

Morgan (2002) suggests that three quarters of young offenders and about half of adult offenders commit further offences within two years of release from prison. Reconviction rates seem to be stable over time. Bottomley and Pease (1986) found that the reconviction rate in the UK ran at 60 per cent throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, and Zamble (1990) reports a similar picture in Canada. Since not all crimes result in convictions and not all these result in imprisonment, the reoffending rate amongst released prisoners is probably significantly higher. Smith et al (2002): reviewed more than one hundred research studies looking at the relationship between reoffending, length of sentence and the use of prison vs. non-custodial sentences. They found that the recidivism rate following imprisonment was no lower than for non-custodial sentencing and that longer prison terms did not lower the risk of reoffending. Oldfield (1996) studied 857 offenders in Kent. Of those given custodial sentences 63 per cent had reoffended within five years. By contrast, only 41 per cent of those given probation reoffended within the same period. Roshier (1995) produced very similar results in Cleveland (64 vs. 41 per cent) but found that community service was slightly more effective, with 37 per cent of this group reoffending. Gendreau and Goggin (1996) reviewed 105 studies comparing imprisonment and community-based sentences and concluded that there were no differences in recidivism.

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