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Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report

The Prevalence of Imprisonment

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In the 1960s, while crime soared, prison populations declined. What followed in the 1970s was a marked shift in national opinion: increasingly, the public began to demand that the justice system get tougher with criminals.

The response of the justice system seemed immediate. From 1970 to 1979, the imprisonment rate surged a record 39%, the largest single decade increase since the 1920s, when the Federal government started keeping records on State and Federal prison populations. The 32% increase during the 1930s is the closest any other decade has come to this record.

Since the 1970s, imprisonment rates have continued to climb. With a 36% increase in just the first five years of the 1980s, and with further increases projected for the remainder of the decade, indications are that the imprisonment rate increase of the 1980s may turn out to be the biggest ever.

The significance of these statistics on the changing imprisonment rate is that they are a measure—perhaps the measure—by which the public gauges government response to crime. But these statistics do not speak for themselves. The changing imprisonment rate is actually a measure of the number of persons (usually per 100,000 population) in prison on a single day in one year relative to the number in prison on a single day in another year. The various implications of a change in these single-day counts are not obvious.

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With this study, the Bureau of Justice Statistics introduces a new statistical indicator measuring the use of imprisonment as a sanction for crime. The prevalence of imprisonment indicator, along with the annual count of prison inmates, gives a comprehensive portrait of the American prison system in both static and dynamic terms. While the annual count of inmates reveals the number of prison inmates on 1 day, the prevalence indicator measures the cumulative effect on the Nation's population of admitting and releasing inmates from State prisons.

The findings of this study question some widely held beliefs about prisons, about deterrence (the inhibiting effect of the threat of imprisonment on the criminal activity of people), and about incapacitation (the effect that prisons have on reducing crime by preventing offenders from committing crimes in society). The fact that so few criminals go to prison relative to the large volume of serious crime convinces many that prisons cannot possibly have much of a deterrent or incapacitative effect on crime. Assessing the States' use of imprisonment in

dynamic terms, however, reveals that the proportion of the Nation's population affected by imprisonment is higher than might previously have been realized. Moreover, it suggests that the deterrent and incapacitative potential of prison may be larger than previously thought.

Estimates of the prevalence of incarceration are useful for a number of other reasons as well. Presenting incarceration rate data in this form facilitates comparison of the likelihood of imprisonment with other prevalence indicators of significant life events increasingly being used to convey important epidemiological information to the public. These data are valuable for planning purposes in anticipating future prison populations. The prevalence indicator is also useful for measuring recidivism, or the percentage released from prison who eventually return to serve another sentence. These detailed measures of lifetime recidivism establish a national benchmark (the first of its kind) against which future claims of superior correctional efficacy can be evaluated.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

This study translates imprisonment rates into more easily understood terms, better to convey the implica-

tions of record prison population growth in the 1970s. The findings presented disclose that the proportion of the pop-

ulation punished by imprisonment (and, by implication, found guilty of serious crime) is much larger than many may realize and is also much larger than the single-day prison population counts indicate.

The study also shows that about half of all prison admissions do not return for subsequent reincarceration.

The study introduces a new statistical indicator measuring the pervasiveness of State imprisonment. The BJS indicator of prevalence of imprisonment measures both the percentage of the Nation's population confined in State prisons on any given day and the percentage that will ever have served a State prison sentence in their lifetime. This indicator is more readily understood than the conventional "rate per 100,000" used to measure imprisonment levels; it facilitates comparisons of the likelihood of imprisonment with other prevalence indicators of significant life events (such as the lifetime probability of being in a serious automobile accident or of contracting a particular disease).

The prevalence of imprisonment indicator has many other applications. It may be valuable for planning purposes if it is applied in local contexts to anticipate future needs for prison space. Researchers may use it in a variety of contexts to study public policy toward crime control. It can be used to measure prison recidivism, or the percentage of State prison inmates who return to prison to serve additional sentences. The establishment of such a national barometer (the first of its kind) of how successful the Nation's State prisons are in reducing crime may become a benchmark against which future claims of superior correctional efficacy can be evaluated.

Summary of findings

As used in this study, the term "prevalence" of State imprisonment initially refers to the probability of being in prison on any given day; and, later, to the probability in a person's lifetime of ever serving a prison sentence.² Recidivism refers to the chances in a person's lifetime of returning to prison after serving a prior prison sentence.

Between 62 and 71% of all first-time prison admissions do not return to prison a second time. Among second-time prison admissions, between 54 and 60% do not return for a third imprisonment; while 47 to 58% of third-time admissions do not serve a fourth prison sentence. As would be expected, the recidivism rate among inmates increases with the number of prison sentences served, since the more hardened, habitual offenders make up an increasing proportion of second, third and fourth-time prison admissions.

Differences in recidivism between the sexes and between the races are found to be much smaller than differences in prevalence. In other words, recidivism rates among male and female criminals show small differences, although males have a much higher probability than females of being in prison on any given day or of serving a prison sentence in their lifetime. Similarly, recidivism rates among black criminals and white criminals show little difference although blacks are more likely than whites either to be in prison on any given day or to serve a prison sentence in their lifetime.^{3,4}

During the period from 1978 to 1982 (the most recent period for which race-specific national data are available), the prevalence of imprisonment on any given day increased for all six of the segments that make up the Nation's population: white males, black males, other males, white females, black females, and other females. The largest increase occurred among white females; the smallest increase occurred among other females.

From 1973 to 1979 (the most recent period for which extensive national data are available), estimates of the lifetime prevalence of a first imprisonment increased for all four of the population segments for which data are available: white males, black males, white females, and black females. The largest increase occurred among black females; the smallest increase occurred among white females.

The probability of being in prison on any given day or of ever serving a prison sentence (aside from being convicted) varies more by sex than by race. Still, among males and females, blacks are found to have higher chances than whites of being in prison on any given day or of ever serving a prison sentence in their lifetime.⁵ This finding neither confirms nor rules out the possibility of racial discrimination by the justice system. Compelling evidence relevant to that issue comes not from studies comparing the racial composition of prison populations with the racial composition of the national population, but from studies comparing the racial composition of prison populations with that of all offenders engaged in serious, imprisonable crime.

The data

This report is one in a series using national data on crime to address issues of public and policy concern. The report presents results from a study based on surveys and censuses sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is a Federal government agency with major responsibility for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of statistical data on crime and justice. BJS

obtains its statistical data through periodic censuses and surveys. An annual census of inmates of State prisons provides counts of the number and demographic characteristics of persons in prison confinement. A survey of inmates of State prisons, conducted about every five years, provides more extensive information on confined persons.

BJS has sponsored two nationwide surveys of inmates of State prisons. The first was conducted in January 1974,⁶ the second in October 1979.⁷ Both involved face-to-face interviews with large, representative samples of inmates of State prisons.⁸ (See appendix tables A and B for details.)

The most recent inmate censuses and the two inmate surveys form the basis for a study of the prevalence of State imprisonment. "Prevalence" refers to the proportion of the Nation's population in prison. The term can apply to the entire population of the United States, as in the question "what percentage of the total U.S. population is in prison on a single day?" or "what percentage of the total U.S. population will ever have been in prison in their lifetime?" It can also refer to population segments, as in the question "what percentage of the Nation's males are in prison on a single day?" or "what percentage of the Nation's males will ever have been in prison in their lifetime?"

The subject of this study is the prevalence of imprisonment among six population segments: white males, black males, males of all other races (hereafter referred to as "other" males, they are Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Alaskan Native), white females, black females, and females of all other races (hereafter referred to as "other" females). A long-standing tradition exists in criminological research for investigations into the demographic characteristics of apprehended offenders. The subject is relevant to key issues in criminology, including, for example, the causes and prevention of crime, the prediction of future criminality, the measurement of offender characteristics, and equality in justice administration.¹⁰

Interest in population segments also stems from two facts about prisons in the United States. First, inmate populations are almost exclusively male. For example, from 1978 to 1982, males were not quite 50% of the general population of the United States but were approximately 96% of State prison populations. (During this period they were also 90% of the persons arrested for FBI Uniform Crime Reports Index violent crime and from 78% to 79% of all those arrested for UCR index property crime.)¹¹ Second, prisons contain proportionately more blacks than the general population. From 1978 to 1982,

11% of the total adult population of the United States was black. Throughout this same period (the most recent period for which national data on the racial composition of State prison populations are available), 47% of prisoners confined in adult State prisons were black. However, during this period, blacks were also 44% to 47% of all the persons arrested for UCR index violent crime and 29% to 33% of all those arrested for UCR index property crime.

The report begins with the prevalence of State imprisonment in the United States on any given day in the years 1978 (the first year in which the annual prison census collected information on race) to 1982 (the most recent year for which race-specific national data are available).

What is the prevalence of adult State imprisonment on any given day?

Total (table 1). Data indicate that, on any given day, prisoners in all the adult State prisons in the United States number about one-fifth of 1% of the Nation's total adult population (or about 1 in every 500 adults). During the period from 1978 to 1982, the prevalence of State imprisonment increased each year from a low of .175% in 1978 (or 1 in every 571 adults) to a high of .227% in 1982 (or 1 in every 441 adults).

Sex (table 1). On any given day males are about 26 times more likely to be in prison than females. From 1978 to 1981 the ratio fluctuated between 26 and 27 to 1. In 1982 the ratio dropped to 25 to 1, indicating a slight narrowing of the difference in the prevalence of imprisonment between males and females. The prevalence of imprisonment

of both males and females increased each year between 1978 and 1982. At yearend 1982, .455% of the Nation's adult males (or 1 in every 220) versus .018% of the Nation's adult females (or 1 in every 5,556) were in State prisons.

Sex and race (table 1). Differences in the prevalence of imprisonment between the sexes are larger than differences between the races, indicating, for example, that the probability of being in prison varies more by sex than by race. Throughout the period from 1978 to 1982, blacks, regardless of their sex, were typically about 8 times more likely to be in prison than either whites or others; but males, regardless of their race, were at least 17 times more likely to be in prison than females of the same race.

Of the six population segments, black males have the highest chances of being in prison on any given day. This conclusion is supported by data from the years 1978 to 1982. During this period black males were at least 8 times more likely to be in prison than white males or other males, 204 times more likely than black females, and 151 times more likely than other females. On a single day in 1982, the most recent year for which race-specific national data are available, 2.04% of the Nation's adult black males (or 1 in every 49) were in State prisons.

On any given day white females are the least likely of the six population segments to be in prison. This conclusion is supported by data from the period 1978 to 1982, throughout which white females had the lowest one-day prevalence rates. Their highest rate over this period occurred in 1982, when

1 in every 10,000 adult white females in the United States were in a State prison.

Of the three male population segments, other males are apparently least likely to be in prison.¹³ From 1978 to 1982 other males were consistently, though only slightly, less likely than white males to be in prison. On December 31, 1982, 1 in every 376 white males vs. 1 in every 437 other males were in State prison confinement.

Of the three female population segments, black females have the highest chances of being in prison on any given day in the United States. Throughout the period from 1978 to 1982, black females were at least 8 times more likely to be in prison than white females and at least 6 times more likely than other females.

From 1978 to 1982, the prevalence of imprisonment increased overall among each of the six population segments. The largest increase over the five-year span occurred among white females (a 43% increase); the smallest occurred among other females (a 9% increase).

Sex, race, and age (table 2). Data from the inmate surveys (the only available source of national data on the age composition of the prison population) indicate that the prevalence of imprisonment is highest among black males in their twenties. On a single day in 1974, an estimated 2.55% (or 1 in every 39) of all the black males aged 20 to 29 in the United States were in State prisons.¹⁴ On a single day in 1979 (the most recent year for which age-specific national data are available), a significantly higher (at the .05 level) percentage, or an estimated 3.03% (1 in every 33) of all the black males aged 20 to 29 in the United States, were in State prisons.¹⁵ The 1974 and 1979 estimates for black males are significantly higher (at the .05 level) than comparable age-specific estimates for white males, other males, white females, black females, or other females.

What is the lifetime prevalence of adult State imprisonment?

Although only about one-fifth of 1% of the Nation's adult population is in State prison confinement on any given day, this seemingly small figure can be misleading. Imprisonment of even a small fraction of a population as large as that of the United States (roughly 175 million adults) translates to hundreds of thousands of persons in State prisons (429,603 as of December 31, 1984).¹⁶ Moreover, the small fraction in confinement on a single day masks the possibility that over some period longer than a day (say, a life-

Table 1. The prevalence of State imprisonment of adults in the United States on December 31, 1978 to 1982, total adult population, by sex, and by sex and race

Population segment	Percent of adult population 18 and over in State prisons on December 31, 1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Total*	.175%	.179%	.186%	.204%	.227%
Male*	.353	.359	.373	.411	.455
White	.204	.209	.218	.242	.266
Black	1.665	1.667	1.703	1.859	2.044
Other**	.292	.202	.189	.207	.229
Female*	.013	.014	.014	.016	.018
White	.007	.007	.007	.009	.010
Black	.062	.063	.062	.073	.082
Other**	.011	.011	.009	.011	.012

NOTE: Rounding obscures certain year-to-year increases in the prevalence of imprisonment. Also, some table percentages are very slightly inflated since they are based on a numerator (the number of inmates) that includes persons under age 18 and a denominator (the adult population) that only includes persons 18 and over. Inmate population data are from the annual publication *Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions* on December 31, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, and 1982, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Washington: USGPO, 1980, '81, '82, '83, and '84, respectively. U.S. population estimates

for the years 1978 to 1981 are from U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 917, Preliminary Estimates of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race: 1970 to 1981*, USGPO, Washington, D.C., 1982; for the year 1982, from U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 929, Estimates of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race: 1980 to 1982*, USGPO, Washington, 1983.

*Includes inmates whose race is not known.
**Includes Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Alaskan Native.

Table 2. The prevalence of State imprisonment of adults in the United States on a single day in 1974 and 1979, by sex, race and age						
Population segment	Percent of population in State prisons on a single day					
	13-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 and over
1974						
Male						
White	.057%	.304%	.208%	.106%	.045%	.014%
Black	.396	2.550	1.444	.753	.329	.091
Female						
White	*.001	.012	.010	.004	*.001	*.0001
Black	.012	.079	.040	*.008	*.004	*.001
1979						
Male						
White	.069	.410	.246	.128	.043	.011
Black	.442	3.027	2.003	.755	.390	.123
Female						
White	.003	.016	.010	.005	.002	*.0001
Black	.009	.124	.094	.035	.012	*.003

NOTE: Estimates applicable to all other races are not shown because of known inconsistencies between census and survey procedures for designating "other" race. Table percentages are computed from data contained in two sources: estimates of inmates of adult State prisons are from the 1974 and the 1979 nationwide surveys of inmates of State correctional institutions;

U.S. population estimates are from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 917, Preliminary Estimates of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race: 1970 to 1981, USGPO, Washington, 1982, Table 1, pp. 11-12, 18-19. *Estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases.

time) the percentage of the population that will ever have been in prison may be substantial.

The lifetime prevalence of imprisonment in an adult State prison is estimated from information on persons entering adult State prisons in the United States in a single year. The number of persons entering at each age for the first time in their lives is critical for this purpose. The number of such first admissions at each age, as a fraction of the total U.S. population at that age, indicates the probability of a first imprisonment occurring at each age. If first-time imprisonment rates are stable over a long period of time, then the sum of the probabilities of first imprisonments at each age forms an estimate of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment in an adult State prison.¹⁸ Thus, for example, the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment for males (see appendix table C) is the probability of a male serving a first sentence at age 13 (the youngest age, recorded in an inmate survey, of a male entering an adult State prison to serve a first sentence),¹⁹ plus the probability of a male serving a first sentence at 14, plus the probability of a male serving a first sentence at 15, and so on through age 84 (an arbitrarily selected upper age limit). Though estimates of lifetime prevalence determined in this way are in one sense hypothetical, they will apply to real populations if the annual imprisonment rates from which they are computed remain stable into the future.

Lifetime prevalence estimates presented here are primarily based on the two inmate surveys carried out during the 1970's. The 1974 survey provides detailed information on a sample of

persons admitted to State prisons in the United States in 1973 (see appendix tables A and B) and, in conjunction with a 1973 census of the number of State prison admissions, is used to produce two estimates of the lifetime prevalence of State imprisonment in the United States: an inmate survey estimate and an admissions census estimate. The second survey, conducted in October 1979, provides details on a sample of persons admitted to State prisons in the United States in the year 1979 (see tables A and B in the appendix) and, in conjunction with a 1979 census of the number of State prison admissions, is also used to produce two estimates of the lifetime prevalence of State imprisonment in the United States: an inmate survey estimate and an admissions census estimate.

The reason for two estimates (an inmate survey estimate and an admissions census estimate) in each case (1973 and 1979) rather than a single estimate is that the number of first admissions to State prisons in a given year—which, to repeat, is critical for estimating the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment—is nowhere recorded explicitly. Available national data are capable only of establishing a range within which the actual number probably lies.

The 1974 and 1979 inmate surveys both provide an underestimate of the total number of sentenced adults admitted to State prisons in 1973 and 1979 because it is unlikely that all the sentenced adults admitted in 1973²¹ and 1979²² were in prison at the precise time the inmate surveys were conducted. (To illustrate, the 1979 inmate survey was conducted before the end of

1979 and therefore could not possibly have included every inmate admitted in 1979.) A 1973 census and a 1979 census of admissions of sentenced persons to adult State prisons both provide an overestimate of the total number of sentenced adults admitted to State prisons in 1973 and 1979 because it is likely that some of the inmates were counted more than once in the censuses when, for one reason or another, they were admitted to prison more than one time in 1973²³ or 1979.²⁴

The 1974 and 1979 inmate surveys both provide an estimate of the number of sentenced persons at each age who were admitted to State prisons for the first time in their lives in the years 1973 and 1979, respectively.^{25,26} (See appendix tables A and B for details.) These numbers are used to calculate inmate survey estimates of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment. When multiplied by certain constants corresponding to the factor by which census counts exceed survey estimates,²⁷ these numbers are also used to calculate admissions census estimates of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment. Admissions census estimates take into account the fact that more sentenced persons entered prisons in 1973 and 1979 for the first time in their lives than the 1974 and 1979 inmate surveys indicate; the constants give some indication of how many more.

To illustrate, the 1979 inmate survey estimates that 87,881 sentenced males entered State prisons in 1979. The 1979 admissions census records 141,477 admissions of sentenced males in 1979. Thus the census suggests about 1.6 times (1.6098702 to be precise) more male admissions than the survey. Multiplying the inmate survey estimate of the number of male first admissions at each age by the constant 1.6 (actually 1.6098702) produces the numbers that are used to calculate the 1979 admissions census estimate of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment of males.²⁸

In summary, data for each of two years (1973 and 1979) are used to calculate two estimates of the lifetime prevalence of adult State imprisonment (an inmate survey estimate and an admissions census estimate). Each estimate's size is determined by the number of persons estimated to have been admitted to prison for the first time in their lives in 1973 and 1979, which in turn is determined by imprisonment levels in 1973 and 1979, respectively. Because the inmate survey provides an underestimate and the admissions census an overestimate of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment, the true figure lies somewhere in between.

Total (table 3). At 1973 imprisonment levels, a person born in the United

States today is estimated to have between a 1.3% (or 1 in 77) and 2.1% (or 1 in 48) lifetime chance of serving a sentence in an adult State prison. These figures do not show that between 1.3% and 2.1% of all the elderly people in the Nation today have a prison record in their background. What they do show is that, if imprisonment rates continue long into the future at their 1973 levels, the day will eventually come when between 1.3% and 2.1% of the Nation's elderly will have served at least one prison sentence in their lifetime.

From 1973 to 1979, a significant (at the .05 level) increase in the prevalence of first admissions occurred.²⁹ Consequently, estimates of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment based on these years increased significantly by about 30% from 1973 to 1979. At 1979 imprisonment levels, a person born in the United States today is estimated to have between a 1.7% (or 1 in 59) and 2.7% (or 1 in 37) lifetime chance of serving a sentence in an adult State prison.

Sex (table 3). At 1973 imprisonment levels, a male in the United States is almost 15 times more likely to serve a prison term in his lifetime than a female. A male has between a 2.5% (or 1

in 40) and 4% (or 1 in 25) chance in his lifetime of serving a State prison sentence, whereas a female has between a .17% (or 1 in 588) and .27% (or 1 in 370) lifetime chance.

At 1979 imprisonment levels, a male is about 14 times more likely to serve a State prison term in his lifetime than a female. Between 3.2% (or 1 in 31) and 5.1% (or 1 in 20) of the males born in the United States, versus between .25% (or 1 in 400) and .37% (or 1 in 270) of the females, would be expected to serve a State prison sentence in their lifetime if 1979 imprisonment levels continue into the future.

The slight narrowing of the difference in the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment between males and females that occurred from 1973 to 1979 reflects the fact that female incarceration rates during this period increased faster than male rates. Nevertheless, for both males and females a significant (at the .05 level) increase occurred from 1973 to 1979 in the number of first admissions to prison. As a result, estimates of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment based on data from these years also increased significantly for both males and females. Admission census estimates increased 30% for males and 34% for females.

Sex and race (table 3). Differences in the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment between the sexes are larger than differences between the races, indicating that the lifetime probability of imprisonment varies more by sex than by race. Based on both 1973 and 1979 prison data, blacks, regardless of their sex, are 6 to 7 times more likely than whites to serve a sentence in their lifetime; but males, regardless of their race, are more than 12 times more likely to serve a sentence in their lifetime than females of the same race.

It is estimated that a black male born in the United States today is 6 (at 1979 imprisonment levels) to 7 times (at 1973 levels) more likely to serve a State prison sentence in his lifetime than a white male. Between 10.2% (or 1 in 10) and 16.5% (or 1 in 6) of black males, versus between 1.5% (or 1 in 67) and 2.4% (or 1 in 42) of white males, would be expected to serve at least one State sentence in their lifetime if 1973 imprisonment rates continue into the future.³⁰ At 1979 rates, a black male born in the United States is estimated to have between an 11.6% (or about 1 in 9) and 18.7% (or 1 in 5) chance in his lifetime of serving a sentence in an adult State prison; a white male has between a 2.1% (or 1 in 48) and 3.3% (or 1 in 30) lifetime chance.

A black female is 6 (at 1973 imprisonment levels) to 8 (at 1979 levels) times more likely to serve a prison sentence in her lifetime than a white female. At 1973 imprisonment levels, a white female born in the United States today would have between a .11% (or 1 in 909) and .18% (or 1 in 556) chance in her lifetime of serving a sentence in an adult State prison; a black female, between a .6% (or 1 in 167) and 1% (or 1 in 100) lifetime chance. At 1979 imprisonment levels, a white female born in the United States today would have between a .14% (or 1 in 714) and .2% (or 1 in 500) chance in her lifetime of serving a sentence in an adult State prison; a black female would have between a 1% (or 1 in 100) and 1.5% (or 1 in 67) chance in her lifetime.

For all four population segments for which data are available—white males, black males, white females, and black females—a significant (at the .05 level) increase occurred from 1973 to 1979 in the estimated number of first admissions to adult State prisons. As a result, estimates of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment based on data from these years also increased significantly. Admissions census estimates indicate that the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment increased 37% for white males, 13% for black males, 11% for

Table 3. Inmate Survey and Admissions Census estimates of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment in adult State prisons in the United States, based on 1973 and 1979 prison data, total U.S. population, by sex, and by sex and race.				
Population segment	Prevalence estimate: percent of population expected to serve a first sentence in lifetime, based on number and demographic characteristics of persons admitted to prison for the first time in their lives			
	in 1973		in 1979	
	Inmate Survey	Admissions Census	Inmate Survey	Admissions Census
Total*	1.306%	2.107%	1.713%	2.742%
Male*	2.453	3.954	3.182	5.123
White	1.491	2.404	2.053	3.305
Black	10.226	16.488	11.590	18.658
Female*	.166	.273	.251	.367
White	.110	.181	.138	.201
Black	.610	1.004	1.030	1.509

NOTE: Estimates applicable to all other races are not shown separately because of known inconsistencies between census and survey procedures for designating "other" race. Demographic characteristics (including the ordinal number of sentence admitted for) and, in the case of inmate survey prevalence estimates, number of persons admitted to adult State prisons are from the 1974 (Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities and Census of State Adult Correctional Facilities, 1974—ICPSR 7811, U.S. Dept. of Justice, BJS, Ann Arbor, MI: ICPSR, Fall 1983) and 1979 (Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities, 1979—ICPSR 7856, U.S. Dept. of Justice, BJS, Ann Arbor, MI: ICPSR, Fall 1981) surveys of inmates of State prisons. In the case of admissions census prevalence estimates, number of persons admitted to adult State prisons based on the inmate surveys are pro-rated to admission counts published in Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions on December 31, 1971, 1972, and 1973 (National Prisoner Statistics Bulletin No. SD-NPS-PSF-1, U.S. Dept. of Justice, NCJSS, Washington: USGPO, May

1975), and Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions on December 31, 1979 (National Prisoner Statistics Bulletin No. NPS-PSF-7, NCJ-73719, U.S. Dept. of Justice, BJS, Washington: USGPO, February 1981). U.S. population estimates used to calculate prevalence estimates are from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 917, Preliminary Estimates of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race: 1970 to 1981, Washington: USGPO, 1982, Table 1, pp. 11-12, 18-19. Also, inmate surveys provide underestimates and admissions censuses provide overestimates of the prevalence of imprisonment. In the case of inmate survey estimates for admission year 1979, correction for some of the underestimation can easily be made. Since the 1979 survey was conducted in October 1979, and therefore could not possibly have included all 1979 admissions, 1979 inmate survey prevalence estimates are based on data for 10 out of 12 months in 1979. To pro-rate 1979 inmate survey prevalence estimates to the full 12 months, they should be multiplied by 1.2. *Includes persons of all other races.

white females, and 50% for black females. The biggest increase was thus among black females; the smallest increase was among white females.

Estimates of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment of males and females of all other races are not presented because of known discrepancies between inmate survey and admissions census procedures for classifying inmates of other races.³¹

What is the rate of recidivism among State prisoners?

The lifetime prevalence of a first prison sentence is calculated from information on first imprisonments (table 3). Similarly, the lifetime prevalence of a second sentence is calculated from information on second imprisonments (table 4); a third sentence, from information on third imprisonments (table 5); and, a fourth sentence, from information on fourth imprisonments (table 6). From these estimates of the prevalence of first as well as subsequent imprisonments, recidivism rates—or the rates at which State prisoners return to adult State prisons to serve additional sentences—can be calculated.

The ratio of the lifetime prevalence of a second sentence (table 4) to the lifetime prevalence of a first sentence (table 3) forms a recidivism rate: the percentage of first-timers (persons who serve a first sentence) who return to prison to serve a second sentence. The ratio of the lifetime prevalence of a third sentence (table 5) to the lifetime prevalence of a second (table 4) forms another recidivism rate: the percentage of second-timers (persons who serve a second sentence) who return to prison to serve a third sentence. Lastly, the ratio of the lifetime prevalence of a fourth sentence (table 6) to the lifetime prevalence of a third (table 5) forms another recidivism rate: the percentage of third-timers (persons who serve a third sentence) who return to prison to serve a fourth sentence. These recidivism rates are examined next.³²

Total (table 7). It is estimated that a first-timer (a person serving a first adult State prison sentence) has a 29% (at 1979 imprisonment levels) to 38% (at 1973 levels) lifetime chance of returning to prison to serve a second sentence. A second-timer (a person serving a second sentence) is estimated to have a 40% (at 1973 levels) to 46% (at 1979 levels) lifetime chance of returning to serve a third sentence. A third-timer (a person serving a third sentence) is estimated to have a 42% (at 1979 levels) to 53% (at 1973 levels) lifetime chance of returning to serve a fourth sentence.³³

Table 4. Inmate Survey and Admissions Census estimates of the lifetime prevalence of a second imprisonment in adult State prisons in the United States, based on 1973 and 1979 prison data, total U.S. population, by sex, and by sex and race.

Population segment	Prevalence estimate: percent of population expected to serve a second sentence in lifetime, based on number and demographic characteristics of persons admitted to prison for the second time in their lives			
	in 1973		in 1979	
	Inmate Survey	Admissions Census	Inmate Survey	Admissions Census
Total*	.502%	.810%	.506%	.800%
Male*	.987	1.591	.963	1.551
White	.607	.978	.581	.935
Black	4.234	6.830	4.006	6.449
Female*	.026	.042	.044	.064
White	**	**	.025	.037
Black	**	**	.183	.271

NOTE: (see note at table 3) **Estimate not shown because it is based on 10 or fewer sample cases.
*Includes persons of all other races.

Table 5. Inmate Survey and Admissions Census estimates of the lifetime prevalence of a third imprisonment in adult State prisons in the United States, based on 1973 and 1979 prison data, total U.S. population, by sex, and by sex and race.

Population segment	Prevalence estimate: percent of population expected to serve a third sentence in lifetime, based on number and demographic characteristics of persons admitted to prison for the third time in their lives			
	in 1973		in 1979	
	Inmate Survey	Admissions Census	Inmate Survey	Admissions Census
Total*	.203%	.327%	.230%	.368%
Male*	.403	.650	.450	.724
White	.233	.376	.275	.443
Black	1.856	2.993	1.870	3.010
Female*	**	**	.016	.023
White	**	**	.009	.013
Black	**	**	.067	.100

NOTE: (see note at table 3) **Estimate not shown because it is based on 10 or fewer sample cases.
*Includes persons of all other races.

Table 6. Inmate Survey and Admissions Census estimates of the lifetime prevalence of a fourth imprisonment in adult State prisons in the United States, based on 1973 and 1979 prison data, total U.S. population, by sex, and by sex and race.

Population segment	Prevalence estimate: percent of population expected to serve a fourth sentence in lifetime, based on number and demographic characteristics of persons admitted to prison for the fourth time in their lives			
	in 1973		in 1979	
	Inmate Survey	Admissions Census	Inmate Survey	Admissions Census
Total*	.109%	.174%	.096%	.153%
Male*	.221	.355	.192	.309
White	.124	.199	.136	.219
Black	1.041	1.679	.676	1.088
Female*	**	**	**	**

NOTE: (see note at table 3) **Estimate not shown because it is based on 10 or fewer sample cases.
*Includes persons of all other races.

Sex (table 7). Even though males are 26 times more likely than females to be in prison on any given day and 14 times more likely ever to serve a sentence in their lifetime, differences in recidivism rates between male and female prisoners are not as great as these differences; and, in one case, the difference is not statistically significant (at the .05 level). Based on

both 1973 and 1979 prison data, male first-timers are more likely (significant at the .05 level) to return to prison than female first-timers (40% of males versus 15% of females, based on 1973 data; 30% of males versus 17% of females, based on 1979 data). Male second-timers return to prison to serve a third sentence at the rate of 41% (at 1973 levels) to 47% (at 1979 levels), the

Table 7. Estimated rates of recidivism from adult State prisons in the United States, based on 1973 and 1979 prison data, total State prisoners, by sex, and by sex and race.

Prisoners	Percent of			
	1st-timers	2nd-timers	3rd-timers	4th-timers
	expected to return to prison to serve a			
	2nd sentence	3rd sentence	4th sentence	
1973				
Total*	38%	40%	53%	
Male*	40	41	55	
White	41	38	53	
Black	41	44	56	
Female*	15	**	**	
White	**	**	**	
Black	**	**	**	
1979				
Total*	29	46	42	
Male*	30	47	43	
White	28	47	49	
Black	35	47	36	
Female*	17	36	**	
White	18	35	**	
Black	18	37	**	

NOTE: Estimates applicable to all other races are not shown separately because of known inconsistencies between census and survey procedures for designating the other races. Also, admissions census estimates (from tables 3 through 6) were used to calculate table percentages. (Except for rounding error, inmate survey estimates produce the same results.)
*Includes prisoners of all other races.
** Estimate not shown because it is based on 10 or fewer sample cases.

latter of which is not significantly higher than the only available rate for female second-timers, the 36% rate based on 1979 imprisonment data. Male third-timers return to prison to serve a fourth sentence at the rate of 43% to 55% (at 1979 and 1973 levels, respectively). Because few females ever serve a third sentence, reliable data on the percentage who return to serve a fourth sentence are not available.

Sex and race (table 7). Although black males are more likely than white males to be in prison on any given day and are also more likely than white males ever to serve a prison sentence in their lifetime, differences in recidivism rates between black male prisoners and white male prisoners are small and, in most cases, not statistically significant. Similarly, black females are more likely than white females either to be in prison on any given day or to serve a sentence in their lifetime, but differences in recidivism rates between black females and white females are also small and, in every case, not statistically significant.

Based on 1973 imprisonment data, white male first-timers (41%) and black male first-timers (41%) do not return to prison at significantly different rates. Based on 1979 data, black male first-

timers return to prison to serve a second sentence at a higher rate (35%) than white male first-timers (28%), but the difference, though statistically significant (.05 level), is very small compared to the sevenfold difference in imprisonment prevalence rates between black males and white males. The only available comparable data on recidivism among female first-timers are from the year 1979. Estimates from that year show no significant difference between the rates at which white females (18%) and black females (18%) return to prison to serve a second sentence.

Based on both 1973 and 1979 imprisonment data, the rates at which white male second-timers (38% to 47%, respectively) and black male second-timers (44% to 47%, respectively) return to prison to serve a third sentence are not significantly different. The only comparable data available on recidivism among female second-timers are from the year 1979. Estimates from that year show no statistically significant difference between the rates at which white female second-timers (35%) and black female second-timers (37%) return to prison to serve a third sentence.

Based on 1973 imprisonment data, the rates at which white male third-timers (53%) and black male third-timers (56%) return to prison to serve a fourth sentence are not significantly different. Based on 1979 imprisonment data, the recidivism rate for white male third-timers (49%) is higher (significant at .05 level) than the rate for black male third-timers (36%). The difference, however, is again small and, moreover, in the opposite direction as compared to differences in imprisonment prevalence between the races.

Finally, brief mention is made of the only consistent temporal trend evident in the limited recidivism data available from the years 1973 and 1979.³⁴ From 1973 to 1979 the recidivism rates of both white male and black male first-timers declined (significant at the .05 level). Some idea of why the consistent decline occurred in the recidivism rates of male first-timers can be derived by looking at tables 3 through 6. For example, table 3 shows an increase in first imprisonments between 1973 and 1979, while table 4 shows little change in second imprisonments. Inevitably, therefore, the probability of a second imprisonment following a first decreases from 1973 to 1979. These figures suggest that the main reason for the increase in overall prison population between 1973 and 1979 was the increase in first imprisonments. An increase in first imprisonments might be expected to be followed by an increase in second

imprisonments, but this cannot be confirmed until the planned inmate survey is conducted in late 1985.³⁵

Research procedures

This study uses research procedures³⁶ that have long been known to criminologists (e.g., Ball, Ross, and Simpson, 1964; Belkin, Blumstein, and Glass, 1973; Gordon, 1973; Gordon and Gleser, 1974; Gordon, 1976; and Farrington, 1981) but have only recently been applied for the first time to the subject of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment (Greenfield, 1981).³⁷ These procedures rest on many assumptions (e.g., assumptions about the accuracy of inmates' accounts of their incarceration histories,³⁸ about the stability of age-specific imprisonment rates, and about the representativeness of inmate survey samples) that have not yet been thoroughly investigated. However, the major findings of this study are robust. Moreover, the prevalence estimates presented in this study understate the level of imprisonment because the study did not include juvenile incarcerations, local jail commitments, and Federal and military sentences in its definition of imprisonment and because 1979 data was the most current available. Since 1979, incarceration rates have increased.

Conclusion

In criminal justice practice, crimes are not neatly divided into those that are imprisonable and those that are nonimprisonable. Whether a crime is imprisonable (meaning the offender stands a high chance of going to prison if apprehended and convicted) usually depends largely on some combination of how serious it is and who commits it. That is, the most serious crimes are imprisonable regardless of who commits them; crimes that are not among the most serious are imprisonable if they are committed by someone with a long or grievous prior record.

It is not possible to specify very precisely what the volume of imprisonable crime is. The most complete source of crime data, the National Crime Survey sponsored by BJS, obtains information from representative samples of the Nation's crime victims. Crime victims can provide many facts about the seriousness of the crimes committed against them but usually cannot be expected to know anything about the criminal backgrounds of the perpetrators. Nevertheless, crime victims' accounts provide a measure, albeit imprecise, of the volume of imprisonable crime.

In 1979, to pick one year, more than

41 million rapes, robberies, assaults, burglaries, larcenies, and motor vehicle thefts were committed against crime victims,³⁹ and approximately 150,000 criminals were sent to State prisons. Because 150,000 criminals could not possibly commit 41 million crimes (at least not these 150,000 and not in a year's time), it would seem that many crimes and many criminals go unpunished.

Clearly, many crimes do go unpunished. However, this study shows that a

significant proportion of the Nation's population is at some point incarcerated in the estimated 403,210 State prison spaces and that about half of all prison admissions do not return for a subsequent prison sentence.^{40,41} Whatever the cause of the latter fact, whether it results from deterrence, correction, or simple maturation, it establishes a benchmark against which the effectiveness of alternative corrections programs can be evaluated.

Table A. 1974 inmate survey estimates and sample sizes. (Sample sizes on which estimates are based are shown in parentheses.)

Population segment	Estimated total number of sentenced and unsentenced inmates at time of 1974 survey	Estimated number of sentenced inmates who said they were admitted to State prison in 1973					
		Total	1st time in life	2nd time in life	3rd time in life	4th time in life	5th or more time in life
Total	190,711 (9,009)	58,482 (3,226)	42,923 (2,029)	15,146 (711)	5,588 (262)	2,759 (128)	2,067 (136)
Male	184,313 (8,711)	65,344 (3,078)	40,344 (1,907)	14,756 (693)	5,464 (256)	2,759 (128)	2,022 (94)
White	93,953 (4,455)	34,523 (1,634)	21,081 (1,006)	7,914 (371)	2,795 (130)	1,316 (61)	1,417 (66)
Black	87,046 (4,099)	29,496 (1,381)	18,522 (865)	6,582 (310)	2,500 (118)	1,335 (62)	757 (26)
Other*	3,315 (157)	1,325 (63)	741 (36)	259 (12)	170 (8)	109 (5)	46 (2)
Female	6,398 (298)	3,138 (148)	2,579 (122)	390 (18)	124 (6)	0 (0)	45 (2)
White	3,681 (169)	1,666 (78)	1,454 (68)	173 (8)	20 (1)	0 (0)	23 (1)
Black	2,678 (127)	1,429 (68)	1,125 (54)	197 (9)	85 (4)	0 (0)	22 (1)
Other*	40 (2)	40 (2)	0 (0)	20 (1)	20 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Also, the 1974 survey actually obtained data on a stratified random sample of 9,040 inmates (or an estimated 191,367 inmates). The table shows 9,009 sample cases (or an estimated 190,711 inmates) because race data were missing on some of the sample cases. *Includes Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Alaskan Native.

Table B. 1979 inmate survey estimates and sample sizes. (Sample sizes on which estimates are based are shown in parentheses.)

Population segment	Estimated total number of sentenced and unsentenced inmates at time of 1979 survey	Estimated number of sentenced inmates who said they were admitted to State prison in 1979					
		Total	1st time in life	2nd time in life	3rd time in life	4th time in life	5th or more time in life
Total	274,563 (11,397)	93,542 (4,221)	63,863 (3,003)	17,717 (746)	7,394 (297)	2,844 (106)	1,727 (69)
Male	263,442 (9,142)	87,881 (3,073)	59,313 (2,077)	16,957 (595)	7,148 (247)	2,804 (98)	1,661 (56)
White	131,250 (4,647)	48,052 (1,715)	32,607 (1,165)	9,049 (324)	3,730 (132)	1,672 (60)	996 (34)
Black	125,573 (4,260)	37,278 (1,267)	24,992 (851)	7,346 (251)	3,199 (107)	1,104 (37)	635 (21)
Other*	6,652 (235)	2,551 (91)	1,714 (61)	562 (20)	218 (8)	27 (1)	30 (1)
Female	11,080 (2,255)	5,661 (1,148)	4,550 (926)	760 (151)	246 (50)	40 (8)	66 (13)
White	5,041 (1,068)	2,637 (558)	2,110 (449)	364 (76)	123 (25)	27 (5)	15 (3)
Black	5,752 (1,125)	2,883 (559)	2,327 (452)	382 (72)	123 (25)	9 (2)	42 (8)
Other*	287 (62)	141 (31)	114 (25)	14 (3)	0 (0)	4 (1)	9 (2)

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding. Also, the survey sample is described as a stratified random sample. *Includes Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Alaskan Native.

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Footnotes

¹The Gallup Poll of public opinion toward capital punishment, if it is any indication, offers dramatic evidence of a shift in the public's mood toward criminals. From the early 1950s to the mid 1960s, progressively smaller proportions of the population said they favored the death penalty. The trend reversed itself in the mid 1960s. From then into the 1980s, larger and larger proportions expressed support for the death penalty (T. Flanagan, et al., eds. *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics—1981*, BJS, Washington: GPO, 1982).

²Most of the discussion in the study focuses on the chances of ever serving a first sentence. Nevertheless, the term prevalence, as used in the study, also refers to the chances of ever serving second, third, and fourth sentences.

³D. Glaser (*The Effectiveness of a Prison and Parole System*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969: 28-29) also concluded that studies of State (and Federal) prisoners indicate little difference in recidivism between whites and blacks.

⁴A. Blumstein and E. Graddy ("Prevalence and Recidivism in Index Arrests: A Feedback Approach," 16 *Law and Society Review*, 265, 1981-1982), and L. Greenfeld ("Measuring the Application and Use of Punishment," a paper presented at the American Society of Criminology meeting, November 12, 1981) also found major differences in prevalence between the races but very similar recidivism probabilities.

⁵A major advantage of epidemiological studies of this kind is that they facilitate comparisons of the probabilities of diverse life events. For example, the findings of this study can be compared to those of a study of lifetime murder victimization (Langan and Innes, *The Risk of Violent Crime*, Washington: BJS May 1985 NCJ-97119). Data were analyzed on the age, race, and sex of murder victims in the United States in 1982. The study concluded that the lifetime chances of being murdered were:

BJS estimate of lifetime risk of murder: 1 out of—

U.S. total	133
Male	84
White	131
Black	21
Female	282
White	369
Black	104

⁶Technical documentation for the 1974 survey is contained in *Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities 1974: Advance Report*, U.S. Dept. of Justice, National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service (now BJS), Washington:

USGPO, March 1976; *Profile of State Prison Inmates: Sociodemographic Findings from the 1974 Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities*, U.S. Dept. of Justice, National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, Washington: USGPO, August 1979; and *Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities and Census of State Adult Correctional Facilities, 1974 (ICPSR 7811)*, U.S. Dept. of Justice, BJS, Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), Fall 1983.

⁷Technical documentation for the 1979 survey is contained in *Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities, 1979 (ICPSR 7856)*, U.S. Dept. of Justice, BJS, Ann Arbor, MI: ICPSR, Fall 1981.

⁸The scope of the inmate surveys is inmates of adult State prisons, which encompasses all persons held in custody under the jurisdiction of State correctional authorities. The scope is further defined as inmates serving sentences longer than a year, since most inmates of adult State prisons receive such sentences. It includes not only those inmates detained in facilities directly administered by State correctional authorities (e.g., maximum security prisons, adult reformatories, community reception centers, work-release centers, prison or road camps, reception or pre-release centers) but also those in any public or private institution charged with the custody of persons under the jurisdiction of State correctional authorities. Examples of the latter arrangement are inmates committed to State mental hospitals and inmates housed in YMCA's while assigned to work-release programs. The expression "adult State prisons," as used throughout this study, thus refers to a wide variety of facilities used by the States to confine inmates.

⁹The race designation "other," as used in this study, does not refer to Hispanics. Inmate census and inmate survey procedures call for Hispanic whites to be designated "white" and Hispanic blacks to be designated "black."

¹⁰Concerning equality in justice administration, two major studies that use BJS data to address the subject are M. Hindelang, "Race and Involvement in Common Law Personal Crimes," *American Sociological Review*, 43 (Feb.), 1978: 93-109; and A. Blumstein, "On the Racial Disproportionality of United States' Prison Populations," *J. of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 73 (3), 1982: 1259-1281.

¹¹UCR index crimes are the serious crimes selected by the FBI for measurement purposes and tabulated annually in its *Uniform Crime Reports*. Index violent crimes are murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Index property crimes are burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and (beginning in 1979) arson.

¹²In this section of the study, dealing with State prison populations on a single day, an inmate was counted as being in prison whether or not he or she was serving a sentence. Available data indicate that, on any given day, approximately 2% of all State prison inmates are not sentenced. They are mainly drug addicts committed for treatment under civil narcotics or dangerous drug statutes in lieu of being sentenced, persons committed for study and observation prior to sentencing, individuals awaiting trial or release on bail, or detainees being held for other authorities. Inmates of Federal prisons, military stockades, local jails, or juvenile institutions are not included in any of the prevalence statistics presented in the study.

¹³Some of the States submitting annual population counts classify as "race not known" all inmates who are neither white nor black. The conclusion that other males have a slightly lower prevalence rate than white males is therefore suspect.

¹⁴The estimate, with its 95% confidence interval, is 2.55% (±.157). The estimate is formed by dividing the survey's estimated 49,134 black males in their twenties (estimated from a sample of 2,312 such black males) by the Nation's 1974 total estimated 1,927,000 black males in their twenties.

¹⁵The estimate, with its 95% confidence interval, is 3.027% (±.141). The estimate is formed by dividing

Table C. 1979 inmate survey estimate of the lifetime prevalence of State imprisonment of males.

Age at admission first time in life 1979	Number admitted for first time in life	1979 male population (X 1,000)	Percent of 1979 male population	Cumulative % of 1979 male population	Age at admission first time in life 1979	Number admitted for first time in life	1979 male population (X 1,000)	Percent of 1979 male population	Cumulative % of 1979 male population
13	0	1,898	0.0000000	0.0000000	49	217	1,168	0.0185788	3.0102310
14	0	2,016	0.0000000	0.0000000	50	176	1,088	0.0161765	3.0264072
15	0	2,127	0.0000000	0.0000000	51	159	1,135	0.0140088	3.0404158
16	140	2,146	0.0065238	0.0065238	52	118	1,119	0.0105451	3.0509605
17	1,390	2,177	0.0638493	0.0703730	53	118	1,134	0.0104056	3.0613661
18	3,639	2,196	0.1657103	0.2360833	54	59	1,147	0.0051439	3.0665092
19	5,574	2,254	0.2472935	0.4833768	55	115	1,116	0.0103046	3.0768137
20	6,263	2,243	0.2792241	0.7626009	56	30	1,101	0.0027248	3.0795383
21	5,293	2,197	0.2409193	1.0035200	57	58	1,111	0.0052205	3.0847588
22	5,180	2,158	0.2400370	1.2435570	58	99	1,058	0.0093573	3.0941153
23	3,656	2,070	0.1766182	1.4201746	59	141	1,085	0.0129954	3.1071100
24	3,272	2,069	0.1581439	1.5783176	60	55	940	0.0058511	3.1129609
25	2,742	2,029	0.1351404	1.7134571	61	60	947	0.0063358	3.1192961
26	2,836	1,962	0.1445462	1.8580027	62	58	907	0.0063947	3.1256905
27	2,415	1,926	0.1253893	1.9833918	63	0	894	0.0000000	3.1256905
28	2,012	1,804	0.1115296	2.0949211	64	131	880	0.0148864	3.1408764
29	1,807	1,850	0.0976756	2.1925964	65	28	843	0.0033215	3.14438971
30	1,460	1,857	0.0786214	2.2712173	66	0	738	0.0000000	3.14438971
31	1,167	1,801	0.0647973	2.3360138	67	28	766	0.0036554	3.1475515
32	1,073	1,942	0.0552523	2.3912659	68	28	734	0.0038147	3.1513662
33	963	1,391	0.0692307	2.4604959	69	0	732	0.0000000	3.1513662
34	692	1,452	0.0476584	2.5081539	70	28	606	0.0046205	3.1559858
35	944	1,453	0.0649690	2.5731220	71	0	617	0.0000000	3.1559858
36	544	1,507	0.0360982	2.6092196	72	0	542	0.0030000	3.1559858
37	668	1,326	0.0503771	2.6595964	73	0	522	0.0000000	3.1559858
38	633	1,228	0.0515472	2.7111435	74	0	478	0.0000000	3.1559858
39	477	1,202	0.0396838	2.7508268	75	72	427	0.0168618	3.1728468
40	259	1,205	0.0214938	2.7723198	76	0	394	0.0000000	3.1728468
41	349	1,149	0.0303742	2.8026934	77	32	333	0.0096096	3.1824560
42	551	1,115	0.0494170	2.8521099	78	0	350	0.0000000	3.1824560
43	315	1,093	0.0288197	2.8809290	79	0	321	0.0000000	3.1824560
44	407	1,095	0.0371689	2.9180975	80	0	232	0.0000000	3.1824560
45	346	1,058	0.0327032	2.9507999	81	0	224	0.0000000	3.1824560
46	170	1,070	0.0158878	2.9666872	82	0	204	0.0000000	3.1824560
47	208	1,077	0.0193129	2.9860001	83	0	185	0.0000000	3.1824560
48	61	1,079	0.0056534	2.9916525	84	0	160	0.0000000	3.1824560

NOTE: Table estimates of the number of male first admissions by age were obtained from the 1979 survey of inmates of State prisons. Also, because the sample on which the prevalence estimate is based happened not to contain persons of certain ages, some ages show no admissions for the first time. This does not mean that people at these ages have no chance of imprisonment. Also, U.S. population estimates are from U.S. Bureau of the Census,

Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 917, *Preliminary Estimates of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex, and Race: 1970 to 1981*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1982, Table 1, pp. 11-12. Lastly, the total estimated number admitted for the first time in their lives is 59,313. Detail may not add to this total because of rounding.

the survey estimated 72,862 black males in their twenties (estimated from a sample of 2,484 such black males) by the Nation's 1979 total estimated 2,407,000 black males in their twenties.

¹⁶The previous section dealt with both sentenced and unsentenced inmates of adult State prisons. This section pertains to sentenced inmates only.

¹⁷BJS *Prisoners in 1984*, Bulletin NCJ-97118, April 1985, table 2.

¹⁸Theoretically, estimates of lifetime prevalence computed in this way can range from a low of 0% to a high of over 100%. Practically speaking, neither limit is possible. An estimate of 0% would only occur if, in a year's time, no one in the United States were admitted to prisons for the first time in their lives. An estimate over 100% would only occur if imprisonment rates in the United States suddenly became far higher than they have ever been.

¹⁹In the United States a person below the age of 18 can be sentenced in an adult State court to an adult State prison. Although in most States a person does not become an adult in the eyes of the law until age 18, in some States the age jurisdiction of adult courts is below 18. Moreover, in most States statutory waiver provisions exist that permit juvenen require the case of a young person (such as a 13-year-old) charged with a very serious crime to be prosecuted in an adult court. In some of these States a juvenile convicted and sentenced to prison

as an adult will be sent to an adult prison; in other States such juveniles will begin their sentences in a juvenile facility.

²⁰It might be thought that the ideal research design for investigating the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment is the longitudinal study involving a follow-up of a cohort of individuals born in a particular year (say 1920). The cumulative percentage of imprisonment up to the present, 1984, could then be obtained for these people by adding the numbers first imprisoned at age 13 (in 1933), age 14 (in 1934), etc. up to age 64 (in 1984). Longitudinal studies may be quite valuable, particularly for causal analyses, but they may not be the ideal design in all respects. Suppose one did estimate prevalence by following a cohort born in 1920. What would one have? An estimate for a cohort born in 1920, now 64 years old—a long wait for a datum that may refer mainly to historical conditions long past. At any rate, the data do not exist to calculate cumulative prevalence from such a longitudinal study. An approximation to this calculation can be achieved by adding up first imprisonments in one particular year at different ages, but this will give accurate figures only for lifetime prevalence under steady-state conditions. If first-time imprisonment probabilities have increased over time, this method will overestimate cumulative prevalence for those people born years ago (e.g., in 1920). The method essentially shows what the lifetime prevalence would be for people born now if

1973 and 1979 imprisonment rates continued long into the future. A desirable feature of this method is its contemporaneity, a feature which cannot be approached by the longitudinal method, especially when the period at risk is a long one, as in the case of adult imprisonment.

21 One reason the 1974 survey is said to underestimate the number of sentenced persons admitted in 1973 is the large discrepancy between the survey estimate (68,482) and the 1973 admissions census count (110,516). Another reason is explained as follows with an example. The 1974 inmate survey was conducted in late January 1974. Based on the survey, an estimated 284,313 males were in adult State prisons at that time, of whom a survey estimated 40,344 were sentenced males admitted to prison for the first time in their lives in the year 1973. These 40,344 males are therefore all the sentenced males who were admitted to prison for the first time in their lives in 1973 and who were still in prison at the time of the 1974 survey. They are a subset of all the sentenced males admitted for the first time in their lives in 1973, because some unknown number of such males had probably been released from prison before the time of the 1974 survey. This assumption must be reconciled with the fact that almost all the males admitted to prison in 1973 were serving sentences exceeding one year. Since the period from the time of the earliest 1973 admission (January 1973) to the time of the 1974 survey (January 1974) was no longer than a year, it might be thought that almost all the males admitted in 1973 would still have been in prison at the time of the survey. Perhaps they were. One reason for thinking they were not is that, because of widely existing statutory provisions relating to prison release (provisions concerning parole eligibility, good-time credit, mandatory minimum sentences, and early release due to prison overcrowding), many prisoners receiving adult State prison sentences exceeding one year actually serve less than one year before being released. In recognition of the survey's potential for underestimating 1973 admissions, the survey is said to provide an underestimate of the number of males admitted to prison for the first time in their lives in 1973. The 1974 survey estimate of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment among males is based on the survey estimate of the number of males admitted for the first time in their lives in 1973. Consequently, the 1974 inmate survey is also said to provide an underestimate of lifetime prevalence.

22 One reason the 1979 survey is said to underestimate the number of 1979 admissions is the large discrepancy between the survey estimate (93,517) and the 1979 admissions census count (149,741). Another reason is that the survey was conducted before the year was ended, in October 1979, and therefore could not possibly have included all the inmates admitted in 1979. A third reason is that some of the inmates admitted in 1979 were probably already released by the time of the survey. In recognition of the survey's potential for underestimating 1979 admissions, the 1979 survey is said to provide an underestimate of the number of males admitted to prison for the first time in their lives in 1979, and consequently (as explained in the preceding footnote) an underestimate of lifetime prevalence.

23 The reason the 1973 prison admissions census is said to provide an overestimate of the number of sentenced persons admitted to adult State prisons in 1973 is further explained here. Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions on December 31, 1971, 1972, and 1973 (NPS Bulletin No. SD-NPS-PSF-1, U.S. Dept. of Justice, National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, Washington: USGPO, May 1975) reports, for 1973, 105,349 (Table 6, p. 21) admissions of sentenced males to State prisons in the U.S. and 5,167 (Table 7, p. 23) admissions of sentenced females. The publication defines admissions as: commitments from court, parole or conditional release violators returned to prison, or escapees returned under an old sentence. Furthermore, the definition restricts admissions to persons sentenced as adults or youthful offenders whose maximum sentence length exceeds one year. However, in both tables cited, a footnote indicates that three States probably departed from the prescribed

definition by submitting admission counts which included some persons with a maximum sentence length of less than a year and a day. Moreover, in both tables cited, a footnote reports that some inmates were involved in more than one prisoner movement, and that the published number of admissions is therefore larger than the actual number of different persons admitted. The publication gives no indication of the extent of such double-counting of people. In view of the census' potential for counting people more than once, the 1973 admissions census is said to provide an overestimate of the number of different persons admitted to prison in 1973. The 1973 admissions census estimate of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment is based, in part, on the 1973 admissions census count. Consequently, the 1973 admissions census is also said to provide an overestimate of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment.

24 The reason the 1979 prison admissions census is said to provide an overestimate of the number of sentenced persons admitted to adult State prisons in 1979 is the same as the reason the 1973 prison admissions census is said to overestimate the number of persons admitted in 1973 (see preceding footnote). Prisoners in State and Federal Institutions on December 31, 1979 (NPS Bulletin No. NPS-PSF-7, NCJ-73719, U.S. Dept. of Justice, BJS, Washington: USGPO, February 1981) reports, for 1979, 41,477 (Table 11, p. 22) admissions of sentenced males and 8,264 (Table 12, p. 24) admissions of sentenced females to adult State prisons in the U.S. Some unknown number of persons admitted were counted more than once. In recognition of the admissions census' potential for double-counting people, the 1979 admission census is said to provide an overestimate of the number of different persons admitted in 1979 and consequently (as explained previously) an overestimate of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment.

25 The 1974 survey estimates that 62.7% of all 1973 admissions, 61.7% of all 1973 male admissions, and 82.2% of all 1973 female admissions were lifetime first sentences to adult State prisons. The 1979 survey estimates 68.3% of all 1979 admissions, 67.5% of all 1979 male admissions, and 80.4% of all 1979 female admissions were lifetime first sentences to adult State prisons.

26 The inmate surveys actually provide various estimates that are used to calculate the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment: estimates of the total number of sentenced persons admitted to prisons for the first time in their lives, by age, race, and sex; the second time in their lives, by age, race, and sex; the third time in their lives, by age, race, and sex; and the fourth time in their lives, by age, race, and sex.

27 The size of the constant is a function of how much larger the admissions census count is than the inmate estimate. The 1973 census count of 110,516 total admissions in 1973 is 1.6137963 times larger than the 1974 inmate survey estimate of 68,482 total admissions in 1973; the census count of 105,349 male admissions, 1.6122215 times larger than the survey estimate's 65,344 male admissions; and the census count of 5,167 female admissions, 1.6465902 times larger than the survey estimate's 3,138 female admissions. Consequently, 1973 admissions census estimate of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment are higher than inmate survey estimates by corresponding factors. Similarly, the 1979 census count of 149,741 total admissions is 1.6012169 times larger than the survey estimate's 93,517; of 141,477 male admissions, 1.6099702 times the survey estimate's 87,881; and, of 8,264 female admissions, 1.4598128 times larger than the survey estimate's 5,661. Consequently, 1979 admissions census estimates of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment are higher than 1979 inmate survey estimates by corresponding factors.

28 Multiplying survey estimates by such constants is justified if it can be assumed that the sentenced inmates who were admitted in 1973 and 1979 and who were present at the time of the 1974 and 1979 inmate surveys are representative of all the sentenced inmates admitted to State prisons in 1973 and 1979, respectively. This assumption has not been investigated.

29 The 1974 survey questionnaire was changed slightly for the 1979 survey. It is therefore possible that some portion of the increase from 1973 to 1979 in the estimated number of first admissions may have been due to minor changes in the survey questionnaire.

30 The possibility was explored that perhaps some substantial number of the persons admitted to prison for the first time in 1973 and designated "black" were not native-born. That possibility is of concern because including such persons with native-born blacks would artificially inflate the prevalence rate applicable to native-born blacks. To check this possibility, data from the 1974 survey on the birthplaces of inmates admitted in 1973 were examined. Only 3.9% reported a birthplace outside the United States. (Comparable data from the 1979 survey are not available.)

31 More specifically, the annual census of prison inmates, which is based on prison records, distinguishes "race not known" from all other races in the census questionnaire. However, a substantial minority of States are known to deviate from these census definitions, either by submitting estimates (as opposed to census counts) of the racial composition of their prison populations, or by classifying as "race not known" those inmates who are Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, or Alaskan Native. The 1974 inmate survey, which was based on interviewer observation or prison records (about 12% of the 1974 survey sample), contained few cases of inmates whose race was not known (less than 1%); the 1979 inmate survey, which was based on prisoner self-reports only, contained none. Perhaps as a result of the censuses' potential for undercounting the other races, the annual censuses, in fact, indicate that the prevalence of imprisonment of other males is slightly lower than that of white males whereas the inmate surveys, in fact, indicate that other males have significantly higher one-day prevalence rates than white males.

32 It is logically possible for recidivism rates computed in this way to exceed 100% as a result of either sampling error or changes in imprisonment rates over time. A longitudinal study of inmates released from prison could not have this defect. Also, inmate survey estimates are said to underestimate prevalence, partly for the reason that some of the inmates admitted in a survey year would already have been released by the time of the survey. The degree of such underestimation may be related to the ordinal sentence number. To illustrate, relatively many first-timers but very few fourth-timers admitted in 1973 would already have been released from prison as a result of early release laws. Recidivism rates computed here do not take this possible relationship into account.

33 Among first-, second-, and third-timers, first-timers tend to have the lowest rates. D. Glaser (The Effectiveness of a Prison and Parole System, New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967: 27) also reported that first-timers have lower recidivism rates than second-timers or subsequent "losers." The finding of lower recidivism rates among first-timers might be expected. Since the probability of recidivism is known to increase with the length of the prior record, first-timers should have lower recidivism rates than second-timers or subsequent losers. However, differences between the recidivism rates of first-timers and subsequent losers would not be expected to increase forever because of the counter effects of aging. That is, the probability of recidivism is known to decrease with age. Since it takes time to become, say, a second-timer or a third-timer, third-timers tend to be older than second-timers who, in turn, tend to be older than first-timers. Consequently, differences between the recidivism rates of first-timers and subsequent losers would grow, but only up to a point, the point at which the effects of aging become pronounced.

34 That is, comparable data for the period 1973 to 1979 are not available on the female population segments; the recidivism rate of white male second-timers increased significantly (at the .05 level) from 1973 to 1979, but the comparable rate for black male second-timers did not; and, the recidivism rate

of black male third-timers declined significantly (at the .05 level) from 1973 to 1979, but the comparable rate for white males did not.

35 This brief discussion draws attention to the difficulties arising from the assumption of steady state conditions.

36 The procedure is a straightforward application of a statistical model known to demographers as a life table. For an excellent discussion of the model, see Chapter 15 of H.S. Shryock, J.S. Siegel, and Associates, The Methods and Materials of Demography, Volume 2, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington: USGPO, 1971.

37 J. Ball, A. Ross, and A. Simpson, "Incidence and Estimated Prevalence of Recorded Delinquency in a Metropolitan Area," American Sociological Review, 29 (1), Feb. 1964; J. Belkin, A. Blumstein, and W. Glass, "Recidivism as a Feedback Process," J. of

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38 In the most comprehensive report to date on the accuracy of inmates' self-reports (K. Marquis, Quality of Prisoner Self-Reports, Santa Monica: Rand Corp., 1981), self-reports of arrests and convictions over a maximum two-year period prior to

imprisonment were investigated by comparing them to official records. It was found that prison inmates do not deny facts about their criminal histories: their accounts included more arrests than, and as many convictions as, their official records. It was also found that the self-reports were equally "accurate" for white and nonwhite inmates.

39 BJS Criminal Victimization in the United States, 79. A National Crime Survey Report, NCJ-76710, NCS-N-19, Washington: USGPO, September 1981.

40 BJS Prisoners in 1984, Bulletin NCJ-97118, April 1985, table 11.

41 Estimates of the lifetime prevalence of imprisonment in this report did not take mortality into account. However, adjustment for mortality would not have substantially affected either the size of the estimates or conclusions regarding differences between population segments compared.

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