



North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission

Research Brief
September 2016

CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS AND RECIDIVISM FOR PRISON RELEASES

In 1998, the North Carolina General Assembly directed the Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission to prepare biennial reports evaluating the effectiveness of the State's correctional programs (N.C.G.S. § 164-47). Correctional resources and, specifically, their effectiveness in increasing public safety and deterring future crime have continued to be of interest to legislators and policy makers. It is the goal of most programs to sanction and control offenders, to offer them opportunities that will assist in altering negative behavioral patterns, and, consequently, to lower their risk of reoffending (i.e., their recidivism). This research brief is a follow-up to the 2016 report that was submitted in compliance with the directive and examined recidivism for Structured Sentencing Act (SSA) offenders who were released from prison or placed on supervised probation in FY 2013.^{1,2}

The research brief focuses on the FY 2013 prison release sample (i.e., prisoners with a felony offense) and examines participation in select correctional programs during incarceration and recidivism during the two-year follow-up. Additional analyses focus on outcomes by gender. Academic Education, Alcohol and Chemical Dependency Programs (ACDP), Correction Enterprises, Sex Offender Accountability and Responsibility (SOAR), Vocational Education, and Work Release were the six correctional (or in-prison) programs selected for analysis and are described below.³

- **Academic Education:** Academic Education is administered by the Rehabilitative Programs and Services Section within the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice (DACJJ). Post-secondary education is offered through continuing education (community college) courses of study for adult offenders and/or youthful offenders who have their diploma or high school equivalency credentials.
- **Correction Enterprises:** Correction Enterprises is a self-supporting prison industry program operating within the Department of Public Safety (DPS) in various prison units across the state. Correction Enterprises provides inmates with opportunities to learn job skills by producing goods and services for the DPS and other tax-supported entities.
- **ACDP:** Staff from the ACDP administer and coordinate chemical dependency screening, complete a "common assessment" and provide intervention, treatment, aftercare, and continuing care services for female and male inmates with substance abuse problems.
- **SOAR:** The SOAR program was established in 1991 for the treatment of male inmates who have committed sexual offenses and meet eligibility criteria for the program. The program's goal is to

¹ See the Sentencing Commission's *Correctional Program Evaluation: Offenders Placed on Probation or Released from Prison in FY 2013* at http://www.nccourts.org/Courts/CRS/Councils/spac/Documents/recidivism_2016.pdf.

² Data for offenders in the samples were provided by the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI).

³ The six correctional programs in the research brief have been previously examined as special topics in the Sentencing Commission's prior recidivism reports.

change offenders' cognition, values, and expectations that have supported and maintained their sexually abusive cycle of behavior.

- **Vocational Education:** Vocational Education is administered by the Rehabilitative Programs and Services Section within the DACJJ and is a collaborative effort with the North Carolina Community College System. Vocational training (e.g., welding, cosmetology, horticulture) is provided through curriculum or continuing education offerings, or a combination of both.
- **Work Release Program:** The Work Release Program provides select inmates the opportunity for employment in the community during imprisonment, addressing the transitional needs of soon-to-be released inmates. Inmates are carefully screened for participation and can only be approved for the program by prison managers or the Post-Release Supervision and Parole Commission.

The FY 2013 sample was comprised of 13,873 prison releases. Ninety percent of prisoners were male and 10% were female. The distribution of select prison programs by gender was generally similar to the overall prison population by gender. Notably, nearly half of the FY 2013 prison releases were in Academic Education and a little over one-third were in Vocational Education while incarcerated. Table 1 examines the number of males and females in each program as a percentage of the total population of males or females. A higher percentage of the female prison population were in Academic Education, ACDP, and Vocational Education during incarceration, while a higher percentage of males were in Correction Enterprises. A similar percentage of males and females were in Work Release.

Table 1
Prisoners in Select Correctional Programs by Gender

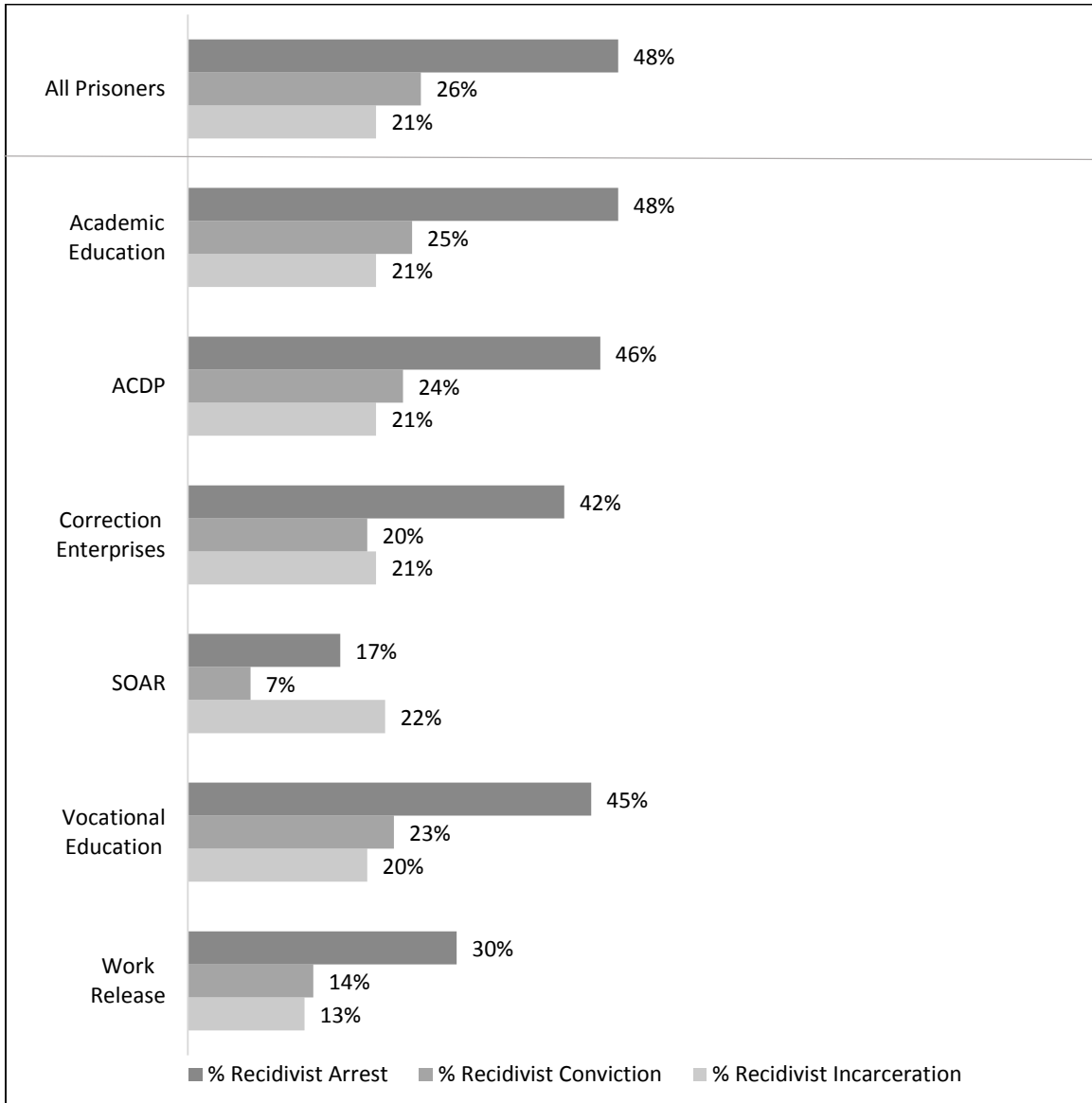
Select Correctional Programs	Prisoners N=13,873		Males n=12,478		Females n=1,395	
	# in Program	% of all Prisoners	# in Program	% of all Males	# in Program	% of all Females
Academic Education	6,744	49	5,911	47	833	60
ACDP	3,124	23	2,754	22	370	27
Correction Enterprises	1,692	12	1,589	13	103	7
SOAR	41	0	41	0	n/a	n/a
Vocational Education	4,753	34	4,082	33	671	48
Work Release	798	6	703	6	95	7

Note: Prisoners can participate in multiple prison programs during their incarceration period and, therefore, may be represented in more than one program.

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2013 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

Figure 1 provides recidivism rates for prison releases by select correctional programs. Recidivism was defined broadly as arrest, conviction, or incarceration during a fixed two-year follow-up period. (For detailed definitions, see Appendix B of the 2016 recidivism report.) Recidivism rates for prisoners in Academic Education, ACDP, and Vocational Education were fairly similar or slightly lower than those found for the overall prison population. Prisoners in Correction Enterprises, SOAR, and Work Release generally had lower recidivism rates than the overall prison population.

Figure 1
Criminal Justice Outcomes for Prison Releases by Select Correctional Programs

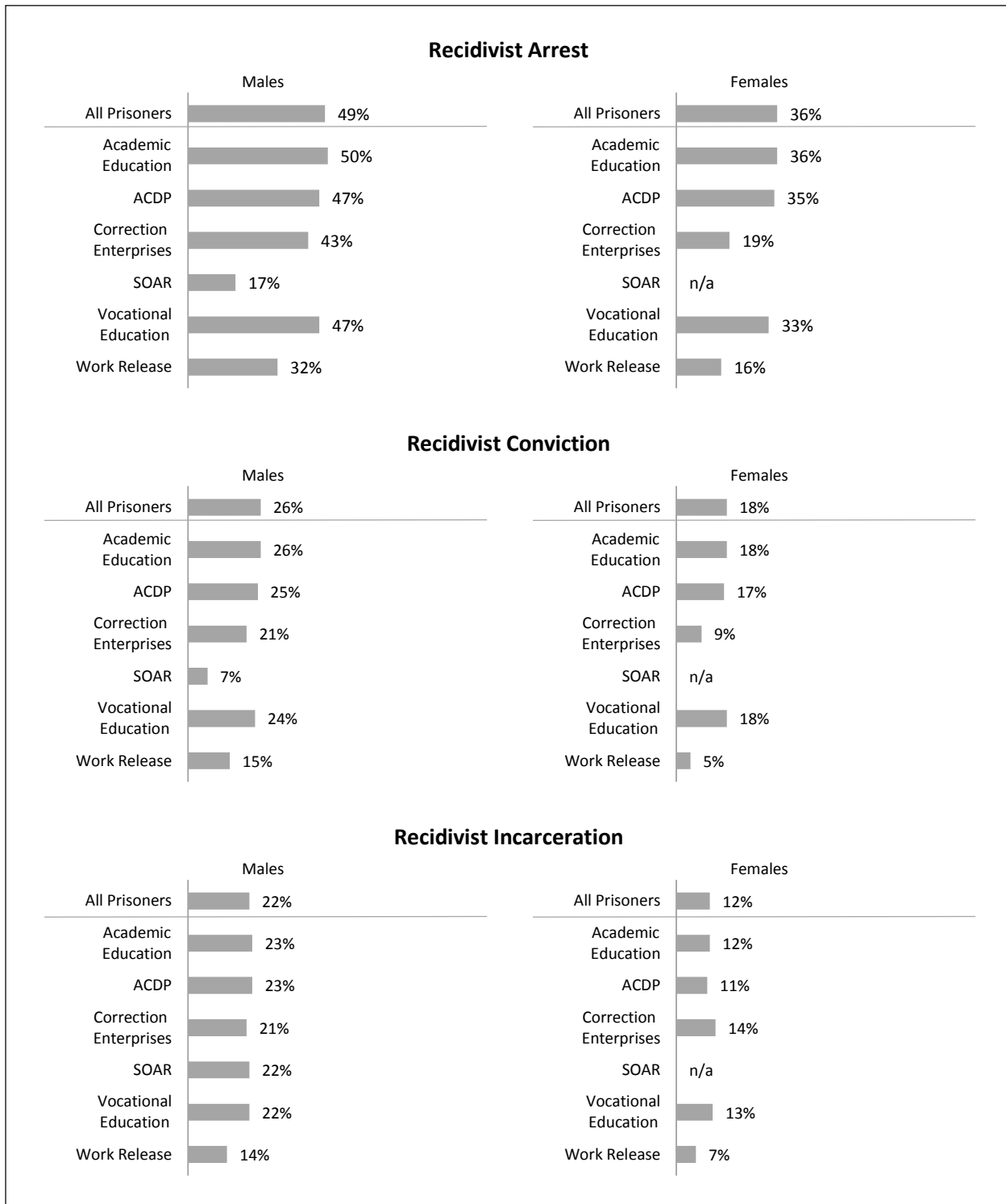


Note: Prisoners can participate in multiple prison programs during their incarceration period and, therefore, may be represented in more than one program.

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2013 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

Figure 2 presents criminal justice outcomes for select correctional programs by gender. Overall, males had higher recidivism rates than females. Males and females in Academic Education, ACDP, and Vocational Education had fairly similar or slightly lower recidivism rates than the overall recidivism rates for males and females, while males and females in Correction Enterprises and Work Release generally had lower recidivism rates than the overall recidivism rates for males or females.

Figure 2
Criminal Justice Outcomes for Prison Releases by Select Correctional Programs and Gender



Note: Prisoners can participate in multiple prison programs during their incarceration period and, therefore, may be represented in more than one program.

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2013 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

This research brief is intended to provide a broad overview of prison programs. The analysis does not include an examination of characteristics of prisoners in select programs (e.g., age, risk level, need level, sentence length) or their level of participation in the program (e.g., duration, successful completion). As such, the findings are not intended to be exhaustive. It should be noted that the recidivism rates of prison programs cannot be compared to one another for several reasons. Not only does program availability vary by prison, but the capacity of programs can be affected by the availability of funding. In addition, prisoners can participate in multiple programs during their incarceration period and, therefore, may be represented in more than one of the six prison programs examined. Future examination of prison programs and their effectiveness will include additional analysis variables following the DPS's realigning and remissioning of its prison programs and recent effort to assign offenders to prison programs based on a validated risk and need instrument. A more comprehensive analysis will allow for greater understanding of prison programs and their effect on recidivism.