

CRIMINAL JUSTICE OUTCOMES FOR PRISON RELEASES ASSIGNED TO SELECT CORRECTIONAL JOBS AND PROGRAMS

Background

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.¹ Correctional resources and, specifically, their effectiveness in increasing public safety and deterring future crime have continued to be of interest to legislators and policymakers. It is the goal of most correctional jobs and programs to manage inmate behavior by limiting idleness while also providing opportunities that will assist in promoting prosocial change and, consequently, lower the risk of reoffending (i.e., recidivism). This research brief is a follow-up to the Commission's 2022 Correctional Program Evaluation report that examined recidivism for Structured Sentencing Act (SSA) offenders who were released from prison or placed on supervised probation in FY 2019.²

Purpose and Sample Characteristics

This research brief focuses on the 16,340 prisoners in the FY 2019 prison release sample (i.e., prisoners with a felony offense) and examines assignment to select correctional jobs and programs during incarceration, as well as recidivism during a two-year follow-up.³ Analyses focus on outcomes by gender, length of job assignment, and program completion as applicable. Figure 1 highlights some of the notable characteristics of the FY 2019 prison release sample.

Figure 1
FY 2019 Prison Release Sample

Sample Characteristics

- 14% had a Class B1 – D felony, 33% had a Class E – G Felony, and 53% had a Class H – I felony
- 87% of the sample were male, 48% were black, and 47% were white
- The average age at prison release was 35
- 70% did not graduate from high school
- 77% were identified as having a possible substance use problem
- 95% had a prior arrest
- 56% had a prior incarceration

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

¹ N.C. Gen. Stat. (hereinafter G.S.) § 164-47.

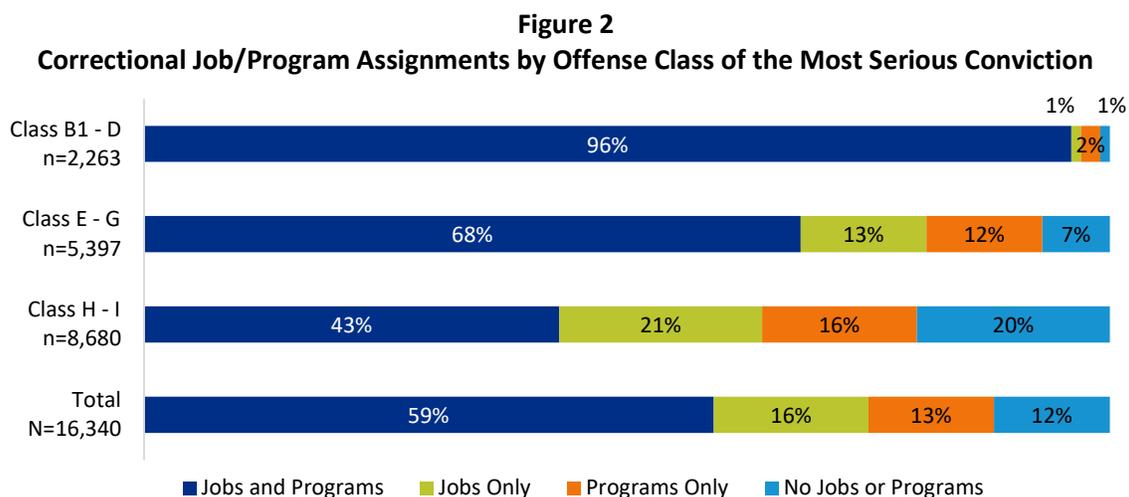
² See <https://www.nccourts.gov/assets/documents/publications/SPAC-2022-Adult-Recidivism-Report-FY2019>.

³ Additional information on correctional job and program assignments and recidivism can be found in Chapter 5 and Appendix G of the Commission's 2022 report.

Correctional Job/Program Assignments

Certain correctional activity assignments require a minimum amount of time served in order to participate; the findings reflected for the select jobs and programs were consistent with these requirements. As shown in Figure 2, sentence lengths and opportunities for job and program assignments were closely related.

- 59% of prisoners were assigned to at least one job and one program during their incarceration.
- Nearly all Class B1 – D felons (i.e., prisoners with the longest sentence lengths) were assigned to both a job and a program during their incarceration (96%).
- Class H and I felons (i.e., prisoners with the shortest sentence lengths) had the highest percentage with no job or program assignment (20%).



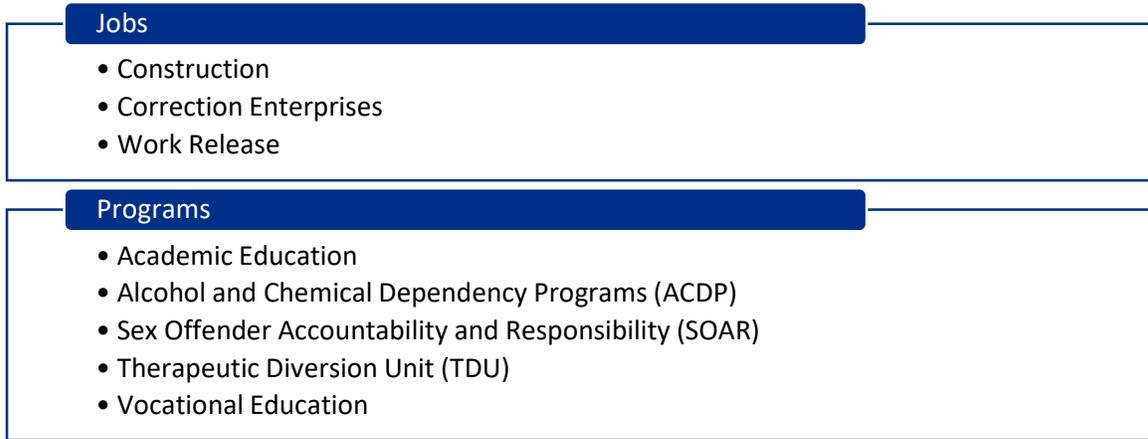
SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

While not shown in Figure 2, given the large proportion of males in the prison release sample, the distribution of job and program assignments for males was similar to all prisoners. However, females were less likely than males to have both job and program assignments (54% compared to 59% of males). Females were more likely to have program assignments only (16% compared to 12% of males).

Select Correctional Jobs/Programs

In addition to examining correctional jobs and programs generally, eight correctional assignments were selected for more specific analysis (see Figure 3) and are described more fully in the Appendix. The eight assignments were selected in consultation with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) as being of particular interest. It is important to note that prisoners can be assigned to multiple prison jobs/programs during their incarceration period and, therefore, may be represented in more than one select correctional job or program.

**Figure 3
Select Correctional Jobs/Programs**



Select Correctional Jobs/Programs by Gender

Among the select correctional jobs and programs examined, the largest proportions of prisoners were assigned to Academic Education and Vocational Education, and the smallest proportions to Work Release, Construction, TDU, and SOAR (see Table 1).

- A similar proportion of males and females were assigned to Academic Education and TDU.
- A larger proportion of females were assigned to Vocational Education and ACDP compared to males.
- A larger proportion of males were assigned to Correction Enterprises and Work Release compared to females.

**Table 1
Select Correctional Job/Program Assignments by Gender**

Select Correctional Jobs/Programs	Prisoners N=16,340		Males n=14,210		Females n=2,130	
	# in Program	% of all Prisoners	# in Program	% of all Males	# in Program	% of all Females
Jobs						
Construction	473	3	473	3	0	0
Correction Enterprises	2,063	13	1,938	14	125	6
Work Release	1,223	7	1,142	8	81	4
Programs						
Academic Education	6,401	39	5,606	39	795	37
ACDP	3,857	24	3,168	22	689	32
SOAR	28	<1	28	<1	0	0
TDU	104	1	79	1	25	1
Vocational Education	5,044	31	4,305	30	739	35

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

Recidivism

Recidivism rates were determined for prison releases assigned to select correctional jobs and programs. For comparison purposes, recidivism rates were also provided for the entire prison release sample and for those who were assigned to any job or program. Fingerprinted arrests within a two-year follow-up period were the primary measure of recidivism, supplemented by information on recidivist incarcerations.

Overall, the recidivist arrest rate for prisoners in the FY 2019 sample was 49% and the recidivist incarceration rate was 36% (see Figure 4). These outcome measures were also examined for correctional jobs and programs overall, as well as for select correctional jobs and programs. While not shown in Figure 4, it is worth noting that prisoners with no job or program assignment had higher recidivist arrest rates (52% and 49% respectively) and recidivist incarceration rates (42% and 39% respectively) than those who participated in correctional jobs and programming.⁴

Recidivist Arrest

- The overall recidivist arrest rates for prisoners assigned to any correctional job and any correctional program were nearly identical to the rate for all prisoners.
- Recidivist arrest rates ranged from a low of 21% (SOAR) to a high of 62% (TDU).
- Recidivist arrest rates for prisoners in Construction, Work Release, and SOAR were 8 or more percentage points lower than the overall recidivist arrest rate for the prison release sample.
- Recidivist arrest rates for prisoners in Academic Education, ACDP, and Vocational Education (50%, 48%, and 47% respectively) were similar to the prison release sample (49%).

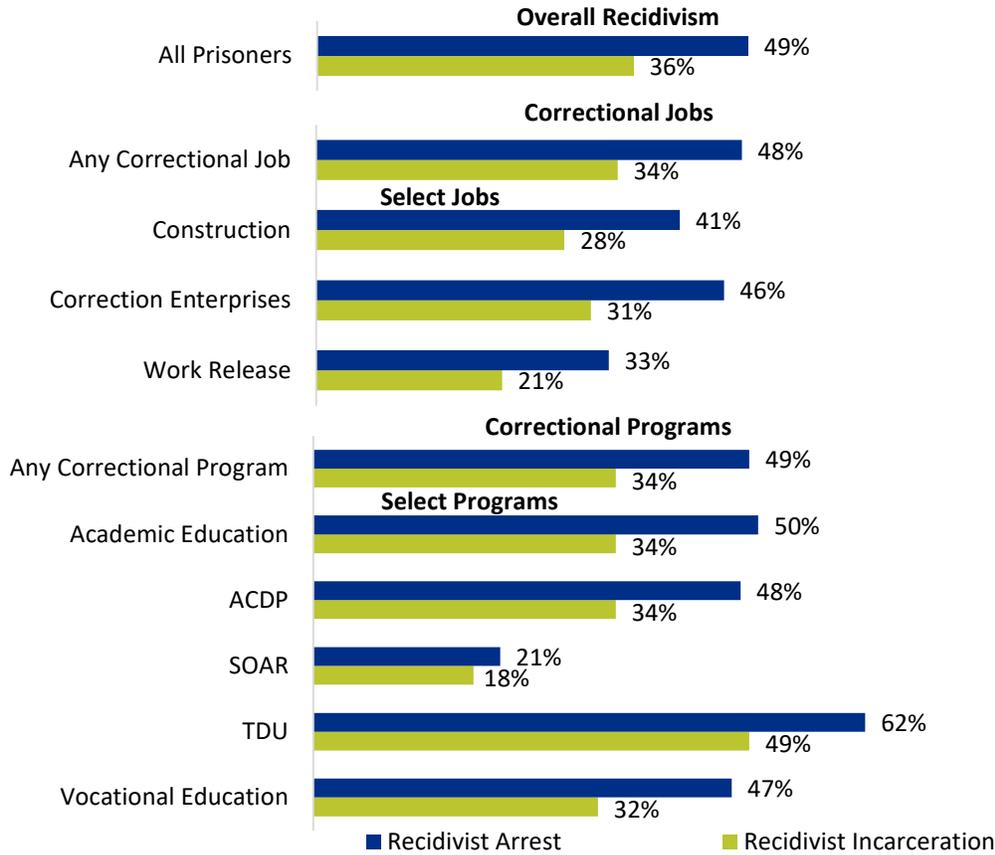
Recidivist Incarceration

- Recidivist incarceration rates for all prisoners were 2 percentage points higher than the overall rates for prisoners assigned to any correctional job and any correctional program.
- Recidivist incarceration rates ranged from a low of 18% (SOAR) to a high of 49% (TDU).
- Recidivist incarceration rates for prisoners in Construction, Work Release, and SOAR were 8 or more percentage points lower than the overall recidivist incarceration rate for the prison release sample.
- Recidivist incarceration rates for prisoners in Academic Education and ACDP (34% each) were similar to the prison release sample (36%).

The program requirements as well as the characteristics of prisoners who were assigned to particular correctional jobs and programs should be considered when comparing recidivism rates of different correctional assignments. It is also important to remember that prisoners may have participated in multiple correctional assignments while incarcerated, and therefore may be represented in more than one category. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, access to job and program assignments varies by prison facility, and the capacity of those assignments can be affected by the availability of funding.

⁴ Prisoners with no job or program assignments tended to have shorter sentence lengths. For correctional job and program participants, the length of participation is likely tied to offense class and, correspondingly, sentence length.

Figure 4
Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Job/Program Assignments



Note: Recidivism rates for SOAR should be interpreted with caution due to the low number of participants (n=28).
 SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

Recidivism by Select Correctional Job/Program Assignments and Gender

Figure 5 expands on the information provided in Figure 4 by examining criminal justice outcomes for select correctional job/program assignments by gender. Overall, the recidivist arrest rates were 51% for males and 39% for females; the recidivist incarceration rates were 36% for males and 33% for females.

Recidivist Arrest

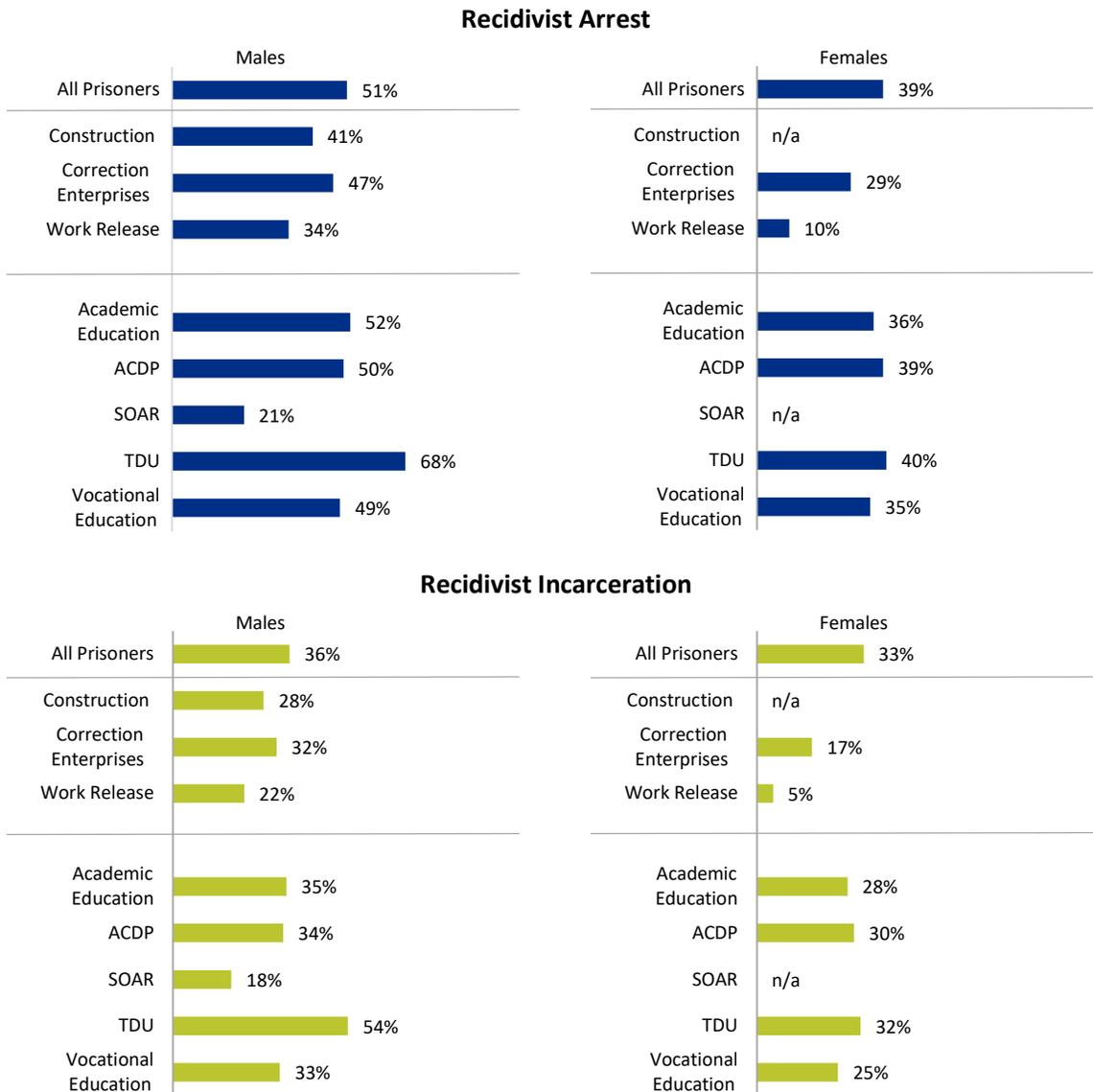
- Males had higher recidivist arrest rates than females for the select jobs and programs.
- Males in Construction, Work Release, and SOAR had the lowest recidivist arrest rates (41%, 34%, and 21% respectively) compared to the overall rate for males (51%).
- Females in Correction Enterprises and Work Release had the lowest recidivist arrest rates (29% and 10% respectively) relative to the overall rate for females (39%).

Recidivist Incarceration

- Across the select correctional jobs and programs examined, males had higher recidivist incarceration rates than females.

- Recidivist incarceration rates were most similar for males and females in ACDP (34% and 30% respectively).
- Males in Work Release and SOAR had the lowest recidivist incarceration rates (22% and 18% respectively) compared to the overall rate for males (36%).
- Females in Correction Enterprises and Work Release had the lowest recidivist incarceration rates (17% and 5% respectively) relative to the overall rate for females (33%).

Figure 5
Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Job/Program Assignments by Gender



Note: Twenty-eight (28) male prisoners had a SOAR program assignment and 25 female prisoners had a TDU assignment; consequently, recidivism rates should be interpreted with caution for these groups.

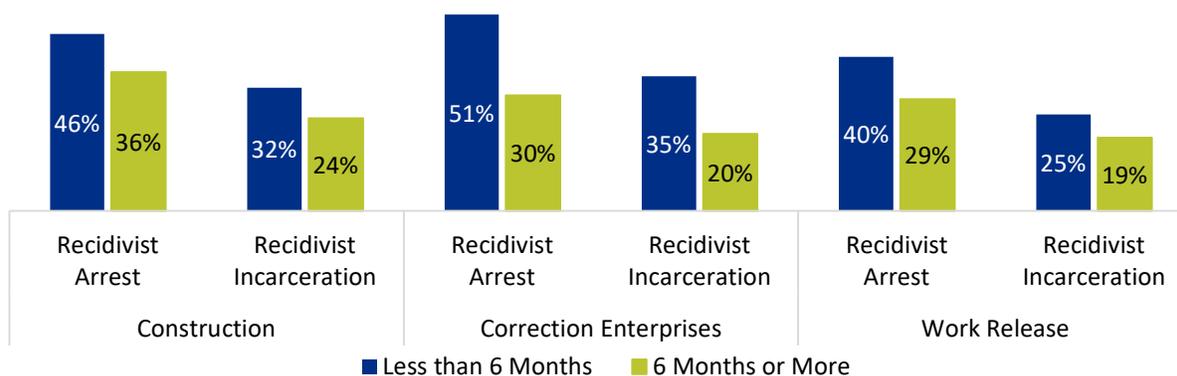
SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

Recidivism for Select Correctional Jobs by Length of Job Assignment

Studying the length of time prisoners spent working while incarcerated provides insight into whether a relationship exists between longer job assignments and recidivism. The length of job assignment represents prisoners' total time in select jobs over the course of their incarceration. Figure 6 shows recidivism rates for select correctional jobs by length of job assignment and is expanded to include gender in Table 2.

- Whether overall or by gender, recidivism rates were generally lower for prison releases with longer job assignments.
- The higher recidivism rates for prisoners with less than 6 months of job participation might be the result of this group being comprised primarily of prisoners who served the shortest sentences and had the highest overall recidivism rates among the prison release sample.

Figure 6
Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Jobs by Length of Job Assignment



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

Table 2
Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Jobs by Gender and Length of Job Assignment

Criminal Justice Outcomes	Length of Job Assignment in Months			
	Male		Female	
	Less than 6	6 or More	Less than 6	6 or More
Construction	n=244	n=229	n/a	n/a
Recidivist Arrest	46%	36%	n/a	n/a
Recidivist Incarceration	32%	24%	n/a	n/a
Correction Enterprises	n=1,426	n=512	n=89	n=36
Recidivist Arrest	53%	31%	34%	17%
Recidivist Incarceration	36%	21%	20%	8%
Work Release	n=356	n=786	n=30	n=51
Recidivist Arrest	43%	31%	10%	10%
Recidivist Incarceration	27%	20%	7%	4%

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

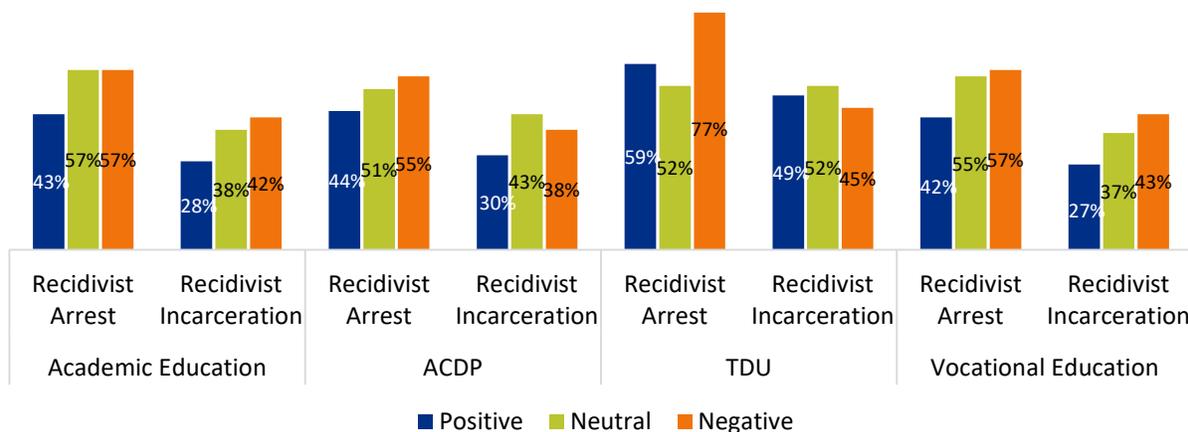
Recidivism for Select Correctional Programs by Program Outcome

It is important to consider the nature of prisoners' participation in correctional programs and how it relates to recidivism. For this analysis, the results of program assignments were categorized into three outcomes: positive (e.g., completion, graduation), neutral (e.g., illness, transferred to another prison, released from prison, program termination), and negative (e.g., removal due to disciplinary action, failure to complete the program). When prisoners had more than one type of outcome within each program category, the outcome was selected using the following ranking: positive, neutral, and negative, with priority given to any positive outcome.

Figure 7 shows program outcomes and recidivism rates for select programs. Table 3 expands on Figure 7 by showing recidivism rates in the context of both program outcomes and gender.

- With the exception of assignment to a TDU, recidivism arrest rates were lower for prison releases with positive program outcomes than for those with negative program outcomes for both overall rates (see Figure 7) and rates by gender (see Table 3).
- Prisoners with positive TDU program outcomes had a recidivist arrest rate that was 18 percentage points lower than those with negative program outcomes. Vocational Education and Academic Education programs had comparable percentage point differences in recidivist arrest between those with positive and negative program outcomes (15 and 14 respectively).
- The largest differences in recidivist incarceration rates between those with positive and negative program outcomes was found among Vocational Education programs; a difference of 16 percentage points, and Academic Education programs; a difference of 14 percentage points.
- Generally, recidivism rates for prisoners with neutral outcomes were in between those prisoners with positive outcomes and those with negative outcomes. However, prisoners with neutral outcomes for ACDP and TDU program assignments had higher recidivist incarceration rates than those with positive and negative outcomes.

Figure 7
Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Programs by Program Outcome



Note: Criminal justice outcomes for participants in the SOAR program (which is for males only) can be found in Table 3.

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

Table 3
Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Programs by Gender and Program Outcome

Criminal Justice Outcomes	Program Outcome					
	Positive	Male Neutral	Negative	Positive	Female Neutral	Negative
Academic Education	n=2,661	n=1,654	n=1,291	n=450	n=223	n=122
Recidivist Arrest	45%	59%	58%	32%	39%	48%
Recidivist Incarceration	29%	39%	43%	23%	34%	32%
ACDP	n=1,946	n=289	n=933	n=481	n=45	n=163
Recidivist Arrest	47%	51%	56%	35%	56%	48%
Recidivist Incarceration	31%	43%	38%	25%	42%	40%
SOAR	n=19	n=6	n=3	n/a	n/a	n/a
Recidivist Arrest	16%	33%	33%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Recidivist Incarceration	16%	33%	0%	n/a	n/a	n/a
TDU	n=48	n=13	n=18	n=13	n=8	n=4
Recidivist Arrest	65%	69%	78%	38%	25%	75%
Recidivist Incarceration	56%	62%	44%	23%	38%	50%
Vocational Education	n=2,798	n=525	n=982	n=558	n=65	n=116
Recidivist Arrest	44%	57%	59%	33%	40%	42%
Recidivist Incarceration	28%	39%	44%	24%	28%	29%

Note: Twenty-eight (28) male prisoners had a SOAR program assignment and 25 female prisoners had a TDU assignment; consequently, recidivism rates should be interpreted with caution for these groups.

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

Summary

This research brief is intended to provide an overview of criminal justice outcomes for prisoners with select correctional job and program assignments. Although this brief examines correctional assignments, length of job employment, and program completion and their relationships to recidivism, the analyses do not include other key characteristics of prisoners that may also affect recidivism (e.g., age, risk level, need level). As such, the findings are not intended to be exhaustive. While the DPS began administering risk and need assessments (RNAs) in prison in 2017, prison RNAs were not used for this analysis due to data quality issues. For the FY 2019 prison release sample, with most prisoners subject to PRS upon release, RNAs completed while offenders were on supervision were used for analysis. However, correctional job and program participation occurred *prior* to the administration of community RNAs, which posed issues with temporal order for the current analysis. Once more complete data are available, risk, need, and other factors such as custody classification level and Service Priority Level should be considered in the context of assignment to programs and outcomes to offer a more comprehensive examination of program effectiveness.⁵

⁵ For more information on DPS case management, risk/need assessments, and Service Priority Levels, see https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/C.1400_%20070317.pdf.

APPENDIX: SUMMARIES OF SELECT CORRECTIONAL JOB/PROGRAM ASSIGNMENTS

Select Job Assignments

- **Construction:** The Inmate Construction Program is a partnership among the offices of Rehabilitative Programs and Services and Central Engineering within the DPS. The program's purpose is to meet the demands of the prison facility construction, expansion, and renovation projects by using inmate labor to reduce the cost of prison construction projects. The program provides inmates an opportunity to learn marketable skills in preparation for release back into the community. For more information, see <https://www.ncdps.gov/e2200-inmate-construction-program>.
- **Correction Enterprises:** Correction Enterprises is a self-supporting prison industry program operating within the DPS in various prison units across the state and provides offenders with opportunities to learn job skills by producing goods and services for the DPS and other tax-supported entities. For more information, see <https://www.correctionenterprises.com/>.
- **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. For more information, see <https://www.ncdps.gov/e0700-work-release>.

Select Program Assignments

- **Academic Education:** Academic Education is administered by the Rehabilitative Programs and Services Section within the DPS. 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.
- **Alcohol and Chemical Dependency Programs (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 offenders with substance abuse problems. For the ACDP summary, only offenders who received prison-based intermediate and long-term intensive treatment were included. For additional information, see the DPS's Substance Use Disorder Treatment Programs Annual Report at https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/FY2017-2018_ACDP_Annual_Legislative_Report.pdf.
- **Sex Offender Accountability and Responsibility (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 change the offender's cognition, values, and expectations that have supported and maintained their sexually abusive cycle of behavior.
- **Therapeutic Diversion Unit (TDU):** TDUs are secure housing facilities designed for offenders with a Serious Mental Illness (SMI). Using evidence-based and multidisciplinary behavioral health therapeutic programming, TDUs aim to decrease the population of offenders with SMIs in Restrictive Housing and aid in preparing offenders with SMIs for successful transition back into less restrictive environments in the prisons or into the community. For additional information, see <https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/TX-I-15-Therapeutic-Diversion-Units-TDU-07.20.20.pdf>.

- **Vocational Education:** Vocational Education is administered by the Rehabilitative Programs and Services Section within the DPS 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.