

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Juvenile Recidivism Report is the latest in a series of annual juvenile recidivism reports that began with the 1998 Baseline Report. The purpose of this report is to gain a better understanding of first time juvenile offenders and the crimes they are adjudicated for, how soon they recidivate, and to continue to measure juvenile recidivism over time. This Report was developed by the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service for the Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC) Division of Juvenile Services (DJS).

Beginning with the 1998 Baseline Report, information on juvenile recidivism has been collected, analyzed, and disseminated. The Baseline Report examined the 1998 cohort of juveniles who were adjudicated for the first time (hereafter referred to as first time juvenile offenders) from January 1 through December 31, 1998. This cohort was then analyzed to determine the rate of recidivism, defined as **the percentage of juveniles who were adjudicated for a second offense during supervision or within one year of release from MDOC supervision**. Each year following 1998, a Juvenile Recidivism Report has been produced to follow an additional cohort of juvenile offenders in order to measure recidivism rates and juvenile crime characteristics over time.

The DJS has a long standing tradition of reporting juvenile recidivism. In 1997, DJS described its goal as follows: **By 2000, to decrease the percentage of youthful offenders who re-offend and are committed to the Department's jurisdiction from the 1998 baseline** (Maine Department of Corrections, 1997). This annual report assists DJS work toward the Department's principle of using applied research to inform its policies. In 1998 the Juvenile Recidivism Baseline Report was created, and a Juvenile Recidivism Report has been issued every year thereafter so that DJS is able to report progress in reducing the percentage of youth who re-offend and are committed to the supervision of the Department.

This report examines statewide and countywide data, as well as type and severity of offenses, age, gender, and race characteristics of juveniles who were adjudicated for the first time in 2004. Female juvenile offenders and felony offenses are also examined separately. In addition, this report examines trends in first time adjudications and recidivism for the 1998 through 2004 cohorts including trends at the state and county level, type and severity of offenses committed, and age, gender, and race characteristics.

Defining Recidivism

For the purpose of this report, recidivism is defined as *any individual recording a second adjudication date in Maine's juvenile court system for offenses committed before the age of 18*. Adjudication occurs when a court makes a finding in a juvenile case that the allegations contained in a petition are supported beyond a reasonable doubt. Juveniles who recorded a subsequent adjudication for a new offense are classified as recidivists. DJS has chosen re-adjudication as its measure of recidivism because re-adjudication counts only those juveniles whose subsequent contact with the juvenile justice system results in a court finding that the allegations contained in a petition are supported beyond a reasonable doubt.

Most recidivism studies use a longitudinal cohort method to evaluate re-offending. A cohort is a group of individuals who share some common characteristics, such as being adjudicated during a specific year. For this report, a cohort was tracked each calendar year for a follow-up period and any re-adjudications were measured to allow for long-term trend analysis.

Key findings

- The one year recidivism rate for the 1998 – 2004 cohorts has remained relatively steady (17-20%). In the 2004 cohort, the one year recidivism rate was 18%.
- Of those that recidivated within one year of their first adjudication, the average number of months between the first and second adjudication was 6 months.
- There is a significant change in the age demographic of first time juvenile offenders in 2004 compared to previous years. The number of juveniles under the age of 13 has decreased 50% since 1998. Over the same time, the number of 15-17 year old first time offenders increased 54%.
- The 1,274 first time juvenile offenders in 2004 were adjudicated for 2,333 offenses. Thirty seven percent of the cohort was adjudicated for 66% of these offenses.
- First time juvenile offenders adjudicated for drug/alcohol offenses has risen significantly since 1998. In 2004, the percentage of drug/alcohol offenses accounted for 18% of all offenses, whereas in 1998 only 6% of all offenses were drug/alcohol offenses.
- The overall rate of first time adjudications for the entire state in 2004 was 9 per 1,000 juveniles ages 10-18. This varied by county and ranged from a high of 15 per 1,000 in Knox County to 5 per 1,000 in Oxford County.
- There is a substantial difference between counties for felony offenses¹ among first time juvenile offenders from a low of 9% in Knox County to a high of 33% in Somerset County.
- While the overall percentage of first time female juvenile offenders was 26%, this differed substantially by county from a low of 12% in Oxford County to a high of 47% in Piscataquis County.

¹ A felony is a serious crime, usually punishable by confinement for more than one year. Less serious crimes are called misdemeanors, and are usually punishable by fine, probation, or a brief term of confinement in a juvenile facility (Garner, 2006).