

VADOC Recidivism



FY2020 State Responsible Releases

2025

Research - Evaluation Unit

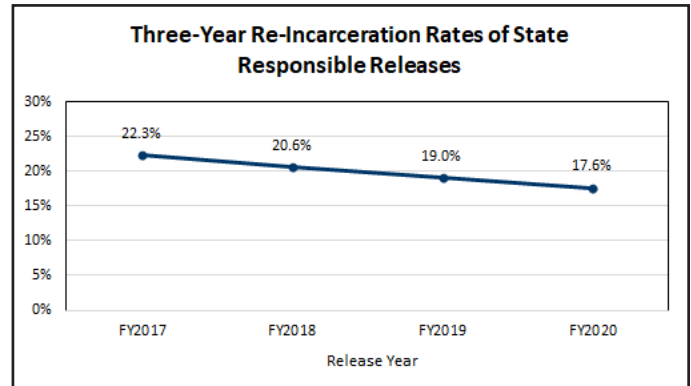
Table of Contents

Trends in Recidivism Rates and Technical Violations	1-2
Recidivism Rate Trends	1
Impact of COVID-19 on Recidivism	1
Technical Violations among Recidivists	1-2
Predictors of Recidivism	2-4
Known Predictors	2
Time to Recidivate and Recidivism Rates	2-3
Current Analyses	3-4
State Responsible (SR) Incarceration Location and Recidivism	4-5
Mental Health and Recidivism	5-6
History of Opioid and/or Cocaine Use and Recidivism	6
Known Gang Affiliation and Recidivism	6-7
Post-Release Employment and Recidivism	7
Combined Impact of Predictors	7-11
SR Location and Mental Health	7-8
SR Location and History of Opioid and/or Cocaine Use	8
Mental Health and History of Opioid and/or Cocaine Use	8
SR Location and Known Gang Affiliation	8-9
SR Location and Post-Release Employment	9
Mental Health, SR Location, and History of Opioid and/or Cocaine Use	10
Substance Use, Known Gang Affiliation, Mental Health, and SR Location	10-11
Summary and Conclusion	11-12
Appendix	13

Trends in Recidivism Rates and Technical Violations

Recidivism Rate Trends

The Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) studies and tracks recidivism to obtain information on the success of inmates re-entering society once released from state responsible (SR) incarceration. Virginia's recidivism rate is the lowest among the 34 states that report the re-incarceration rate of inmates with an SR sentence within three years of their release.¹ The three-year SR re-incarceration rate among the FY2020 cohort was 17.6%, the lowest it has been in over 20 years. The process used by VADOC to calculate the three-year re-incarceration rate of SR releases includes waiting at least four years to allow all court information to be received and entered into VirginiaCORIS.² Without waiting for the data to fully mature, the FY2020 cohort recidivism rate in July 2023 would have been 17.5%.³



Impact of COVID-19 on Recidivism

In previous release cohorts, an estimate of how court closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic affected recidivism rates was able to be calculated. However, because the entire follow-up period for the FY2020 cohort was affected by the pandemic, unlike previous cohorts, an estimate of what the recidivism rate of the FY2020 release cohort may have been if it were not impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic is not possible. Although, compared to previous cohorts, FY2020 releases spent longer in the community before recidivating (mean=628 days, median=644 days); however, this may be due to a delay in court proceedings because of the pandemic.

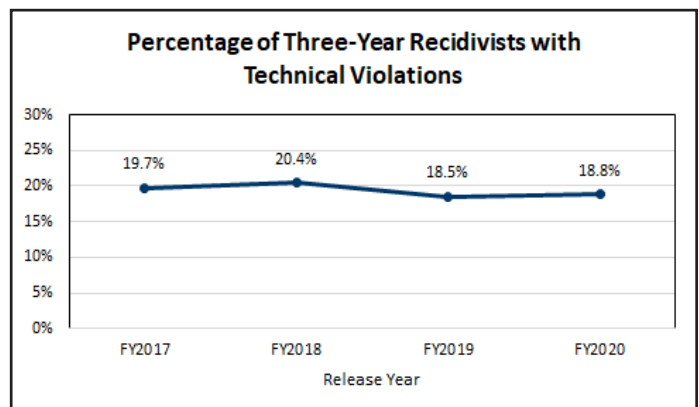
	SR Releases	Total Recidivists	Rate	Time to Recidivate	
				Mean	Median
FY2014*	12,021	2,868	23.9%	607	607
FY2015	12,385	2,862	23.1%	606	604
FY2016	12,551	2,997	23.9%	607	609
FY2017	12,376	2,754	22.3%	600	597
FY2018	12,499	2,576	20.6%	580	569
FY2019	12,597	2,399	19.0%	609	616
FY2020	12,680	2,232	17.6%	628	644

*Due to multiple court-updated New Commitment Dates in the data, re-incarceration rates for the FY2014 release cohort has been kept constant with the rates reported in the previous year.

Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 463 inmates were released early in FY2020.⁴ These releases were screened prior to release and have been reported on separately. Due to the screening process, these releases have a lower recidivism rate than the overall FY2020 release cohort (13.6%).

Technical Violations among Recidivists

Technical violations are any violation of probation for reasons other than a new criminal conviction. The percentage of inmates returning for technical violations in



1 VADOC Research-Evaluation Unit (October 2024), State Recidivism Comparison Report.

2 VirginiaCORIS is the computer-based Virginia Department of Corrections' inmate management system.

3 Due to COVID-19, the four-year waiting period did not have as significant of an impact on the FY2020 cohort as it previously has.

4 These releases were a result of the COVID Early Release Authorization that allowed for inmates within one year of release to be released early.

the FY2020 cohort was 18.8%, a small increase (0.3 percentage points) compared to the FY2019 cohort. Without technical violations, the recidivism rate for FY2020 cohort would have been 14.3%. This is one percentage point (1.2) lower than the FY2019 recidivism rate excluding technical violations.

Predictors of Recidivism

Known Predictors

The VADOC examines inmate characteristics and other factors associated with recidivism in order to understand, identify, and address their criminogenic needs, with the ultimate goal of reducing recidivism and thereby increasing public safety. VADOC research findings have shown a link between certain factors and recidivism, as well as time to recidivism, establishing their importance in predicting recidivism among inmates released from an SR incarceration in Virginia.

These predictive factors include the following:

- 1) Gender: Male inmates are more likely to recidivate and spend less time in the community, on average, prior to recidivating than females.
- 2) Age: Younger inmates are more likely to recidivate than older inmates.
- 3) Previous SR Incarcerations: Inmates with a greater number of previous SR incarcerations are more likely to recidivate and those with no previous SR incarceration terms spend the most time, on average, in the community prior to recidivating.
- 4) Crime Type of Most Serious Offense: Inmates who commit a property/public order crime as their most serious offense are more likely to recidivate than those who commit violent crimes or drug-related offenses.

Time to Recidivate and Recidivism Rates

Just as recidivism rates vary among released inmates with different offense types and risk characteristics, the time to recidivate also varies. Time to SR re-incarceration is defined as the number of days between a recidivist's release date and receiving a sentence that results in a new SR incarceration. The table ([see Appendix](#)) is divided into four quartiles and displays the average time to recidivate. The re-arrest and re-incarceration rates of inmates with different offense types and risk characteristics are also included in the table.

Of the 10,809 male inmates released from an SR incarceration in FY2020, 18.4% had a new SR incarceration within three-years of their release date. Of the 1,991 male inmates who were re-incarcerated within three-years, 25% had a new SR incarceration within 412 days, one-half had a new SR incarceration within 644 days, and 75% had a new SR incarceration within 863 days. On average, males who recidivated started a new term of SR incarceration within 627 days of release. Slightly less than one-half of all male releases (49.9%) were re-arrested within three-years of release. Females were less likely to recidivate than males (12.9% and 18.4%, respectively) and returned with a new SR incarceration later than males. On average, female recidivists had a new SR incarceration within 637 days of release compared to 627 days for male recidivists.

As the age of released inmates increased, the re-arrest and re-incarceration rates declined. Those under the age of 30 at the time of release had the highest re-arrest rate (59.9%) and re-incarceration rate (22.8%). Inmates under the age of 30 spent less time in the community before recidivating than those aged 30 to 49. Inmates

aged 40 to 49 who recidivated spent the longest amount of time in the community with an average of 642 days.

Overall, those who had more previous SR incarcerations tended to have higher re-arrest rates and re-incarceration rates. Of inmates with five or more previous terms of incarceration, almost two-thirds (63.2%) were re-arrested and more than one-quarter (27.1%) were re-incarcerated within three-years of release compared to inmates with no previous terms of incarceration (42.8% and 13.2%, respectively). Of those with a prior SR incarceration term, inmates with one previous SR incarceration tended to spend more time in the community before returning to VADOC, with an average of 627 days. Inmates with five or more previous terms of incarceration averaged the least amount of time overall and spent 35 days less, on average, in the community before returning to VADOC when compared to inmates with one previous term of incarceration (592 days and 627 days, respectively). Inmates with no previous terms of incarceration spent 644 days, on average, in the community before returning to VADOC.

Recidivism Rates and Time to Recidivate for FY2020 SR Releases by Characteristics									
	Total Releases	Total Recidivists	Quartiles				Average	Percent Re-Arrested ²	Percent Re-Incarcerated
			25th	50th ¹	75th	100th			
All Releases	12,680	2,232	415	644	865	1,095	628	49.4%	17.6%
Gender									
Male	10,809	1,991	412	644	863	1,095	627	49.9%	18.4%
Female	1,871	241	432	643	869	1,094	637	46.1%	12.9%
Age at Release									
Under 30	3,008	687	402	631	869	1,095	625	59.9%	22.8%
30-39	4,377	848	421	650	867	1,095	630	54.3%	19.4%
40-49	2,821	433	429	665	867	1,095	642	43.9%	15.3%
50-59	1,807	214	405	623	809	1,095	603	37.2%	11.8%
60+	667	50	445	600	915	1,079	627	25.8%	7.5%
Previous SR Incarcerations									
No previous SR terms	6,527	860	428	669	882	1,095	644	42.8%	13.2%
1 previous SR term	2,984	621	402	649	874	1,095	627	53.6%	20.8%
2 previous SR terms	1,561	369	436	632	834	1,094	618	58.6%	23.6%
3 previous SR terms	812	186	372	625	883	1,095	612	58.4%	22.9%
4 previous SR terms	465	104	430	590	782	1,093	602	57.7%	22.8%
5 or more previous SR terms	340	92	356	599	823	1,085	592	63.2%	27.1%
Crime Type									
Violent	4,667	742	422	645	873	1,095	636	44.1%	15.9%
Property/Public Order	4,816	976	425	647	856	1,095	628	55.3%	20.3%
Drug	3,197	514	387	634	860	1,095	616	48.1%	16.1%

¹50th percentile = Median.

² Arrest records come from the Virginia State Police (VSP) and are matched to data in VirginiaCORIS based on key identifiers. As of July 2021, only arrests mandated to be reported to the Central Criminal Records Exchange (CCRE) are included in the VSP data, per 2021's House Bill 2113. Re-arrest information is based on July 2024 Virginia State Police criminal history data.

Note: As of Data Copy Date 08/14/2024.

Inmates whose most serious offense (MSO) during their release term of incarceration was a property/public order crime had the highest re-arrest rates (55.3%) compared to those whose MSO was a violent or drug-related crime (44.1% and 48.1%, respectively). Inmates with a property/public order crime were also more likely to recidivate (20.3%) than inmates with a violent or drug-related crime (15.9% and 16.1%, respectively). Inmates with a violent crime MSO spent 636 days, on average, in the community prior to recidivating, which is the longest average time spent in community before returning of the three MSO categories. Those with a drug-related crime spent the least amount of time in the community prior to recidivating (616 days).

Current Analyses

In addition to the known predictors of recidivism previously discussed, VADOC has found other predictors that will be highlighted in this report. In particular, this report highlights the links between SR incarceration location, mental health impairment, drug use, gang affiliation, employment, and recidivism. Regression analysis shows that

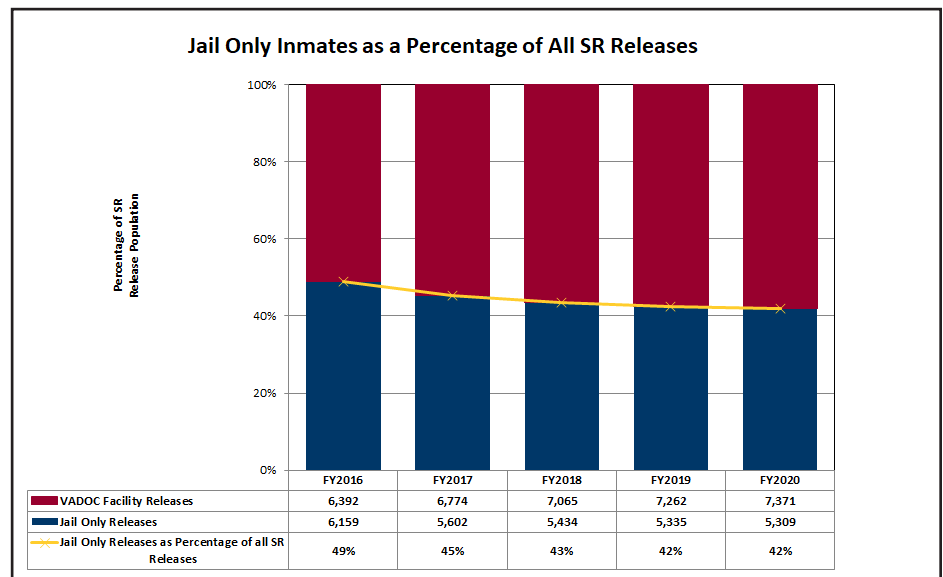
when all other factors are kept constant, certain factors are statistically significant predictors of recidivism.⁵

The relationships between the following factors, alongside other known predictors of recidivism, will be explored in this report:

- 1) SR Incarceration Location: Inmates who serve their entire SR term of incarceration in a local/regional jail were more likely to recidivate than those who serve some or all of their SR incarceration term in a VADOC facility.
- 2) Evidence of a Mental Health Impairment: Inmates with a known mental health impairment were more likely to recidivate than those with no known mental health impairment.
- 3) History of Positive Drug Tests for Opioids and/or Cocaine:⁶ Inmates with a history of positive drug tests for opioids and cocaine were more likely to recidivate than inmates with a history of positive drug tests for either opioids or cocaine or inmates without any history of positive drug tests for opioids or cocaine.
- 4) Known Gang Affiliation:⁷ Inmates with a known gang affiliation at the time of release were more likely to recidivate than those with no known gang affiliation.
- 5) Post-Release Employment:⁸ Inmates who did not have reportable wages (i.e. unemployed) during the three-year follow-up period were more likely to recidivate than those with reportable wages. Additionally, those who were able to sustain employment for almost one-half (47%) of their time at liberty had a drastically lower recidivism rate.⁹

SR Incarceration Location and Recidivism

Due to capacity limitations in VADOC facilities, some SR inmates served their entire term of SR incarceration in a local or regional jail (Jail Only). The number of Jail Only SR releases has been declining since FY2016. The percentage of Jail Only SR inmates stayed the same between the FY2019 and FY2020 cohorts (42%). The percentage of Jail Only SR inmates has decreased by seven percentage points since the peak in FY2016. The increase in SR releases who spent at least a portion of their SR incarceration in a VADOC facility may, in part, help



⁵ Determined using a logistical regression model controlling for gender, mental health impairment, number of previous SR incarcerations, age at release, testing positive for opioids and/or cocaine, SR incarceration location, crime type of MSO, and percentage of time employed post release. The factors identified as predictors were all significant at $p < .01$.

⁶ History of multiple drug tests was evaluated in the FY2016-FY2020 cohorts. History of drug tests was examined before or within three years of an inmate's release (end of three-year follow-up for non-recidivists and recidivated date for recidivists).

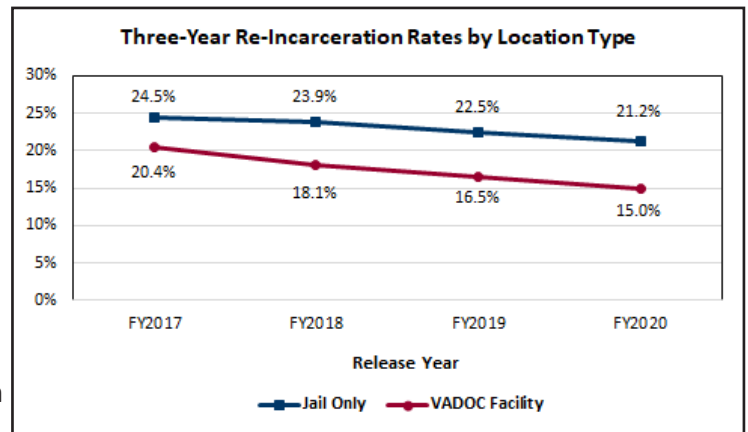
⁷ Known gang affiliation was not significant when taken into consideration with the other factors in the logistical regression model, but was found to be a significant predictor of recidivism on its own.

⁸ Employment information was obtained from the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). VEC data contains only data from Virginia employers subject to unemployment compensation laws. Employment where wages were earned under the table, through freelance work, from another state, or in Washington D.C. are not included in this data. Employment was defined as any wages earned during the follow-up period.

⁹ The time that an inmate was employed is defined as the percentage of quarters that an inmate was employed during the follow-up period while at liberty. The follow-up period was from the quarter/year the inmate was released through 12 additional quarters or through the quarter/year the inmate recidivated.

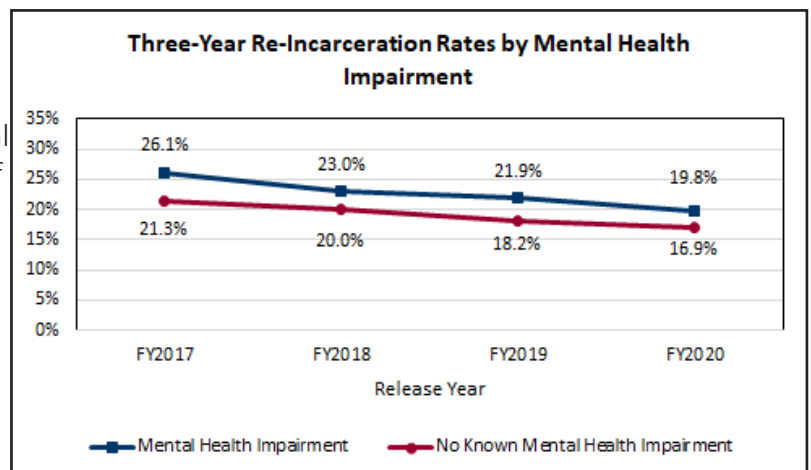
explain the overall lower recidivism rate for the FY2020 cohort compared to previous cohorts.

The three-year re-arrest and re-incarceration rates of Jail Only SR inmates are consistently higher than that of inmates who spent at least part of their SR incarceration term in a VADOC facility. FY2020 releases who were Jail Only prior to release had a re-arrest rate of [54.6%](#) compared to [45.6%](#) of those who were located in a VADOC facility. Among FY2020 releases who served at least part of their SR term of incarceration in a VADOC facility, 15.0% recidivated within three-years. This is a decrease of one percentage point (1.5) compared to the FY2019 cohort. Similarly, Jail Only inmates saw a decrease of one percentage point (1.3) in recidivism rates between the FY2019 and FY2020 cohorts (22.5% and 21.2%, respectively). Inmates who spent at least a portion of their SR term in a VADOC facility spent almost three months longer ([83 days](#)), on average, in the community prior to recidivating than those who spent their entire SR term in a jail ([670 days and 587 days](#), respectively). Access to evidence-based programs (EBPs), educational programs, substance use treatment, and mental health treatment in VADOC facilities helps returning citizens successfully re-enter society.



Mental Health and Recidivism

Inmates with a known mental health impairment are designated with a mental health code in VirginiaCORIS indicating the severity of mental health impairment or a diagnosis of a serious mental illness. The recidivism rate of inmates with a known mental health impairment is higher than that of inmates with no known mental health impairment (19.8% and 16.9%, respectively). Individuals with a known mental health impairment had higher re-arrest rates ([54.1%](#)) compared to those with no known mental health impairment ([47.9%](#)). The average length of time to re-incarceration of inmates with a known mental health impairment was similar to that of inmates with no mental health impairment ([627 and 628 days](#), respectively).



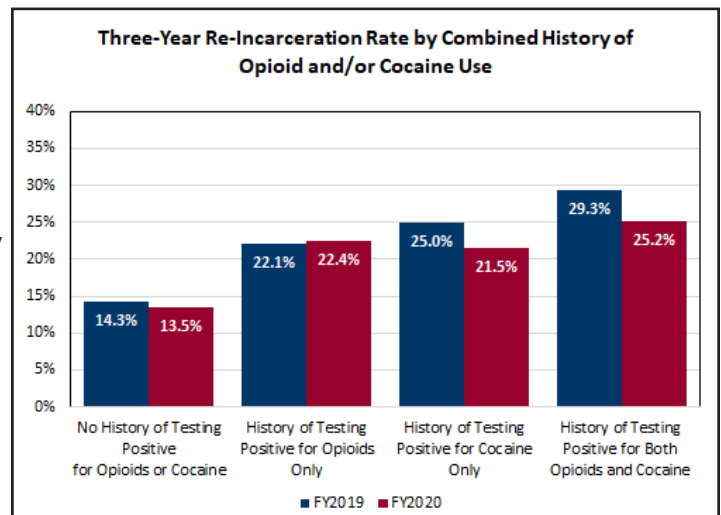
Compared to the FY2019 cohort, the recidivism rate of those with a known mental health impairment decreased by two percentage points (2.1) to 19.8% and those without a known mental health impairment decreased by one percentage point (1.3) to 16.9% in the FY2020 cohort. Recognizing the increased risk of recidivism among those with a known mental health impairment, in 2016, the Virginia General Assembly approved funding for 20 full-time mental health positions to help support VADOC's 43 Probation and Parole (P&P) Districts. The primary objective for the new staff was to facilitate continuity of care and increase the likelihood of successful re-entry for supervisees

with a known mental health impairment. The additional mental health staff are also able to collaborate with VADOC prisons, local jails, and regional jails to assist with re-entry planning. The additional support may have contributed to the convergence in recidivism rates observed in the FY2018, FY2019, and FY2020 cohorts among those with a known mental health impairment and those without. The support may also have contributed to the large decrease in recidivism rates of those with a mental health impairment in the FY2020 cohort compared to the FY2017 cohort (19.8% and 26.1%, respectively).

History of Opioids and/or Cocaine Use and Recidivism

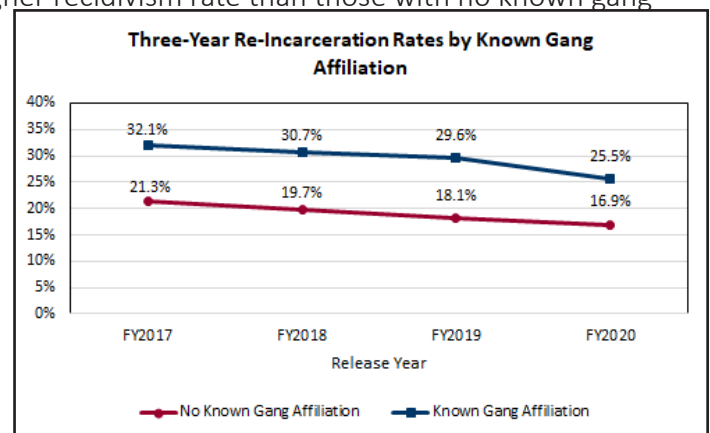
The effect of testing positive for both opioids and/or cocaine on recidivism was explored for the FY2016 through FY2020 cohorts. Similar patterns were observed in all cohorts. Inmates with a history of testing positive for both opioids and cocaine before or within three-years of release had the highest recidivism rate.

FY2020 releases who had a history of testing positive for both opioids and cocaine had a three-year re-arrest rate of [68.0%](#) and a three-year recidivism rate of 25.2%. Releases who did not have a history of opioid and/or cocaine use had a much lower re-arrest rate ([38.8%](#)) and re-incarceration rate (13.5%). Inmates with a history of testing positive for only opioids and not cocaine had the second highest re-incarceration rate of 22.4%. The recidivism rates for all drug use categories except those with a history of testing positive for only opioids were lower for the FY2020 cohort than the FY2019 cohort. Inmates who tested positive for both opioids and cocaine spent the most amount of time in the community prior to returning to VADOC, on average, [653 days](#) (median of [668 days](#)).



Known Gang Affiliation and Recidivism

Inmates with a known gang affiliation¹⁰ tend to have a higher recidivism rate than those with no known gang affiliation. The percentage of FY2020 releases with a known gang affiliation who recidivated was 25.5%, a decrease of four percentage points (4.1) compared to the FY2019 cohort and five percentage points (5.2) compared to the FY2018 cohort. Additionally, inmates with no known gang affiliation had a lower recidivism rate than the release cohort overall (16.9% and 17.6%, respectively). Individuals with a known gang affiliation at the time of release had a higher three-year re-arrest rate ([64.6%](#)) than those who did not have a known gang affiliation ([48.0%](#)).

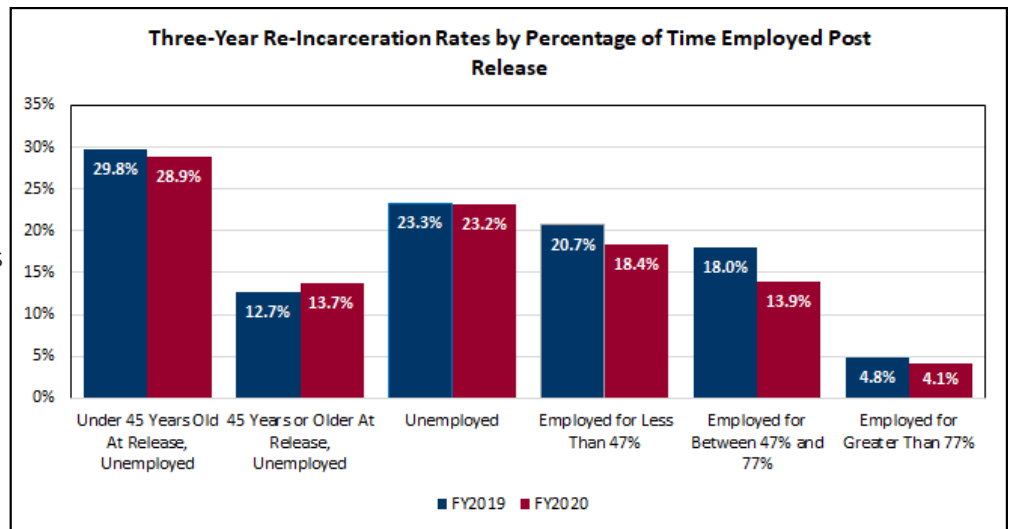


¹⁰ Gang affiliation is defined as affiliation with at least one documented gang organization at release. Inmates may be affiliated with more than one gang.

Post-Release Employment and Recidivism

Inmates who were employed were much less likely to recidivate than inmates who weren't employed (14.0% and 23.2%, respectively). Inmates who are unemployed or have lower percentages of time employed post release have higher recidivism rates. Inmates under the age of 45 at release who were unemployed had much higher recidivism rates than inmates who were 45 or older at release who were unemployed (28.9% and 13.7%, respectively). This highlights that employment has a greater impact on recidivism for younger releases than older releases. Inmates who were employed for more than 77% of the time they were at liberty during the follow-up period had the lowest recidivism rate (4.1%), which is much lower than the overall cohort (17.6%). Inmates who found employment but were employed for less than 47% of their time at liberty had much higher recidivism rates than those who maintained employment 47% or more of their time at liberty (18.4% and 9.1%, respectively).

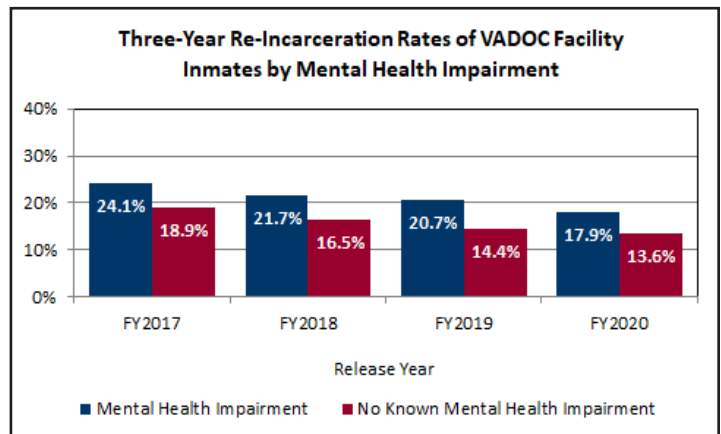
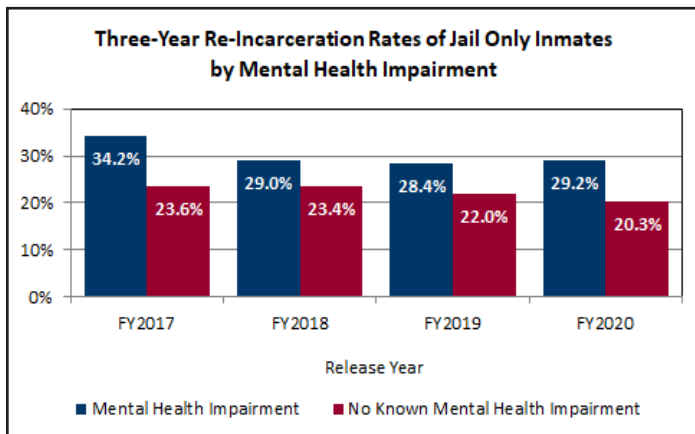
Regardless of the amount of time they were employed, FY2020 releases who found employment post-release had lower recidivism rates than FY2019 releases who found employment. The recidivism rate of FY2020 releases who were employed between 47% and 77% of the follow-up period was more than four percentage points (4.1) lower than FY2019 releases who were employed between 47% to 77% of the follow-up period.



Combined Impact of Predictors

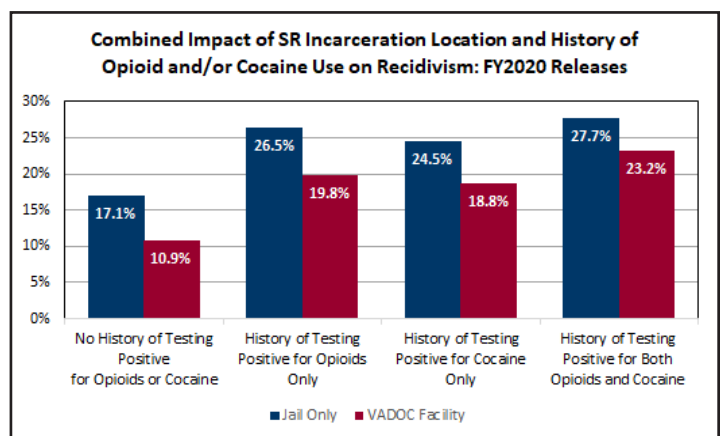
SR Location and Mental Health

When considering both SR incarceration location and mental health, the recidivism rate of FY2020 Jail Only releases with a known mental health impairment was eleven percentage points (11.3) higher than that of those with a known mental health impairment who spent at least part of their SR incarceration term in a VADOC facility (29.2% and 17.9%, respectively). Similarly, there is a seven percentage point (6.7) difference in recidivism between those without a known mental health impairment who were Jail Only versus those without a known mental health impairment who spent at least part of their SR incarceration term in a VADOC facility (20.3% and 13.6%, respectively). This can be seen on the charts on the next page.



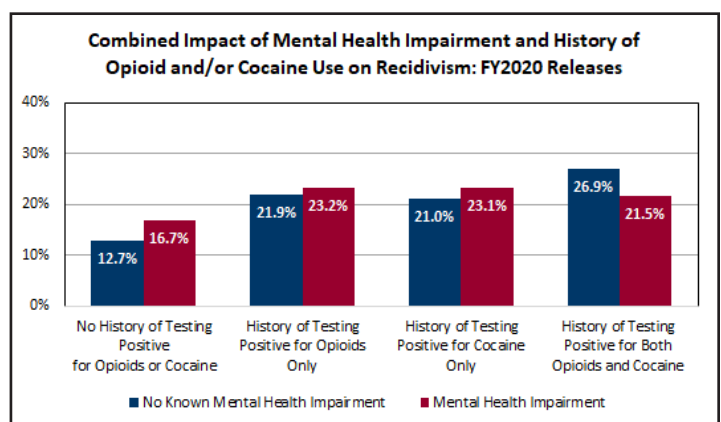
SR Location and History of Opioid and/or Cocaine Use

Regardless of location of incarceration, inmates who tested positive for opioids and/or cocaine had higher recidivism rates than those who did not. However, the recidivism rates were even higher for releases who were Jail Only. Jail Only inmates had higher recidivism rates across all categories of opioid and/or cocaine use compared to those who spent a portion of their incarceration term in a VADOC facility. This can be seen on the chart to the right.



Mental Health and History of Opioid and/or Cocaine Use

For the FY2020 cohort, inmates with a known mental health impairment who had a history of testing positive for both opioids and cocaine had a lower recidivism rate than those with no known mental health impairment and a history of testing positive for opioids and cocaine (21.5% and 26.9%, respectively).¹¹ When examining inmates who had a history of testing positive for opioids only or cocaine only, those with a known mental health impairment were more likely to recidivate than those with no mental health impairment. This suggests that inmates with comorbid mental health impairment and substance use disorders may require additional resources to prevent recidivism.



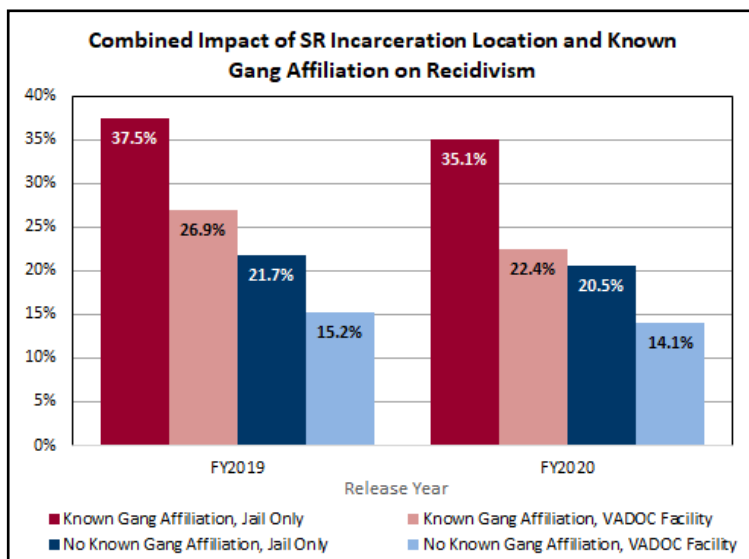
SR Location and Known Gang Affiliation

Approximately 12% of the 2,232 inmates who recidivated in the FY2020 cohort had a known gang affiliation at

¹¹ Mental health codes for Jail Only inmates are not readily available. Because of this, it is possible that some Jail Only inmates could have had a known mental health impairment that is not captured in the data, impacting the recidivism rates.

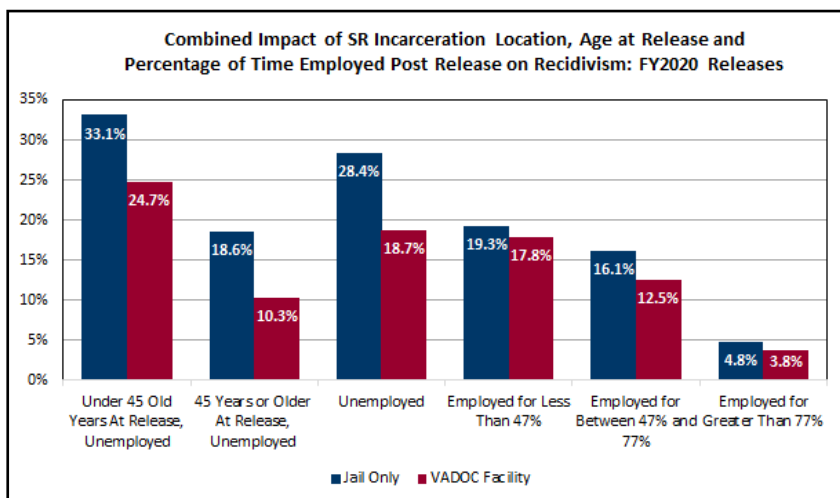
the time of release (N = 272). Jail Only inmates were less likely to be identified as a known member of a gang as local/regional jails cannot enter confirmed gang member status into VirginiaCORIS. However, if a Jail Only inmate had previous DOC history (incarceration or supervision), their gang affiliation could be identified. More than 10% (10.9%) of inmates in the FY2020 cohort who spent at least a portion of their incarceration term in a VADOC facility had a known gang affiliation at the time of release. In contrast, less than 5% (4.9%) of Jail Only inmates in the FY2020 cohort had a known gang affiliation at the time of release.

Inmates with a known gang affiliation at the time of release who spent the entirety of their incarceration term in a local/regional jail were at a greater risk of recidivating (35.1%) than those who spent at least a portion of their term in a VADOC facility (22.4%). Recidivism rates of inmates with a known gang affiliation who spent at least a portion of their term in a VADOC facility were lower for the FY2020 cohort when compared to the FY2019 cohort (22.4% and 26.9%, respectively). This suggest that inmates with a known gang affiliation may benefit from the social, cognitive behavioral, and work-related programs offered by VADOC facilities (e.g., Thinking For a Change [T4C]) that are not consistently available in all jails, prior to and upon release. Jail Only inmates with a known gang affiliation also had a lower recidivism rate for the FY2020 cohort than the FY2019 cohort (35.1% and 37.5%, respectively).



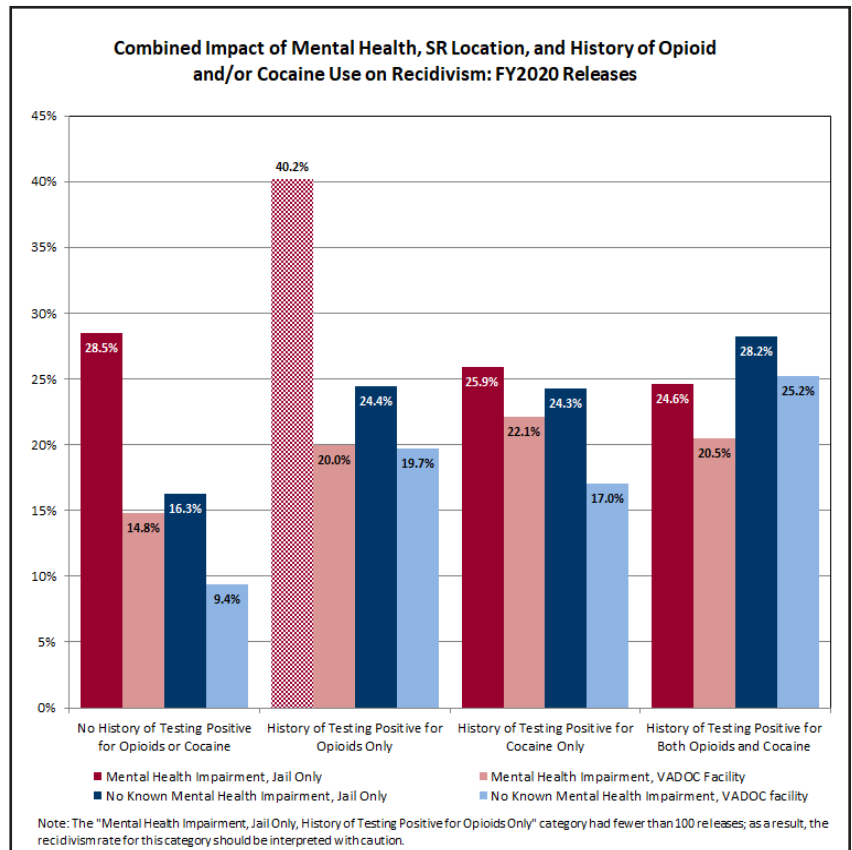
SR Location and Post-Release Employment

Regardless of post-release employment, Jail Only inmates had higher recidivism rates than inmates who spent at least a portion of their term of incarceration in a VADOC facility with the same percentage of time employed post release. Unemployed Jail Only inmates who were younger than 45 years at release had the highest recidivism rate (33.1%). Those who were employed for greater than 77% of the follow-up period while they were at liberty, both Jail Only and VADOC facility releases, had much lower recidivism rates (4.8% and 3.8%, respectively) than any other employment status. The overall recidivism rates for employed and unemployed Jail Only releases (15.8% and 28.4%, respectively) had a much larger difference than the recidivism rates for employed and unemployed inmates who spent at least a portion of their incarceration in a VADOC facility (13.0% and 18.7%, respectively).



Mental Health, SR Location, and History of Opioids and/or Cocaine Use

Jail Only inmates had higher recidivism rates than those who served a portion of their term in a VADOC facility with the same drug testing results and mental health impairment status. Jail Only inmates with a known mental health impairment and a history of testing positive for opioids only had the highest recidivism rate of 40.2%.¹² Regardless of incarceration location, those with a known mental health impairment and a history of testing positive for cocaine only had higher recidivism rates than those with a known mental health impairment and a history of testing positive for both opioids and cocaine. The recidivism rate for FY2020 releases with no known mental health impairment, no history of opioid and/or cocaine use, and who spent at least a portion of their incarceration in a DOC facility prior to release was 9.4%, which is much lower than the overall recidivism rate (17.6%).



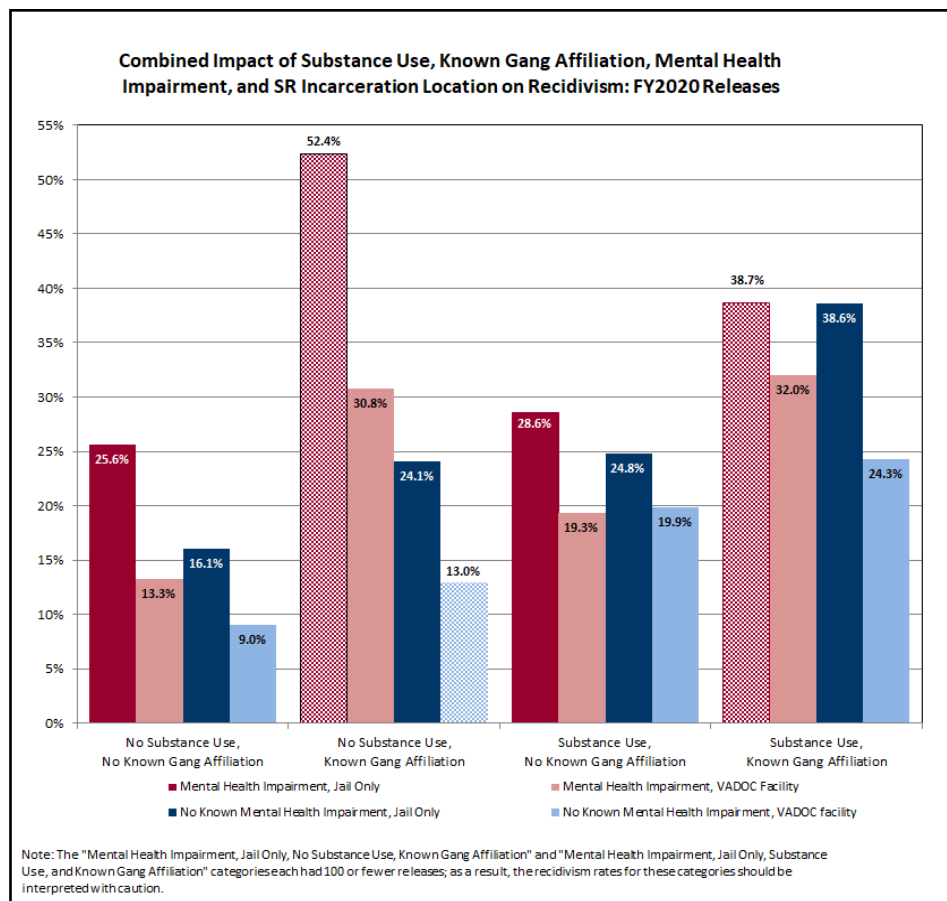
Substance Use¹³, Known Gang Affiliation, Mental Health, and SR Location

Comparing the recidivism rates of inmates by substance use, gang affiliation, mental health impairment, and SR incarceration location shows that inmates with a known gang affiliation at the time of release, a known mental health impairment, and a history of testing positive for substances who spent their entire incarceration term in a local/regional jail had a higher recidivism rate than those with similar characteristics who spent at least a portion of their incarceration term in a VADOC facility (38.7% and 32.0%, respectively). These rates should be interpreted with caution, however, since there were some groups with low numbers of inmates. Regardless of mental health impairment or SR incarceration location, inmates with a known gang affiliation at the time of release or a history of testing positive for substances were at a greater risk of recidivating. This risk was compounded in the presence of multiple risk factors.

These findings suggest that inmates with a known gang affiliation at the time of release are especially vulnerable to recidivism, particularly those with a history of substance use and a mental health impairment. Disparities in identifying gang affiliation by incarceration location may factor into the differences in recidivism rates by SR incarceration location seen here. These results indicate that improvements are needed to better identify and support gang-affiliated inmates to increase their chances of successful re-entry.

¹² The "Mental Health Impairment, Jail Only, History of Testing Positive for Opioids Only" category had fewer than 100 releases; as a result the recidivism rate for this category should be interpreted with caution.

¹³ Substance use in this context is defined as a history of positive tests for opioids and/or cocaine use.



Summary and Conclusion

The analyses in this report indicate that risk factors historically tied with recidivism continue to play a central and statistically significant role in the prediction of recidivism in the FY2020 cohort. Most broadly, there was a one percentage point (1.4) decrease in the recidivism rate for the FY2020 cohort compared to the FY2019 cohort. The three-year SR re-incarceration rate among the FY2020 cohort was 17.6%, the lowest it has been in over 20 years. This low recidivism rate may be partially attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic as the entire follow-up period for the FY2020 release cohort was affected by the pandemic.

Mental health impairment, history of testing positive for opioids and/or cocaine, SR incarceration location, and post-release employment were found to be significant factors that impact recidivism. These factors, when considered individually or in combination, are associated with an increase in the likelihood of recidivating. Regardless of whether inmates have a known mental health impairment, a history of testing positive for opioids and/or cocaine, a known gang affiliation, or were unemployed or were employed for a smaller percentage of time during the follow-up period, inmates who spent at least a portion of their incarceration term in a VADOC facility consistently have lower re-incarceration rates than their counterparts who spent the entirety of their incarceration term in a local/regional jail. These differences are likely due to the evidence-based practices, educational programs, and substance use treatment provided in VADOC facilities.

In comparison to the FY2019 cohort, the FY2020 recidivism rates of those with a mental health impairment (19.8%) and those without a mental health impairment (16.9%) decreased slightly by two percentage points (2.1) and one percentage point (1.3), respectively. The recidivism rates of those with a mental health impairment have decreased by more than six percentage points (6.3) since FY2016 (19.8% and 26.1%, respectively).

Inmates with a history of testing positive for both opioids and cocaine were more likely to recidivate than those with a history of testing positive for either opioids or cocaine. FY2020 SR releases who had a history of testing positive for only opioids had higher recidivism rates than those who had a history of testing positive for only cocaine (22.4% and 21.5%, respectively). It is also important to note that inmates with no history of testing positive for opioids or cocaine had a recidivism rate four percentage points (4.1) lower than that of the overall FY2020 cohort (13.5% and 17.6%, respectively). Recidivism rates for each substance history group except those who had a history of testing positive for only opioids were lower than the recidivism rates of those in the same category in FY2019.

Consistent with the pattern seen in previous cohorts, inmates in the FY2020 cohort with a known gang affiliation at the time of release were more likely to recidivate than those with no known gang affiliation (25.5% and 16.9%, respectively). Those with no known gang affiliation had lower recidivism rates than the overall cohort (16.9% and 17.6%, respectively).

Inmates who were employed for 47% or more of the follow-up period while at liberty had much lower recidivism rates than those who were employed for less than 47% or were unemployed (9.1% and 21.0%, respectively). Although employment post release reduces recidivism, inmates who had sustained employment saw the greatest reduction in recidivism rates. Inmates under 45 years of age at release and unemployed during the follow-up period had much higher recidivism rates than those 45 years or older and unemployed (28.9% and 13.7%, respectively).

Additionally, when time to recidivism was examined by demographic factors, mental health impairment, previous incarceration history, crime type, incarceration location, history of opioid and/or cocaine use, gang affiliation, and employment, differences in the length of time to recidivism emerged. The current study found that established predictors of SR incarceration location, mental health, and substance use still play a role in recidivism and identified gang affiliation as a novel predictor of recidivism. Additionally, employment post release, especially sustained employment, also plays a large role as a predictor of recidivism. Addressing these risks may help prevent recidivism in future cohorts.

Research- Evaluation Unit

Virginia Department of Corrections
6900 Atmore Drive
P.O. Box 26963

Tama S. Celi, Ph.D
Brittney Via, MA
Megan Skolnick, MA

research@vadoc.virginia.gov

Appendix

([Return to page 2](#))

Recidivism Rates and Time to Recidivate for FY2020 SR Releases by Characteristics									
	Total Releases	Total Recidivists	Quartiles				Average	Percent Re-Arrested ²	Percent Re-Incarcerated
			25th	50th ¹	75th	100th			
All Releases	12,680	2,232	415	644	865	1,095	628	49.4%	17.6%
Gender									
Male	10,809	1,991	412	644	863	1,095	627	49.9%	18.4%
Female	1,871	241	432	643	869	1,094	637	46.1%	12.9%
Age at Release									
Under 30	3,008	687	402	631	869	1,095	625	59.9%	22.8%
30-39	4,377	848	421	650	867	1,095	630	54.3%	19.4%
40-49	2,821	433	429	665	867	1,095	642	43.9%	15.3%
50-59	1,807	214	405	623	809	1,095	603	37.2%	11.8%
60+	667	50	445	600	915	1,079	627	25.8%	7.5%
Previous SR Incarcerations									
No previous SR terms	6,527	860	428	669	882	1,095	644	42.8%	13.2%
1 previous SR term	2,984	621	402	649	874	1,095	627	53.6%	20.8%
2 previous SR terms	1,561	369	436	632	834	1,094	618	58.6%	23.6%
3 previous SR terms	812	186	372	625	883	1,095	612	58.4%	22.9%
4 previous SR terms	465	104	430	590	782	1,093	602	57.7%	22.8%
5 or more previous SR terms	340	92	356	599	823	1,085	592	63.2%	27.1%
Crime Type									
Violent	4,667	742	422	645	873	1,095	636	44.1%	15.9%
Property/Public Order	4,816	976	425	647	856	1,095	628	55.3%	20.3%
Drug	3,197	514	387	634	860	1,095	616	48.1%	16.1%
Location History									
VADOC Facility Releases	7,371	1,107	470	688	900	1,095	670	45.6%	15.0%
Jail Only Releases	5,309	1,125	365	595	823	1,095	587	54.6%	21.2%
Mental Health Code									
Mental Health Impairment ³	3,009	597	405	647	855	1,095	627	54.1%	19.8%
No Known Mental Health Impairment or Not Reported	9,671	1,635	419	642	867	1,095	628	47.9%	16.9%
History of Testing Positive for Opioids and Cocaine⁴									
Negative both Opioids and Cocaine	7,187	967	400	614	842	1,095	607	38.8%	13.5%
Positive only Cocaine	1,772	381	445	674	872	1,094	646	62.5%	21.5%
Positive only Opioids	1,892	423	411	652	867	1,095	631	59.1%	22.4%
Positive both Opioids and Cocaine	1,829	461	427	668	886	1,095	653	68.0%	25.2%
Known Gang Affiliation at Time of Release									
Known	1,067	272	400	634	863	1,095	617	64.6%	25.5%
No Known	11,613	1,960	419	644	865	1,095	629	48.0%	16.9%
Employment⁵									
Unemployed	4,936	1,144	322	531	771	1,095	545	45.7%	23.2%
Employed for Less Than 47% of Follow-Up Period	4,104	757	575	750	932	1,095	738	62.1%	18.4%
Employed for Between 47% and 77% of Follow-Up Period	1,849	257	484	685	905	1,095	672	51.9%	13.9%
Employed for Greater Than 77% of Follow-Up Period	1,791	74	433	610	829	1,095	620	27.8%	4.1%
Re-Incarceration Reason									
Technical Revocation	--	432	329	572	867	1,094	589	--	--
New Crime Revocation	--	1,347	452	669	863	1,095	648	--	--
Not a Revocation, New Crime Only ⁶	--	453	397	615	868	1,095	607	--	--

¹50th percentile = Median.

²Arrest records come from the Virginia State Police (VSP) and are matched to data in VirginiaCORIS based on key identifiers. As of July 2021, only arrests mandated to be reported to the Central Criminal Records Exchange (CCRE) are included in the VSP data, per 2021's House Bill 2113. Re-arrest information is based on July 2024 Virginia State Police criminal history data.

³The Mental Health Impairment category includes those who had a mental health code of "Appropriate for Field Unit/Work Center".

⁴Drug test history was examined before and within three years of release (end of three-year follow-up period for non-recidivists and recidivate date for recidivists).

⁵Employment was defined as any wages earned during a quarter. Employment was categorized by the percentage of time an inmate was employed during the follow up period while at liberty. Employment data was obtained from VEC and excludes employment data where wages were earned under the table, through freelance work, from another state, or in Washington D.C.

⁶Includes eleven inmates who did not have probation revocation information in VirginiaCORIS.

Note: As of Data Copy Date 08/14/2024.