



# **An Examination of Admissions, Exits and End-of-the-Year Populations of Adult Female Inmates in the Illinois Department of Corrections, State Fiscal Years 1989 - 2011**

**An Examination of Admissions, Exits and End-of-the-Year Populations of Adult Female  
Inmates in the Illinois Department of Corrections, State Fiscal Years 1989 to 2011**

Prepared by  
David E. Olson  
Gipsy Escobar  
&  
Loretta Stalans

Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology  
Loyola University Chicago  
820 North Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60611  
312-915-7564

Prepared for  
The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

October 2011

This project was supported by Grant # 06-DJ-BX-0681 awarded to the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the authors and not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, or the Illinois Department of Corrections.

## Executive Summary

Through analyses of existing data collected by the Illinois Department of Corrections, and Illinois criminal history record information (CHRI) supplied by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, a team of faculty at Loyola University Chicago examined trends and characteristics of adult female admissions to, exits from, and end of state fiscal year (SFY) prison populations in Illinois between SFY 1989 and SFY 2011. Based on these analyses, the following conclusions were reached:

- 1) A dramatic increase in admissions to prison, as well as prison exits and end of the year prison populations, of adult females was seen in Illinois between SFY 1989 and 2005, primarily fueled by increased admissions for drug-law violations;
- 2) The proportion of total prison admissions accounted for by females increased from less than 7 percent in SFY 1989 to a peak of 10.5 percent in SFY 2005, before falling back to 7.6 percent of admissions in SFY 2011. Similarly, the percent of the end of the fiscal year prison population accounted for by females increased from 4.3 percent in SFY 1989 to 6.3 percent in SFY 2005 and 5.8 percent in SFY 2011;
- 3) From SFY 1989 to 1999, female court admissions for drug *delivery/sale* increased dramatically and outnumbered admissions for drug possession, before *decreasing* consistently through SFY 2011;
- 4) Court admissions of females for drug *possession* increased consistently between SFY 1989 and 2005, and outnumbered sentences for drug sale/delivery since SFY 2000, but females sentenced to prison for drug possession *decreased* dramatically since SFY 2005;
- 5) Throughout the entire period included in the analyses, the majority of females sentenced to prison were convicted of the least serious felony classes of crimes (Class 3 and 4 felonies), peaking in SFY 2005 when roughly three-quarters of all females sentenced to prison in Illinois were convicted of a Class 3 or 4 felony;
- 6) Between SFY 1998 and 2001, the number and proportion of total female prison admissions accounted for by parole violators increased dramatically, as was the case with male prison admissions. However, between SFY 2001 and 2008, females returned to prison as parole violators decreased both in sheer number and as a proportion of total female admissions to prison;
- 7) During the time period examined, the age of females sentenced to prison in Illinois has been increasing. Among females sentenced to IDOC in SFY 1989, more than 80 percent were under 36 years old, but by SFY 2011, only 32 percent were under 36.

- 8) An increasing proportion of women admitted to prison in Illinois had previously been sentenced to prison. Among women sentenced to prison in SFY 1989, less than 30 percent had previously been in prison; by SFY 2011, that proportion had increased to 43 percent;
- 9) As a result of changes in the types of crimes women have been sentenced to prison for, and a decrease in admissions from Cook County (Chicago) between SFY 2005 and 2011, the proportion of females sentenced to prison in Illinois accounted for by blacks has decreased, from more than 70 percent of all females sentenced to prison during the late 1990s to less than 50 percent among the SFY 2011 female court admissions. On the other hand, the proportion of female prison sentences accounted for by whites increased from roughly 20 percent in the mid- to late-1990s to almost 50 percent in SFY 2011;
- 10) There were a number of differences evident between the females and males admitted to prison in recent years, including women being slightly older than males, women being more likely to be a parent, women having slightly higher levels of educational achievement, and women being more likely than men to be sentenced and incarcerated in prison for less serious crime types and felony class offenses;
- 11) Females released from prison in Illinois tended to have lower recidivism rates than males, even after differences in offender characteristics and risk factors were taken into account. After roughly 3 years post-prison, 61 percent of women were rearrested for any new crime (compared to 70 percent among male releases), 15 percent of women were rearrested specifically for a crime of violence (compared to 31 percent of males), and 34 percent of women were returned to prison either as a result of a new prison sentence or violation of parole (compared to 51 percent of males).

## **Introduction**

Between State Fiscal Years (SFY) 1989 and 2011, the number of adult females incarcerated in prison in Illinois increased from fewer than 1,000 to nearly 3,000. During that time period, admissions to, and exits from, prison also increased dramatically, from fewer than 800 in SFY 1989 to roughly 2,500 during SFY 2011. Using data provided by the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) to researchers at Loyola University Chicago, Illinois criminal history record information (CHRI) supplied by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) in cooperation with the Illinois State Police, and through grant support from the ICJIA, this report provides an overview and examination of the changes in the number and characteristics of adult female prison admissions, exits and end-of-the year populations in Illinois over the past 23 years—from SFY 1989 to 2011.

Before examining the trends in female prison admissions in Illinois, however, it is important to understand the general structure of Illinois law as it relates to the sentencing of those convicted of a felony crime. In Illinois, those convicted of felony offenses can be, and in some cases are required to be, sentenced to prison with a determinate sentence. A determinate sentence requires the judge to impose a prison sentence of a specific length of time, and inmates serve that sentence, minus any credit for time served in jail prior to conviction, good conduct credit, or earned time credits they may be eligible for and granted. Prior to 1978, Illinois utilized an indeterminate sentencing structure, which allowed judges to impose sentences that covered a range (i.e., 2 to 5 years), but the actual date of an inmate's release would be determined by the Prisoner Review Board (PRB). Illinois law classifies felonies into 6 different groups, including First Degree Murder, Class X felonies, and Class 1, 2, 3, and 4 felonies. Class 4 felonies are considered the least serious of the felony classes. Class X felonies were originally—when the determinate sentencing structure was introduced in Illinois in 1978--intended to include those crimes, other than First Degree Murder, for which a sentence to probation was not allowable (i.e., non-probationable, or a mandatory minimum prison sentence was required). Since 1978, however, a number of non-Class X felony offenses have been designated as non-probationable offenses. For example, conviction of a Class 1 felony-level Possession of a Controlled Substance offense (i.e., possession of 15 grams or more of cocaine or heroin) requires a prison sentence

somewhere within the range of 48 to 180 months be imposed. In addition to felony-level crimes, there are also less serious misdemeanor offenses; however, since conviction for a misdemeanor cannot result in a prison sentence, these offenses are excluded from this discussion.

Summarized in Table 1 are the statutorily allowable sentences that can be imposed on those convicted of the different felony classes in Illinois. It should be noted that when specific, statutorily-specified, aggravating circumstances are present, the maximum allowable prison sentences are higher, as indicated in Table 1. Thus, for someone convicted of a Class 3 felony, a judge can impose either a prison sentence or a probation sentence, whichever they feel is appropriate, and then impose a specific prison sentence length somewhere within the range of 24 to 60 months (if no aggravating circumstances are evident). Since this report is only focused on examining females admitted to the Illinois Department of Corrections—prisons—no analyses are provided regarding the number or characteristics of women sentenced to *probation*. However, it should be noted that research in Illinois has documented that the probability of being sentenced to prison is lower for the less serious felony classes (i.e., Class 3 and 4 felonies) than the more serious classes (i.e., Class 1 and 2 felonies) (Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council, 2011). Further, research in Illinois and nationally has also found that females convicted of a felony tend to be less likely than males to be sentenced to prison after factors such as age, offense, and prior criminal history are taken into consideration (Simon & Landis, 1991; Spohn & Beichner, 2000; Olson, 2001).

**Table 1**  
**Possible Sentence Lengths for Convicted Felons, in Months, by Felony Class**

<b>Felony Class</b>	<b>Statutory Prison Sentencing Range</b>	<b>Allowable Maximum Sentence if Aggravating Circumstances</b>	<b>Mandatory Supervised Release-MSR</b>	<b>Statutory Probation Sentencing Range</b>
Murder	240 – 720	Beyond 720 months, natural life or death	36	Not allowable
Class X	72 - 360	720	36	Not allowable
Class 1	48 - 180	360	24	Up to 48
Class 2	36 - 84	168	24	Up to 48
Class 3	24 - 60	120	12	Up to 30
Class 4	12 - 36	72	12	Up to 30

In addition to the prison sentence, when an inmate sentenced to prison from the court is ultimately released, they are required to be supervised for a period of time in the community under mandatory supervised release, or MSR, the length of which is specified under Illinois law by the felony class of the crime for which they were sentenced to prison (Summarized in Table 1). For inmates convicted of First Degree Murder or a Class X felony, for example, they must be supervised for 36 months on MSR following their release from prison, whereas those convicted of a Class 1 or 2 felony have 24 months of MSR, and those convicted of Class 3 or 4 felonies (the least serious of the felony offense classes in Illinois) have 12 months of MSR.

Once an adult female is sentenced to prison by the court, or returned to prison as a violator of their MSR, they are processed through the Reception and Classification Center (R&C) at the Dwight Correctional Center, in Dwight Illinois. Following this period in the R&C, where an inmate's security classification is determined, along with other needs, they are then placed within an appropriate housing unit within one of Illinois' three adult female prisons, including the Dwight Correctional Center, the Decatur Correctional Center, or the Lincoln Correctional Center.

The analyses presented in this report are intended to provide a general overview of trends in the number of adult females admitted to, released from, and incarcerated within Illinois' prisons between SFY 1989 and 2011, the characteristics of these women and the crimes they have been sentenced to prison for, how these characteristics have changed over time, and how the characteristics of the females admitted to prison in Illinois are similar to, and different from, males admitted to Illinois' prison system.

### **Total Admissions, Exits & End of the Year Populations of Females in IDOC**

When examining trends and characteristics of prison populations, it is important to point out and understand the different ways the flow of inmates into and out of Illinois' prisons are measured, since these different measures provide different perspectives on who goes to, and is in prison, and also helps to explain changes in the overall prison population. Generally, the flow of prison populations is measured through *admissions* to prison—how many individuals enter the prison

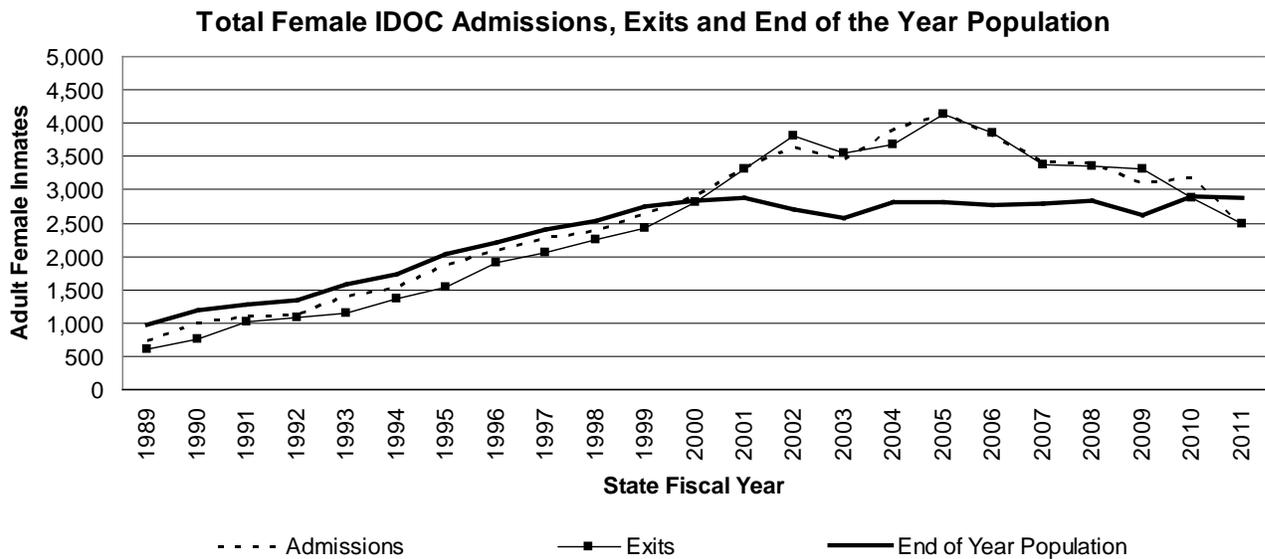
system, *exits*—how many individuals are released from prison, and *the population* in prison on any given day (usually the end-of-the calendar year or the end-of-the fiscal year). In very general terms, during periods when there are more admissions to prison than exits, an increase in the prison population will be experienced, whereas times when there are more exits from prison than admissions will see decreases in the prison population. Also, in general terms, those in prison on any given day tend to be reflective of those sentenced to prison for more serious crimes—those that receive relatively long prison sentences and tend to stay in the prison population over an extended period of time.

As seen in Figure 1, between SFY 1989 and 2002 there was a steady increase in the total number (combined court admissions and admissions resulting from violations of MSR) of adult females *admitted* to prison in Illinois, from fewer than 800 in SFY 1989 to more than 4,100 in SFY 2005, before decreasing below 2,500 during SFY 2011. During the period from SFY 1989 to 2002, there were more females admitted to Illinois' prisons than were released (exiting), and as a result, the end-of-the-year prison population accounted for by female inmates grew as well, from less than 1,000 on June 30, 1989 to just over 2,700 on June 30, 2002 (Figure 1). Starting in 2002, however, the trend experienced in the preceding time period changed—with a relatively equal number of admissions to, and exits from, prison for females each state fiscal year, and a general decrease in the number of females admitted to and released from prison. For example, between SFY 2005 and 2011, the total number of females admitted to prison in Illinois decreased 41 percent, from the highest recorded annual total of more than 4,100 in SFY 2005 to below 2,500 in SFY 2011. As a result, the end-of-the year population of female inmates in IDOC stabilized, averaging between 2,500 and 3,000 from SFY 2000 through 2011.

Although the total number of adult *males* admitted to prison in Illinois also increased considerably during the period from SFY 1989 to 2005, and also decreased during the period between SFY 2005 and 2011, proportionately the *decrease* in male prison admissions during the SFY 2005-2011 period was much smaller—falling just 16.3 percent—than that seen with female admissions to prison. Between SFY 2005 and 2011, the total number of male prison admissions in Illinois fell from more than 35,000 to just below 30,000. As a result of these slightly different patterns, females as a proportion of total admissions into IDOC grew slightly, from roughly 6

percent of all prison admissions in Illinois during SFY 1989 through 1992, to just over 10 percent of all admissions during the SFY 2000 to 2005 time period. During SFY 2011, females accounted for 7.6 percent of all prison admissions in Illinois. However, because females sentenced to prison in Illinois are sentenced for less serious crimes (see Figures 4 and 5), which carry shorter sentences, females accounted for only 5.8 percent of all those in prison on June 30, 2011 in Illinois.

**Figure 1**



**Distinguishing Between Court Admissions and Technical Violation of MSR Admissions**

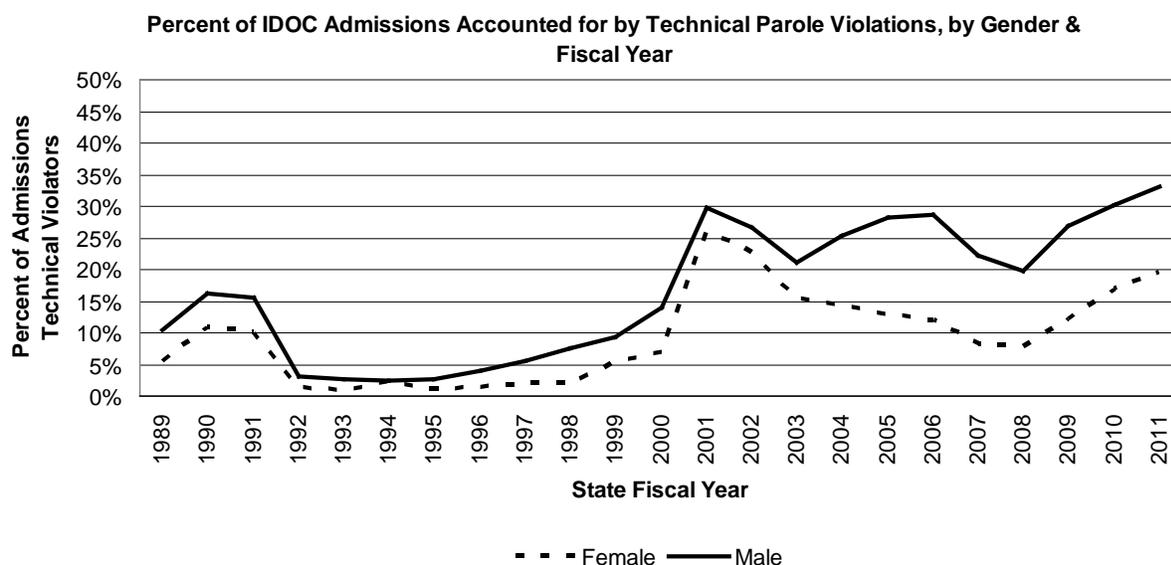
Underlying these overall changes in the number of females admitted to, released from, and in Illinois’ prisons during this time period are a number of specific patterns that need to be examined closer in order to more fully understand trends in Illinois’ female inmate population. Also important to recognize and identify are trends and patterns seen among female inmate prison admissions, exits and populations that are similar to, and different from, those of the adult male prison population. The first such distinction and more detailed analyses involves examining court admissions separately from admissions to prison resulting from technical violations of MSR. In addition to being sentenced to prison from the court, former inmates on MSR can also be admitted (or returned) to prison if they violate conditions of their MSR. Unlike sentences to prison from the court, which are the result of a judicial decision following a felony conviction,

admissions to prison resulting from a technical violation of MSR are returns to prison initiated by a parole agent in response to a violation of some condition of MSR and reviewed by the Prisoner Review Board (PRB). These violations can include missed appointments, positive urinalysis tests, or arrests for a new crime. If a new arrest results in a trial, conviction and subsequent new sentence to prison, these would be counted as court admissions, since it is a sentence from the court requiring the inmate's incarceration in prison.

During the 1990s, the number and proportion of females admitted to prison for technical violations of MSR was relatively low—reflecting both the small numbers of females exiting prison and being supervised on MSR, but also the lower overall rate of technical violations resulting in return to prison. During most of the 1990s, 2 percent or less of all females admitted to prison in Illinois were accounted for by technical violators of MSR (Figure 2). Although the proportion of prison admissions accounted for by technical violators of MSR has always been lower for females than males in Illinois, the general *trends* over time in the proportion of total admissions accounted for by these MSR violators between male and female admissions has been quite similar (Figure 2).

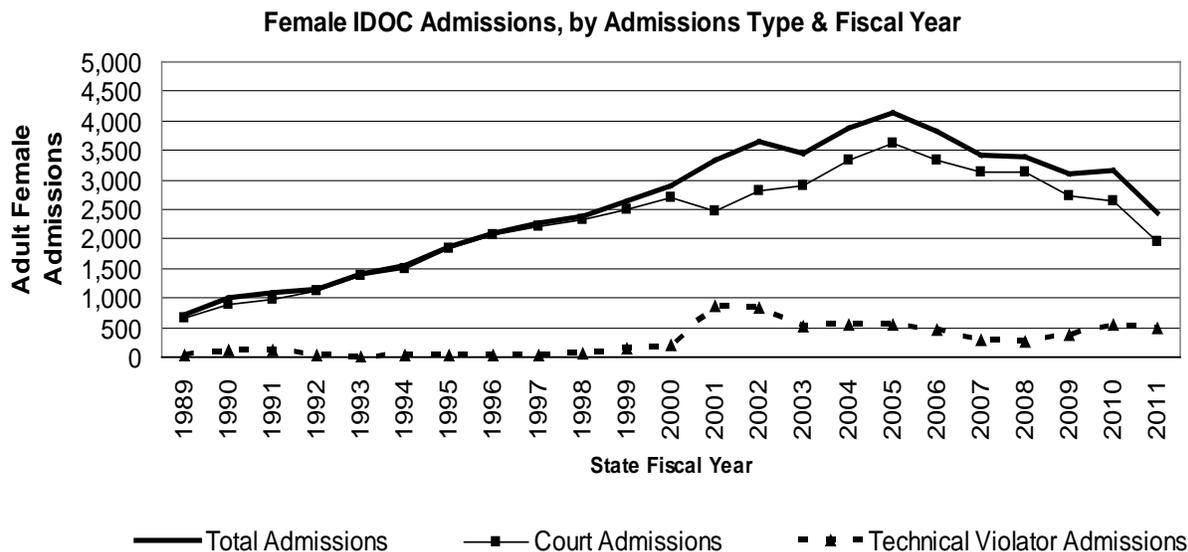
As seen in Figure 2, during the late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, fairly similar *trends* in the proportion of prison admissions accounted for by parole violation admissions were evident between female and male prisons admissions, and fluctuated during that period primarily as a result of differences in parole staffing levels. However, beginning in SFY 2001, and through SFY 2008, the proportion of female admissions accounted for by technical parole violations *decreased* rather steadily, from roughly one-quarter of all female prison admissions to less than 10 percent, before increasing to 20 percent of all female admissions being accounted for by technical parole violators in SFY 2011. Among male prison admissions since SFY 2001, on the other hand, between 20 percent and 35 percent of all prison admissions have been accounted for by technical parole violations, and a clear upward trend from SFY 2008 through 2011 was evident. Part of the reason for the widening gap between male and female prison admissions accounted for by technical violations are more resources and options for alternative placements in the community for female MSR violators, less serious types of violations, and shorter lengths of MSR due to being convicted of less serious felony class offenses.

**Figure 2**



When the actual *number* of female admissions to prison in Illinois is examined separately for court versus technical violator admissions, the relatively low number and rate of technical violations through SFY 2000 is evident, as well as the steady increase in court admissions of females to IDOC from SFY 1989 through SFY 2005 (Figure 3). In fact, during that entire time period, there was only one year that saw a decrease in *court* admissions from the previous year—from SFY 2000 to SFY 2001. However, this decrease in court admissions was offset by the large increase—from fewer than 200 to almost 900-- in the number of female technical violators admitted between SFYs 2000 and 2001, resulting in the *total* admissions of females to IDOC continuing the upward trend. Also evident in Figure 3 is the large, and consistent, decrease seen in *total* female admissions to IDOC between SFYs 2005 and 2011, driven primarily by decreases in female *court admissions* every year during that time period. The slight increase in *total* female admissions to IDOC between SFY 2009 and 2010 was due *exclusively* to an increase in the number of *technical* violator admissions between those two years, while the decrease between SFY 2010 and 2011 was due to decreases in both types of admissions.

**Figure 3**



Thus, for the most part, changes in the total number of adult females admitted to prison in Illinois over the past 23 years has been driven by changes in court admissions, with admissions for technical violations accounting for 15 percent or more of all female prison admissions during only 5 years of the 23 year time period examined (SFY 2001, 2002, 2003, 2010, and 2011). Among males admitted to prison in Illinois, however, the role of admissions for technical violations was more influential. Specifically, during 13 of the 23 years of data examined in this report, including every year since SFY 2001, 15 percent or more of male admissions to prison were accounted for by technical violations of MSR. Since court admissions appear to drive most of the changes in the admissions of *females* to IDOC, a closer examination of the types of crimes, and inmate characteristics of those admitted from the court is provided next.

**Female Court Admissions to IDOC by Felony Class & Crime Type**

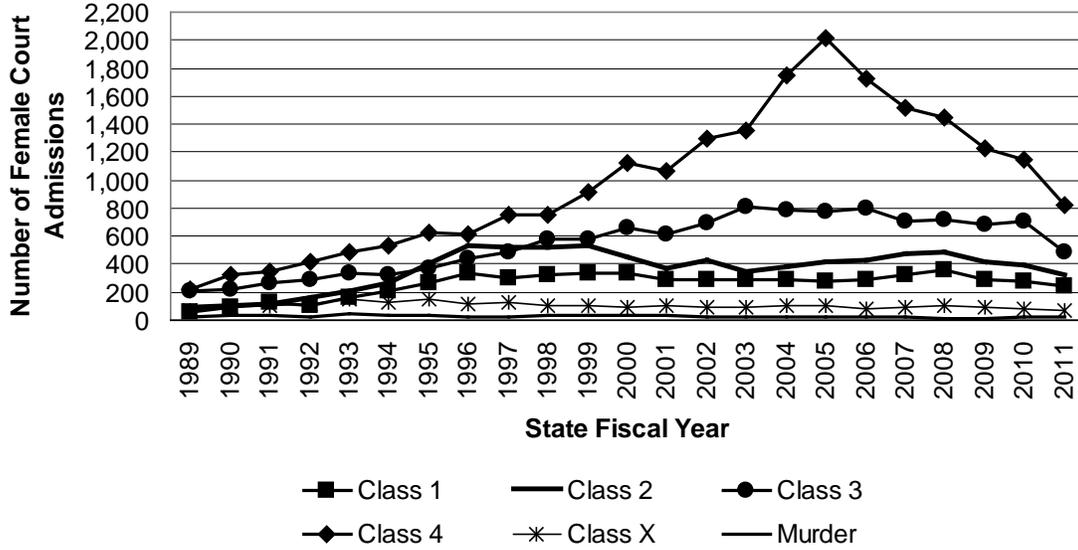
Looking only at court admissions of females to IDOC by the felony class and type of offense they were convicted of reveals dramatic changes between SFY 1989 and 2011. As described previously, Illinois law classifies felonies into six different categories, with First Degree Murder and Class X felonies being the most serious, and for which a prison sentence is always required upon conviction, and then, in descending order of seriousness, Class 1, 2, 3 and 4 felonies.

As seen in Figures 4 and 5, a relatively small number (Figure 4) and proportion (Figure 5) of female court admissions to IDOC over the past 23 years have been for First Degree Murder or Class X felonies, and the proportion of all court admissions accounted for by these two groups of offenses *decreased* during the period examined. For example, in SFY 1989, Class X felonies accounted for 72 of the 673 (10 percent) female court admissions to IDOC, but since SFY 1998, the annual number of female court admissions for Class X felonies averaged 96 per year, out of an average of nearly 2,900 court admissions per year, or less than 5 percent of the annual female court admissions to IDOC. Similarly, the average annual number of females sentenced to IDOC from the court for First Degree Murder during the period from SFY 1989 through 1999 was 31 per year, or 1.9 percent of all court admissions during that period. By comparison, during the period from SFY 2000 to 2010, the number of females sentenced to IDOC for Murder averaged 22 per year, or 0.7 percent of all court admissions. Generally, a much smaller proportion of female prison admissions in Illinois were accounted for by First Degree Murder and Class X felonies than was the case with male prison admissions. For example, during the period from SFY 2000 to 2010, an average of just over 1,800 male inmates per year were admitted to IDOC from the court for a Class X felony, or 7.2 percent of male court admissions, and during that same period an average of 319 males per year were sentenced to IDOC for First Degree Murder, or 1.3 percent of all male court admissions.

On the other hand, as seen in Figures 4 and 5, during the entire 23 year period examined, Class 4 felonies—the least serious felony class—accounted for the single largest number and proportion of female court admissions to prison in Illinois. Further, it was a dramatic increase in the number of Class 4 felony female court admissions to IDOC from SFY 1996 to 2005 that drove almost all of the overall growth in female IDOC admissions during that time period. Specifically, between SFY 1996 and 2005, the number of Class 4 felony court admissions of females increased 230 percent—more than three-fold, from just over 600 to more than 2,000 (Figure 4). Further, these Class 4 felony court admissions of females increased from 30 percent of all court admissions to IDOC of females in SFY 1996 to more than one-half (56 percent) of all court admissions in SFY 2005. By comparison, among male court admissions to prison in Illinois, Class 4 felonies have only accounted for the single largest category of admissions since SFY 2001 out of the 22 years examined, and never accounted for more than 40 percent of all court admissions.

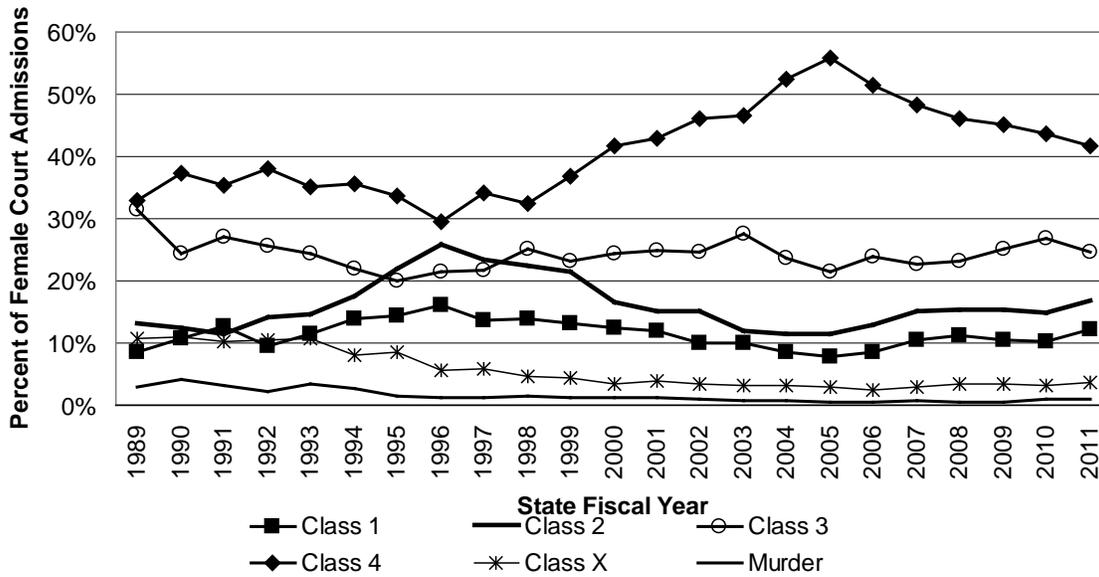
**Figure 4**

**Number of Adult Female Court Admissions to IDOC, by Offense Felony Class and Fiscal Year**



**Figure 5**

**Percent of Adult Female Court Admissions to IDOC Accounted for by Offense Felony Class, by Fiscal Year**



While Class 4 felonies accounted for almost all of the *increase* in female court admissions from SFY 1996 to 2005, fewer admission for these offenses is also what contributed to the dramatic *decrease* in court admissions of females to prison in Illinois between SFY 2005 and 2011. From SFY 2005 to 2011, the number of female court admissions for Class 4 felonies fell by almost 60 percent, from just over 2,000 in SFY 2005 to fewer than 900 in SFY 2011. Although male court admissions for Class 4 felonies also decreased between SFY 2005 and 2011, the decrease of 34 percent, from just over 10,200 to just below 7,000, was proportionately much smaller than the 60 percent decrease of female Class 4 felony court admissions during that period.

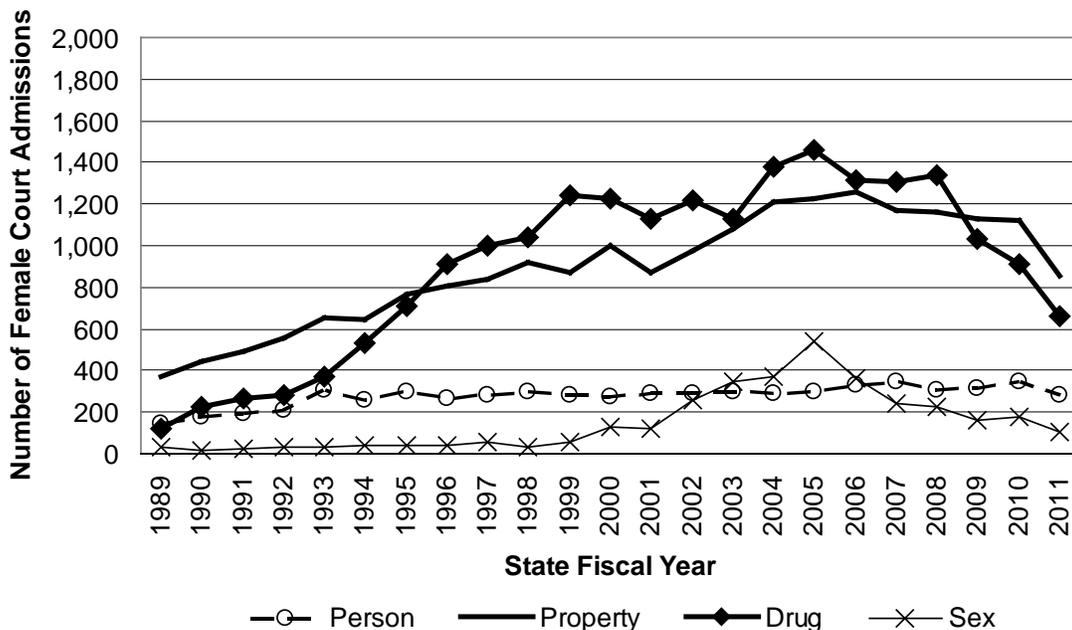
Another notable, albeit less obvious, change in court admissions when felony classes were examined separately was the substantial increase in the number of court admissions of females for Class 2 felonies between SFY 1989 and 1996. During this period, the number of females sentenced to IDOC for a Class 2 felony increased by a factor of five, from fewer than 100 to more than 500. Further, as a proportion of total female court admissions to IDOC, Class 2 felonies increased from 13 percent of all court admissions in SFY 1989 to 26 percent by SFY 1996. After SFY 1996, the number and proportion of female admissions to IDOC for Class 2 felonies first stabilized, and then ultimately decreased.

Just as the examination of trends over time in the number and proportion of prison admissions by *felony class* revealed dramatic change, analyses of trends in female prison admissions by *crime type* also reveals significant changes. As seen in Figure 6, from SFY 1989 through the 1990s, there was a steady increase in the *number* of female court admissions where the conviction offense was either a property crime or a drug-law violation (illegal drug possession or sale/delivery), followed by a dramatic decrease in court admissions of females for drug-law violations between SFY 2005 and 2010 and a slight decrease in admissions for property crimes during the SFY 2005 to 2010 time period. On the other hand, the number of females sentenced to prison following the conviction of a *person* crime (i.e., a crime of violence) increased from SFY 1989 to 1993, but has been relatively stable since then, and have always been low relative to admissions for drug and property crimes (Figure 6). Finally, another significant change in the number of female court admissions to prison in Illinois during the period examined involved admissions for sex offenses, which include not only sexual abuse and sexual assault, but also

prostitution charges. Among male court admissions to prison, offenses related to sexual assault or sexual abuse account for the majority of admissions for sex crimes, whereas for females, prostitution convictions account for the majority of court admissions for sex offenses. Between SFY 1989 and 1999, the number of females admitted to IDOC convicted of prostitution never exceeded 100 per year, and averaged 30 per year. However, a change to the law effective in 2000 made a second conviction for prostitution a felony-level offense, and therefore eligible for either a prison or probation sentence. Between SFY 1999 and 2005, admissions of females to IDOC for prostitution increased from 56 to more than 500, and based on analyses of criminal history record information by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, felony-level prostitution arrests jumped from 79 in 2000 to 836 in 2005, before falling to 437 in 2009. Roughly 90 percent of the female admissions to IDOC for prostitution during the 22-year period examined were from Cook County (Chicago). Between SFY 2005 and 2009, admissions to IDOC for prostitution decreased from more than 500 to 165, a period when arrests for felony-level prostitution in Illinois fell by nearly 50 percent, and continued falling, to 102 in SFY 2011.

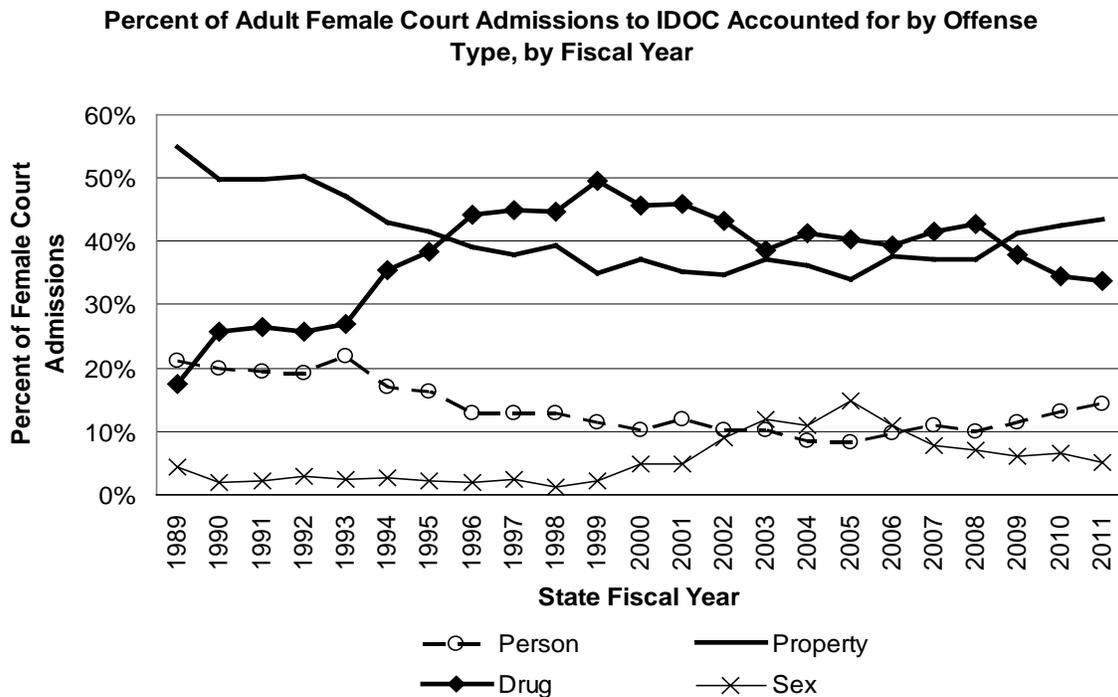
**Figure 6**

**Number of Adult Female Court Admissions to IDOC Accounted for by Offense Type, by Fiscal Year**



When the *proportion* of all court admissions accounted for by the different crime types was examined (Figure 7), the impact of the larger growth in admissions for drug-law violations relative to all other types of offenses is more obvious: drug-law violations accounted for less than 20 percent of all court admissions of females to IDOC in SFY 1989, but by SFY 1999, one-half of all female court admissions to IDOC were accounted for by drug-law violations. Property crimes, on the other hand, decreased *as a proportion* of total female court admissions from SFY 1989 to 1999. However, this decrease in the proportion of female court admissions accounted for by those convicted of a property crime was ***not*** due to a decrease in the actual *number* of female admissions for property crimes, but rather, the increase in drug-law violations was just much larger than the increase during that period in female admissions for property crimes. From SFY 2005 to 2011, there was a large ***decrease*** in the number of female drug-law violators sentenced to prison in Illinois, while admissions for property crimes remained relatively stable. As a result, drug-law violators as a proportion of total female court admissions to prison fell during that period, and in SFY 2010 and 2011 females sentenced to prison for property crimes accounted for the single largest category of admissions to prison—as was the case prior to SFY 1996.

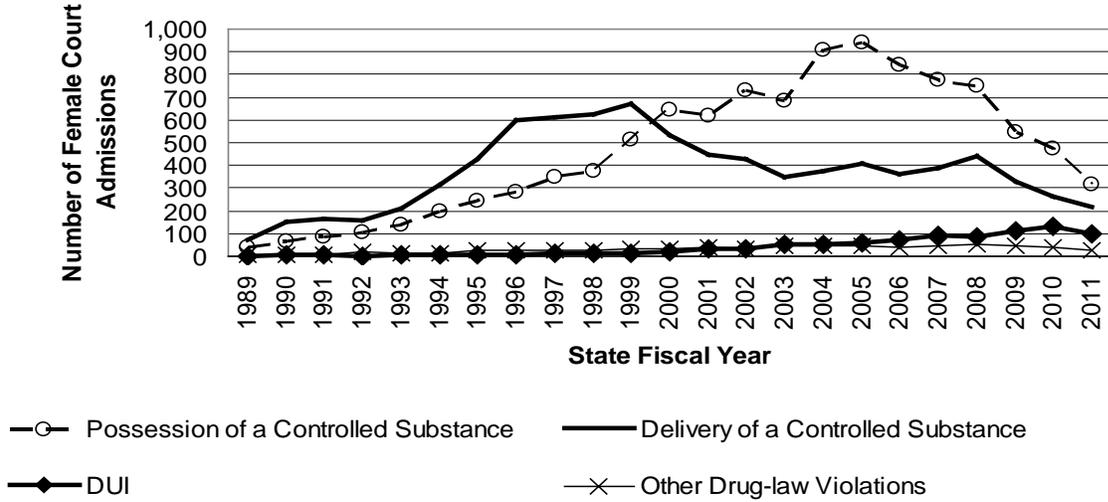
**Figure 7**



Looking at female court admissions to IDOC for drug-law violations more closely reveals a few substantive changes that are masked when all drug-law violations are aggregated together. As seen in Figure 8, from SFY 1989 to 1999, the illegal sale/delivery of drugs classified under the Controlled Substances Act (which in Illinois includes all drugs other than marijuana) accounted for the majority of female admissions to prison for drug-law violations, and admissions for these offenses increased dramatically. This dramatic increase in female admissions for drug sale/delivery is also what was behind the large increase in females admitted for Class 2 felonies described earlier—more than 70 percent of the female Class 2 felony admissions in SFY 1999 were for drug sale/delivery. This period coincided with two changes that occurred in Illinois regarding drug-law violations: 1) an increased emphasis and focus on drug-law violations by local police departments, including the creation and expansion of federally-funded drug task forces in Illinois, and 2) changes to Illinois law that lowered the amounts of drugs associated with more serious felony classes and expansion of the number of drug-law violations that were non-probationable (i.e., required a prison sentence upon conviction). However, by SFY 2000, females admitted to IDOC for the illegal possession of a controlled substance *surpassed* sale/delivery offenses as the largest group of drug-law violation admissions, continued increasing until SFY 2005, and were primarily accounted for by Class 4 felony-level offenses. Figure 8 reveals how sharply female admissions to prison for the illegal sale/delivery of a controlled substance decreased between SFY 1999 and 2011, and, similarly, how female admissions for possession of a controlled substance fell more than 50 percent from SFY 2005 and 2010. Much of this decrease in admissions for both sale/delivery and possession of controlled substance offenses can be attributed to a dramatic decrease in arrests for violations of the Controlled Substances Act in Chicago since 2000. Based on data reported by Chicago to the Illinois State Police through the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) program, between 2000 and 2009, arrests by the Chicago Police Department for Controlled Substance Act offenses fell from 40,318 to 17,289, a 57 percent decrease. As seen in Figure 9, the trends in male court admissions for drug-law violations mirrored trends in female admissions almost identically, although the sheer number of male admissions was dramatically higher than those seen among female admissions.

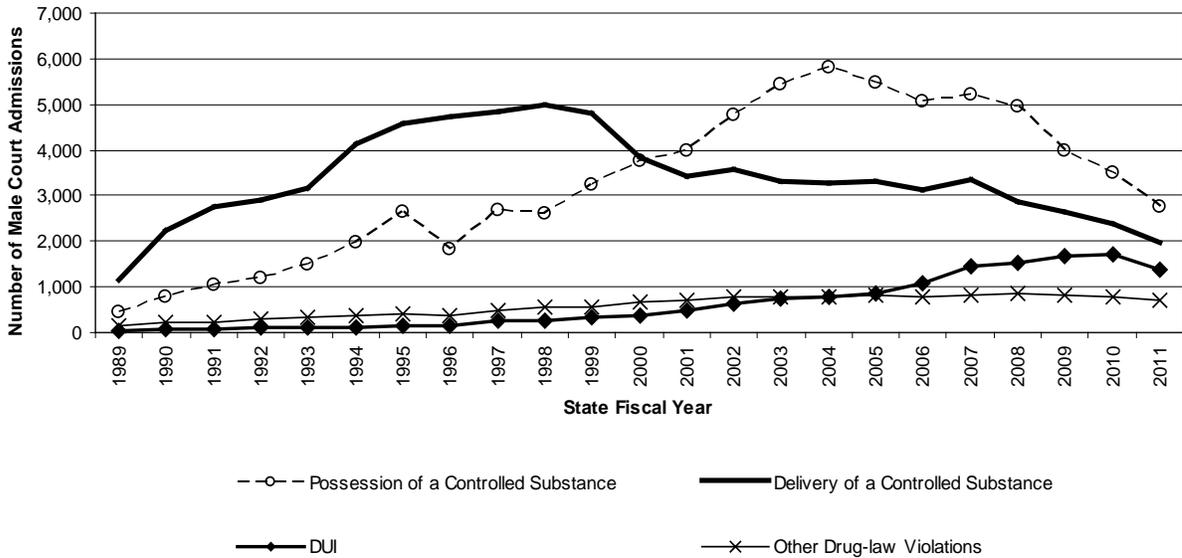
**Figure 8**

**Adult Female Court Admissions to IDOC for Drug-Law Violations, by Fiscal Year**



**Figure 9**

**Adult Male Court Admissions to IDOC for Drug-Law Violations, by Fiscal Year**



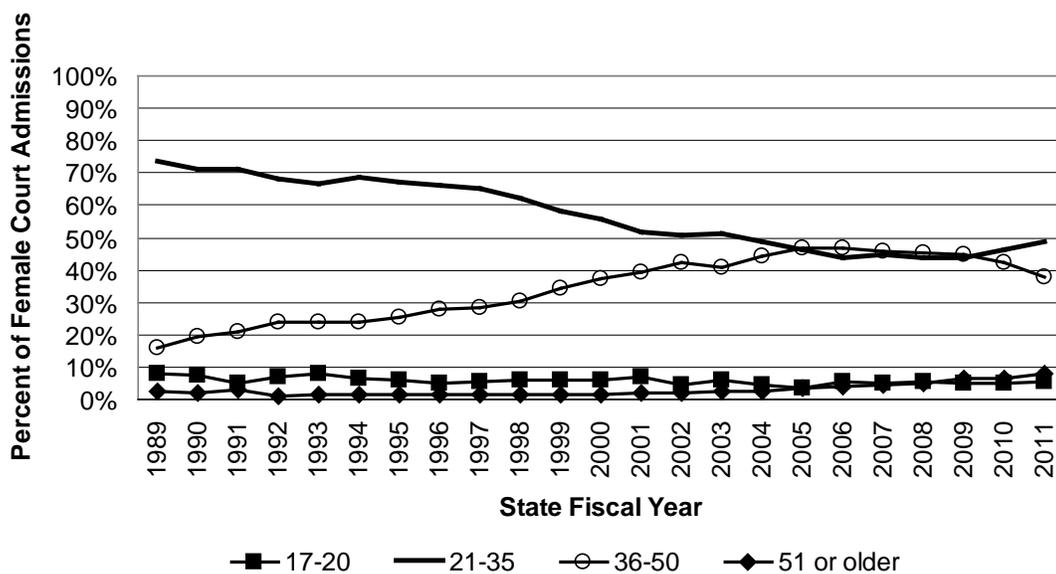
Also evident in Figures 8 and 9 is that among both female and male prison admissions there has been a steady, and in recent years a substantial, increase in court admissions to IDOC for DUI offenses. These increases can primarily be attributed to changes in Illinois law that increased the number of circumstances where DUI is a felony-level offense, and therefore subject to a possible or mandatory prison sentence. Among female court admissions, DUI offenses grew from fewer than 10 admissions per year from SFY 1989 through 1996 to more than 130 in SFY 2010, before decreasing to 99 in SFY 2011. Similarly, male court admissions for DUI grew from less than 200 per year between SFY 1989 and 1996 to more than 1,700 in SFY 2010, before falling to fewer than 1,400 in SFY 2011.

### **Characteristics of Female Prison Admissions**

Just as there have been dramatic changes in the number and proportion of female court admissions to prison accounted for by the different felony classes and crime types, there have also been changes in the demographic characteristics of the females sentenced to prison in Illinois during the period examined. Specifically, from SFY 1989 to 2011, the average age of females sentenced to prison in Illinois increased, and the age distribution of females admitted to prison has also changed dramatically. For example, the average age of females sentenced to IDOC in SFY 1989 was 29.8 years-old, compared to an average age of 35.4 years-old among those admitted in SFY 2005 (the peak year of admissions) and an average of 34.9 years-old among those admitted in SFY 2011. Looked at another way, among females admitted to IDOC in SFY 1989, 81 percent were *under* the age of 36, but by SFY 2011, only 54 percent of females admitted to IDOC were under the age of 36 (Figure 10). Similarly, less than 20 percent of women sentenced to prison in Illinois in SFY 1989 were over the age of 35, but by SFY 2011, that proportion increased to 45 percent. By comparison, the age of *males* sentenced to prison increased from an average of 28 years-old among the SFY 1989 admissions to 32.4 years-old among the SFY 2011 admissions. Among males sentenced to prison in SFY 2011, 64 percent were under 36 years-old, and 36 percent were over the age of 35 at admission. Thus, females admitted to prison in Illinois tend to be older than male court admissions to IDOC.

**Figure 10**

**Percent of Adult Female Court Admissions to IDOC Accounted for by Age Groups, by Fiscal Year**



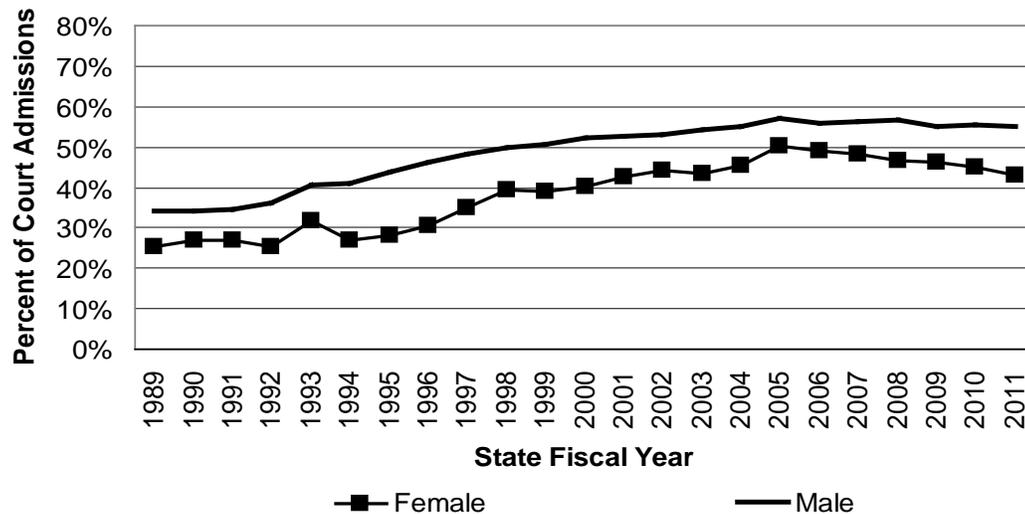
Partly explained by the increase in the average age of females admitted to prison, a larger proportion of females admitted to prison in SFY 2011 had children than was the case among women admitted to prison in Illinois in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For example, roughly 62 percent of females admitted to prison in Illinois in SFY 1989 had children, compared to 80 percent among the SFY 2011 female admissions to IDOC. Among males admitted to IDOC during SFY 2011, 61 percent reported having children. That same year, 62 percent of all females admitted to IDOC reported having *more than 1 child*, compared to 41 percent of men.

Further, a larger proportion of the females admitted to prison in Illinois in SFY 2011 had previously been in prison—43 percent—than those women admitted in SFY 1989, when only 25 percent of those admitted to IDOC had previously been sentenced to prison (Figure 11). As seen in Figure 11, a larger proportion of male court admissions to IDOC had previously been sentenced to prison than female court admissions, although the proportion of both female and male court admissions with prior prison sentences increased over the time period examined. Among female and male inmates released in SFY 2007 (described below in the section regarding

recidivism), the average number of prior arrests of females and males were very similar (an average of 19.7 versus 19.4 priors, respectively), although males tended to have more prior arrests for crimes of *violence* (an average of 3.2) than the female prison releaseses (an average of 1.7).

**Figure 11**

**Percent of Adult Court Admissions to IDOC that have Previously Been in Prison, by Inmate Gender and Fiscal Year**

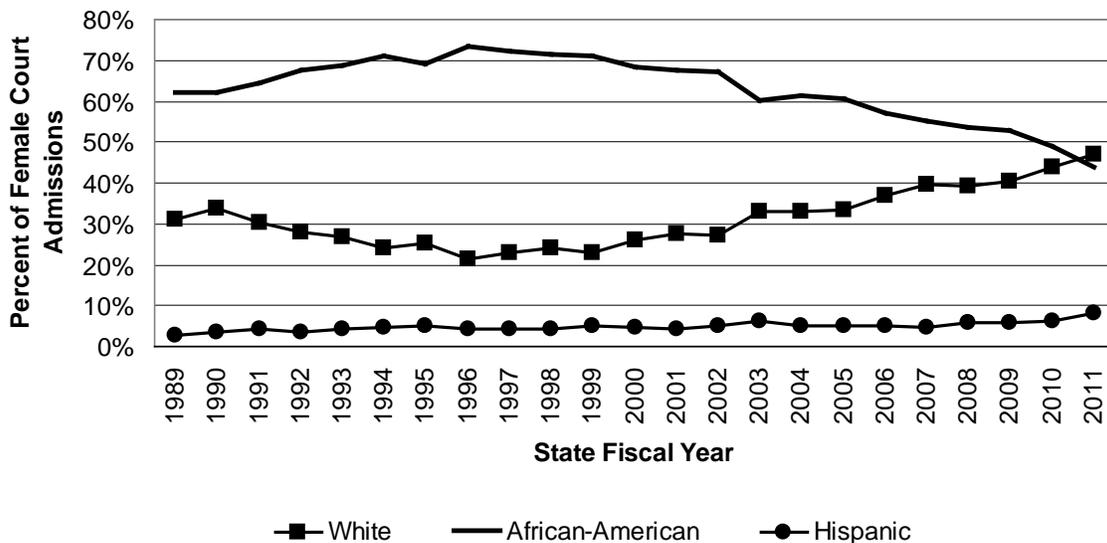


There have also been some fairly substantial changes in the racial composition of female court admissions to IDOC over the past 23 years (Figure 12), although most of the changes have occurred since SFY 2000, and much of it can be attributed to the changing proportion of admissions accounted for by drug-law violations. Specifically, the proportion of females sentenced to IDOC accounted for by African-Americans decreased from 60 percent or more prior to SFY 2005, to less than 50 percent in SFY 2010 and 45 percent in SFY 2011; the first time in the 23 year time period examined in this report that African-Americans accounted for less than one-half of women sentenced to IDOC. Most of this can be attributed to the dramatic decrease in the actual *number* (Figure 13) of African-American females sentenced to prison between SFY 2005 and 2011, which, as was seen before, was primarily driven by decreases in the number of Class 4 felony admissions, and in particular, decreased admissions for the illegal possession of a controlled substance. Since these decreases were driven primarily by changes in arrests, and therefore sentences, in Cook County (Chicago), and historically a higher proportion

of African-American female prison admissions were from the Chicago-land area, it can be concluded that much of the change in the racial composition of females sentenced to IDOC has to do with changes in arrest and sentencing practices in Cook County/Chicago. Because the actual number of white females sentenced to prison in Illinois increased steadily up until the mid-2000s, and decreased only slightly in the last couple of years, they have grown as a proportion of female sentenced to prison, from less than 30 percent of all female prison admissions during most of the 1990s, to 40 percent or more from SFY 2007 to 2011. The proportion of women admitted to prison accounted for by Hispanics has remained below 10 percent throughout the 23 year period examined in this report, but it has increased slightly—from 2 to 3 percent in SFY 1989 and 1990, to 8 percent in SFY 2011. By comparison, less dramatic changes in the racial distribution of adult *male* prison admissions have occurred over the 23 year time period examined: while the proportion of *female* court admissions accounted for by African-Americans fell from more than 70 percent in the late 1990s to less than 50 percent in SFY 2010 and 2011, African-Americans accounted for more than 60 percent of *male* prison court admissions from SFY 1990 through SFY 2004, before decreasing to 55 percent of male court admissions to prison in SFY 2011.

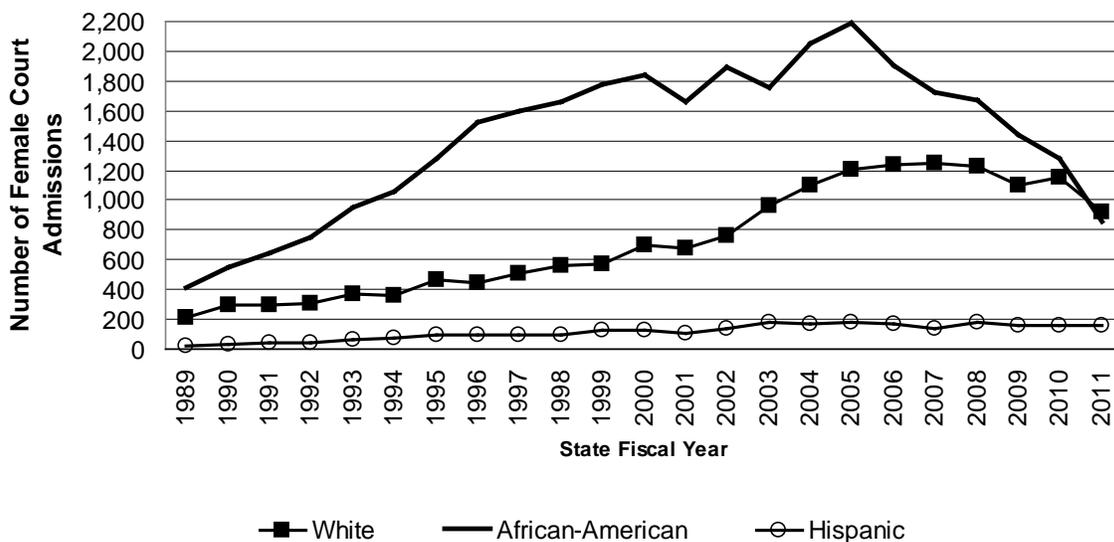
**Figure 12**

**Percent of Adult Female Court Admissions to IDOC Accounted for by Racial Groups, by Fiscal Year**



**Figure 13**

**Number of Adult Female Court Admissions to IDOC, by Racial Groups and Fiscal Year**



**Differences Between Admissions and End-of-the-Year Populations**

Oftentimes when people are describing the characteristics of those in prison they use the characteristics of those *admitted* to prison in a particular year to describe those who are *in* prison at a particular point in time. While the distinction may appear to be minor, it is important to understand the dynamics of prison population flows and how these dynamics can result in the characteristics of those *in prison* on any given day being very different from the characteristics of those *admitted* to prison. The most significant factor is that those who stay in prison for long periods of time—the ones most likely to be in prison on any given day—are very different in terms of their conviction offense and age—than those who stay in prison for a very short period of time, and are therefore less likely to be in prison on any given day.

As seen previously in Figure 7, and in Table 2 below, during SFY 2011, roughly 12 to 14 percent of all female court *admissions* to, and *exits* from, IDOC were accounted for by women convicted of violent offenses, but that same year, violent offenses accounted for 35 percent of the women

in prison on June 30, 2011 (the end of SFY 2011). Because those sentenced to prison for crimes of violence tend to receive much longer sentences and stay in prison longer than those admitted for property or drug-law violations, they build up in the prison population. On the other hand, drug-law violations accounted for 33 percent of female court admissions, and 35 percent of women released from prison, in SFY 2011, but only 28 percent of sentenced women in prison at the end of SFY 2011. Since property crimes and drug-law violations tend to involve primarily lower level felony classes (i.e., Class 3 and 4 felonies), a similar pattern is seen when the proportion of females admitted, released and in prison for these offense classes are examined: Class 3 and 4 felonies account for relatively large proportions of the court admissions and exits from prison (roughly 66 percent), but a smaller proportion—38.1 percent-- of the sentenced end-of-the-fiscal-year female prison population. On the other hand, the most serious felony classes—First Degree Murder and Class X felonies—accounted for small proportions of court admissions and exits among women (roughly 4 percent in SFY 2011), but a relatively large proportion—27 percent-- of the sentenced end-of-the-year population. A similar pattern was seen among male admissions, exits and end-of-the-year populations (Table 2), although violent offenses, and the most serious felony classes, tended to account for higher proportions of male admissions, exits and end-of-the-year populations than was the case among females. For example, 35 percent of all sentenced females in IDOC at the end of SFY 2011 had been convicted of a violent offense, compared to 55 percent of the sentenced males in prison on that same date.

**Table 2**  
**Percent of Female and Male IDOC SFY 2011 Court Admissions, Exit and End of the Fiscal Year Populations Accounted for by Different Types of Offenses**

	Violent Crimes (Female/Male)	Drug-Law Violations (Female/Male)	Class 3 and 4 felonies (Female/Male)	First Degree Murder and Class X Felonies (Female/Male)
Percent of SFY 2011 Court Admissions	14.7% / 30.8%	33.7% / 34.5%	66.4% / 49.9%	4.6% / 9.6%
Percent of Total SFY 2011 Court Exits	12.6% / 33.0%	35.3% / 35.8%	68.6% / 54.2%	4.7% / 8.7%
Percent of Total Sentenced Population on 6/30/2011	34.8% / 55.3%	28.3% / 22.3%	38.1% / 20.0%	27.1% / 41.6%

## **Recidivism of Females Released from Prison**

In the field of criminal justice, the most frequently used measure to gauge the impact and effectiveness of rehabilitative programs is the reduction in recidivism, or reduced involvement in criminal behavior, by those who participate in the rehabilitative program. However, accurately measuring an individual's involvement in crime is very difficult since many crimes never come to the attention of law enforcement. Thus, measuring subsequent involvement in crime in criminal justice research usually involves analyses of official criminal history information, including rearrests for new crimes or return to prison. Using these two different measures of recidivism is advantageous because they examine recidivism from different perspectives. For example, rearrests for new crimes can illustrate behavior detected by police agencies that at least meet the legal threshold of probable cause necessary for police to initiate an arrest, regardless of whether or not the arrest results in prosecution, conviction or return to prison.

While many might argue that *conviction* for a crime would be a better measure of recidivism (since there would have been proof beyond a reasonable doubt that a crime was committed), the limitation with this measure is that when an offender is on active parole (mandatory supervised release, or MSR), the decision as to whether or not the State's Attorney's Office will actually file charges and seek a conviction would be influenced by both the seriousness of the offense and the response to the new arrest by parole agents and the Prisoner Review Board (PRB). For example, a rearrest for drug possession while on mandatory supervised release (MSR) can result in a revocation of MSR and the offender being returned to prison to serve the remainder of their MSR in prison. In this case, a prosecutor may not file charges, and therefore not seek a conviction, because the response by the parole agent and PRB achieved the goal of punishment or incarceration. On the other hand, if the crime was more serious, or the response by the parole officer and/or PRB was not viewed by the prosecutor as sufficient, charges may be filed and a conviction sought. Thus, some arrests of parolees will result in prosecution being sought, and potentially a conviction being obtained, whereas other cases will not result in additional formal processing through the courts.

Return to prison is another measure of recidivism that is often used in research examining prison releasees, and can be influenced by both rearrests as well as other violations of mandatory supervised release. As described above, inmates rearrested for a new crime while on MSR in Illinois can be returned to prison because of this new arrest without being convicted, and are considered to be “technical violations” as opposed to a return to prison for a new crime. Inmates returned to prison for violating the conditions of MSR other than a new arrest can be viewed as “purely” technical violators, and can include reasons such as failure to report to their parole agent, not complying with treatment requirements, testing positive for drugs during urinalysis, etc. If an inmate released from prison is rearrested, convicted and re-sentenced to IDOC as a result of this new conviction within 3 years following release, they are considered by IDOC to be “new offense recidivists.”

In order to examine the degree to which females released from Illinois’ prison system experienced recidivism, both rearrests for new crimes and return to prison were examined. Specifically, for the current project, detailed Illinois criminal history record information were obtained from the ICJIA through a cooperative agreement with the Illinois State Police, along with data directly from the IDOC for all adults released from prison in Illinois during SFY 2007. Because inmates can be released multiple times within a specific fiscal year, the first release during the fiscal year was used to select the cases for inclusion in the analyses when an inmate had multiple exits during SFY 2007. So, if an inmate was released from prison after having been returned as a parole violator, and then subsequently readmitted and re-released during SFY 2007 as a court commitment, the first exit event (the release after having served additional time for a technical parole violation) was selected for inclusion in the analyses. Within the sample selected, 78 percent of the 34,034 cases were for releases following incarceration for a court-imposed sentence and 22 percent of the cases were for releases following incarceration that resulted from a technical parole violation. The criminal history record information included all arrests reported to the Illinois State Police criminal history record information (CHRI) system as of May 2010, so each individual included in the analyses was at risk of being rearrested for an average of 34 months, or almost 3 years, while return to prison data went through June 2010. Thus, the average length of the follow-up period was roughly 3 years, although most—90 percent--of those

rearrested or returned to prison experienced that negative outcome within the first 2 years following release.

Based on analyses of these data, the research found that women were less likely than men released from prison to be rearrested for any new crime, a crime of violence, and were also less likely to be returned to prison during the follow-up period (Table 3). Specifically, 61 percent of the women released from prison were rearrested for any crime within the follow-up period, compared to 70 percent of the men. Similarly, 15 percent of the women were rearrested specifically for a crime of violence, compared to 31 percent of the men, during the same follow-up period. Finally, when return to prison was examined during the follow-up period, 34 percent of females released from prison were returned to prison within the follow-up period, compared to a rate of 51percent among the males included in the analyses. Although some of this reduced risk of recidivism among the female inmates relative to the males had to do with fewer risk factors, including fewer prior arrests, higher educational achievement, being older, and having a higher likelihood of receiving rehabilitative services in IDOC (i.e., substance abuse treatment), even after these differences were statistically accounted for, women still had lower rates of recidivism, a pattern that has been documented among convicted offenders in Illinois and nationally (Olson, Alderden, & Lurigio, 2003; Deschenes, Owen, & Crow, 2006) .

**Table 3  
Recidivism Rates of 2007 Releasee Cohort During Follow-up Period**

	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
Percent Rearrested for Any New Offense	70.0%	61.2%	69.2%
Percent Rearrested for a Crime of Violence	30.6%	15.2%	29.1%
Percent Returned to Prison	50.8%	34.2%	49.2%

In addition, there were a number of characteristics that were associated with higher rates of recidivism among the female prison releasees. Generally, females inmates released from IDOC that were younger, not married, who had not completed high-school or received a GED, had more prior arrests and prison sentences, who were gang involved, who were in prison for property offenses and less serious felony class offenses, and who had numerous disciplinary infractions while serving their current prison sentence were more likely to be rearrested and

returned to prison than females without these characteristics. On the other hand, female inmates who had participated in drug treatment while incarcerated were *less likely* to be rearrested following their release than women who did not receive substance abuse treatment.

As seen in Table 4, the average age of women who were not rearrested during the follow-up period was higher than the average age of those who were rearrested following release from prison (36.4 versus 35.2, respectively). In addition, black females were more likely than white females released from prison to be rearrested for any offense during the follow-up period, although some of these differences were accounted for by the characteristics of the community released inmates returned to after their stay in prison. The marital status and education-level of the females also played a role in their post-prison likelihood of rearrest, with 58 percent of the females who had either a high-school diploma or GED being rearrested for any offense compared to almost 65 percent of those women who had neither a high-school diploma or GED. In terms of the current conviction offense, females released after having served a sentence for sex-related offense, primarily prostitution among the female prison releasees, were the most likely to be rearrested for any offense—78.5 percent were rearrested for any offense during the follow-up period—whereas those released from prison after serving a sentence for a violent crime had the lowest overall rate of rearrest at 49.6 percent. These rearrests were for any offense, not necessarily the same type of crime for which they had been originally sentenced to prison.

Those with more extensive criminal histories were also more likely to recidivate. For example, those females who had served their first prison sentence had a rearrest rate of 51.1 percent, compared to 76.4 percent of those women in the sample who had been in prison two or more times previously. Similarly, the average number of prior arrests for those women who were released and did not get rearrested was 13.5, compared to an average of almost 24 prior arrests for those women in the sample that did recidivate. Finally, the volume of disciplinary incidents during the current period of incarceration, and participation in rehabilitative programs, also was related to post-release rearrests. For example, women who had no disciplinary incidents during the current period of incarceration were less likely to be rearrested following release from prison than those with three or more incidents (57.9 percent versus 64.1 percent). Further, those women who participated in substance abuse treatment had a post-release rearrest rate of 50.5 percent, compared to 63.3 percent among those who did not participate in drug treatment.

**Table 4**  
**Characteristics Associated\* with Any Rearrest During Follow-up Period of Females**  
**Released from IDOC During SFY 2007 (N=3,253)**

	<b>No Rearrest N=1,263</b>	<b>Rearrest N=1,990</b>	<b>Total N=3,253</b>
<b>Total Sample</b>	38.8%	61.2%	100%
<b>Age (Mean, Years)</b>	36.4 years	35.2 years	35.6 years
<b>Race</b>			
White	44.7%	55.3%	100%
Black	33.8%	66.2%	100%
Hispanic	42.1%	57.9%	100%
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single	37.5%	62.5%	100%
Married	46.7%	53.3%	100%
<b>Education Level</b>			
High/School Grad or GED	42.0%	58.0%	100%
No High/School No GED	35.4%	64.6%	100%
<b>Current Convict Offense</b>			
Violent	50.4%	49.6%	100%
Drug	41.9%	63.5%	100%
Property	36.5%	63.5%	100%
Sex Offense (Primarily Prostitution)**	21.5%	78.5%	100%
<b>Current Release Type</b>			
Court Sentence	39.4%	60.6%	100%
Parole Violator	32.1%	67.9%	100%
<b>Prior prison sentences</b>			
None	48.9%	51.1%	100%
One	34.2%	65.8%	100%
2 or more	23.6%	76.4%	100%
<b>Prior Arrests (Mean, Number)</b>	13.5 priors	23.7 priors	19.7 priors
<b>Gang Member</b>			
Not a gang member	39.9%	60.1%	100%
Gang Member	24.5%	75.5%	100%
<b>Number of Disciplinary Incidents During Current Prison Stay</b>			
None	42.1%	57.9%	100%
One to Two	36.7%	63.3%	100%
Three or More	35.9%	64.1%	100%
<b>Participated in Drug Treatment During Current Prison Stay</b>			
No	36.7%	63.3%	100%
Yes	49.5%	50.5%	100%

\*All correlations between characteristics & recidivism statistically significant at the  $p<.01$  level.

\*\* Among female releasees, 92% of the sex offenses involved prostitution and 8% involved sexual abuse/assault or failure of sex offender to report change of address.

## Conclusions

The preceding analyses illustrate and highlight a number of trends in the admission of females to the Illinois Department of Corrections that are markedly different from the trends seen among male prison admissions in Illinois, as well as some patterns that are consistent for both male and female prison admissions. First, while the number of females admitted to prison accounts for a relatively small proportion of overall prison admissions, and the overall prison population in Illinois, female admissions actually increased at a faster pace than male admissions during the 1990s, and as a result, the proportion of admissions accounted for by women increased during the period examined. This was driven by a proportionately larger increase in female admissions to prison for drug-law violations. The proportion of female court admissions to prison for drug law violations increased from less than 20 percent of all female court admissions in SFY 1989 to 50 percent in SFY 1989, whereas drug-law violations never accounted for more than 42 percent of male court admissions to IDOC during the period examined. Second, while the dramatic increase in admissions for drug-law violations fueled much of the growth in admissions to prison of females during the 1990s, the dramatic *decrease* in admissions for drug-law violations and prostitution offenses since SFY 2005 has resulted in fewer overall admissions to prison of females, and as a result, females accounted for under 10 percent of both court admissions to prison, as well as total admissions (including parole violators) during SFY 2011.

As a result of these changes in the volume of admissions of females to prison, as well as changes in the types of crimes resulting in their incarceration, some dramatic changes have also been seen in terms of the characteristics of females admitted to IDOC during the period analyzed. Women coming to prison in Illinois are older now than before, are more likely to have children, and are also more likely to have been in prison previously. As a result of changes in the volume of drug-law violators being sentenced to prison during the last decade, particularly the reduced number sentenced from Cook County (Chicago) for drug-law violations, a smaller proportion of both women and men sentenced to IDOC are coming from Cook County, and an decreasing proportion of admissions are being accounted for by blacks than during the 1990s.

Finally, while the rate of recidivism for female inmates released from IDOC is lower than that of males, regardless of how it is measured, and in part reflects higher levels of access to rehabilitative services such as drug treatment and opportunities for diversion from being returned to prison, the overall recidivism rate it is still considerably high. The efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of institutional programming for women, and stronger reentry planning implemented by the IDOC over the past decade has benefitted both the females under the custody of IDOC, as well as the public in terms of reduced recidivism and reincarceration, and should continue.

## Citations

Deschenes, E.P., Owen, B., & Crow, J.: *Recidivism Among Female Prisoners: Secondary Analysis of the 1994 BJS Recidivism Data Set*. Final report submitted to U.S. Department of Justice, 2006.

Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council: *A Retrospective Examination of Felony Sentencing in Illinois*. Research Bulletin, Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council, April 2011.

Olson, D.E., Alderden, M., & Lurigio, A.J.: Men are from Mars, women are from Venus: But what role does gender play in probationer recidivism? *Justice Research and Policy*. Fall 2003.

Olson, D.E.: *Racial Disparity in the Sentencing of Drug Law Violators from Cook County*. Testimony presented before the Illinois State Legislature's House Judiciary, Criminal Law Committee, December 2001.

Simon, R. & Landis, J. (1991). *The crimes women commit, the punishmentsthey receive*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Spohn, C. & Beichner, D. (2000). Is preferential treatment of female offenders a thing of the past? A multistate study of gender, race, and imprisonment. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 11, 2, 49–184.