

# Digest 4

## Chapter 7 - Reconvictions

The data contained in some of the charts in this chapter, are accessible by clicking below. You will need Excel 4.0 or later installed on your computer to be able to view the spreadsheets.

Reconviction rates within two years for those released from prison in 1987 to 1993

Reconviction rates within two years by number of previous convictions

Reconviction rates within two years by number of previous convictions



## Introduction

In any consideration of the criminal justice system it is important to look at the extent to which different punishments available from the courts may affect future offending. Reconviction rates provide us with the only viable means of assessing the national impact of community and custodial penalties in preventing reoffending. However, comparing the reconviction rates of different court sentences is complex, for several reasons:

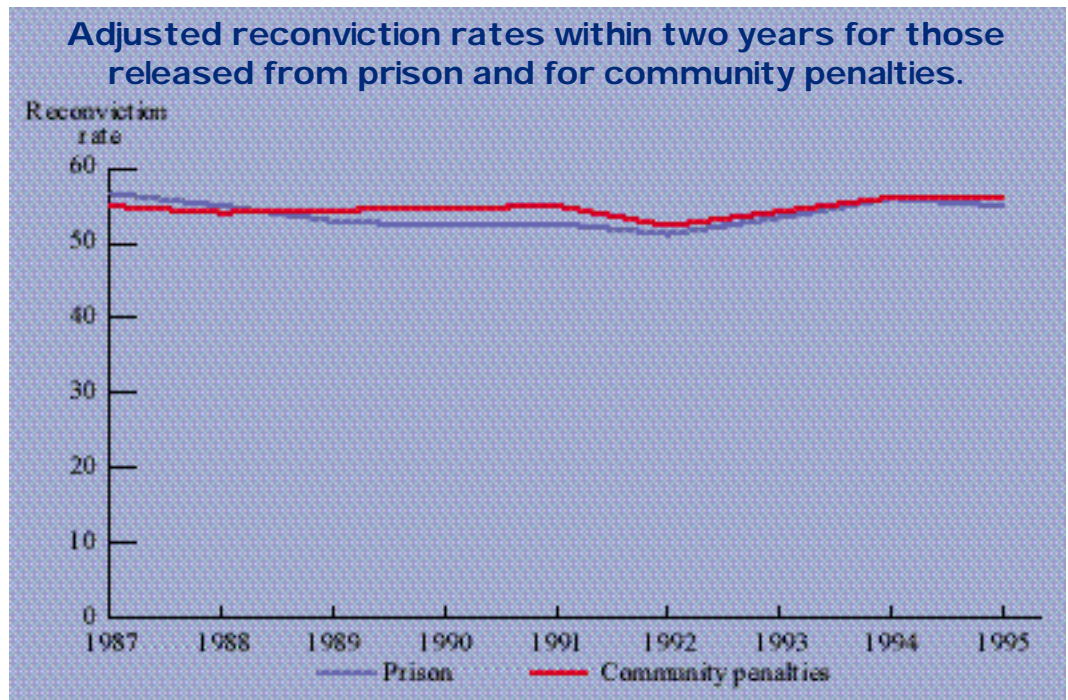
- reconviction rates are only a proxy measure of reoffending
- they are the product of many factors beside the sentence – including the criminal history of the offender and the practice of the police and prosecution service
- different lengths of follow-up period for reconvictions yield different results
- sentencing has other aims besides preventing reoffending
- a direct causal relationship between the sentence (including activities within it) and subsequent behaviour is difficult to establish.

## Summary

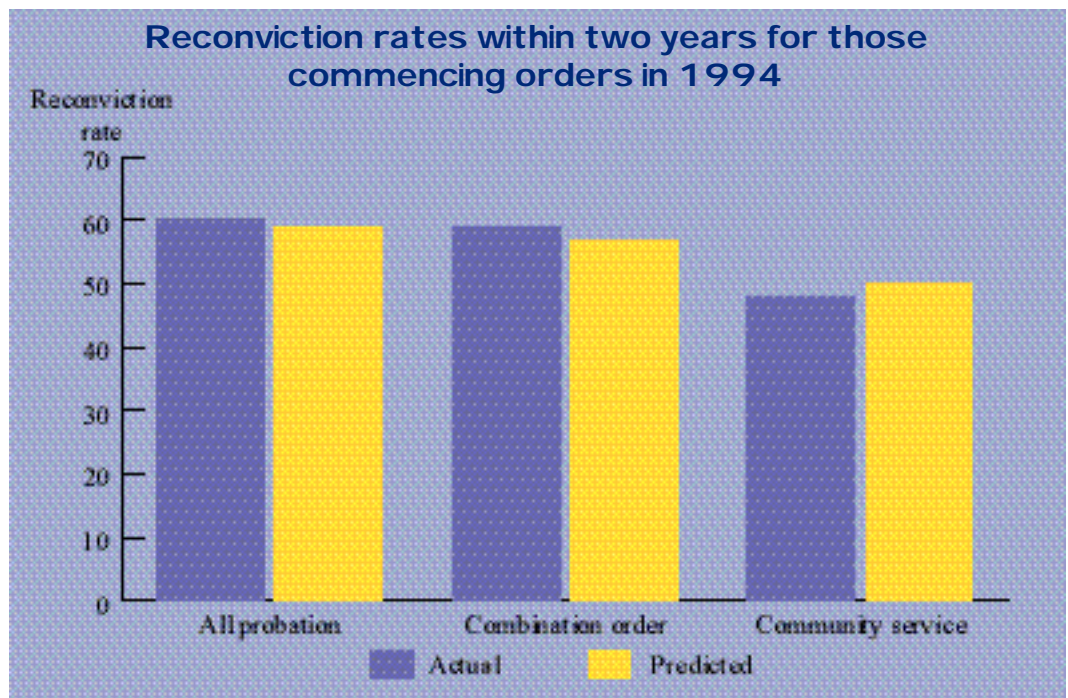
- ④ After adjustments were made for the characteristics of offenders which affect the risk of reconviction (e.g. age, gender and number of previous convictions), there were no significant differences between reconviction rates for custody and all community penalties.
- ④ Research suggests that drugs, employment, accommodation and finances all affect reoffending rates.
- ④ For those commencing community penalties or discharged from prison in 1994.
  - about 70% of offenders aged under 21 were reconvicted within two years compared to just under 40% for those aged 30 and over
  - about 56% of males were reconvicted within two years compared with 45% of females
  - over two-thirds of those with 7 or more previous convictions were reconvicted within two years compared with one-quarter for those with no previous conviction.

## Type of sentence

- ④ After adjustments were made for the characteristics of offenders which affect the risk of reconviction (e.g. age, gender and number of previous convictions), there were no significant differences between reconviction rates for custody and all community penalties.



- ④ For those serving different types of community sentences, reconviction rates were found to be similar to those predicted when allowance is made for age, gender and criminal history.

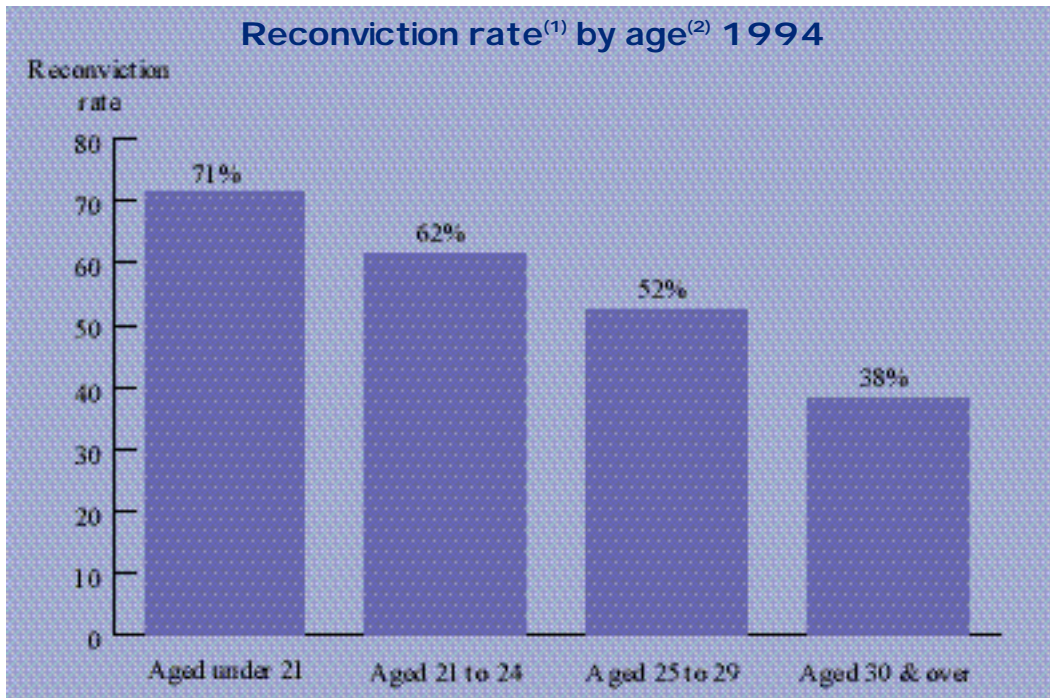


Source: *Reconviction of offenders sentenced or discharged from prison in 1994, England and Wales* (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 5/99).

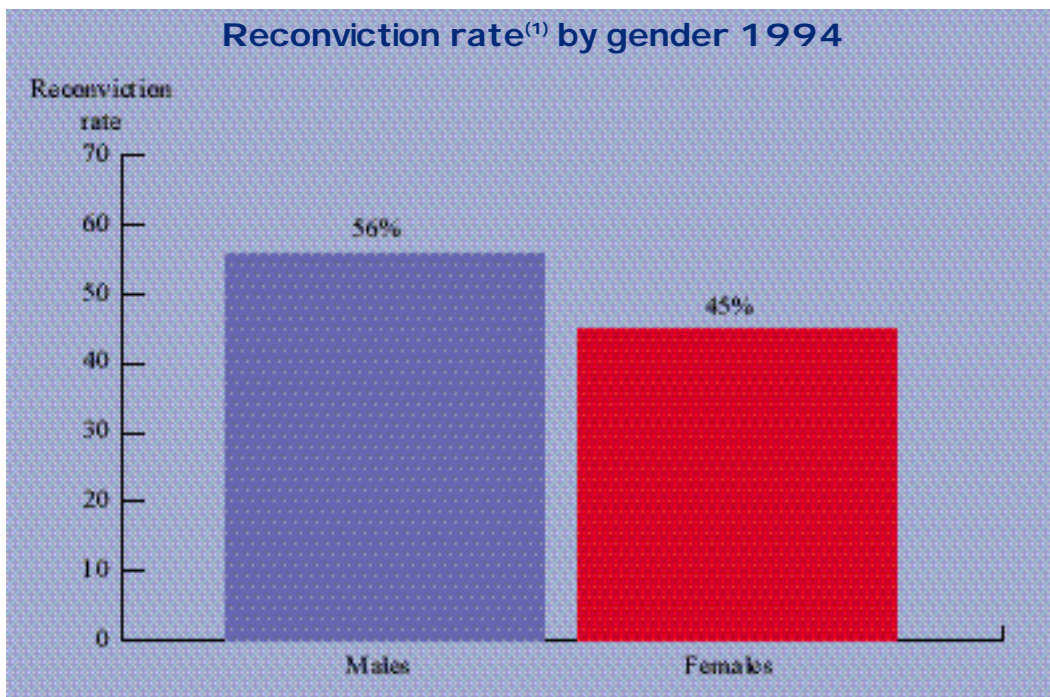
## Age and gender<sup>(1)</sup>

Two of the factors most closely associated with reconvictions are age and gender.

- ④ Age. Just over 70% of offenders aged under 21 are reconvicted within two years of discharge or commencement of order as compared with 62% of offenders aged 21 to 24 years, 52% aged 25 to 29 and 38% for those aged 30 and over.



- ④ Gender. About 56% of males were reconvicted within two years of discharge or commencement of order as compared with 45% of females.



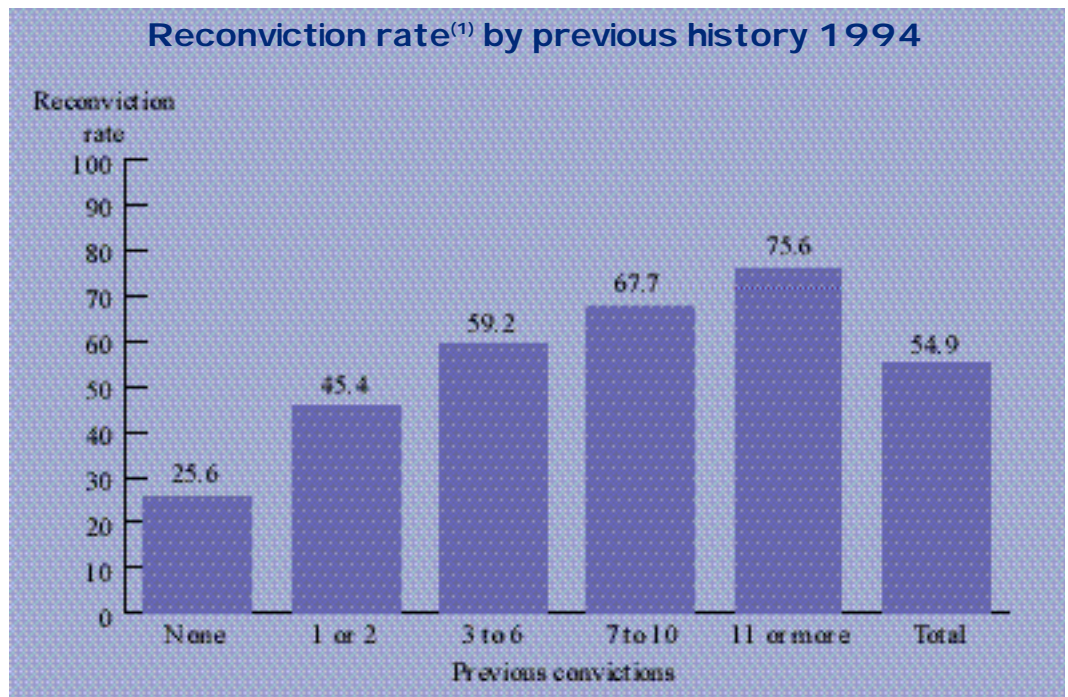
(1) Combined rates for those commencing community penalties or discharged from prison in 1994.

(2) Age at discharge from prison custody or commencement of community penalty.

Source: *Reconvictions of offenders sentenced or discharged from prison in 1994, England and Wales (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 5/99)*.

## Criminal history

- ④ Previous history. Over two-thirds of those with 7 or more previous convictions were reconvicted within two years of the date of commencement of order or discharged from prison compared with one-quarter for those with no previous convictions.



- ④ Previous history is found to be the best predictor of reconviction.
- ④ Research suggests that drugs, employment, accommodation and finances all affect reoffending rates.

(1) Combined rates for those commencing community penalties or discharge from prison in 1994.  
Source: Home Office (unpublished) and *Explaining reconviction following a community sentence: the role of social factors* (Home Office Research Study No. 192).