Never married	53.7	51.9
Education^b		
Less than 12 years	61.6%	52.7%
12 years or more	38.4	47.3
Military service		
Served	20.2%	23.8%
Never served	79.8	76.2

Note: The State prison population in 1986 was an estimated 450,316. For each of the characteristics listed, data were available for at least 99% of the inmates. In 1979 the State prison population was an estimated 274,567. For each characteristic other than ethnicity, data were available for at least 99% of the inmates. Ethnicity data were available for 95% of the inmates.

^aThe median age was 28 in 1986 and 26 in 1979.

^bThe median number of years of education was 10 in 1986 and 11 in 1979.

In both 1986 and 1979 women were less likely than men to have been convicted of a violent crime and more likely to have been convicted of a property or drug offense. About 3 in 10 of the women in prison each year were serving sentences for larceny/theft or fraud. Between 1979 and 1986 the proportion of women in prison for a violent offense dropped from almost half to two-fifths.

	Percent of prison inmates	
	1986	1979
Pre-arrest employment		
Employed	69.0%	70.5%
Full-time	57.4	60.5
Part-time	11.6	10.0
Not employed	31.0%	29.5%
Looking	13.0	14.0
Not looking	13.0	15.5
Income prior to arrest		
Free at least 1 year, annual income:		
No income	1.6%	1.6%
Less than \$3,000	24.7	24.5
\$3,000-\$10,000	35.7	37.9
More than \$10,000	39.9	36.0
Free less than 1 year, monthly income:		
Less than \$500	40.1%	39.5%
\$500-\$1,000	28.4	29.2
More than \$1,000	31.5	31.4

Note: Pre-arrest employment data were available for at least 99% of the inmates in 1986 and 1979. Income data were available for 89% of all State prison inmates in 1986 and for 90% of the inmates in 1979.

Prior sentences and criminal histories

Over four-fifths of State prison inmates in 1986 were recidivists—they had previously been sentenced to probation or incarceration as a juvenile or adult (table 4). About 45% of inmates in prison in 1986 had been on probation or incarcerated at least three previous times, and nearly 20%, at least six previous times. Two-thirds of inmates had been on probation at least once, usually as an adult, and one-third said they had been sentenced to probation two or more times. Similarly, more than three-fifths of inmates had previously been incarcerated, most as an adult, and 40% had served time in prison or jail at least twice.

Such long criminal histories are complex, involving past incarcerations or probation sentences for a variety of offenses (see the accompanying box). In 1986, 55% of the inmates had a violent offense as the most serious current offense for which they had been incarcerated. Another 11% had a previous violent offense for which they had been incarcerated or placed on probation. An estimated 34% of inmates had no history of violence. However, 84% of these nonviolent offenders—29% of the total State inmate population—had previously been sentenced to incarceration or probation. In all, only 5% of all State prison inmates were nonviolent offenders with no previous convictions.

Table 3. Current offense of State prison inmates, by sex, 1986 and 1979

Current offense	Percent of prison inmates					
	1986		1986		1979	
	total	1979 total	Male	Female	Male	Female
Violent offenses	54.6%	57.9%	55.2%	40.7%	59.3%	48.9%
Murder*	11.2	12.3	11.2	13.0	12.2	15.5
Negligent manslaughter	3.2	4.0	3.0	6.8	3.6	9.8
Kidnaping	1.7	2.2	1.7	.9	2.2	1.4
Rape	4.2	4.3	4.4	.2	4.5	.4
Other sexual assault	4.5	2.0	4.7	.9	2.0	.3
Robbery	20.9	25.1	21.3	10.6	25.6	13.6
Assault	8.0	7.7	8.1	7.1	7.7	7.6
Other violent	.8	.3	.8	1.2	.3	.4
Property offenses	31.0%	31.4%	30.5%	41.2%	31.2%	36.8%
Burglary	16.5	18.1	17.0	5.9	18.5	5.0
Larceny/theft	6.0	4.8	5.6	14.7	4.5	11.2
Motor vehicle theft	1.4	1.5	1.4	.5	1.5	.5
Arson	.8	.7	.7	1.2	.6	1.2
Fraud	3.8	4.4	3.2	17.0	3.8	17.3
Stolen property	2.0	1.3	2.0	1.6	1.3	.9
Other property	.5	.7	.5	.4	.8	.4
Drug offenses	8.8%	6.4%	8.4%	12.0%	6.2%	10.5%
Possession	2.9	1.6	2.9	4.0	1.5	2.7
Trafficking	5.4	4.4	5.3	7.3	4.3	7.1
Other drug	.3	.4	.2	.7	.4	.7
Public-order offenses	5.2%	4.0%	5.2%	5.1%	4.1%	2.9%
Weapons	1.4	1.4	1.5	.9	1.4	.9
Other public-order	3.7	2.6	3.7	4.3	2.7	2.0
Other offenses	.7%	.3%	.7%	.9%	.3%	.9%

Note: Current offense data were available for at least 99% of the inmates in 1986 and 1979.

*Includes nonnegligent manslaughter.

Prior sentences	Percent of prison inmates
Total	100%
Probation	
None	34.0%
Juvenile only	18.3
Adult only	28.3
Both	19.5
Number of times	
0	34.0%
1	33.7
2	16.7
3-5	12.6
6-10	2.5
11 or more	.6
Incarceration	
None	38.1%
Juvenile only	6.5
Adult only	36.9
Both	18.5
Number of times	
0	38.1%
1	22.2
2	13.2
3-5	16.4
6-10	6.6
11 or more	3.6
Probation and/or incarceration	
None	18.5%
Juvenile only	10.6
Adult only	35.9
Both	34.9
Number of times	
0	18.5%
1	19.8
2	15.5
3-5	26.0
6-10	12.6
11 or more	6.6

Inmates can be categorized on the basis of their criminal histories into six groups. They are: (1) first-time non-violent offenders; (2) first-time violent offenders; (3) recidivists with neither a current nor a previous violent offense; (4) recidivists with a current nonviolent offense and a previous violent offense; (5) recidivists with a current violent offense but no previous violent offense; and (6) recidivists with both a current and a previous violent offense (table 5).

Nonviolent offenders, both first-timers and recidivists, were slightly more likely to be women or to be white than were violent offenders. While the median age of first-timers and recidivists was similar, first-time offenders were older than recidivists when they were arrested or incarcerated for their current offense. Based on their age at first arrest and their current age, most recidivists had been criminally active for over a decade. At the time of the interview inmates had served an average of 27 months in prison on their current incarceration.

	Criminal history of prison inmates						
	Total	First-timers		Recidivists ^a			
		Non-violent	Violent	Non-violent	Prior violent only	Current violent only	Current and prior violent
Number of prison inmates	447,185 ^b	23,808	58,983	129,165	49,827	98,946	86,155
Percent of all inmates	100%	5.3%	13.2%	29.0%	11.1%	22.1%	19.3%
Sex							
Male	95.6%	91.2%	93.3%	93.6%	97.3%	97.4%	98.3%
Female	4.4	8.8	6.7	6.4	2.5	2.6	1.7
Race							
White	49.7%	63.2%	50.7%	56.9%	44.9%	47.1%	40.2%
Black	46.9	33.3	45.6	40.5	51.6	48.9	56.2
Other	3.4	3.5	3.7	2.6	3.5	4.0	3.6
Median age	28	29	28	27	29	28	30
Median age at first arrest	17	20	22	17	16	16	15
Median age at first confinement	19	25	24	19	17	19	18
Mean months served on current confinement	27.3	21.0	30.6	19.6	20.7	32.1	32.0

^aDefined as having previously been sentenced to probation or incarceration as a juvenile or adult.

^bThis number differs from that in table 1 because criminal history information was not available for an estimated 3,231 inmates.

Table 6. Current offense of State prison inmates incarcerated for violent crimes, by criminal history, 1986

Current offense	Criminal history of prison inmates incarcerated for violent crimes		
	First-timers	Recidivists ^a	
		No prior violence	Prior violence
Total	100%	100%	100%
Murder ^b	29.1%	20.5%	15.0%
Negligent manslaughter	10.1	5.4	3.5
Kidnaping	2.8	3.1	3.5
Rape	7.6	7.8	7.8
Other sexual assault	10.8	8.1	6.6
Robbery	27.0	40.0	43.9
Assault	10.9	14.0	18.2
Other violent	1.7	1.2	1.5

^aSee table 5.

^bIncludes nonnegligent manslaughter.

The six categories of inmates varied in the types of offense for which they were serving sentences at the time of the interview. Among those serving sentences for a violent crime, first-time offenders were most likely to have been convicted of murder (including nonnegligent manslaughter) or robbery, and recidivists were most likely to be serving time for robbery, whether or not they had a past violent offense (table 6). Among those serving sentences for a nonviolent crime, first-time offenders were most likely to have been convicted of a drug offense; over half of the nonviolent first-timers were convicted of drug trafficking or burglary (table 7). Recidivists serving time for a nonviolent offense were most likely to have been convicted of burglary.

Long criminal histories were commonplace among recidivist inmates, who comprised 82% of the entire inmate population.⁴ Three-fourths of the recidivists had at least two prior sentences to probation or incarceration; over half had at least three such prior sentences; and nearly a fourth had six or more (table 8).

⁴Also see *Recidivism of Young Parolees*, BJS Special Report, NCJ-104916, May 1987.

Table 7. Current offense of State prison inmates incarcerated for nonviolent crimes, by criminal history, 1986

Current offense	Criminal history of prison inmates incarcerated for nonviolent crimes		
	First-timers	Recidivists*	
		No prior violence	Prior violence
Total	100%	100%	100%
Property offenses			
Burglary	25.0%	38.5%	35.8%
Larceny/theft	9.9	13.6	14.1
Motor vehicle theft	.7	3.2	3.8
Arson	3.1	1.3	1.8
Fraud	11.0	8.7	6.2
Stolen property	1.0	4.8	4.8
Other property	.9	1.0	1.5
Drug offenses			
Possession	6.6%	6.4%	6.3%
Trafficking	26.1	10.1	9.5
Other drug	.4	.6	.5
Public-order offenses			
Weapons	3.2%	2.2%	5.7%
Other public-order	7.1	8.2	8.8
Other offenses	4.4%	1.1%	1.1%

*See table 5.

Whatever the criminal history pattern of the recidivists (with previous violence only, current violence only, both prior and current violence, or no history of violence), numerous previous convictions were common. About 40% of nonviolent recidivists had previously been sentenced to probation or incarceration both as a juvenile and an adult; more than half had three or more prior sentences to probation or incarceration; over a fifth had six or more. Among recidivists serving sentences for their first conviction for a violent offense, a third had been on probation or incarcerated both as a juvenile or an adult; more than two-fifths had three or more prior sentences to probation or incarceration; and nearly a sixth had six or more.

Finally, those whose current offense was nonviolent but who had a prior violent conviction had even longer records. Almost three-fifths had served a probation or incarceration sentence both as a juvenile and an adult; almost three-fourths had three or more prior sentences to probation or incarceration; and over a third had six or more.

Recidivists with no prior history of violence were 29% of the State prison population. In this group, 43% had at least one previous burglary conviction, and 20% had two or more (table 9). In addition, 32% had a previous larceny conviction, and 13% had two or more such convictions. Past public-order offenses such as commercialized vice or probation and parole violations were also commonly reported; 22% had at least one conviction for such an offense.

These histories indicate that recidivists as a group appear more alike than different regardless of their current offense. Recidivists commonly reported a wide variety of offenses, often both violent and nonviolent. Even those who reported that they had never been convicted of a violent offense still reported numerous previous convictions.

Table 8. Prior sentences of recidivists in State prisons, 1986

Prior sentences	Percent of recidivists by type*				
	Total	Non-violent	Prior violent only	Current violent only	Current and prior violent
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Probation					
None	19.0%	15.1%	20.6%	21.2%	21.6%
Juvenile only	22.5	16.4	17.3	30.9	24.9
Adult only	34.7	43.1	28.9	30.5	30.1
Both	21.9	25.5	33.1	17.4	23.5
Number of times					
0	19.0%	15.1%	20.6%	21.2%	21.6%
1	41.4	41.6	31.0	47.2	48.5
2	20.5	24.0	23.4	16.5	18.0
3-5	15.4	15.8	19.5	12.7	15.5
6-10	3.1	2.9	4.7	1.9	3.7
11 or more	.7	.7	.9	.5	.8
Incarceration					
None	24.0%	28.0%	9.4%	32.6%	15.3%
Juvenile only	7.9	6.5	4.9	11.2	8.0
Adult only	45.3	46.5	49.0	41.9	45.3
Both	22.7	18.2	36.6	14.9	31.4
Number of times					
0	24.0%	28.0%	9.4%	32.6%	15.3%
1	27.2	25.9	22.4	30.7	27.9
2	16.2	15.4	19.3	14.3	18.0
3-5	20.1	19.0	29.7	14.4	22.0
6-10	8.1	7.1	12.4	4.8	10.6
11 or more	4.3	3.8	6.0	3.0	5.3
Probation and/or incarceration					
Juvenile only	13.1%	10.1%	4.5%	24.0%	9.9%
Adult only	44.1	50.2	37.7	43.4	39.3
Both	42.8	39.7	57.7	32.6	50.8
Number of times					
1	24.3%	24.6%	11.9%	34.7%	19.2%
2	20.3	20.4	16.0	22.3	20.2
3-5	31.9	32.9	36.8	27.6	32.6
6-10	15.5	15.0	21.9	10.4	16.3
11 or more	0.0	7.1	13.4	5.0	9.6

*See table 5 for definition of recidivism.

Table 9. Prior offenses of nonviolent recidivists in State prisons, 1986

Prior offense	Percent of nonviolent recidivists previously sentenced to probation or incarceration by number of times*					
	None	At least one	One	Two	Three	Four or more
Property offenses						
Burglary	56.9%	43.2%	23.2%	11.7%	4.0%	4.3%
Larceny/theft	67.8	32.2	19.4	7.7	2.8	2.3
Motor vehicle theft	86.4	13.6	9.0	2.9	1.1	.6
Arson	98.6	1.4	1.3	.1	0	0
Fraud	86.0	14.0	9.9	2.6	.7	.9
Stolen property	91.6	8.4	6.3	1.8	.2	.1
Other property	92.3	7.7	6.3	1.2	.1	.1
Drug offenses						
Possession	85.7%	14.3%	9.9%	3.0%	.7%	.7%
Trafficking	93.3	6.7	5.1	1.3	.2	.1
Other drug	98.3	1.7	1.2	.3	.1	.1
Public-order offenses						
Weapons	94.7%	5.3%	4.5%	.7%	.1%	0%
Other public-order	77.7	22.3	14.3	4.8	1.7	1.5
Other offenses						
	86.0	14.0	10.4	2.4	.8	.4

*See table 5 for definition of recidivism.

Thirty-five percent of inmates reported they had used one of the major drugs--heroin, methadone, cocaine, LSD, or PCP--on a regular basis in the past. Furthermore, 19% said they were using one of these drugs daily in the month before their current offense. These figures indicate a significant involvement of drugs in the lifestyles of these inmates before their incarceration.

More than half of inmates said they were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol at the time of their current offense (table 12). This percentage was relatively constant across the different offenses. The percentages reporting that they used both drugs and alcohol, however, varied considerably--from over 25% of those serving sentences for rape to 7% of those convicted of weapons offenses.

Drug and alcohol use

The extensive criminal histories many prison inmates report are often accompanied by equally long histories of drug use. About four-fifths of the inmates in prison in 1986 reported use of an illegal drug in the past (table 10). More than three-fifths said they had used a drug on a regular basis--once a week or more for at least a month--at some time in the past. Marijuana and hashish were the most commonly mentioned drugs, whether ever used or used on a regular basis, followed by cocaine. In 1986, 35% of the inmates said they were under the influence of a drug at the time of their current offense, and 43% were using drugs daily in the month before the offense (table 11).

Table 10. Pre-incarceration use of illegal drugs by State prison inmates, 1986

Type of drug	Percent of prison inmates who previously used illegal drugs	
	Ever used	Used regularly ^a
Any drug	79.5%	62.3%
Marijuana/hashish	75.6%	54.5%
Cocaine	43.7	22.2
Barbiturates	37.0	11.9
Amphetamines ^b	30.3	16.2
Rathemogens ^b	27.1	11.7
Heroin	25.1	16.9
Other ^c	27.2	14.1

^aUsed once a week or more for at least a month.

^bIncludes PCP and LSD.

^cIncludes methadone, Quaaludes, and amphetamines and barbiturates in combination.

Table 11. History of pre-incarceration use of illegal drugs by State prison inmates, 1986

Type of drug use	Percent of inmates using drugs	
	1986	1979
Under the influence of drugs at time of the current offense	35.3%	32.3%
Ever used drugs on a regular basis	62.3	62.9
Ever used a major drug on a regular basis*	35.8	33.4
Used drugs on a daily basis in the month before the current offense	42.6	39.5
Used a major drug on a daily basis in the month before the current offense	18.5	14.0

*Major drugs include heroin, methadone, cocaine, LSD, and PCP.

Table 12. Inmates under the influence of drugs and alcohol, by the current offense for State prison inmates, 1986

Current offense	Not under the influence	Whether under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of offense			
		Total	Drugs only	Alcohol only	Both
All offenses	46.2%	53.8%	17.2%	18.5%	16.1%
Violent offenses					
Murder*	46.5%	53.5%	13.4%	20.1%	20.0%
Negligent manslaughter	48.1	51.9	9.3	23.6	19.0
Kidnaping	47.6	52.4	7.2	32.4	12.8
Rape	41.6	58.4	14.2	21.2	23.0
Other sexual assault	43.3	56.7	6.8	24.7	28.2
Robbery	54.2	45.8	5.3	20.9	19.0
Assault	44.7	55.3	20.7	13.4	21.2
Other violent	46.9	53.1	10.7	24.5	17.9
Other violent	47.8	52.2	11.6	20.4	20.2
Property offenses					
Burglary	43.4%	56.6%	20.8%	17.9%	17.9%
Larceny/theft	37.5	62.5	21.9	19.7	20.9
Motor vehicle theft	45.3	54.8	23.6	15.7	15.5
Arson	46.8	53.2	16.4	19.6	17.2
Fraud	43.7	56.3	6.4	25.7	24.2
Stolen property	69.0	40.0	13.7	10.9	9.4
Other property	56.7	43.2	16.7	13.5	13.9
Other property	28.9	71.1	8.6	37.7	24.8
Drug offenses					
Possession	51.7%	48.3%	31.9%	5.6%	10.8%
Trafficking	51.6	48.4	34.4	5.7	8.3
Other drug	51.9	48.0	30.1	5.7	12.2
Other drug	49.9	50.0	39.5	.5	10.0
Public-order offenses					
Weapons offense	47.3%	52.7%	13.3%	27.7%	11.7%
Other public-order	50.7	49.3	12.1	21.8	7.4
Other public-order	42.7	57.2	13.8	30.8	13.4
Other offenses					
	61.4%	38.6%	13.1%	11.9%	13.6%

*includes nonnegligent manslaughter.

Among those who committed violent offenses, alcohol use, alone or in combination with other drugs, was reported by about 40% of the inmates. The use of drugs alone was more common among property offenders, especially those convicted of larceny/theft or burglary, and among drug offenders than among violent or public-order offenders. One exception was robbery, where 42% of the offenders reported being under the influence of drugs, alone or in combination with alcohol.

This high level of drug and alcohol use by inmates was also found in the 1974 and 1979 surveys.⁵ The level of drug use in particular appears to far exceed that reported by the general population.⁶

Victim information

In 1986 inmates who had committed a violent offense were asked to describe the sex, race, and age of their victims and their relationship to the victim. Over half of the inmates reported their victim to be male and two-thirds to be white (table 13). About two-fifths of inmates estimated their victim's age as 25-39 years old. Over half of the inmates reported that they were strangers to their victim, and about a quarter said that the victim was well known to them. There were multiple victims in about a fourth of the cases.

⁵Prisoners and Alcohol, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-88223, January 1983; Prisoners and Drugs, BJS Bulletin, NCJ-87575, March 1983.

⁶See National Survey of Drug Abuse: Main Findings, 1982, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Washington, D.C., 1983.

Victim characteristics varied by the type of offense. Victims of kidnaping, rape, and other sexual assault, for example, were more likely to be women than men. For each offense the majority of offenders reported that their victims were white, with the exception of negligent manslaughter (48%). The crimes with the highest level of black victimization were murder (33%), negligent manslaughter (47%), and assault (37%). The violent crimes with the youngest victims were rape (62% under 25), other sexual assault (74% under 18), and other violent offenses, which includes child abuse (66% under 18).

The relationship of the offender and victim also varied by the type of offense. In over a third of murders and nearly half of manslaughters, the victim was well known to the offender. Similarly, a third of rapists and over three-fifths of those convicted of other types of sexual assault were well known to their victims. Kidnaping and robbery, on the other hand, most often had a stranger as the victim.

This information drawn from the responses of offenders is similar to the pattern of responses that victims give in surveys of the general population. For example, inmates convicted of violent crimes reported that they were complete strangers to their victims 57% of the time, while the National Crime Survey has reported that 46% of violent victimizations involve complete strangers.⁷

⁷Violent Crime by Strangers and Nonstrangers, BJS Special Report, NCJ-103782, January 1987.

Methodology

The inmate surveys are conducted using a sample of inmates in State correctional facilities. The data are collected by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The sample design is a stratified two-stage selection with the probabilities proportional to the size of the correctional facility. In the first stage the sample is selected independently from two frames: the first for males only, and a second to allow an oversample of females. Within each frame, facilities are stratified by type (prison vs. community corrections facility) and by census region. In the second stage interviewers visit each selected facility and select a sample of inmates using predetermined sampling procedures. In 1979, 11,397 interviews were conducted at 215 prisons with a selected sample of about 12,000 inmates. In 1986, 13,711 interviews at 275 facilities were conducted from a sample of about 15,000 inmates.

Based on these interviews estimates of the entire inmate population were developed that used a weighting factor derived from the original probability of selection in the sample. This factor is then adjusted for variable rates of nonresponse and with two different ratio adjustments. The first ratio adjustment accounts for sample effects; the second is intended to bring the sample population as closely into agreement as possible with the known distribution of the entire population. All comparisons presented in this report are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Table 13. Characteristics of the victims of those incarcerated in State prisons for violent crimes, 1986

Victim characteristics	Current offense								
	Total	Murder ^a	Negligent manslaughter	Kidnaping	Rape	Other sexual assault	Robbery	Assault	Other violent
Sex									
Male	53.0%	69.2%	74.5%	28.8%	4.6%	17.0%	55.6%	68.3%	42.1%
Female	39.0	27.4	22.7	62.5	93.9	60.5	29.4	24.7	47.3
Both ^b	8.1	3.3	2.8	8.7	1.5	2.4	14.9	7.0	10.7
Race									
White	64.6%	62.9%	48.0%	74.3%	69.4%	77.5%	66.7%	55.6%	70.8%
Black	27.5	32.7	47.4	18.5	26.0	17.5	20.7	37.2	26.8
Other	3.3	2.9	3.3	2.4	3.8	4.1	3.7	2.6	2.0
Mixed ^b	4.7	1.4	1.3	4.8	1.7	.9	8.8	4.6	.3
Age									
Less than 18 years	15.2%	8.7%	8.9%	17.2%	30.8%	74.1%	4.3%	7.4%	66.2%
18-24	22.5	21.2	29.6	32.3	31.4	12.5	23.0	23.8	7.7
25-39	41.7	38.1	46.6	37.1	28.0	19.8	48.7	55.6	19.8
40 and older	20.5	32.0	23.9	13.4	9.8	2.7	23.9	13.2	7.4
Relationship to offender									
Well known	26.1%	35.7%	49.6%	18.5%	33.3%	61.2%	5.5%	31.8%	58.2%
Casual acquaintance	11.2	12.8	13.8	10.7	15.3	11.2	7.6	14.9	10.9
Known by sight only	5.3	6.4	6.3	3.4	4.5	3.1	5.0	9.7	3.4
Stranger	56.9	45.2	38.3	67.3	46.9	24.5	81.8	43.5	27.5
Offense involved multiple victims	26.0%	14.4%	11.6%	25.4%	14.9%	19.9%	38.3%	26.8%	21.4%

^aIncludes nonnegligent manslaughter.

^bFor cases involving multiple victims.

Criminal history was based on the self-reports of inmates. Inmates could report on past probation sentences and the offense(s) associated with their first time on probation as juveniles and as adults; incarcerations for such less serious offenses as drunkenness, vagrancy, and disorderly conduct; and on prior incarcerations for other offenses for up to 10 past incarcerations. A recidivist is defined as any inmate who reported a probation or incarceration sentence at any time in the past.

Drug use history is also based directly on the responses from inmates. Inmates were asked a very detailed set of questions about each of 10 drugs. Drug use histories were developed by examining the responses to all of the 10 sets of questions. The drugs that were specifically asked about were: heroin or methadone; amphetamines and barbiturates, alone or in combination; methaqualone (Quaaludes); cocaine; LSD; PCP; and marijuana and hashish. Alcohol use was examined in a separate set of questions.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Reports are prepared principally by BJS staff. This report was written by Christopher A. Innes. James J. Stephan provided statistical review. The report was edited by Frank D. Balog. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administered production, assisted by Jeanne Harris and Yvonne Shields. The design and collection of the data were directed by Phyllis Jo Baunach, formerly of BJS. Data collection was carried out at the Bureau of the Census by Marilyn Monahan, Susan Shacter-Ryan, Gregory Wells, and Rita Williamson under the supervision of Larry McGinn, Gertrude Odom, and Robert Tinari.

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