

# An Examination of Incarceration, Motherhood, and Recidivism

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## Prior Research

- ❖ Prior research has posited conflicting stories of mothers who have been incarcerated. Some accounts assert motherhood reduces the likelihood of recidivism, others cite it as a stressor that increases the likelihood of recidivism (Cobbina, 2009; Burgess 2013; Huebner, 2009).
- ❖ Many women find themselves overwhelmed with the new responsibilities associated with motherhood compounded with the stress of reintegrating into society, and cite this as a reason for reoffending. (Cobbina, 2009; Burgess 2013)
- ❖ The quality of the mother’s relationship with her child directly impacts her likelihood to recidivate (Hairston, 2001; Gabel and Johnston, 1995; Goshin, Byrne, and Henninger 2013).

## Healthy Beginnings at William & Mary

The William & Mary Healthy Beginnings Project is housed in the Psychology department at William & Mary. The project works with incarcerated women to identify pregnancies early and work with the women to deliver prenatal care as well as nutritional counseling. The project hopes to promote healthier lifestyles, healthier pregnancies, and healthier babies.

For more information on Healthy Beginnings, please visit our website at [http://www.wm.edu/as/programs/healthy\\_beginnings/](http://www.wm.edu/as/programs/healthy_beginnings/)

## Research Questions

The current study seeks to examine the following questions:

- ❖ How many women who participated in the study recidivated?
- ❖ At what developmental stage (0-3 months, 3-6 months, 6-9 months, 9-12 months, 12-18 months and 24+ months) were women most likely to recidivate?
- ❖ Are there any common characteristics of the women who recidivated?

## Participants and Measures

- ❖ Of the **170** women who participated in the Healthy Beginnings project, **108** had complete data that were used for this analysis.
- ❖ Of the selected participants, 29 (27%) were first time mothers; the average age at time of first interview was 25 ( $M = 25.05$ ;  $Max = 40$ ;  $Min = 19$ ); 45.3% identified as White, 49.7% identified as Black, 28.8% hadn’t completed High School, 24.9% received WIC in the last year, and 9.9% were married.
- ❖ **Healthy Beginnings Intake and Postpartum Surveys: were taken from the CDC Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (2014).** This survey included the demographic information, birth outcome information, health behaviors, and risk behavior measures.
- ❖ **VineLink Data:** VineLink is an online service that allows the public to search for offenders and track their status with the detention system. Once women came through our program, we registered to get emails from VineLink upon their release. VineLink was then checked about once a week to determine if any women had been released, reincarcerated, or transferred to another facility.

## Results

Figure 1: Whether or not the participant has recidivated since their time with Healthy Beginnings



Figure 2: How many times the participant recidivated

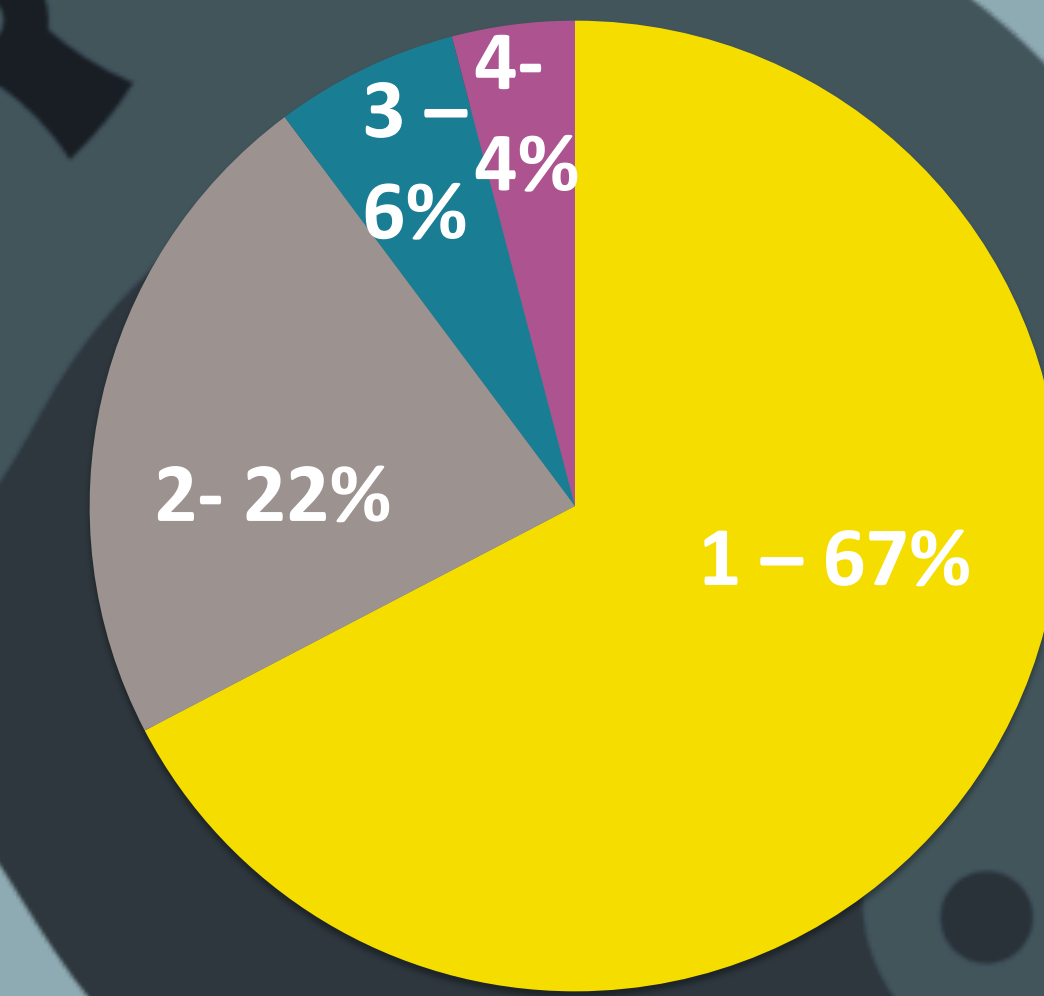


Table 1: The age of the child at the time of their mother’s first instance of reincarceration was separated into developmental stages.

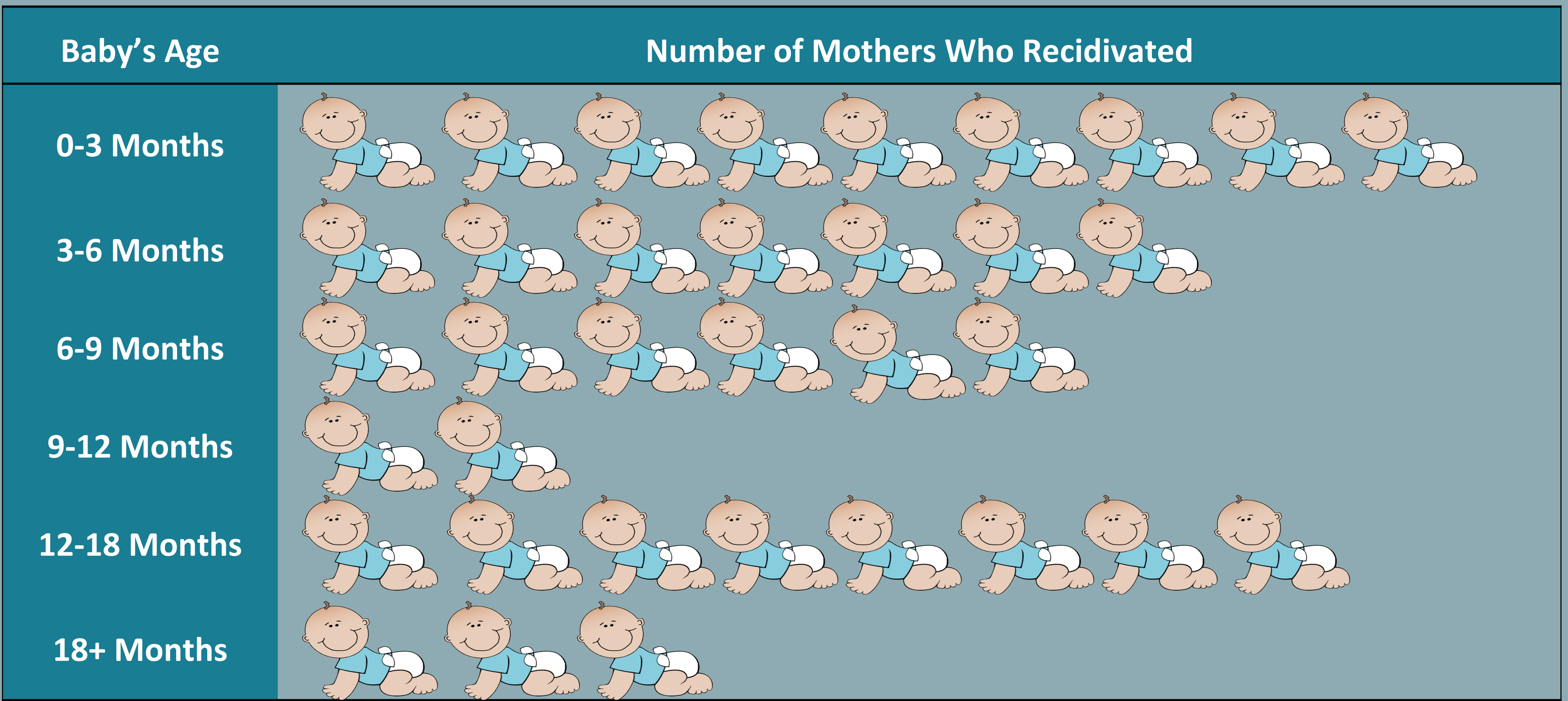
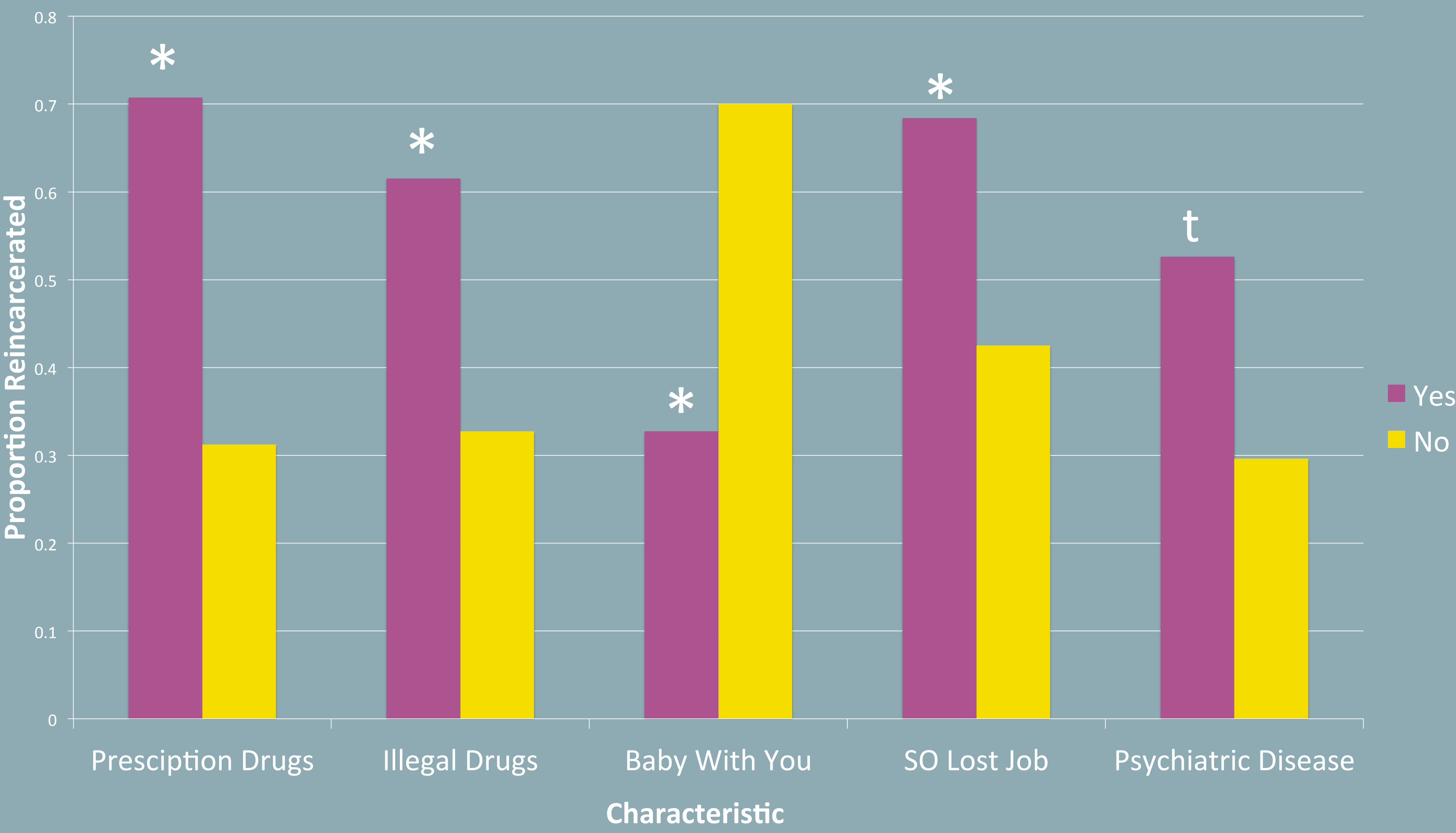


Figure 3: Characteristics of mothers who recidivated. Relationships marked \* indicate significance after running a Chi Square analysis ( $p < 0.05$ ), relationships marked t indicate a trend ( $p < 0.10$ ).



## Discussion

- ❖ Three women from the study recidivated multiple times in between the intervention and the reported birth date of their child, but have not been reincarcerated since the birth of their child.
- ❖ Of the 108 women, 48 (44%) went on to recidivate after the program, and 60 (56%) have not yet recidivated following their release and enrollment in the Healthy Beginnings Program.
- ❖ Almost equal percentages of women recidivated when their child was 0-3 months old, 3-6 months old, and 12-18 months old. However, the majority of women who recidivated did so when their child was 0-3 months old, and the minority did when their child was 9-12 or 18+months old.
- ❖ Whether or not the mother had previously been incarcerated was a significant predictor of whether or not she would recidivate after completion of Healthy Beginnings.
- ❖ Most women (33) have recidivated once since their involvement with Healthy Beginnings, though 11 have twice, 3 have three times, and 2 have four times.
- ❖ Women who recidivated were more likely to have taken prescription drugs within the last two years, have used illegal drugs in the 3 months prior to the conception of their child, their significant other to have lost their job in the last year, and to not have the baby living with them.
- ❖ There was also a trend towards women being more likely to have reported psychiatric disease at the beginning of the study.
- ❖ Other stressors such as food insecurity, homelessness, and depression were analyzed to determine if there were any links between those factors and the likelihood of the participants to recidivate, but only those discussed were significant or followed trends after preliminary analysis.

## Implications and Future Research

- ❖ Mothers have a different set of stressors and triggers for recidivism than other offenders, and these can combine with other stressors such as additions or drug use to increase the likelihood of previously incarcerated mothers to recidivate.
- ❖ Since women who used illegal or legal drugs prior to their incarceration were more likely to recidivate, it is important to provide drug counseling and addiction treatment to women who are incarcerated as well as support services once they are released.
- ❖ Future research on this topic could delve more deeply into the characteristics of the women who recidivated to study how these characteristics factor in to stressors and other aspects of the women’s lives that could increase their likelihood to reoffend.

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