

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE OUTCOMES FOR PRISON RELEASES ASSIGNED TO SELECT CORRECTIONAL JOBS AND PROGRAMS

### Background

In 1998, the North Carolina General Assembly directed the Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission to prepare biennial reports evaluating the effectiveness of the State's correctional programs (N.C.G.S. § 164-47). Correctional resources and, specifically, their effectiveness in increasing public safety and deterring future crime have continued to be of interest to legislators and policy makers. It is the goal of most correctional jobs and programs to manage inmate behavior by limiting idleness, offer them opportunities that will assist in altering negative behavioral patterns and, consequently, lower their risk of reoffending (i.e., their recidivism). This research brief is a follow-up to the Commission's 2018 adult recidivism report that examined recidivism for Structured Sentencing Act (SSA) offenders who were released from prison or placed on supervised probation in FY 2015.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Purpose and Sample Characteristics

This research brief focuses on the 15,077 prisoners in the FY 2015 prison release sample (i.e., prisoners with a felony offense) and examines assignment to select correctional jobs and programs during incarceration, as well as recidivism during a two-year follow-up.<sup>3</sup> Analyses focus on outcomes by gender, length of job assignment, and program completion as applicable. Figure 1 highlights some of the notable characteristics of the FY 2015 prison release sample.

**Figure 1**  
**FY 2015 Prison Release Sample**

#### Sample Characteristics

- 15% had a Class B1 – D felony, 32% had a Class E – G Felony, and 53% had a Class H – I felony
- 90% of the sample were male and a majority of the offenders were black (54%)
- The average age at prison release was 34
- 74% did not graduate from high school
- Over three-fourths (78%) were identified as having a possible substance use/abuse problem
- 94% had a prior arrest
- 56% had a prior incarceration

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2015 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

<sup>1</sup> See the Sentencing Commission's *Correctional Program Evaluation: Offenders Placed on Probation or Released from Prison in Fiscal Year 2015* (also referred to as the 2018 adult recidivism report) at [http://www.nccourts.org/Courts/CRS/Councils/spac/Documents/recidivism\\_2018.pdf](http://www.nccourts.org/Courts/CRS/Councils/spac/Documents/recidivism_2018.pdf).

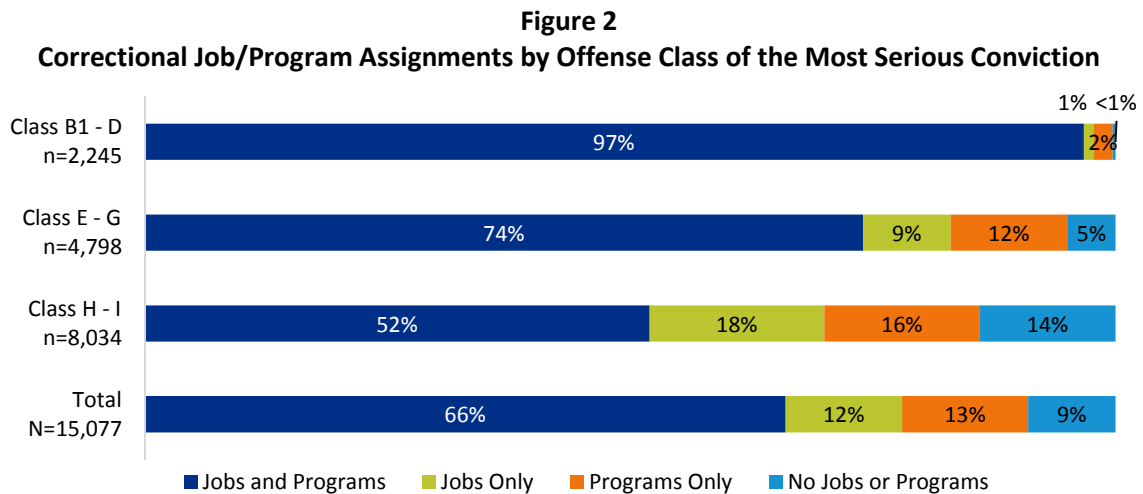
<sup>2</sup> Data for offenders were provided by the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI).

<sup>3</sup> Additional information on correctional job and program assignments and recidivism can be found in Chapter 4 and Appendix F of the Commission's 2018 adult recidivism report.

## Correctional Job/Program Assignments

As shown in Figure 2, sentence lengths and opportunities for job and program assignments were closely related.

- 66% of prisoners were assigned to at least one job and one program during their incarceration.
- Nearly all Class B1 – D felons (i.e., prisoners with the longest sentence lengths) were assigned to both a job and a program during their incarceration.
- Class H and I felons (i.e., prisoners with the shortest sentence lengths) had the highest percentage with no job or program assignment (14%).



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2015 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

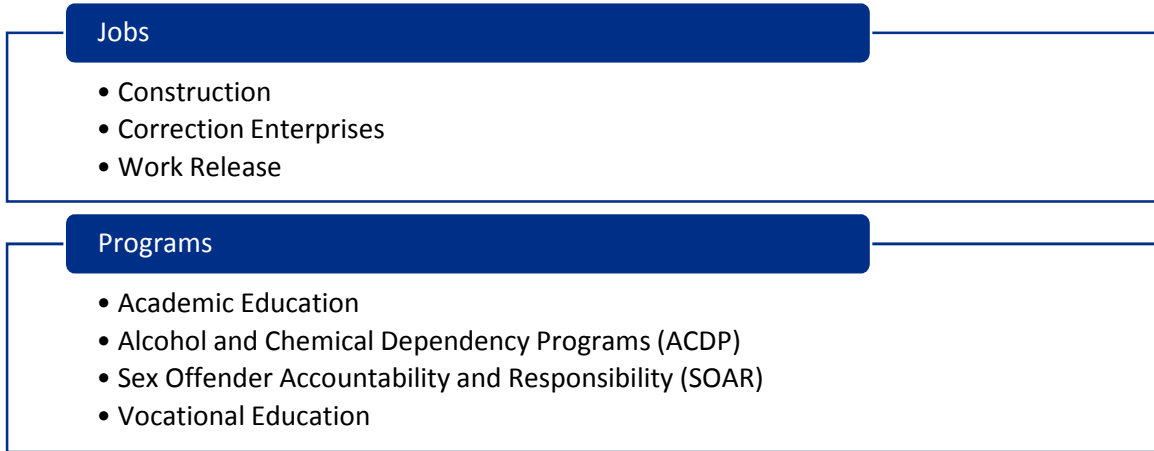
While not shown in Figure 2, given the large proportion of males in the prison release sample, the distribution of job and program assignments for males was similar to all prisoners. However, females were less likely than males to have both job and program assignments (58% of females compared to 67% of males). Females were more likely to have program assignments only (20% compared to 12% of males).

## Select Correctional Jobs/Programs

In addition to examining correctional jobs and programs generally, seven correctional assignments were selected for more specific analysis (see Figure 3) and are described more fully in the Appendix. The seven assignments were selected in consultation with DPS as being of particular interest.

*Note that prisoners can be assigned to multiple prison jobs/programs during their incarceration period and, therefore, may be represented in more than one select correctional job or program.*

**Figure 3**  
**Select Correctional Jobs/Programs**



**Select Correctional Jobs/Programs by Gender**

Among the select correctional jobs and programs examined, the largest proportions of prisoners were assigned to Academic Education and Vocational Education, and the smallest proportions for Construction, Work Release and SOAR (see Table 1).

- Higher percentages of females were assigned to ACDP and Vocational Education.
- A higher percentage of males were assigned to Correction Enterprises compared to females.
- A similar proportion of males and females were assigned to Work Release and Academic Education.

**Table 1**  
**Select Correctional Job/Program Assignments by Gender**

Select Correctional Jobs/Programs	Prisoners N=15,077		Males n=13,498		Females n=1,579	
	# in Program	% of all Prisoners	# in Program	% of all Males	# in Program	% of all Females
<b>Jobs</b>						
Construction	418	3	418	3	n/a	n/a
Correction Enterprises	1,835	12	1,729	13	106	7
Work Release	740	5	679	5	61	4
<b>Programs</b>						
Academic Education	6,609	44	5,883	44	726	46
ACDP	3,418	23	2,833	21	585	37
SOAR	45	<1	45	<1	n/a	n/a
Vocational Education	4,549	30	3,938	29	611	39

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2015 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

## Recidivism

Recidivism rates were determined for prison releases assigned to select correctional jobs and programs. For comparison purposes, recidivism rates were also provided for the entire prison release sample and for those who were assigned to any job or program. Fingerprinted arrests within a two-year follow-up period were the primary measure of recidivism, supplemented by information on recidivist incarcerations.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, the recidivist arrest rate for prisoners in the FY 2015 sample was 49% and the recidivist incarceration rate was 32% (see Figure 4). These outcome measures were also examined for correctional jobs and programs overall, as well as for select correctional jobs and programs. While not shown in Figure 4, it is worth noting that prisoners with no job or program assignment had higher recidivism rates (primarily those prisoners with shorter sentence lengths).

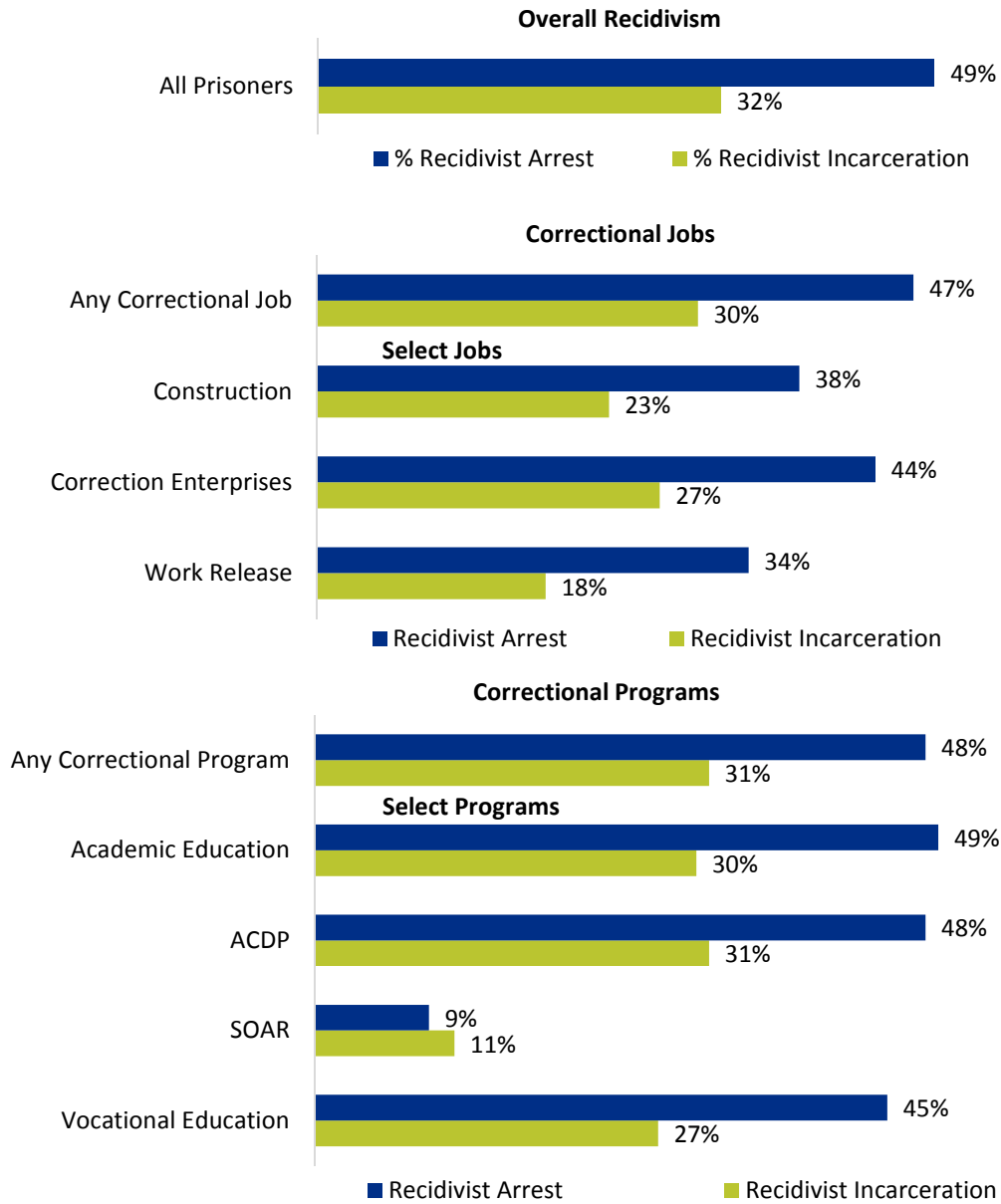
- Recidivism rates for all prisoners were nearly identical to the overall rates for prisoners assigned to any correctional job and any correctional program.
- Recidivist arrest rates ranged from a low of 9% (SOAR) to a high of 49% (Academic Education).
- Recidivism rates for prisoners in Academic Education and ACDP were similar to the prison release sample.
- Prisoners in Correction Enterprises and Vocational Education had slightly lower recidivism rates than the prison release sample.
- Recidivism rates for prisoners in Construction, SOAR, and Work Release were lower than the recidivism rates for the prison release sample.

It is important to consider correctional job and program requirements, as well as the characteristics of prisoners who were assigned to particular jobs and programs, when comparing recidivism rates of different correctional assignments. It is also important to remember that prisoners may have participated in multiple correctional assignments while incarcerated, and therefore may be represented in more than one category. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, access to job and program assignments varies by prison, and the capacity of those assignments can be affected by the availability of funding.

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<sup>4</sup> For detailed definitions of recidivism and other key terms, see Appendix B of the Commission's 2018 adult recidivism report.

**Figure 4**  
**Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Job/Program Assignments**



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2015 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

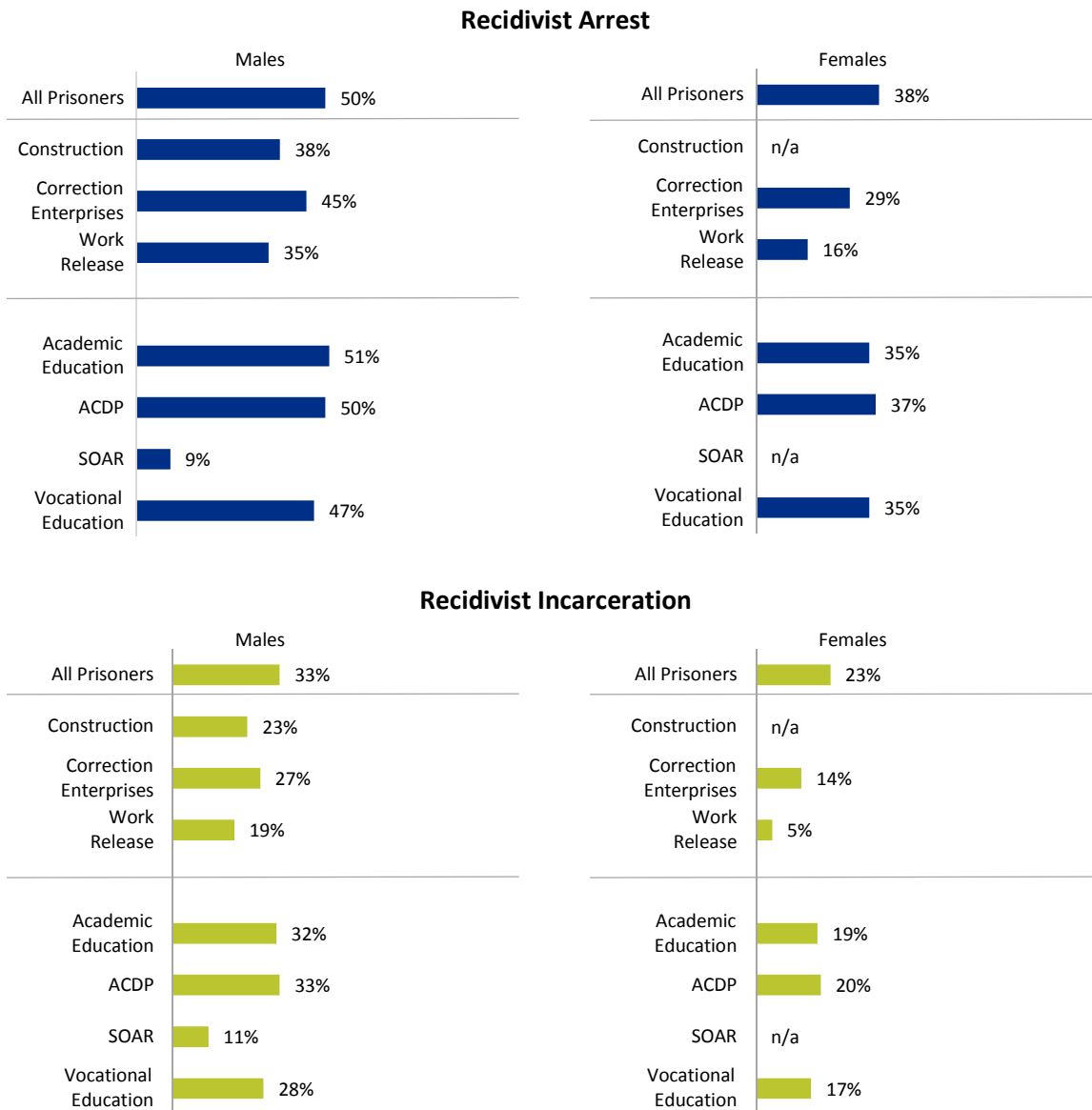
**Recidivism by Select Correctional Job/Program Assignments and Gender**

Figure 5 expands on the information provided in Figure 4 by examining criminal justice outcomes for select correctional job/program assignments by gender. Overall, the recidivist arrest rates were 50% for males and 38% for females; the recidivist incarceration rates were 33% for males and 23% for females.

- Regardless of the select correctional job or program, males had higher recidivism rates than females.

- Males and females in the correctional jobs examined had lower recidivism rates than the overall recidivism rates for males and females.
- Compared to the overall recidivism rates for males and females, prisoners in Academic Education, ACDP, and Vocational Education programs had similar or slightly lower recidivism rates.
- Males in the SOAR program had much lower recidivism rates than the overall male prison release sample.

**Figure 5  
Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Job/Program Assignments by Gender**



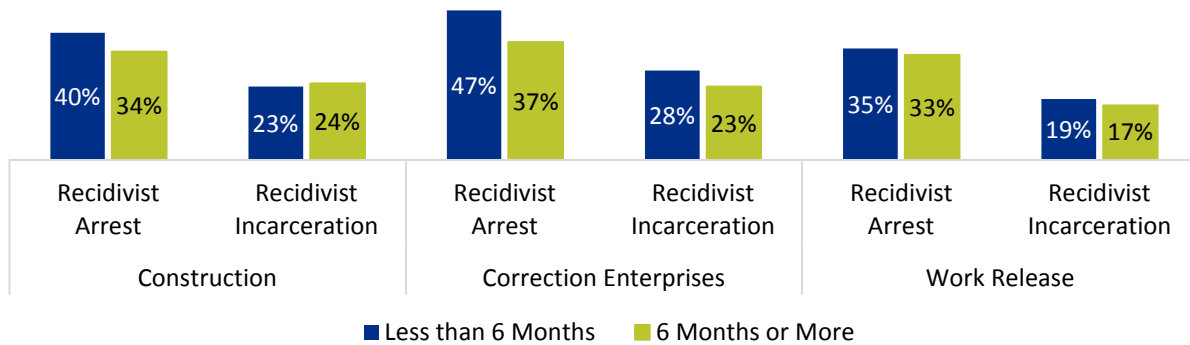
SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2015 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

## Recidivism for Select Correctional Jobs by Length of Job Assignment

Studying the length of time prisoners spent working while incarcerated provides insight into whether a relationship exists between longer job assignments and recidivism.<sup>5</sup> Figure 6 shows recidivism rates for select correctional jobs by length of job assignment and is expanded to include gender in Table 2.

- Whether overall or by gender, recidivism rates were generally lower for prison releases with longer job assignments.
- The higher recidivism rates for prisoners with less than 6 months of job participation might be the result of this group being comprised primarily of prisoners who served the shortest sentences and had the highest overall recidivism rates among the prison release sample.

**Figure 6**  
**Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Jobs by Length of Job Assignment**



**Table 2**  
**Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Jobs by Gender and Length of Job Assignment**

Criminal Justice Outcomes	Length of Job Assignment in Months			
	Male		Female	
	Less than 6	6 or More	Less than 6	6 or More
<b>Construction</b>	n=261	n=157	n/a	n/a
Recidivist Arrest	40%	34%	n/a	n/a
Recidivist Incarceration	23%	24%	n/a	n/a
<b>Correction Enterprises</b>	n=1,216	n=513	n=74	n=32
Recidivist Arrest	47%	38%	34%	19%
Recidivist Incarceration	29%	24%	16%	9%
<b>Work Release</b>	n=250	n=429	n=24	n=37
Recidivist Arrest	36%	35%	21%	14%
Recidivist Incarceration	20%	18%	4%	5%

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2015 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

<sup>5</sup> The length of job assignment represents prisoners' total time in select jobs over the course of their incarceration.

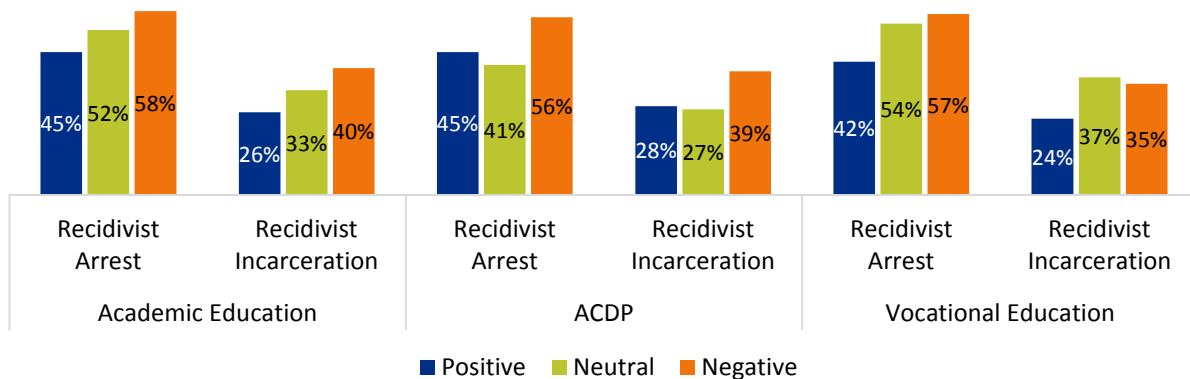
## Recidivism for Select Correctional Programs by Program Outcome

It is important to consider the nature of prisoners' participation in correctional programs and how it relates to recidivism. For this analysis, the results of program assignments were categorized into three outcomes: positive (e.g., completion, graduation), neutral (e.g., illness, transferred to another prison, released from prison, program termination), and negative (e.g., removal due to disciplinary action, failure to complete the program).<sup>6</sup>

Figure 7 shows program outcomes and recidivism rates for select programs. Table 3 expands on Figure 7 by showing recidivism rates in the context of both program outcomes and gender.

- Whether overall or by gender, recidivism rates were lower for prison releases with positive program outcomes than for those with negative program outcomes.
- Overall, recidivism rates for prisoners with positive program outcomes were more than 10 percentage points lower than recidivism rates for those with negative program outcomes.
- Generally, recidivism rates for prisoners with neutral outcomes were in between those prisoners with positive outcomes and those with negative outcomes.

**Figure 7**  
**Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Programs by Program Outcome**



Note: Criminal justice outcomes for participants in the SOAR program (which is for males only) can be found in Table 3.

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2015 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

<sup>6</sup> When prisoners had more than one type of outcome within each program category, the outcome was determined using the following ranking: positive, neutral, and negative, giving priority to any positive outcome. For prisoners in ACDP, the outcome of prisoners' last ACDP participation prior to release was chosen for analysis. A ranking of program outcomes was unnecessary.



**Table 3**  
**Criminal Justice Outcomes for Select Correctional Programs by Gender and Program Outcome**

Criminal Justice Outcomes	Program Outcome					
	Positive	Male Neutral	Negative	Positive	Female Neutral	Negative
<b>Academic Education</b>	n=3,162	n=1,596	n=1,125	n=424	n=228	n=74
Recidivist Arrest	46%	53%	60%	32%	39%	38%
Recidivist Incarceration	27%	34%	41%	14%	25%	30%
<b>ACDP</b>	n=1,912	n=145	n=776	n=395	n=42	n=148
Recidivist Arrest	48%	43%	57%	34%	33%	45%
Recidivist Incarceration	31%	28%	41%	15%	24%	30%
<b>SOAR</b>	n=41	n=3	n=1	n/a	n/a	n/a
Recidivist Arrest	10%	0%	0%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Recidivist Incarceration	10%	0%	100%	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Vocational Education</b>	n=2,900	n=346	n=692	n=473	n=73	n=65
Recidivist Arrest	43%	55%	58%	32%	52%	37%
Recidivist Incarceration	25%	38%	36%	15%	27%	23%

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2015 Correctional Program Evaluation Data

**Summary**

This research brief is intended to provide an overview of criminal justice outcomes for select correctional job and program assignments. Although this brief examines correctional assignments, length of job employment, and program completion and their relationships to recidivism, the analysis does not examine other key characteristics of prisoners that may also affect recidivism (e.g., age, risk level, need level). As such, the findings are not intended to be exhaustive. A validated risk and need assessment for prisoners was not available for this time period, which would offer a more comprehensive examination of program effectiveness. Once these data are available, risk, need, and other factors such as custody classification level and Service Priority Level should be considered in the context of correctional assignments and recidivism.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For more information on DPS case management, risk/need assessments, and Service Priority Levels, see [https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/C.1400\\_%20070317.pdf](https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/C.1400_%20070317.pdf).

## APPENDIX: SUMMARIES OF SELECT CORRECTIONAL JOB/PROGRAM ASSIGNMENTS

### Select Job Assignments

- **Construction:** The Inmate Construction Program is a partnership among the offices of Rehabilitative Programs and Services (RPS) and Central Engineering within the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (DPS). The program's purpose is to meet the demands of the prison facility construction, expansion, and renovation projects by using inmate labor to reduce the cost of prison construction projects. The program also provides inmates an opportunity to learn on-the-job marketable skills to help them prepare for their release back into the community. <https://www.ncdps.gov/e2200-inmate-construction-program>.
- **Correction Enterprises:** Correction Enterprises is a self-supporting prison industry program operating within the DPS in various prison units across the state. Correction Enterprises provides inmates with opportunities to learn job skills by producing goods and services for the DPS and other tax-supported entities. <https://www.correctionenterprises.com/>.
- **Work Release Program:** The Work Release Program provides select inmates the opportunity for employment in the community during imprisonment, addressing the transitional needs of soon-to-be released inmates. Inmates are carefully screened for participation and can only be approved for the program by prison managers or the Post-Release Supervision and Parole Commission. [https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/documents/files/E.0700\\_06\\_15\\_17.pdf](https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/documents/files/E.0700_06_15_17.pdf).

### Select Program Assignments

- **Academic Education:** Academic Education is administered by the RPS Section within the DPS. Post-secondary education is offered through continuing education (community college) courses of study for adult offenders and/or youthful offenders who have their diploma or high school equivalency credentials. <https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/documents/files/2015%20EDSvcsAnnual%20Report.pdf>.
- **Alcohol and Chemical Dependency Programs (ACDP):** Staff from the ACDP administer and coordinate chemical dependency screening, complete a common assessment and provide intervention, treatment, aftercare, and continuing care services for female and male inmates with substance abuse problems. For the ACDP summary, only prisoners who received prison-based intermediate and long-term intensive treatment were included. For additional information, see the DPS's Substance Use Disorder Treatment Programs Annual Report at [https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/DPS\\_Substance\\_Abuse\\_Program\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2018\\_03\\_01.pdf](https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/DPS_Substance_Abuse_Program_Annual_Report_2018_03_01.pdf).
- **Sex Offender Accountability and Responsibility (SOAR):** The SOAR program provides treatment for male inmates who have committed sexual offenses and meet eligibility criteria for the program. The program's goal is to change the offender's cognition, values, and expectations that have supported and maintained their sexually abusive cycle of behavior.
- **Vocational Education:** Vocational Education is administered by the RPS Section within the DPS and is a collaborative effort with the North Carolina Community College System. Vocational training (e.g., welding, cosmetology, horticulture) is provided through curriculum or continuing education offerings, or a combination of both. <https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/documents/files/2015%20EDSvcsAnnual%20Report.pdf>.