

December 13, 2022

Let's reflect on the  
purpose of having a  
uniform recidivism  
definition

# Recidivism as a measure



**"Tracking the success of those released from prison/intervention can tell us whether the criminal legal system/intervention is fulfilling its mission and whether public investments are being put to effective use."**

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# Limitations

Recidivism rates are typically binary (yes/no) measures.

encourage a sole focus on negative outcomes in the criminal legal domain when evaluating reentry process.

administrative records do not count criminal behavior that goes undetected by criminal legal system officials and can include wrongful assignment of criminal behavior to innocent parties.

any return to crime as a failure, without distinguishing between failure as an end state or as part of a desistance process.

ignore factors that would provide a more complete picture of movement toward desistance.



# Recommendation 1

To ensure more precise and accurate use of the construct of recidivism, researchers, policy makers, and practitioners should (a) specify the exact actions taken by legal authorities (arrest, revocation, conviction, incarceration) included in their measures, (b) clarify the limitations of the data used to measure these actions, and (c) supplement binary recidivism measures with measures of desistance from crime such as the frequency and seriousness of offense and length of time until a new offense.



# Recommendation 2

Review existing measures and, as needed, develop and validate new measures to evaluate post-release success in multiple domains, including personal well-being, education, employment, housing, family and social supports, health, civic and community engagement, and legal involvement.



# Recommendation 3

Researchers should review existing measures and, as needed, develop new measures of facilitators of and structural barriers to post-release success in multiple domains, including personal well-being, education, employment, housing, family and social supports, health, civic and community engagement, and legal involvement. These measures should reflect the particular needs and experiences of historically marginalized groups.



**A more meaningful conception of success views post-release outcomes through the lens of overall healthy adult development across multiple life domains in addition to crime control: education, employment, housing, family and social support, mental and physical health, and civic and community engagement.**

Thank you for your consideration. Have a great snowy day.