NORTH CAROLINA
SENTENCING AND
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COMMISSION

PRELIMINARY EVALUATION
OF THE EXPANSION OF PRS
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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the Justice Reinvestment Act (JRA) expanded post-release supervision (PRS) to include all felons exiting prison. This research summary addresses a question of interest to policymakers: has this expansion had an effect on public safety? More specifically, has PRS for low-level felons (Class F-I prisoners) had a measurable effect on recidivism rates? This research summary provides a first look at the effect of PRS on recidivism for low-level felons using data from the 2014 and 2018 adult recidivism reports (pre- and post-JRA samples respectively).[1] Preliminary findings indicate PRS had no effect on recidivist arrest rates for Class F-I prisoners.

METHODOLOGY

The effect of the expansion of PRS to Class F-I prisoners on recidivist arrests was examined using a quasi-experimental design that matched offenders from pre- and post-JRA samples using propensity score matching (PSM). PSM estimates the effect of a treatment or policy and is commonly used in studies where individuals are not randomly assigned to control/test groups in order to minimize selection bias.

Offenders in each sample were matched using a propensity score that was created using 17 independent variables identifying an offender's personal characteristics, criminal history, and incarceration profile to account for changes in the sample composition pre- and post-JRA. Variables of interest were selected following an examination of the Class F-I post-JRA sample. Prior to matching, the post-JRA sample was comprised of 4,420 Class F-I offenders released from prison onto PRS in FY 2015 who had a full two-year follow-up. A summary of select variables used to match the pre- and post-JRA samples is provided in Table 1.

In order to isolate the program effect of PRS for Class F-I prisoners, Class B1-E prisoners with PRS were used as a baseline to control for system-level factors (e.g., crime rate).

Pre- and post-JRA Class B1-E prison releases were subject to the same matching criteria used for Class F-I prisoners.

Table 1: Select Post-JRA Sample Statistics[2]	
33% 21-29 Years at Entry	59% Under 21 at 1st CJC
86% Male	Average Prior Arrests – 6
54% Nonwhite	57% Prior Incarceration
70% Dropout/GED	61% New Crime Entry

Once each pre- and post-JRA sample was matched and balanced (indicating the samples were comparable), pre- and post-JRA recidivist arrest rates were compared within each offense class grouping. Since recidivist arrest rates for Class B1-E and Class F-I prisoners have historically followed the same trend, any changes found in this comparison could be attributed to the program intervention (PRS).

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Multiple propensity score models were run to determine the effect of PRS on recidivist arrests; results were consistent in each of the models. Accounting for personal characteristics and system-level changes, no difference was found in recidivist arrest rates for Class F-I offenders when comparing the pre-JRA (no PRS) and post-JRA (PRS) samples.

It is important to note the purpose of PRS is multifaceted and includes not only controlling conditions, but also reintegrative conditions. In this analysis, recidivism was the sole measure used to assess effectiveness; it may be that PRS has had a positive effect on other outcomes (e.g., obtaining employment) that were not examined. Additionally, recidivism outcomes were examined during early implementation of the expansion of PRS – a relatively new strategy for Class F-I offenders. Using data further along in implementation may provide more insight on the effectiveness of PRS in reducing recidivist arrests for Class F-I prisoners.

Evaluation of the Expansion of PRS: Methodology and Findings

Individual Factors	Matched pre- and post-JRA Class F-I prisoners using 17 variables identifying their personal characteristics, criminal history, and incarceration profile.
System-Level Changes	Controlled for system-level factors affecting recidivism using pre- and post-JRA Class B1-E prisoners subject to same matching criteria used for Class F-I prisoners.
Isolated Effect of PRS	Preliminary findings indicated no difference in recidivist arrest rates for Class F-I prisoners when comparing the pre- and post-JRA samples after accounting for individual factors and system-level changes.
Future Research	Comprehensively evaluate the effect of the expansion of PRS by using data further along in implementation and by examining additional variables (e.g., correctional programs) and outcomes.

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[1] *See* www.NCSPAC.org for the NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission's adult recidivism reports and all other publications.
[2] Additional matched variables include marital status, employment status, substance abuse/use, age at first criminal justice contact (CJC), most frequently occurring prior arrest type (property), risk score, time served, number of infractions, most serious infraction (Class A), and custody classification at release.