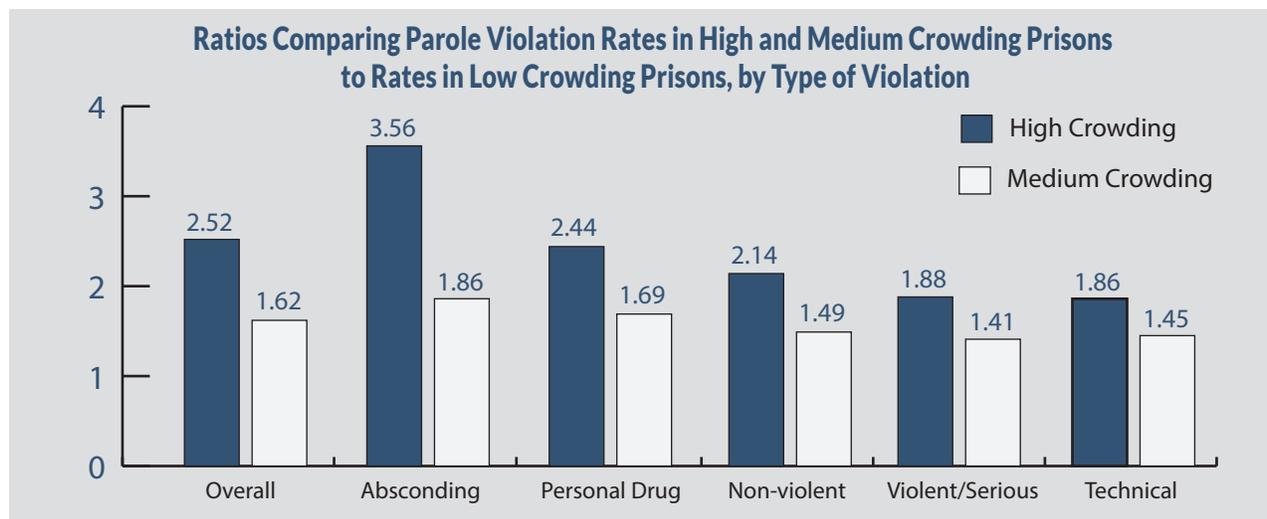




## Higher Rates of Recidivism Associated with Prison Crowding

Prison crowding predicted higher rates of parole violations after release from prison, according to study findings recently published in *PLOS ONE*. Using data from a random sample of individuals under parole supervision in California during an observation period of two years,<sup>1</sup> researchers analyzed parole violation occurrences and types—including violations for absconding, personal drug, non-violent, serious/violent, and technical offenses<sup>2</sup>—among individuals released from environments of varying prison crowding levels.<sup>3</sup> Overall, parole violations occurred at 2.52 times the rate for those released from highly crowded prisons compared to those released from prisons with low levels of crowding. The effect was strongest for absconding and personal drug offenses (3.56 and 2.44 times the rate in high crowding vs. low crowding prisons, respectively). Authors suggest that psychosocial stress associated with adverse conditions present in crowded prisons, which may exacerbate decision-making and behavioral problems, may explain increased risk of recidivism. Additionally, inadequate treatment for substance use disorders (SUD), which are highly prevalent among prison populations, may increase the risk of drug-related recidivism for some. They recommend interventions that address both prison crowding and inadequate SUD and mental health care, such as mandatory drug treatment referrals as an alternative to incarceration.



**Source:**

Ruderman, M. A., Wilson, D. F., and Reid, S. (2015). Does prison crowding predict higher rates of substance use related parole violations? A recurrent events multi-level survival analysis. *PLOS ONE* 10(10): e0141328. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0141328

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> The sample included 5% of California’s parolees under supervision between 1/1/03 and 12/31/04 (N = 13,070). Researchers analyzed parole event data, including 8,792 violations. Approximately 98% of the sample was observed for 104-106 weeks.

<sup>2</sup> Technical violations included missed appointments with officers, visiting outside the parole region, and other non-criminal offenses. Absconding violations included leaving the state’s jurisdiction without permission and failing to report for supervision. Personal drug offenses included drug use or possession, failure to register as a drug offender, being under the influence, and being drunk in public. Non-violent offenses included drug sales, property offenses, and other non-injury crimes.

<sup>3</sup> Using population census reports from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), researchers developed groupings of crowding levels: “low” crowding = less than 190% capacity; “medium” crowding = 190-205% capacity; and “high” crowding = 205% capacity or greater. Crowding exposure was determined for each study subject by the parole region of the individual’s prison and the crowding level in that region during the month prior to their date of release.

Prepared by the Center for Health and Justice (CHJ) at TASC. CHJ works to support and sustain strong and vibrant communities by promoting policies and practices that stop the cycle of drugs and crime. We conduct research and evaluations, and offer policy analysis, training, and consultation in the fields of health and justice. For more information, visit us online at [www.centerforhealthandjustice.org](http://www.centerforhealthandjustice.org).

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