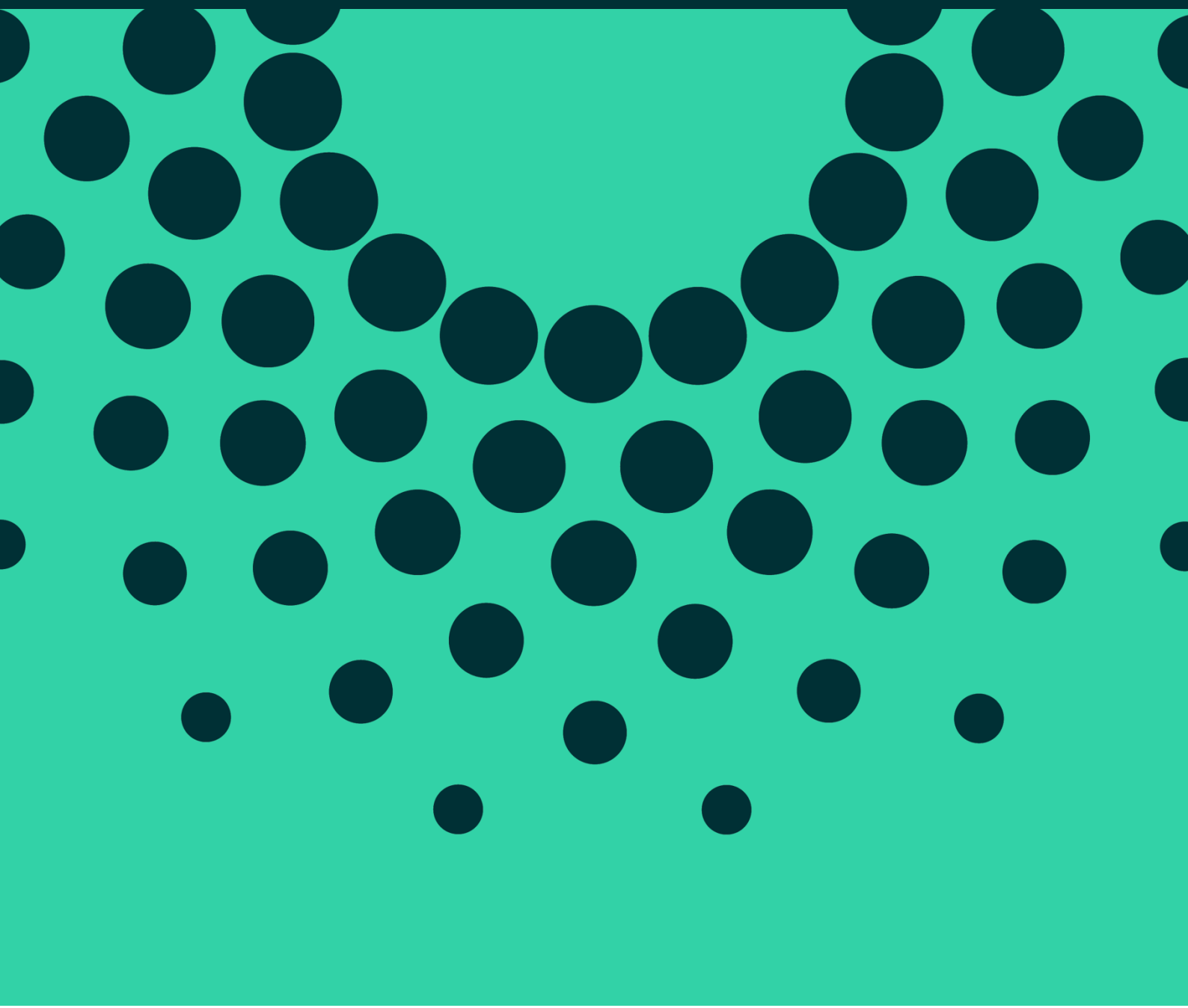


Ethnic disparities in recall on licence

Author: Kitty Lymperopoulou

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Summary

This Data Insight investigates whether ethnic disparities persist post-sentencing by examining whether ethnic minority individuals released on licence are more likely to be recalled compared to their white British counterparts.

The analyses are based on linked criminal justice datasets including criminal courts, prisons and probation, made available through the ADR UK-funded Ministry of Justice Data First programme, and multilevel models examining the likelihood of recall.

Analysis of differences in recall by ethnicity indicated that individuals from white ethnic groups (white British, white Irish, and Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Romany) and mixed ethnicity (white and black Caribbean, and white and black African) groups were more likely to be recalled than those from other ethnic groups. There were also differences in licence conditions between ethnic groups. While electronic monitoring and reporting conditions were more prevalent among ethnic minority individuals, white British individuals were more likely to have drugs and alcohol testing, curfew and residency, programme participation and no contact conditions.

After adjusting for licence conditions and other factors, recall remained more likely for Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Romany individuals, and those from white Irish and white and black Caribbean groups than white British individuals. In contrast, individuals from other ethnic minority groups including black African, black Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups were less likely to be recalled than those who were white British.

What we did

The analyses used linked probation, prisons and criminal courts data(3) to examine ethnic disparities in recalls. The sample is based on individuals on licence with probation disposals between 2018-2021.

In order, to examine whether the likelihood of recall varies by ethnicity a multilevel logistic model was estimated controlling for age, gender, offence type, sentence length (the length in days between the court disposal date and the earliest licence start date), criminal history (prior custodial sentences in the five years prior to the court disposal of the sentence associated with the licence) and licence conditions. Licence conditions examined include drugs and alcohol testing; electronic monitoring; contact restrictions; curfew and residency restrictions and reporting conditions. The volume of licence conditions was measured by the number of licence conditions associated with a probation event. As there may be multiple recalls in a probation event, only the first set of licence conditions in a probation event have been used for those recalled more than once, while for those recalled once or not recalled, all licence conditions associated with the probation event were used. The analyses focused on eleven self-identified ethnic group categories: Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, black Caribbean, black African, white and black Caribbean, white and black African, Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Romany, white British, white Irish, and any other ethnic group which includes ethnic categories not individually reported such as other black, other Asian and other white, as well as smaller ethnic minority groups such as Arab and Chinese.

Background

There have been decades of research across multiple jurisdictions examining whether ethnic disparities in criminal justice outcomes persist after accounting for legally relevant factors such as offence severity and criminal history (King and Light 2019). However, much of this literature focuses on sentencing disparities, with comparatively limited attention paid to post-sentencing outcomes and community supervision (Kurlychek and Johnson, 2019)(1).

Probation supervision decisions can significantly affect an individual's ability to complete their sentence successfully, particularly where restrictive licence conditions and supervision requirements increase the risk of breach and re-imprisonment (Bradner and Schiraldi, 2020)(2). Consequently, disparities arising at earlier stages of the criminal justice process may be reproduced or amplified through post-sentencing decision-making.

This study draws on linked Ministry of Justice Data First datasets from criminal courts, probation and prisons to examine ethnic disparities in recall following release on licence, focusing on whether individuals from ethnic minority groups are more likely to be recalled than white British individuals.

What we found

Table 1 shows the proportion of individuals on licence who were recalled by ethnicity. Around 43% of Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Romany individuals on licence were recalled. This was the highest proportion for any ethnic group. In comparison, 36% of white British individuals on licence were recalled. The only two other ethnic groups more likely to be recalled than the white British were white and black Caribbean (38%) and the white Irish (38%). The groups with the lowest levels of recalls were Indian (22%), Pakistani (24%), Bangladeshi (22%), and other groups not individually reported (24%). Individuals from black Caribbean groups and black African groups also had a lower proportion of recalls (30% and 26% respectively) than the white British group.

Table 1. Recalls by ethnicity

	Recall (%)
White British	35.5 (35.2,35.9)
Indian	22.3 (20.1,24.7)
Pakistani	24.3 (22.7,26)
Bangladeshi	22.2 (19.4,25.2)
Black Caribbean	29.7 (28.3,31.2)
Black African	25.8 (24.3,27.5)
White and black Caribbean	37.7 (35.9,39.5)
White and black African	35.5 (31.4,39.9)
Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Romany	42.6 (39.5,45.7)
White Irish	37.8 (34.7,41)
Any other group	23.8 (22.9,24.8)

Note: 95% confidence intervals (upper and lower) are shown in parenthesis.

Table 2 shows the proportion of individuals in each ethnic group with different types of licence conditions. There is a higher proportion of individuals on licence with electronic monitoring conditions from the Indian (24%) Pakistani (31%), Bangladeshi (24%) and Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Romany (26%) ethnic groups than the white British group (21%). The highest proportion of individuals on licence with drugs and alcohol testing conditions were from the white British (33%), white and black Caribbean (27%), white and black African (30%) and Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Romany (29%) groups. Similarly, white British individuals were more likely to have curfew and residence conditions (40%), programme participation conditions (58%) and non-contact conditions (43%) compared to individuals from ethnic minority groups. Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Romany and white and black Caribbean individuals were also more likely to have curfew, residence conditions (38% and 37% respectively), programme participation conditions (51% and 49% respectively) and no contact conditions (42% and 38% respectively) compared to individuals from other ethnic minority groups. In contrast, white British individuals had the lowest proportion of reporting conditions (28%). In comparison, Indian, black Caribbean and black African individuals were more likely to have reporting licence conditions (between 46% and 50%) than individuals from any other ethnic group. The average number of licence conditions was slightly higher for individuals from white British, Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Romany, white and black African and white and black Caribbean groups.

Table 2. Licence conditions by ethnicity

	Drugs and alcohol (%)		Electronic monitor(%)		Curfew/ Residence (%)		Programme participation (%)	
White British	32.5	(32.2,32.9)	20.8	(20.5,21.1)	40.3	(39.9,40.6)	57.5	(57.1,57.8)
Indian	13.7	(11.9,15.7)	23.8	(21.6,26.2)	32.0	(29.5,34.6)	43.0	(40.3,45.7)
Pakistani	18.4	(17,19.9)	31.0	(29.3,32.8)	34.8	(33,36.6)	47.0	(45.1,48.8)
Bangladeshi	14.6	(12.3,17.3)	23.9	(21,27)	30.7	(27.6,34.1)	36.6	(33.2,40)
Black Caribbean	18.9	(17.7,20.1)	19.6	(18.4,20.9)	30.1	(28.7,31.5)	38.3	(36.8,39.8)
Black African	14.4	(13.1,15.7)	17.4	(16.1,18.9)	27.2	(25.6,28.9)	35.0	(33.3,36.8)
White and black Caribbean	27.3	(25.7,29)	21.3	(19.8,22.9)	36.9	(35.1,38.7)	49.3	(47.5,51.2)
White and Black African	30.0	(26.1,34.2)	20.9	(17.5,24.8)	35.9	(31.7,40.3)	44.2	(39.8,48.6)
Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Romany	28.9	(26.1,31.9)	25.6	(22.9,28.4)	37.7	(34.7,40.8)	51.4	(48.2,54.6)
White Irish	24.2	(21.6,27.1)	18.1	(15.8,20.8)	32.7	(29.7,35.8)	46.0	(42.8,49.3)
Any other group	16.4	(15.6,17.3)	14.4	(13.6,15.2)	29.5	(28.5,30.6)	39.7	(38.5,40.8)

Note: 95% confidence intervals (upper and lower) are shown in parenthesis.

Table 2 (continued). Licence conditions by ethnicity

	Reporting (%)		No contact (%)		Average no of licence conditions	
White British	27.5	(27.2,27.9)	43.1	(42.8,43.5)	4.1	(4.1,4.1)
Indian	50.0	(47.2,52.7)	31.8	(29.3,34.4)	3.2	(3,3.3)
Pakistani	38.7	(36.9,40.5)	37.4	(35.6,39.2)	3.5	(3.4,3.6)
Bangladeshi	39.7	(36.3,43.1)	36.3	(33,39.7)	3.0	(2.8,3.2)
Black Caribbean	49.1	(47.5,50.6)	32.2	(30.8,33.7)	3.3	(3.1,3.4)
Black African	46.3	(44.4,48.1)	30.4	(28.7,32.1)	3.0	(2.9,3.1)
White and black Caribbean	39.3	(37.6,41.2)	38.2	(36.4,40)	3.8	(3.6,3.9)
White and black African	38.1	(33.8,42.5)	38.7	(34.4,43.1)	3.8	(3.4,4.1)
Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Romany	31.5	(28.6,34.5)	41.6	(38.6,44.8)	3.8	(3.5,4)
White Irish	40.7	(37.5,43.9)	34.4	(31.3,37.5)	3.3	(3.1,3.5)
Any other group	42.9	(41.8,44.1)	32.7	(31.6,33.8)	3.0	(3,3.1)

Note: 95% confidence intervals (upper and lower) are shown in parenthesis.

The results of the multilevel model in Table 3 show that individuals from most ethnic minority groups had lower odds of recall while on licence than the white British even after controlling for licence conditions, extra-legal (age and gender) and legal factors (offence type, sentence length and criminal history). Specifically, the odds of recall for individuals from the Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, black African, black Caribbean and ethnic groups not individually reported, were between 8% and 36% lower than the white British. However, the odds of recall were 13% higher for white and black Caribbean, 39% higher for Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Romany individuals and 21% higher for white Irish individuals compared to white British individuals.

Table 3. Two-level logistic model of recall

	b	SE	OR	
Licence conditions				
Number of licences	0.11	0.00	1.12	***
Drugs and alcohol	0.34	0.02	1.40	***
Electronic monitoring	0.08	0.02	1.08	***
No contact	-0.20	0.02	0.82	***
Curfew and residence restrictions	0.03	0.02	1.03	
Programme participation	0.11	0.02	1.12	***
Reporting	0.15	0.02	1.16	***
Ethnicity (ref:white British)				
Indian	-0.28	0.07	0.76	***
Pakistani	-0.36	0.05	0.70	***
Bangladeshi	-0.45	0.09	0.64	***
Black Caribbean	-0.08	0.04	0.92	*
Black African	-0.24	0.05	0.78	***
White and black Caribbean	0.12	0.04	1.13	**
White and black African	0.01	0.10	1.01	
Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Romany	0.33	0.07	1.39	***
White Irish	0.19	0.07	1.21	**
Any other group	-0.27	0.03	0.76	***
Age (Ref:50 plus)				
under26	0.61	0.03	1.83	***
26-35	0.49	0.03	1.63	***
36-49	0.38	0.03	1.46	***
Gender (Ref:Women)				
Men	-0.07	0.03	0.93	**
Offence (Ref:Other offence)				
Crimes against society	-0.29	0.03	0.75	***
Drugs	0.01	0.03	1.01	
Public order offences	0.04	0.03	1.04	
Robbery	0.69	0.05	1.99	***
Theft	0.30	0.02	1.35	***
Violence	0.22	0.02	1.24	***
Sentence length(log)				
	0.23	0.01	1.26	***
Prior custodial (Ref:none)				
One	0.60	0.02	1.82	***
Two or more	1.13	0.02	3.08	***
AIC	110286.8			
BIC	110638.6			
Prob var	0.05			
N probation areas	112			
N individuals	99438			

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; the model includes controls for year of licence.

Beyond ethnicity the results show that individuals on drugs and alcohol testing conditions were 40% more likely to be recalled, while individuals with reporting conditions, participation in programme conditions and electronic monitor conditions were 16%, 12%, and 8% more likely to be recalled, respectively. In contrast non-contact licence conditions were associated with lower odds of recall. Additionally, for each additional licence the odds of recall increase by 12%. The odds of recall for males were 7% lower compared to females while they were higher for those in the younger age groups, with those aged under 26 having 83% higher odds of recall than those aged 50 or older. The odds of recall for those convicted of robbery offences were substantially higher (double) of those convicted for other offences. They were also 35% and 24% higher for those convicted of theft and violence offences respectively, compared to those convicted of other offences. In contrast, there were no differences in the odds of recall between those convicted for drugs or public order offences compared with those convicted of other offences. Individuals with one custodial sentence, and those with two or more previous custodial sentences, had 1.8 and 3 times the odds (respectively) of recall than those with no previous custodial sentences. A one-unit increase in the log sentence length was also associated with a 26% increase in the odds of recall.

Key findings

Recall rates varied by ethnicity, with the highest rates among Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Romany individuals, white Irish individuals, and white and black Caribbean individuals, while Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, black African and black Caribbean groups had lower recall rates than white British individuals.

Differences in licence conditions were also observed across ethnic groups, but after accounting for licence conditions, age, gender, offence type, sentence length and criminal history, most ethnic minority groups remained less likely to be recalled than white British individuals.

The exceptions were Gypsy, Irish Traveller and Romany, white Irish, and white and black Caribbean individuals, who continued to show higher odds of recall, suggesting that patterns of ethnic disparity in recall are not uniform and differ from those observed at earlier stages of the criminal justice system.

Why it matters

The findings show that patterns of recall are not uniform across ethnic minority individuals. While some ethnic minority groups exhibited significantly higher likelihoods of recall relative to the white British group, individuals from most ethnic minority groups were less likely to be recalled than their white British counterparts, after controlling for the factors. This suggests that ethnic minority groups do not experience uniformly elevated risks of recall. It also suggests that post sentencing, the licence supervision stage may operate differently from earlier criminal justice stages where disparities are more pronounced (4). Ethnic disparities identified at earlier stages of criminal justice processing are not consistently observed in recall on licence outcomes.

What next?

Further analyses will examine ethnic differences in recall by type, distinguishing between recalls for further offending and non-compliance breaches. Disaggregating recall outcomes will help differentiate pathways into recall and allow assessment of whether ethnic differences are concentrated in particular types of recall. This distinction is important because non-compliance recalls may reflect discretionary supervision and monitoring practices, whereas recalls for further offences are more likely to be directly linked to offending behaviour. This will aid understanding of the mechanisms underlying recall differences and assess whether disparities are concentrated in more discretionary recall types.

Works cited

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5. HM Prison and Probation Service. (2026). Recall, review and re-release of recalled prisoners policy framework. GOV.UK.

Notes

A recall typically happens when a person released from prison on licence breaches their licence conditions or poses an increased risk of reoffending or harm that can no longer be safely managed in the community. Recall decisions are made in accordance with the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and the HMPPS (2026) Recall, Review and Re-release of Recalled Prisoners Policy Framework(5), which sets out the mandatory requirements and guidance for recall decision-making.

Prior custodial sentences relate to both magistrates' and Crown Court outcomes. The datasets include only cases from 2011 onwards for the magistrates' court dataset and 2013 onwards for the Crown Court dataset. As there are no available data for defendants' previous convictions prior to these dates, prior custodial sentences were examined in the five years prior to the current sentence. The incomplete nature of the available data on criminal histories may lead to underestimation of prior offending, potentially affecting the observed differences between ethnic groups in the regression estimates.

Drugs and alcohol conditions exclude those involving electronic monitor. Electronic monitoring conditions include alcohol monitoring, curfew, GPS tagging and curfew police checks. Curfew and residency licence conditions include prohibited residency, residence at a specific place, restriction of residency, freedom of movement, and curfew involving police checks only. Reporting licence conditions include reporting to a police station, hostel or other specified location.

Offence categories were drawn from the 12- fold Home Office classification, with less common and more heterogeneous categories combined into a residual group.

The analysis does not account for all factors affecting recalls, such as probation risk classifications, which may influence recall decisions. While the analyses incorporated controls for extra-legal and legal factors, unmeasured factors may still contribute to the observed differences between ethnic groups.

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About ADR UK

ADR UK (Administrative Data Research UK), ESRC's flagship data-sharing partnership, enables secure access to linked UK public-sector data for researchers. From crime and justice to education, the economy, and health, this UK-wide partnership is transforming public sector data into research insights and policy evidence to improve lives.

Disclaimer

Data Insights allow ADR UK to swiftly share emerging findings as they are reported. This ensures everyone from government decision makers to members of the public can find out what is identified in our data throughout the research process. Note that Data Insights have not been formally peer reviewed and are often shared before a linked journal article is published to ensure timeliness.

This work was produced using administrative data accessed through the ONS Secure Research Service. The use of the data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS or data owners (e.g., HM Courts and Tribunals Service, HM Prison and Probation Service, and the Ministry of Justice) in relation to the interpretation or analysis.

This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates. National Statistics follow consistent statistical conventions over time and cannot be compared to Data First linked datasets.

Publication contact

Name: Dr Kitty Lympelopoulou

Email: kitty.lympelopoulou@plymouth.ac.uk

