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Reconviction in Northern Ireland: Results from the 2003 cohort

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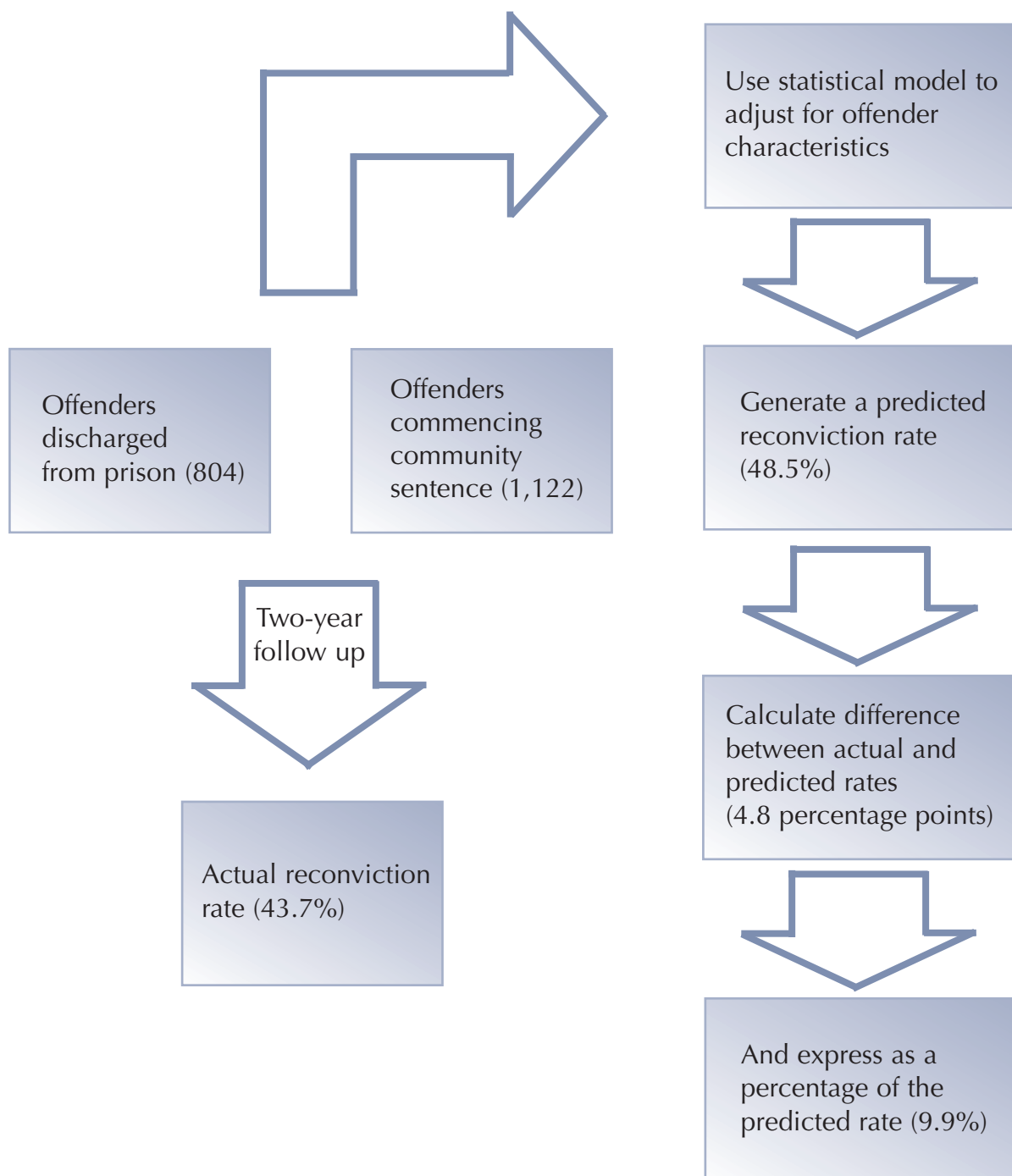
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INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the two year reconviction rates of offenders who commenced a community disposal or were discharged from prison in Northern Ireland during 2003. It presents statistics of predicted rates of reconviction and actual rates of reconviction. Predicted reconviction rates are an estimate of the percentage of offenders who are likely to reoffend and be convicted within a two year period, having controlled for changes in offender characteristics. Actual reconviction rates are the percentage of offenders who are subsequently convicted in court, **for any offence**, within two years of their baseline in 2003.

This method of comparing predicted and observed reconviction rates is used to measure progress towards the Northern Ireland Office Spending Review 2004 Public Service Agreement (PSA) target on reducing reconviction. The target specifies a reduction in reconviction of five percent compared with the predicted rate for the 2005 cohort. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Measuring difference in predicted and actual two year reconviction rates



Note: Adapted from Figure 1, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 25/05

RESULTS

Overall reconviction rate

Statistical modelling of the criminological characteristics of offenders contained in the 2003 cohort predicted a reconviction rate of 48.5%. The actual reconviction rate at the end of the two year follow-up period was 43.7%. This represents a reduction in reconviction of 9.9 % compared to the predicted rate (Table 1).

Table 1 – Overall two year reconviction rates against predicted rates, 2003

	Reconvicted	Total	Observed %	Predicted %	Difference %
Community disposal	424	1,122	37.8	45.4	16.7
Custody discharge	417	804	51.9	53.0	2.1
All Offenders	841	1,926	43.7	48.5	9.9

% Difference = (Predicted - Actual) / Predicted = (48.5% - 43.7%) / 48.5% = 9.9%

Reconviction by gender

The 2003 cohort comprised 1,739 males (90%) and 187 females (10%). Males were more likely than females to be reconvicted within the two year follow up period (Table 2).

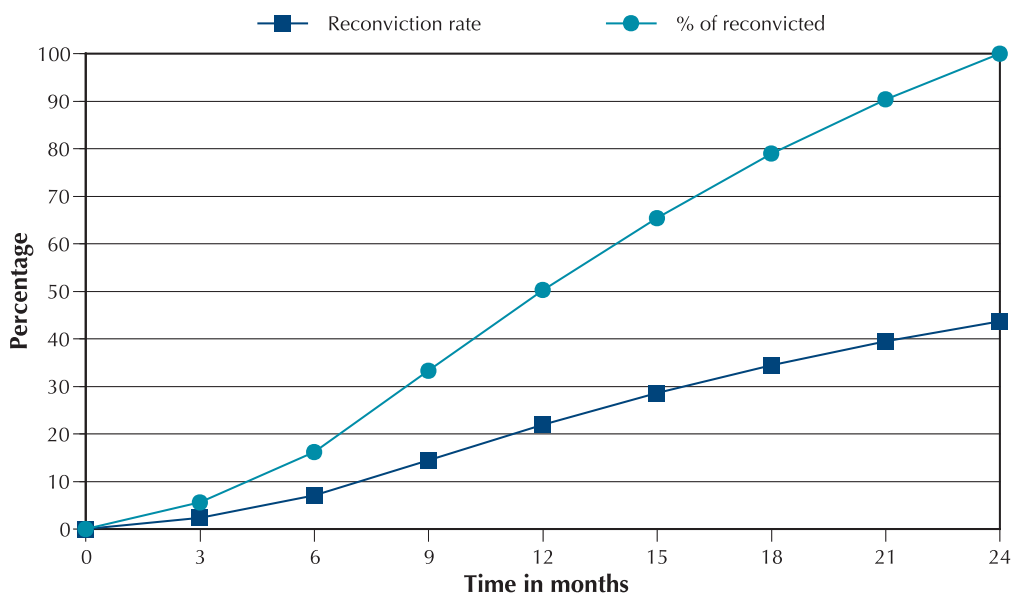
Table 2: Two year reconviction rate by gender, 2003

	Reconvicted	Total	Reconvicted %
Male	791	1,739	45.5
Female	50	187	26.7
All offenders	841	1,926	43.7

Reconviction Interval

In order to place the overall reconviction rates into some context, the time to first reconviction is examined. This measure is called the reconviction interval. It is defined as the time, in months, from date of discharge from custody or from date of community disposal to date of next conviction (reconviction). Figure 2 shows the percentage of those who were reconvicted within one month, two months and so on, up to two years.

Figure 2 – Reconviction interval, 2003



After six months, 7% of the 2003 cohort had been reconvicted within the two-year follow up period, 22% after twelve months and 35% after eighteen months. A further dissection of the reconviction rates is when the reconviction happened within the two-year follow up period, this is also illustrated in Figure 2. After six months 16% of those who were reconvicted within the two-year follow up period had been sentenced, 50% after twelve months and 79% after eighteen months.

Reconviction by offending history

The previous criminal career of an offender appears to impact on the likelihood of re-offending. Those with fewer convictions prior to their 2003 conviction had a markedly low reconviction rate (Table 3). 25% of those with no previous convictions were reconvicted within the two-year follow up period. This compared with a 37% reconviction rate for those with 1-2 previous convictions, 40% reconviction rate for those with 3-6 previous, 50% reconviction rate for those with 7-10 previous and 57% reconviction rate for those with 11 or more previous convictions.

Table 3: Two year reconviction rates by offending history, 2003

	Reconvicted	Total	Reconvicted %
No previous	75	295	25.4
1-2 previous	137	371	36.9
3-6 previous	161	407	39.9
7-10 previous	124	249	49.8
>=11 previous	344	604	57.0
All offenders	841	1,926	43.7

Reconviction by baseline offence class

Two-year reconviction rates also vary considerably between the various categories of baseline offence (Table 4). The highest reconviction rate was recorded for those convicted for robbery (59.5%). At the other end of the spectrum, 10.3% of those convicted for sexual offences were reconvicted within the two year follow up period. It should not be assumed that offenders were reconvicted in the same category as their original offence (i.e. that an offender convicted for, say, robbery necessarily committed another robbery as their reconviction offence).

Table 4: Two year reconviction rates by baseline offence class, 2002

Baseline Offence Category	Reconvicted	Total	Reconvicted %
Non-indictable	125	372	33.6
Violence against the person	136	383	35.5
Sexual offences	6	58	10.3
Burglary	70	136	51.5
Robbery	50	84	59.5
Theft	172	314	54.8
Fraud & Forgery	19	49	38.9
Criminal Damage	85	166	51.2
Offences against the state	40	91	44.0
Other - Indictable	23	50	46.0
Drugs offences	40	86	46.5
Other - Indictable	75	137	54.7
All offenders	841	1,926	43.7

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The results are based on an analysis of offenders discharged from prison or commencing a community sentence during 2003. Details of offenders discharged from custody into the community are taken from the Prison Index Database, maintained by the Northern Ireland Office statistics and research branch. This data is then further refined to remove any duplicate records within 2003 – in measuring reconviction it is important that we only capture details of the first discharge from prison in that year in the first instance. The resultant dataset is then matched to the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Integrated Crime Information System (ICIS) in order to track criminal history and monitor for re-offending. The data matching routine adheres to the 'National Statistics Protocol on Data Matching'. The matching routine looks at offenders' surnames, initials and dates of birth.

The community dataset is drawn directly from the ICIS database. Again, the first sweep of data for those sentenced during 2003 was refined to only capture details of an offender's first sentence at court in 2003. Together, the final custody discharge and community datasets make up the 2003 cohort.

Offenders contained in the 2003 cohort were followed up for a period of two years from the date of their discharge from custody or date of sentence and any subsequent conviction flagged as a reconviction. Pseudo reconvictions are convictions within the follow up period for offences committed prior to commencement of an order or discharge from custody. These have been removed from this study.

Baseline offence as referred to in the commentary of this bulletin is the principal offence for which the offender was charged at court or was discharged from prison in 2003.

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