

RESEARCH BRIEF

Published January 2025



The Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Recidivism Report: Juveniles Closed 2007–2020

INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, the Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (JCJC) has undertaken the task of monitoring the annual statewide recidivism rates of juveniles who were closed for services from a Pennsylvania juvenile probation department. These studies establish an ongoing, consistent recidivism rate to examine the impact of the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice System Enhancement Strategy (JJSES). This *Research Brief* highlights the major findings in *The Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Recidivism Report: Juveniles Closed 2007-2020*, which the JCJC released in January 2025. The full report is available on the JCJC website at <https://www.jcjc.pa.gov>.

Data for this project was compiled from the JCJC's Pennsylvania Juvenile Case Management System and the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Court's Common Pleas Case Management System.

STATE- AND COUNTY-LEVEL RECIDIVISM PATTERNS

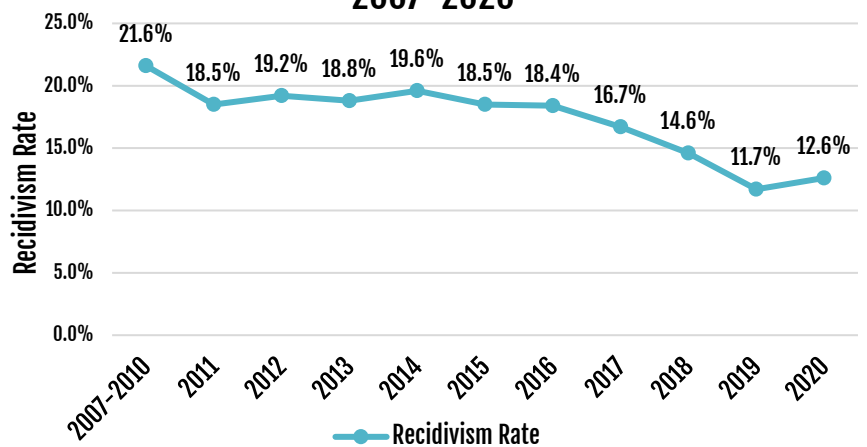
The recidivism rate for juveniles closed in 2020 was 12.6%. This rate continues the trend of "post-JJSES initiation" rates (2011-2020) being below the "pre-JJSES initiation" (2007-2010) rate (21.6%).

Note: The COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to 2018, 2019, and 2020's low recidivism rates. However, rates were trending down prior to the onset of the pandemic.

RECIDIVISM DEFINITION

A subsequent delinquency adjudication in juvenile court or conviction in criminal court for either a misdemeanor or felony offense within two years of case closure.

Figure 1: Recidivism Rate for Juveniles Closed, 2007–2020



- The statewide recidivism rate decreased 20.4% between the pre-JJSES and post-JJSES initiation periods. Furthermore, 78% of counties (n=52) had a recidivism rate in the post-JJSES initiation era below their rate in the pre-JJSES era. Among these 52 counties, the mean percentage decrease in recidivism rates was 22.2%, and the median percentage decrease was 21.5%.
- The statewide recidivism rate decreased 17.7% between the earlier (2011-2014) and later (2015-2020) post-JJSES initiation periods. Furthermore, 70% of counties (n=47) had a recidivism rate for the years 2015-2020 below their rate for 2011-2014. Among these 47 counties, the mean percentage decrease in recidivism rates was 22.3%, and the median percentage decrease was 21.0%.

SERIOUS, VIOLENT, AND/OR CHRONIC OFFENDER

Since the completion of the first recidivism study, the JCJC has presented data on the relationship between Serious, Violent, and/or Chronic offending and recidivism. Juveniles who were closed in 2020 and met the criteria for being Serious, Violent, and Chronic (SVC) recidivated at a higher rate than those who only met the less restrictive criteria of being Serious, or Violent, or Chronic offenders (36% vs. 28%). These findings are consistent with those of previous cohorts of juveniles closed.

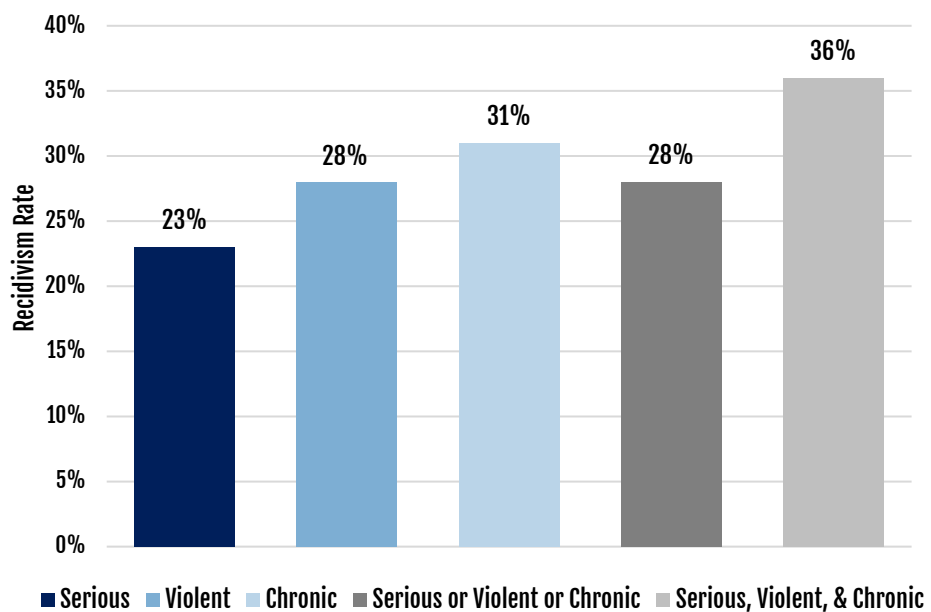
DEFINITIONS

Serious Offender: A juvenile who has been adjudicated delinquent in juvenile court at any point in his or her juvenile offending history for one of the following offenses: burglary, theft (felonies only), arson, drug trafficking (manufacture/deliver/possession with intent to deliver), and extortion (theft by extortion).

Violent Offender: A juvenile who has been adjudicated delinquent in juvenile court at any point in his or her juvenile offending history for one of the following offenses: homicide or non-negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, kidnapping, and select firearm/weapon offenses.

Chronic Offender: A juvenile who has four or more previous written allegations for separate incidents that occurred prior to the date of the juvenile's case closure.

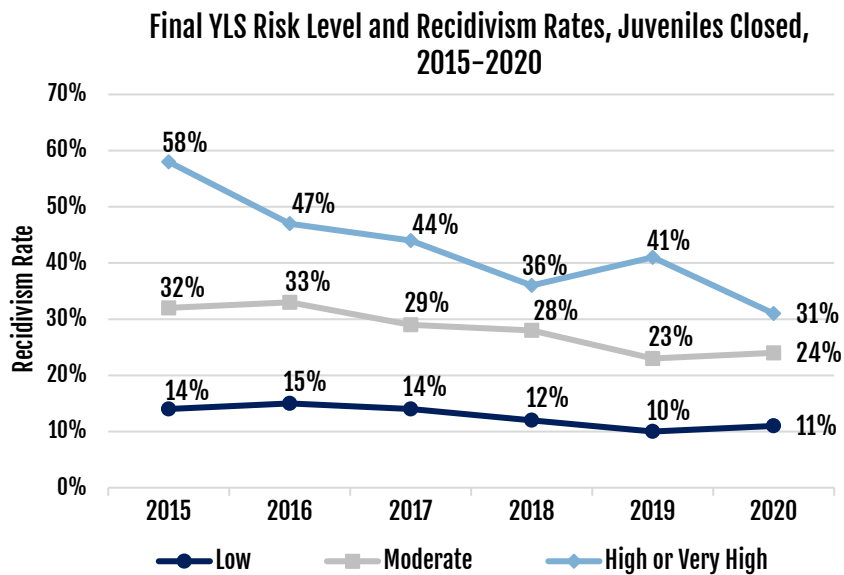
Serious, Violent, and Chronic Youth and Recidivism, Juveniles Closed, 2020



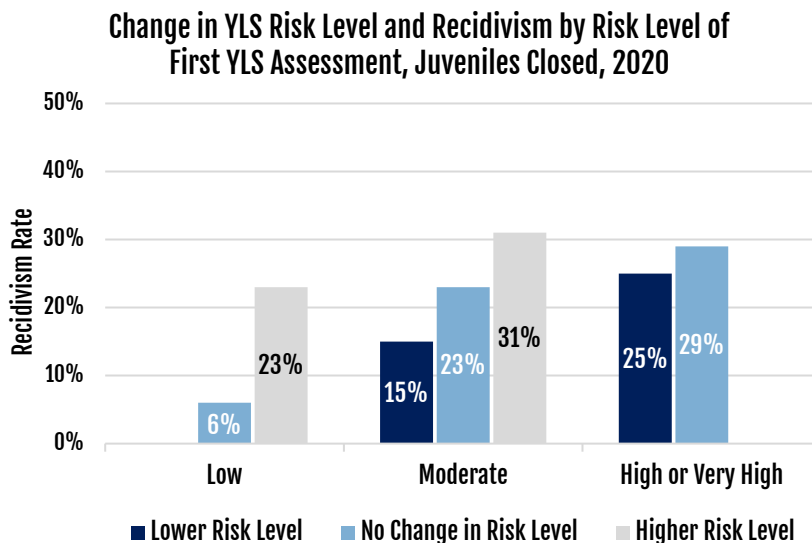
YOUTH LEVEL OF SERVICE/CASE MANAGEMENT INVENTORY™ (YLS)

A fundamental step in recidivism reduction is the use of a research-based risk assessment tool to measure a youth’s risks and needs. This information can then be used to determine appropriate levels of supervision, establish case-specific goals, and better allocate resources in order to achieve effective outcomes. The YLS has been chosen as the risk assessment tool to be used in Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice system.

- Consistent with past years, juveniles closed in 2020 who were assessed as high or very high risk were more likely to reoffend than moderate-risk youth, who, in turn, were more likely to reoffend than low-risk youth (31% vs. 24% vs. 11%).



As the chart below reflects, change in the risk level of youth from initial to final YLS assessment is correlated with recidivism.



YLS Domains

1. Prior and Current Offenses
2. Family Circumstances / Parenting
3. Education / Employment
4. Peer Relations
5. Substance Abuse
6. Leisure / Recreation
7. Personality / Behavior
8. Attitudes / Orientation

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