

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin.

Prisons and Prisoners

Inmates of State prisons are predominantly poor young adult males with less than a high school education. Prison is not a new experience for them; they have been incarcerated before, many first as juveniles. The offense that brought them to prison was a violent crime or a burglary. On the average, they have already served 1 1/2 years on a maximum sentence of 8 172 years. Along with a criminal history, they have a history of drug abuse and are also likely to have a history of alcohol abuse. They are typically housed in a maximum or medium security prison where they are likely to be sharing their living space with at least one other person.

1979 prison census and inmate survey

This sketch of State prison inmates is drawn from information collected during a census of each of the 791 correctional facilities operated by the 50 States and the District of Columbia and a sample survey conducted by a personal interview with more than 12,000 State prison inmates across the country. The Census of State Correctional Facilities and the Survey of Inmates were both conducted for the Bureau of Justice Statistics by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in late 1979. These studies, in general, confirm the findings of similar studies conducted 5 years earlier, while at the same time identifying certain changes in the characteristics of prison populations that have taken place in the intervening

The basic consistency in the findings for 1974 and 1979 suggest that these data represent a reasonably accurate portrait of State prisoners in 1982. The picture of confinement and crowding is a less accurate portrayal of the situation in early 1982. State prison populations have risen 18% since

companion Census of State Correctional Facilities. Topics covered by these two data sources include demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of inmates, criminal histories, adjudication histories for current offenses, drug and alcohol histories, veteran's status, conditions of confinement, physical conditions of prison facilities, degree of prison security,

This bulletin is the second to be

issued by the Bureau of Justice

1979 Survey of Inmates of State

Correctional Facilities and its

Statistics based on the November

prison capacities, overcrowding, prison staff, health care, and inmate programs.

January 1982

To permit maximum use of these data, the Bureau of Justice Statistics has placed public-use data tapes in the criminal justice data archive of the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. For information on acquiring machinereadable data files, call the archive staff at 313/763-5010.

> Benjamin H. Renshaw III **Acting Director**

the 1979 study was conducted without a young people from 18 to 29 years of commensurate increase in prison space. Consequently, space shortages in State prisons are considerably more acute than the 1979 data indicate.

Prisoner characteristics not typical of general population

The racial composition of State prison populations in 1979 had not changed significantly from that recorded 5 years earlier. Blacks, who made up 12% of the total U.S. population, accounted for 48% of the prison population; whites accounted for 50%; other racial groups, 2%. The number of Hispanic prisoners, however, doubled during the 5 years and in 1979 they represented 9% of all State prisoners. The rate of growth for females was substantially higher than for males, yet females represented only 4% of the prisoners, about the same as in 1974.

The largest group of the inmates,

age, accounted for 63% of the population. Less than 1% of the inmates were under 18; only 4% were over 50. In 1979 as in 1974, the median age of inmates was 27.

Education and income low

The 1979 inmates were somewhat better educated than their 1974 counterparts, but nearly 3 out of every 5 had not completed high school. As a group, they averaged 11.2 years of schooling. The lack of a high school diploma undoubtedly contributed to their employment problems and low income during the year prior to the arrest that led to incarceration. Only 60% had been working full time. Among the 30% who had no job, fullor part-time, half were not looking for work. Among inmates admitted to prison after November 1977, one-fifth had no income in the 12 months prior to arrest and another fifth had earned less

than \$3,000.\frac{1}{2} For this group as a whole, the median annual income for the year prior to arrest was \$6,660, far lower than the 1979 national median for males, \$10,972.

Most offenders violent

In 1979, 57% of the of State prisoners had been convicted of violent crimes compared with 52% 5 years earlier. Among the violent offenders, 30% had committed murder, attempted murder, or manslaughter and 45%, robbery. Roughly a third of all inmates were convicted of property crimes; more than half of these were burglars. Three-fourths of the State prison inmates had used drugs, but 7% were in prison because of a drug offense, compared with 10% in 1974. This slight drop may be attributable to decriminalization of certain marijuana offenses by some jurisdictions as well as to increased prosecutorial attention to violent crime cases.

Reflecting the more serious nature of their crimes, prisoners in 1979 were serving somewhat longer sentences than those in 1974. In 1979, 54% of those reporting sentence length had received a maximum sentence of 10 years or more compared to 50% in 1974. Ten percent of the 1979 inmates were serving life sentences. Only 1 inmate in 3 had not served time previously. Of those with a record of prior incarceration, half began that record while still legally a juvenile and over a third had prior incarcerations as both juveniles and adults. The proportion of inmates who were recidivists was the same in 1979 as in 1974, specifically 64%.

Drug and alcohol abuse common

More than half of the State inmates had been regular users sometime in their lives. Among drug users 40% had been heroin addicts: most of the others had been habitual users of marijuana. Among prisoners who said they had used drugs only occasionally (23%), most were marijuana users, but 8% of all inmates said they had used heroin occasionally. About half the inmates drank daily or almost daily in the year before their arrest. Most had done so heavily, consuming the equivalent of 8 cans of beer, 7 glasses of wine, or 10 ounces of hard liquor. Another 26% drank weekly. Some 18% said they did not drink at all. About half of all inmates admitted to drinking, most of

Income data were restricted to persons admitted to prison after November 1977 in order to minimize the extent to which inflation distorts the comparability of incomes earned in different years.

Characteristic	Number '	%	Characteristic	Number	
Total	274,564	100.0	Maximum sentence length Less than 5 years 5 to 9 years 10 to 14 years 15 to 19 years 20 to 97 years 98 years or more Median Life		
	-		Less than 5 years	56,517	2
Age at survey			5 to 9 years	63,775	2
Under 30	173,093	63.0	io to 14 years	39,062	ī
30 and over	173,093 101,471 27.3	37.0	15 to 19 years	24.211	_
Median	27.3	NA	20 to 97 years	48,015	1
			98 years or more	2.143	-
Sex			Median	103.6	
Male Remale	263,484	96.0	Life	27.740	1
Pemale	11,080	4.0	Death	1.270	-
	44,646	•••	Median Life Death Not available	13,832	
Race	100 000	40.6	171 ma agains of an annual aft		
White	135,296	49.6	Time served on current offe	ense	
White Black Other	131,329 6,939	47.8	Less than I year	95,634	3
Other	6,939	2.5	Less than 1 year 1 to 1.9 years 2 to 2.9 years 3 to 3.9 years 4 to 4.9 years 5 to 9.9 years 10 years or more Median (in months) Not available	63,595	2
mail: .f .fa			2 to 2.9 years	40,133	1
Ethnicity Hispanic Non-Hispanic			3 to 3.9 years	24,273	
Hispanic	25,816	9.4	4 to 4.9 years	16,338	
Non-Hispanic	248,148	90.6	5 to 9.9 years	27,344	1
			10 years or more	6,057	
Prior incarceration record			Median (in months)	18.0	
With prior incarceration	175,473	63.9	Not available	1,191	
Juvenile only	21,668 79,652 62,476	7.9	}		
Adult only	79,652	29.0	Education		
Both	62,476	22.8	Less than 12 years	159,340	5
Not available	11,680	4.3	Less than 12 years 12 years or more	115,224	4
Without prior			Median	11.2	
incarceration	97,866	35.9	1		
Not available	1,225	0.4	Prearrest employment state	15	
Character of the control of the cont			Employed	192,800	7
Current offense			Full-time	165,577	6
	157,742	57.5	Part-time	27,223	
Murder & attempted			Not employed	81,005	2
murder	37,352	13.6	Looking for work	38,230	1:
Manslaughter	10,941	4.0	Not looking for work	42,433	1
Sexual assault	17,053	6.2	Not available	342	
murder Manslaughter Sexual assault Robbery Assault Other Property Burglary Larceny Auto theft Forgery, fraud,	68,324	24.9	Employed Full-time Part-time Not employed Looking for work Not looking for work Not available Not available	759	
Assault	17,554	8.4			
Other	6,517	2.4	Prearrest annual income		
Property	85,562	31.1	Total I	25,940	10
Burglary	49,687	18.1	With income	20,172	7
Larceny	13,018	4.7	Prearrest annual income Total ¹ With income Less than \$3,000 \$3,000-\$9,999 \$10,000 or more Don't know Median	4,982	1
Auto theft	5,138	1.9	\$3,000-\$9,999	7,834	3
Forgery, fraud,			\$10,000 or more	6,457	2
embezzlement	11,894	4.3	Don't know	899	,
Other	5,825	2.i	Median Without income	\$6,660	
Drug	19,120	7.1	Without income	5,768	2
Public order	10,982	4.0	1	-,	_
Other Drug Public order Unspecified	859	0.3			
NOTE: Detail may not add			Includes only persons admi		

them heavily, just prior to the offense that brought them to prison.

Most held in secure prisons

Almost all the inmates were held in traditional, secure-confinement institutions; only 4% were in relatively open facilities providing access to community resources.² Of the total 223 community-based facilities in the United States, Florida accounted for more than twice as many (38) as any other State. In some States, however.

²In the 1979 census, a correctional facility was considered a community-based residence rather than a confinement institution if at least half the residents were regularly permitted (or eligible) to depart unaccompanied for the daily use of community resources, such as schools or treatment programs, or for seeking or holding employment.

such residences may be operated through agencies other than the Department of Corrections. Of the Nation's 568 confinement facilities, the largest single group (73) was in North Carolina; on the average, however, that State's facilities had a lower capacity than those in most other jurisdictions.³ Texas held the largest number of inmates (26,290), followed by California (22,745) and Florida (19,554).

Confinement conditions vary

The largest group of inmates in confinement institutions (42%) was held under maximum security conditions; 37% under medium security; 19% under

3Details on facility capacity will be presented in subsequent report.

Number of facilities and inmates, by type of facility, security level, region, and State, November 1979

Region and State		All fa	cilities	Confinement facilities Inmates							Community-based facilities	
United States 791 274,563 568 263,553 109,738 98,189 51,193 3,616 817 223 11,1 Northeast 115 41,520 85 40,700 19,630 14,933 4,869 1,040 222 30 0 Maine 5 6844 3 637 682 233 228 0 0 2 New Hampshire 3 299 1 281 20 233 228 0 0 2 Vermont 6 376 6 376 95 132 113 36 0 0 Massachusetts 19 2,712 13 2,653 798 1,209 366 13 47 6 Rhode Stland 6 741 5 673 295 192 113 36 0 0 Massachusetts 19 3,631 10 3,631 1,635 218 102 10 0 0 0 Massachusetts 19 3,631 10 3,631 1,635 218 102 10 0 0 0 Massachusetts 19 5,714 30 1,633 778 1 10 0 0 0 0 Massachusetts 19 5,714 30 1,633 778 1 1 0 0 0 0 0 Massachusetts 19 7,714 50 10 1,714 1 1 0 0 0 0 0 Massachusetts 19 7,714 1 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	,			Pacil-			1111101		Not	·····		-3
Northeast Naine Na	Region and State	ities	Inmates	ities	Total	Maximum	Medium	Minimum	classified	Other	ities	Inmates
Maine	United States		274,563	568	263,553	109,738	98,189	51,193	3,616	817	223	11,010
New Hampshire 3 299	Northeast	115	41,620		40,700	19,630	14,933	4,869	1,040	228	30	920
Vermont									-	0		47
Missaehusetts									-	-		18
Rhode Island 6 741 5 673 285 108 123 119 38 1 Connecticut 10 3,831 10 3,831 1,065 2,664 102 0 0 0 0 New York 33 19,426 30 19,199 10,233 7,589 1,377 0 0 3 New Jersey 9 5,919 8 5,890 3,504 239 1,3699 778 0 1 Pennsylvenia 24 7,632 9 7,360 3,248 2,591 1,284 94 143 15 North Central 157 61,682 101 59,3399 23,080 23,787 11,340 1,183 9 56 2,700 100 13 13,362 10 15,2399 23,080 23,787 11,340 1,183 9 56 2,700 100 13 13,362 10 15,239 23,080 23,787 11,340 1,183 9 56 2,700 100 13 13,362 10 15,2431 2,947 1,465 735 103 0 6 Illinois 21 11,627 12 11,1219 3,595 5,158 2,128 368 0 9 Michigan 40 14,018 25 13,347 6,022 3,555 5,158 2,128 368 0 9 Michigan 40 14,018 25 13,347 6,022 3,555 3,153 2,128 368 0 9 Michigan 40 14,018 25 13,347 6,022 3,555 3,153 2,122 368 0 9 Michigan 40 14,018 25 13,347 6,022 3,555 3,158 2,122 368 0 9 Michigan 40 14,018 25 13,347 6,022 3,555 3,158 2,122 368 0 9 Michigan 40 14,018 25 13,347 6,022 3,555 3,773 0 0 0 15 Michigan 40 14,018 25 13,347 6,022 3,555 3,158 2,122 368 0 9 Michigan 40 14,018 25 13,347 6,022 3,255 3,250 3,773 0 0 0 15 Michigan 40 14,018 25 13,347 6,022 3,255 3,250 3,773 0 0 0 15 Michigan 40 14,018 25 1,987 1,016 827 144 0 0 0 2 2 North Dakota 2 235 2 235 186 40 9 0 0 0 7 Michigan 40 14,018 25 14,000 3,00										-		0
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minimum security; and 2% either not classified or categorized in a different manner. The proportion of inmates held in maximum security facilities, which have extremely high operating cost, ranged from 94% in Texas to less than 10% in New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Wyoming. In 14 States more than half of all prisoners were

confined in maximum security institutions.

If 60 square feet per person is used as a standard, then 58% of all one-person cells, 90% of all two-person cells, and 20% of all larger living units in traditional prisons were overcrowded. No State avoided placing at least some of

its inmates into space that was less than 60 square feet per person. The 39 States with community-based facilities generally did not have as severe a problem with overcrowding in these facilities as they did among their secure institutions.

The most common confinement unit

in each State was the one-person cell. Overcrowding occurs in these units when the cell contains less than 60 square feet or more than one person. Two States, Arkansas and South Dakota, had no overcrowded one-person cells, but at least 97% of the one-person cells were overcrowded in Mississippi, North Dakota, Texas, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Slightly more than 97,000 persons were employed in State correctional facilities in 1979; more than 97% of them were employed full time. The total number of correctional personnel increased by some 60% during 1974-79, with a resultant decline from 3.2 to 2.9 in the number of inmates per full-time

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staff member. Among traditional confinement units, there were 58,700

full-time employees with direct responsibility for inmate supervision. On the average, each of these employees was responsible for 4.5 inmates, but the number ranged from 2.1 in Rhode Island to 13.7 in Texas.

Further reading

The first release of data from the November 1979 Survey of Inmates of State Correctional Facilities and its companion Census of State Correctional Facilities was the Veterans in Prison bulletin, October 1981, NCJ-79232. The most recent prison population data was released in the Prisoners at Midyear 1981 bulletin, September 1981, NCJ-78756.

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