

EXPERT PLATFORM ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Recidivism in the Republic of Ireland – lessons for International research

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Recidivism in the Republic of Ireland – lessons for International research

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Overview of presentation

- What is recidivism?
- Why punish?
- Why study recidivism?
- Who cares about recidivism?
- What's happening in Ireland?
- Where do we go from here?

What is recidivism?

- The Challenge of 'Re-entry'
- Re-offending (self-report studies)
- Re-arrest by police (police bias)
- Reconviction (through a court process)
- Re-imprisonment

Back to original principles – Why Punish?

- Retribution
- Individual or general deterrence
- Reform or rehabilitation
- Incapacitation
- Denunciation

Why study recidivism?

- To add some facts to the criminal justice debate! (Revolving door syndrome)
- To determine what sentences are effective?
- To enhance public safety & family/community vitality
- To see what conditions in society make recidivism less likely?
- To reduce costs of the criminal justice system?
 - Average cost €90,000 per prisoner in Ireland
- To identify effective drug treatment?
- To identify effective re-integration?
- To provide information to agencies as to what works
 - Drug rehabilitation services
 - Probation service

Who cares about recidivism – what research is there?

- Growing body of research facilitated by automation of police, judicial and prison data (14 European countries have some form of data)
- US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand
- Denmark, England, Finland, Iceland, Ireland (North/South), Malta, Netherlands, Scotland, Sweden, Wales

Recidivism in Ireland – study objective

- What is recidivism rate for persons exposed to a prison term?
- Do recidivism rates vary by offender:

- Age, gender, education/employment status, recent criminal history/ offence type/ duration of punishment
- Irish prison inmates tracked after release to see how many return to system and within what timeframe
- To test the theory of re-integrative shaming (Braithwaite 1989 , *Crime, shame and reintegration*)
 - Low rate of crime and incarceration in Ireland
 - Considered as due to strong collective ties & informal social control/ more accepting, forgiving society?
 - Will the same impact be found in relation to recidivism patterns?

Recidivism in Ireland – study sample

- Facilitated by New data system (PRIS) and full access
- Timeframe 2001-2004 (Follow-up from 1-48 months)
- 19,955 releases (14,485 different persons)
- More than 52% unemployed prior to first prison term
- Main crimes for which imprisoned:
 - Violence (27%)
 - Motoring (22%)
 - Drugs (13%)
 - Property (13%)
 - Public order (10%)
 - Sex crime (2%)

Recidivism in Ireland – key findings

- Jan 2001-Dec 2004, approx 20,000 inmates released from prison (M 93%/ Unmarried 82%/ Average age <30/ Unemployed 52%)
- 27% back in prison in one year
- 39% after two years
- 45% after three years
- 50% after four years

Recidivism in Ireland – key findings

- Recidivism higher among
 - Males
 - Young persons
 - Unemployed
 - Those with prison record

- Highest for property offenders (49% re-imprisoned in 36 months)
- Lowest for sex offenders (18% in 36 months)
- Not much difference regarding length of sentence (Specific and general deterrence)

From national to international research

- To identify recidivism patterns across different socio-cultural contexts
 - Reintegrative shaming theory – Despite low crime levels, Irish recidivism rates similar to Iceland, Japan, Malta.
 - Why? Stronger level of symbolic social exclusion?
- In drugs field, are there certain treatment/ reintegrative approaches that make recidivism less likely?
 - Access to jobs/ treatment/ family ties/ other social supports
- Are there urban/ rural differences?
- Can help us analyse link between drugs and crime
- Can show us the extent to which prison doesn't work in terms of rehabilitating drug-using offenders
- Can help us measure impact of QCT and alternatives to prison

Future research – synchronising studies

- Develop research with similar methods and techniques
 - At what point do we define/measure recidivism?
 - Re-offence/ re-arrest/ re-conviction/ re-imprisonment
 - What is the selection period?
 - What is the sample size?
 - What offences do we measure – drug and/or drug-related?
- Also incorporate social and cultural conditions – employment status/ education/ health (eg European values survey)

The way forward - Discussion

- WODC Research bureau of Ministry of Justice, the Netherlands
- Questionnaire to 41 countries (2005)
 - Prevalence of nationwide recidivism research
 - Types of data collected
 - Research design and methods
- International working group (13 countries) established to formulate an international standard to make cross-national comparisons
- Pompidou group to investigate/ collaborate and seek incorporation of focus on drug issues

Key references

- Braithwaite J (1989) *Crime, shame and reintegration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Donnell I, Baumer E and Nicola Hughes (2008) *Recidivism in the Republic of Ireland*. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*. SAGE
- Wartna B & Nijssen L (2006) *National studies on recidivism – an inventory of large-scale recidivism research in 33 European countries*. Netherlands. Research and Documentation Centre.

Go raibh maith againh.

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