

Recidivism Rates for Fire Camp Participants Released in Fiscal Year 2020-21

Summary of Findings

This briefing provides supplemental recidivism rates for fire camp participants released from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020-21.ⁱ Fire camp participants consistently have lower arrest, conviction, and return-to-prison rates than non-fire camp participants.ⁱⁱ Individuals who participated in a fire camp for one year or longer have a substantially lower rate than those who participated for less than one year. Furthermore, younger participants have notably lower conviction rates than their counterparts without participation. These findings suggest that fire camp participation may not only reduce an individual's risk of reoffending, but longer participation may enhance that effect, especially for younger participants.

Highlights

- The three-year conviction rate for fire camp participants is 38.5 percent, nearly five percentage points lower than the rate for individuals with no fire camp experience (43.2 percent).ⁱⁱⁱ The arrest rate for participants is 61.5 percent, compared to 67.3 percent for non-participants, and the return-to-prison rate is 19.2 percent, compared to 22.4 percent for non-participants (Table 1).
- Individuals who participated in a fire camp for one year or longer have a conviction rate of 27.9 percent, compared to 42.4 percent for participants with less than one year of participation (Table 2).
- Fire camp participation appears to have a greater impact on recidivism for younger participants when compared to older participants (Table 3):
 - Fire camp participants who were under 35 years old at the time of their release have a three-year conviction rate of 41.4 percent, compared to their counterparts without fire camp participation, who have a rate of 50.9 percent – a difference of nearly 10 percentage points.
 - Participants aged 35 or older at the time of their release had a conviction rate of 34.9 percent, while non-participants had a rate of 35.6 percent – a much smaller difference than younger participants. This is an important finding, as younger individuals are consistently characterized by higher recidivism rates than older individuals.^{iv} Younger individuals are also slightly more likely to participate in a fire camp than older individuals and may indicate those who stand to benefit the most from participation are directed towards fire camp participation.^v
- Of the 1,372 fire camp participants who were convicted of a new crime within the three-year follow-up period, 58.2 percent were convicted of a felony and 41.8 percent were convicted of a misdemeanor. Of the non-participants with a conviction, 61.1 percent were convicted of a felony, and 38.9 percent were convicted of a misdemeanor. While the differences appear minor, fire camp participants are less likely to be convicted of more serious felonies or misdemeanors after their release compared to non-participants (Table 4).
- Some individuals released from CDCR were eligible to participate in a fire camp but were released without fire camp experience.^{vi} The arrest, conviction, and return-to-prison rates for the 1,025 fire-camp eligible individuals are higher than rates for fire camp participants, indicating lower rates among fire camp participants can be partially attributed to actual fire camp experience versus other factors that may have contributed to fire camp eligibility or low rates of recidivism (Table 5).

Table 1. Three-Year Recidivism Rates by Fire Camp Participation

Three-Year Recidivism Rates	Fire Camp Participants			No Fire Camp		
	Total Released	Number Recidivated	Recidivism Rate	Total Released	Number Recidivated	Recidivism Rate
Arrest	3,563	2,192	61.5%	22,572	15,181	67.3%
Conviction	3,563	1,372	38.5%	22,572	9,758	43.2%
Return-to-Prison	3,590	688	19.2%	23,013	5,150	22.4%

Table 2. Three-Year Conviction Rates by Fire Camp Participation Length

Days Spent in Fire Camp	Fire Camp Participants		
	Total Released	Number Convicted	Conviction Rate
Less than 30 Days	234	100	42.7%
30 to 90 Days	513	239	46.6%
91 to 180 Days	797	342	42.9%
181 to 364 Days	1,063	424	39.9%
1 Year or Longer	956	267	27.9%
Total	3,563	1,372	38.5%

Table 3. Three-Year Conviction Rates by Fire Camp Participation and Age at Release

Age at Release	Fire Camp Participants			No Fire Camp		
	Total Released	Number Convicted	Conviction Rate	Total Released	Number Convicted	Conviction Rate
18 and 19	4	1	N/A	70	38	54.3%
20 to 24	379	170	44.9%	2,182	1,246	57.1%
25 to 29	778	347	44.6%	4,299	2,184	50.8%
30 to 34	817	301	36.8%	4,711	2,266	48.1%
35 to 39	626	257	41.1%	3,799	1,640	43.2%
40 to 44	428	139	32.5%	2,848	1,095	38.4%
45 to 49	260	81	31.2%	1,661	533	32.1%
50 to 54	149	50	33.6%	1,271	397	31.2%
55 to 59	89	20	22.5%	941	224	23.8%
60 and over	33	6	18.2%	790	135	17.1%
Total	3,563	1,372	38.5%	22,572	9,758	43.2%

Table 4. Type of Post-Release Conviction by Fire Camp Participation

Type of Conviction	Fire Camp Participants		No Fire Camp	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
All Felonies	799	58.2%	5,965	61.1%
Felony Crimes Against Persons	248	18.1%	2,010	20.6%
Felony Property Crimes	217	15.8%	1,537	15.8%
Felony Drug/Alcohol Crimes	84	6.1%	517	5.3%
Felony Other Crimes	250	18.2%	1,901	19.5%
All Misdemeanors	573	41.8%	3,793	38.9%
Misdemeanor Crimes Against Persons	166	12.1%	1,190	12.2%
Misdemeanor Property Crimes	129	9.4%	958	9.8%
Misdemeanor Drug/Alcohol Crimes	223	16.3%	1,267	13.0%
Misdemeanor Other Crimes	55	4.0%	378	3.9%
Total	1,372	100.0%	9,758	100.0%

Table 5. Three-Year Recidivism Rates for Fire Camp Eligible Individuals Released without Fire Camp Experience

Three-Year Recidivism Rates	Fire Camp Participants			Fire Camp Eligible (No Fire Camp)		
	Number Released	Number Recidivated	Recidivism Rate	Number Released	Number Recidivated	Recidivism Rate
Arrest	3,563	2,192	61.5%	1,016	679	66.8%
Conviction	3,563	1,372	38.5%	1,016	413	40.6%
Return-to-Prison	3,590	688	19.2%	1,025	209	20.4%

Table 6. Demographics and Characteristics of Individuals Released in FY 2020-21 by Fire Camp Participation

Demographics and Characteristics	Fire Camp Participants		No Fire Camp	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	3,563	100.0%	22,572	100.0%
Gender				
Male	3,393	95.2%	20,761	92.0%
Female	170	4.8%	1,811	8.0%
Age at Release				
18 and 19	4	0.1%	70	0.3%
20 to 24	379	10.6%	2,182	9.7%
25 to 29	778	21.8%	4,299	19.0%
30 to 34	817	22.9%	4,711	20.9%
35 to 39	626	17.6%	3,799	16.8%
40 to 44	428	12.0%	2,848	12.6%
45 to 49	260	7.3%	1,661	7.4%
50 to 54	149	4.2%	1,271	5.6%
55 to 59	89	2.5%	941	4.2%
60 and over	33	0.9%	790	3.5%
Race/Ethnicity				
Hispanic/Latino	1,493	41.9%	10,689	47.4%
White	902	25.3%	5,391	23.9%
Black/African American	948	26.6%	5,217	23.1%
Asian	41	1.2%	285	1.3%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	32	0.9%	264	1.2%
Pacific Islander	14	0.4%	84	0.4%
Other	133	3.7%	642	2.8%
Commitment Offense Category				
Crimes Against Persons	1,799	50.5%	10,884	48.2%
Property Crimes	817	22.9%	4,823	21.4%
Drug Crimes	409	11.5%	1,977	8.8%
Other Crimes	538	15.1%	4,888	21.7%

Table 6. Demographics and Characteristics of Individuals Released in FY 2020-21 by Fire Camp Participation (continued)

Demographics and Characteristics	Fire Camp Participants		No Fire Camp	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	3,563	100.0%	22,572	100.0%
Sentence Type				
Determinate Term	1,998	56.1%	14,772	65.4%
Second Strike (Determinate Term)	1,565	43.9%	7,800	34.6%
Type of Post-Release Supervision				
Post-Release Community Supervision	1,471	41.3%	11,671	51.7%
Parole	2,089	58.6%	10,871	48.2%
Directly Discharged	3	0.1%	30	0.1%
Serious/Violent Offense				
Non-Serious/Non-Violent	1,474	41.4%	11,710	51.9%
Serious	726	20.4%	5,083	22.5%
Violent	1,363	38.3%	5,779	25.6%
CSRA Risk Score				
Low	954	26.8%	6,186	27.4%
Moderate	1,162	32.6%	6,421	28.4%
High Drug	191	5.4%	1,118	5.0%
High Property	449	12.6%	2,663	11.8%
High Violent	807	22.6%	6,184	27.4%
Participant Group				
Fire Camp Releases	2,405	67.5%	0	0.0%
Fire Camp Participants	1,158	32.5%	0	0.0%

Notes

ⁱ This report supplements the *Statewide Recidivism Report for Individuals Released from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in Fiscal Year 2020-21*. Detailed information regarding the evaluation design, methodology, and data limitations may be found in the statewide report. Please note that the recidivism rates for the FY 2020-21 release cohort were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and should be interpreted with caution. Individuals are followed for three years after their release from CDCR. The three-year conviction rate serves as the primary measure of recidivism, while arrest and return-to-prison rates are provided as supplemental measures of recidivism. For more information regarding primary and supplemental measures of recidivism, see the Statewide Recidivism Report series, available at:

<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/offender-outcomes-characteristics/offender-recidivism/>.

ⁱⁱ During FY 2020-21 a total of 30,116 individuals released from a CDCR institution and 13.6 percent or 3,563 individuals participated in a fire camp prior to their release. A total of 3,981 individuals were dropped from this analysis because they were ineligible to participate in a fire camp. These individuals include 793 individuals sentenced to an indeterminate term, 2,930 individuals required to register under Penal Code 290 (sex registrants), and 43 individuals who were both sentenced to a life term and sex registrants. A total of 26,135 remaining individuals from the FY 2020-21 statewide release cohort are included in this analysis and 3,563 individuals (or 13.6 percent of the remaining individuals) participated in a fire camp. Beyond the ineligibility criteria (i.e., individuals sentenced to a life term and sex registrants), individuals may be disqualified from participation in a fire camp (e.g., do not meet sentence or release date requirements, timing of program), or are considered fire camp eligible but do not participate in a fire camp. The “No Fire Camp” group consists of 22,572 individuals, including those who did not qualify to participate in a fire camp and 1,016 individuals who were eligible but did not participate prior to their release in FY 2020-21. For more information on fire camp eligibility and qualifications, see: <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/faq-conservation-fire-camp-program/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Only some fire camp participants are released directly from a fire camp, while others may be transferred back to an institution prior to their release. Fire camp participants can be returned to an institution for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to medical, dental, court, and disciplinary reasons, or if an individual is paroling from an institution, rather than the fire camp. During FY 2020-21, a total of 30,655 individuals were released from CDCR, however, only 30,116 individuals had an automated Department of Justice Record of Arrest Prosecution (RAP) sheet. Arrest and conviction data only include those individuals with an automated RAP sheet, while return-to-prison data include all individuals released during the fiscal year. For more information, please see Appendix F: Evaluation Design of the Recidivism Report for Individuals Released in Fiscal Year 2020-21: <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/offender-outcomes-characteristics/offender-recidivism/>.

^{iv} For more information regarding age and recidivism, please see Section 5.2 of the *Statewide Recidivism Report for Individuals Released from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in Fiscal Year 2020-21*: [Recidivism Report for Individuals Released from CDCR in Fiscal Year 2020-21](#).

^v Most individuals in the fire camp participation group (55.5 percent) were under age 35 at the time of their release, compared to under 50 percent (49.9 percent) of the non-fire camp participant group. Conversely, 44.5 percent of the fire camp group was over age 35 at their release, while 50.1 percent of the non-fire camp participation group was over age 35. These data may indicate younger individuals who benefit from fire camp experience are being directed towards fire camp participation. Certain categories are associated with high or low rates of recidivism (including age at release) with individuals belonging to younger age groups recidivating at higher rates than individuals belonging to older age groups. When a cohort is comprised of a large group of individuals associated with high or low rates of recidivism, it may have the effect of influencing the rate up or downward. For more information, see Section 5 of the *Statewide Recidivism Report for Individuals Released from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in Fiscal Year 2020-21*: <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/offender-outcomes-characteristics/offender-recidivism/>.

^{vi} Of the 26,135 individuals included in this analysis, 1,016 individuals were considered fire camp-eligible, meaning they met all eligibility requirements for participation in a fire camp (e.g., cleared by health care staff, minimum custody status, eight years or less left on their sentence and were not disqualified from a fire camp), however, they did not participate in a fire camp prior to their release. For more information regarding fire camp eligibility and disqualification from fire camp participation, see: <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/facility-locator/conservation-camps/faq-conservation-fire-camp-program/>.