



## Recidivism of Adult Felons 2002

### Overview

During calendar year 2002, Washington courts entered 28,205 felony sentences. Approximately 80% of the offenders sentenced were male and approximately 59% of the sentences involved offenders who had a history of one or more prior offenses.<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this report, the term “recidivism” includes any sentence in which the offender’s criminal history contains a prior felony sentence. The overall rate of recidivism for men was 62% compared to 48% among women.

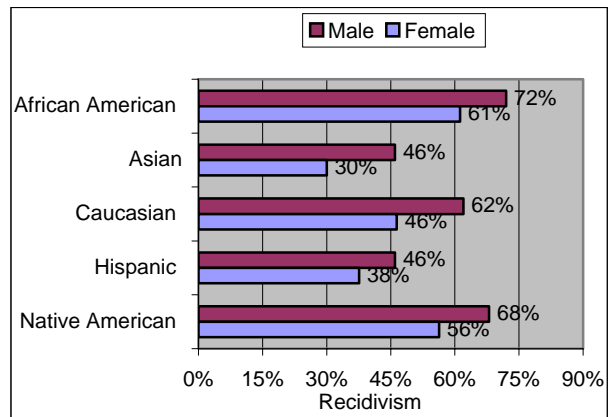
**Table 1: Demographics**

| Race/Ethnicity         | Number | Percentage of Total Sentences | Recidivism Percentage | Percent of Population <sup>2</sup> |
|------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| African American       | 4,160  | 15%                           | 70%                   | 3.3%                               |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 657    | 2%                            | 44%                   | 6.6%                               |
| Caucasian              | 21,244 | 75%                           | 59%                   | 81.9%                              |
| Hispanic <sup>3</sup>  | 1,347  | 5%                            | 45%                   | 6.7%                               |
| Native American        | 663    | 2%                            | 65%                   | 1.5%                               |

|                  | Number | Recidivism Percentage | Percentage of Total Sentences |
|------------------|--------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>    |        |                       |                               |
| Female           | 5,616  | 48%                   | 20%                           |
| Male             | 22,517 | 62%                   | 80%                           |
| <b>Age group</b> |        |                       |                               |
| 16 to 24         | 7,274  | 53%                   | 26%                           |
| 25 to 34         | 8,965  | 63%                   | 32%                           |
| 35 to 44         | 7,128  | 64%                   | 25%                           |
| 45 to 54         | 2,554  | 56%                   | 9%                            |
| 55 to 64         | 461    | 47%                   | 2%                            |
| Over 65          | 1,823  | 56%                   | 6%                            |

African Americans comprise 3.3% of the population in Washington yet received a disproportionately high percentage of felony sentences, 14.7%. Similarly, the recidivism rate of African Americans was the highest of all racial groups at 70%. Native Americans, the smallest group comprising 1.5% of the general population received 2.4% of all sentences and experienced a recidivism rate of 65%. Caucasians, the largest segment of the general population, 81.9%, received 75% of all sentences and had a recidivism rate of 58.5%. Women in the Asian/Pacific Islander group comprised the smallest number of convicted felons and accounted for the lowest overall recidivism rate. (See Figure 1)

**Figure 1: Recidivism by Race and Gender**



<sup>1</sup> The SGC database does not contain data relating to dates of release from confinement. As such, unlike some other studies, the length of time between convictions has not been factored into this report.

<sup>2</sup> The data are estimates from the National Center for Health Statistics, provided by the Washington Office of Financial Management.

<sup>3</sup> Although the United States Census Bureau does not include Hispanic in its list of “races,” due to the relatively large segment of Washington’s population identified as “Hispanic” and in the interest of clarifying disproportionality issues, persons of Hispanic ethnicity have been placed in this group regardless of race.

Contrary to generally accepted views, the average age of first time offenders, 30.6 years, was only slightly lower than the average age of repeat offenders, 31.4. Women tended to become repeat offenders at a later age, averaging 33 years old, compared to men at 31.1. The highest percentage of recidivism occurred among offenders between the ages of 35 and 44, followed closely by those between 25 and 34 years old.

### Recidivism by Offense Group

Felony offenses are categorized into nine primary offense groups: Assault, burglary, drug, manslaughter, murder, property, robbery, sex, and other. New drug offenses and property crimes accounted for more than 17,500 of the 28,252 felony sentences entered in 2002 (see table 2).

**Table 2: Recidivism by Type of Offense**

| Offense Group of Sentences in 2002 | Number of Current Sentences | Sentences Involving Prior Offenses | Percentage of Recidivism |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Assault                            | 4,390                       | 2,453                              | 56%                      |
| Burglary                           | 1,845                       | 1,124                              | 61%                      |
| Drug                               | 9,232                       | 5,388                              | 58%                      |
| Manslaughter                       | 102                         | 31                                 | 30%                      |
| Murder                             | 132                         | 74                                 | 56%                      |
| Other                              | 2,114                       | 1,367                              | 65%                      |
| Property                           | 8,320                       | 5,197                              | 62%                      |
| Robbery                            | 639                         | 383                                | 60%                      |
| Sex                                | 1,431                       | 714                                | 50%                      |

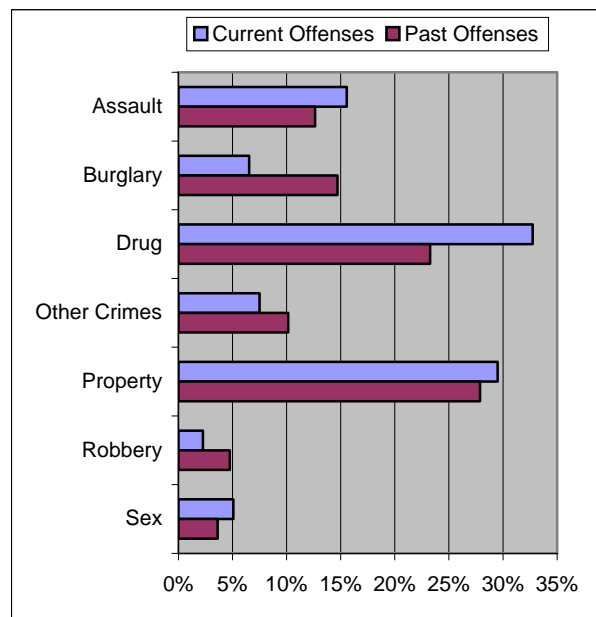
There were 16,731 sentences that involved offenders with a history of prior convictions. The most frequently listed prior offenses were property crimes, closely followed by drug offenses (see table 3).

**Table 3: Past Sentences by Recidivists**

| Offense Group of Past Sentences | Total Number of Prior Sentences | Percent of Prior Sentences |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Assault                         | 3,972                           | 12.6%                      |
| Burglary                        | 4,619                           | 14.7%                      |
| Drug                            | 7,312                           | 23.3%                      |
| Manslaughter                    | 92                              | 0.3%                       |
| Murder                          | 63                              | 0.2%                       |
| Other Crimes                    | 3,191                           | 10.2%                      |
| Property                        | 8,757                           | 27.9%                      |
| Robbery                         | 1,493                           | 4.8%                       |
| Sex                             | 1,139                           | 3.6%                       |

Despite generally held views, the more violent offenses, manslaughter, murder and robbery, accounted for the smallest number of offenses and, along with sex offenses, the lowest recidivism rates. Sex offenses and robbery had the lowest overall rate of current and past offenses. (see figure 2).

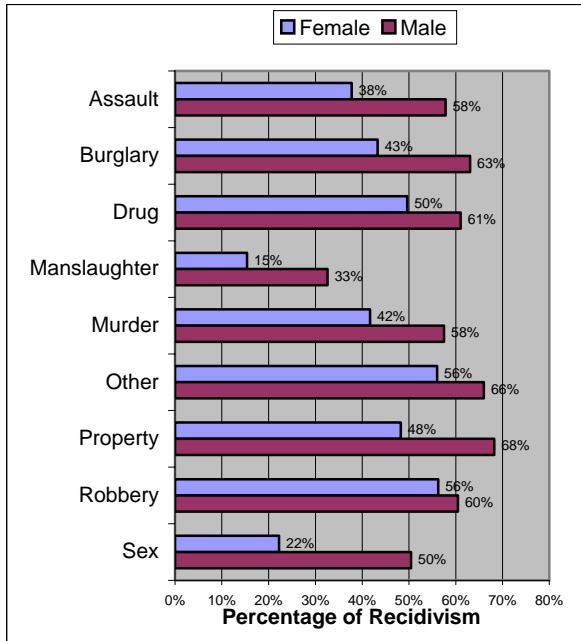
**Figure 2: Current Sentences Compared to Past Sentences<sup>4</sup>**



<sup>4</sup> Figure 2 excludes manslaughter and murder which comprise .4% and .5% of current sentences and .3% and .4% of past sentences respectively.

Figure 3 illustrates recidivism by gender for each offense group. Property offenses were the most likely to have been committed by repeat offenders among men, with a recidivism rate at 68%. Fifty-six percent of women recidivists were convicted of robbery.

**Figure 3: Recidivism by Gender and Offense Group**

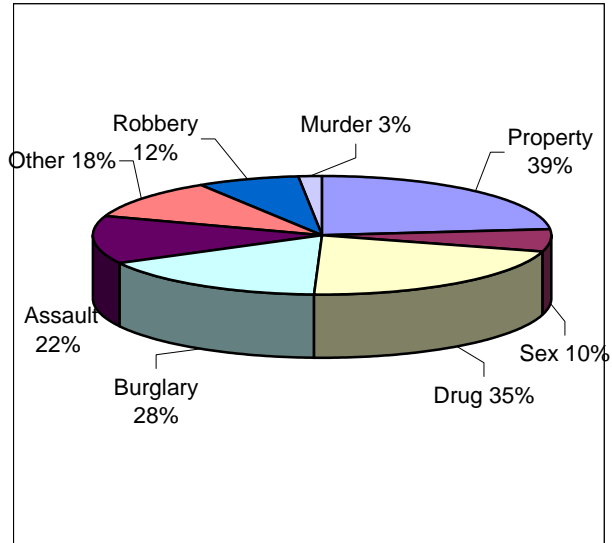


A subset of recidivism is that of offenders sentenced more than once for the same type of criminal behavior. Webster’s WordNet Dictionary defines such an offender as a habitual criminal, though state statutes generally apply the term to persons who are repeatedly arrested for any criminal behavior.

Figure 4 illustrates the percentage of habitual offenders for each offense group.<sup>5</sup> Property offenders were the most likely group to have repeated the same type of offense, followed by drug offenders.

<sup>5</sup> Failure to register as a sex offender was excluded from the analysis of repeat offenders because such a conviction by definition requires a prior sentence for sex crimes and does not involve subsequent sexual misconduct.

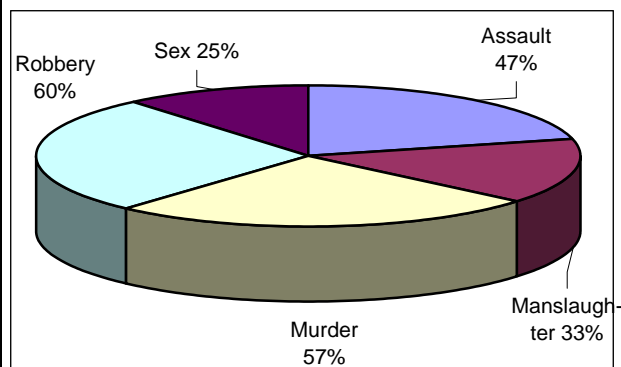
**Figure 4: Habitual Offenders by Offense Group**



**Violent And Nonviolent Offenders**

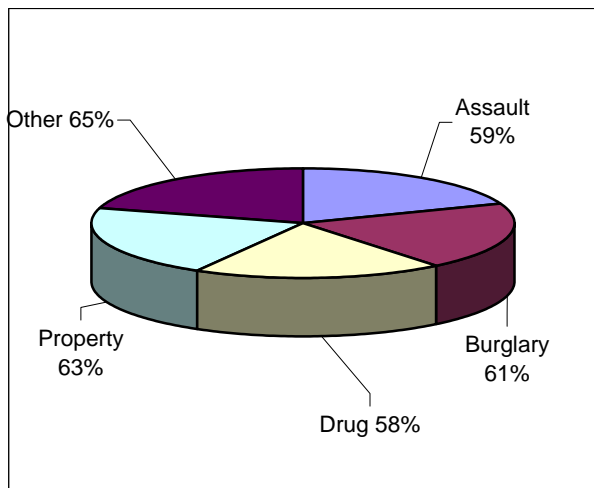
Of the 28,205 sentences entered in 2002, nearly 10% involved violent offenses. Offenders sentenced for non-violent crimes were more likely to have had a previous felony conviction than those sentenced for a violent crime, 61% and 47% respectively. Among recidivists with non-violent current offenses, 21% of the prior convictions were for violent crimes. Recidivists with current violent offenses had a lower percentage of prior convictions for violent crimes at 14%. Of the sentences for violent crimes, the highest recidivism rate was for robbery at 60%, followed by murder and assault (see figure 6).

**Figure 6: Percentage of Recidivism for Violent Offenses**



Of the sentences for non-violent offenses the recidivism rates were close in all the categories. The “other” offense group had the highest recidivism at 65%, followed by 63% for property crimes and 61% for burglary. (see figure 7).

**Figure 7: Percentage of Recidivism for Non-Violent Offenses**



### Conclusion

The Sentencing Guideline’s database does not contain demographic information on individual offenders sufficient to support intensive research into the causes of recidivism. As such, this report is intended to summarize the state’s recidivism statistics and to provide a starting point for reviewing efforts aimed at reducing recidivism. Additional tables and charts relating to recidivism in Washington State can be found on the Sentencing Guidelines Commission’s Internet Website at <http://www.sgc.wa.gov/>.

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### Data:

Offense and offense history data are derived from the Washington Judgment and Sentencing (J & S) forms transmitted to the Sentencing Guidelines Commission by the courts. In reporting on sentences that involved convictions for multiple charges, only the most serious offense was used. Some individual offenders were sentenced for more than one offense in 2002. In such cases each sentence is counted as a separate case record. As such, it should be understood that this report reflects sentencing data, not offender data.

Comments or questions may be directed to:

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