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Prison Trends During COVID-19

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Abstract

This research article aims to examine the statistical trajectory of the number of prisoners incarcerated. By comparing studies conducted in the past and during the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in Thailand from 2017 to 2022, it will be possible to determine the number of inmates who were detained during the spread of the COVID-19 virus and to predict the likely causes that will affect the increase or decrease in the number of inmates in Thailand during that time period. This study employed a qualitative research approach to collect numbers, statistics, and other data pertaining to the situation of inmates infected with COVID-19 in prisons, statistics of inmates held in prisons, and statistical data of convicted prisoners in terms of the number of times they have been sentenced and the nature of their offense. Including statistics on prisoner parole and the number of recidivism cases among released inmates. During the years 2017 to 2022, data has been published in the form of documents in print media as well as websites and various electronic media to compare the difference in the number of inmates before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand. The results indicate that the number of inmates held by the Department of Corrections during the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand during the years 2020–2021 decreased substantially. However, the decrease in the number of prisoners during this time period may be attributable to the prohibition on people leaving their homes between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m., when crime is prevalent. It might also be the result of policies or actions taken to lower the number of inmates in prisons, such as the release of prisoners ahead of schedule to ease the strain on prisons brought on by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Keywords

Prison, COVID-19, Thailand

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Introduction

Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, or so-called COVID-19, at the end of 2019, countries around the world have paid more attention to and become better aware of the importance of social distancing — an approach that has been utilised to prevent and mitigate the severity of the pandemic (Aslam, 2020). This unprecedented situation not only had detrimental effects on human health, tourism, economy, society, and politics, but also heavily impacted the criminal justice system, especially the Department of Corrections, which oversees prisons and correctional institutions throughout Thailand. As these facilities incarcerate a huge number of prisoners and are often found to be densely populated, such condition was highly conducive to the transmission of this airborne virus. However, with restrictions imposed by rules and regulations that are deemed necessary for the monitoring and surveillance of prisoners' behaviour, together with spatial limitations as most prisons are closed and compact facilities, this means that, by nature, it was almost impossible to implement social distancing measures among prisoners during the outbreak of COVID-19.

For all the reasons outlined above, the idea of reducing prison populations during the pandemic was suggested (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). A review of existing literature reveals that one common approach among prisons in many jurisdictions to ease overcrowding was early release scheme with community-based support, harnessing cooperation and engagement of communities to assist and supervise reintegrated prisoners (UNODC, 2018). This is especially important in the case of those convicted of serious offences which require particularly close surveillance following release (Lattimore et al, 2009). It is also worth noting that newly released prisoners have a higher likelihood of reoffending (Visher & Travis, 2003). Therefore, in order to prevent these prisoners from recidivism and to safeguard social order, especially in such a turbulent time as this viral pandemic, the Marron Institute of Urban Management (2020), New York University, proposed that the criminal justice system together with the correctional regime should make a paradigm shift towards decreasing prison sentences for certain offences and focusing on reintegration-oriented approach.

Another interesting and notable social phenomenon which emerged as a response to the recent pandemic was the use of public policy to restrict mobility and the amount of time spent outside in different jurisdictions. Such move was made with the intention of reducing the opportunity for mass gatherings, hoping to bring the viral spread under control. Thailand also adopted similar approach as seen in Section 9 of the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situation B.E. 2548 (2005) (No.5), which prohibits any person from departing from a dwelling place from the time of 22.00 hrs to 04.00 hrs of the following day. Moreover, anyone refusing to be isolated, quarantined, or controlled for monitoring, or gathering and assembling to engage in activities that may risk spreading the disease during the aforementioned time may be liable for another offence under the laws on communicable

diseases and other relevant laws. It can be observed that such regulations not only helped to curb the spread of COVID-19 but also inadvertently contributed to the reduction of crime rates, as many types of criminal activities tend to take place at night (Newton & Felson, 2015), especially sexual offences (Aroonjit & Munmoa, 2014).

The primary objective of this research is to explore prison population trends in Thailand before and during the pandemic from 2017 – 2022. The findings can help to determine the number of inmates during the outbreak and predict the factors that affect the increase or decrease in prison population, enabling correctional agencies to prepare for the future spread of serious, communicable diseases in prison settings. The insights derived from the data can also be used to inform decisions relevant to prison administration in the future.

Methodology

This study uses a documentary research method in which relevant statistical data are collected and analysed, including the number of infected inmates, general prison population, disaggregated data on recidivism rates and types of offences, prison release statistics, and the number of reoffending after release during the period of 2017-2022. The data are drawn from information disseminated by relevant government agencies in the form of documents, published materials, websites, and other media, to demonstrate differences in inmate populations before and during the spread of COVID-19 in Thailand.

Research Findings

This research on Thailand's prison trends in response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate the following significant points:

1. The number of prisoners under the custody of the Department of Corrections in 2017-2022

According to the national incarceration rates published by the Department of Corrections during the period of 2017-2022, it was found that the number of people in prison rose overall by 50,899 in 2017- 2018, or a 16.21% increase. However, it declined by 21.78% (79,506 prisoners) from 2018-2021, especially between 2020-2021, as the period was marked by the pandemic. Therefore, it is unsurprising to see a decrease in prison population in Thailand by 19.92% or as many as 71,000 people during that span of one year. Nevertheless, in the first half of 2022, there were a total of 268,062 inmates (as of 14 June 2022), which was 17,344 people less than that of 2021 (as of 1 December 2022), as illustrated in Figure 1 with the total prison population in 2017-2022. This period also coincided with the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions in Thailand and around the world, meaning that people were finally able to resume their normal activities.

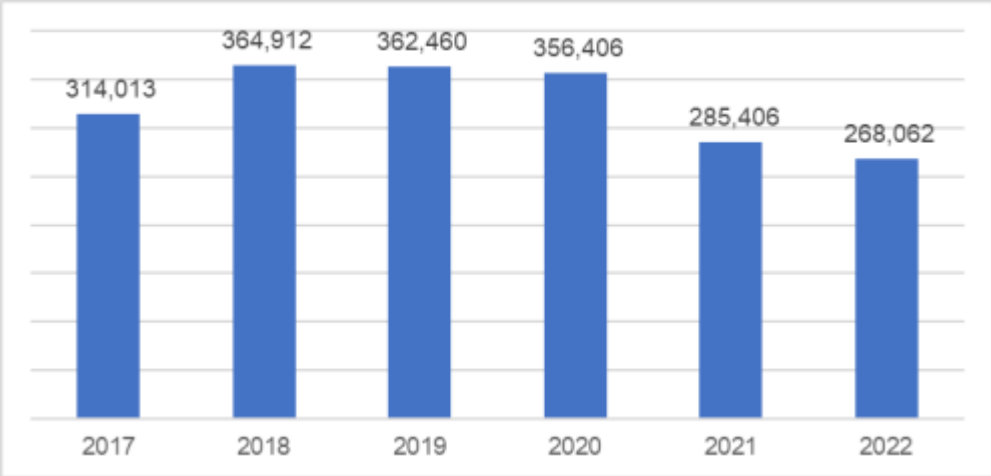

Figure 1 Total prison Population 2017-2022

Source: Department of Corrections, accessed 14 June 2022

The research team gathered data specifically on the number of convicted prisoners between 2018 – 2022 from the Nationwide Correctional Statistics Report (*Ror Tor.* 103) published by the Information Technology Development Section of the Information Technology and Communication Centre under the Department of Corrections. Typically, this annual report provides data taken as of 1 December every year. However, in order to include 2022 figures in this report, relevant data was retrieved on 1 June 2022. The statistics showed that the number of convicts between 2018-2019 did not vary greatly, with only a slight increase in 2019. There was then a clear downward trend in the convict population from 2019-2021, with a 27% decrease or a total of 82, 987 people as shown in Figure 2, which portrays the total number of convicted persons between 2018 – 2022.

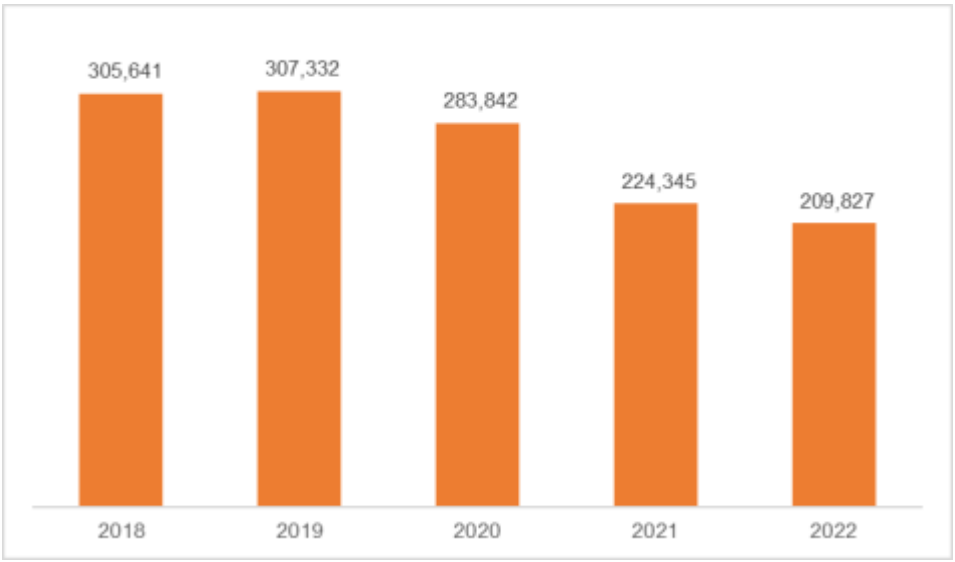

Figure 2 Number of convicted prisoners (2018 - 2022)

Source: Department of Corrections' Nationwide Correctional Statistics Report (so-called Ror Tor. 103) as of 1 December of every year.
Note that for 2022, the data was retrieved on 1 June 2022

To gain insights from these data on convict population, the research team categorized convicted persons according to their length of prison sentences from 2018-2022. The majority of convicts received a two-to-five-year sentence term, followed by those who were sentenced to a period of imprisonment of five to ten years. For this particular group of prisoners, the number continued to decrease from the beginning of the pandemic in 2019 to 2022. By contrast, it was observed that the number of serious convicts gradually increased between 2019-2020, when COVID-19 was arguably at its peak. To illustrate, there was an increase in the number of serious convicts who were sentenced to a long imprisonment term of 20-50 years by 3,459 inmates between 2019-2020. Figures for convicts who were given a sentence of more than 50 years also reflected this trend between 2019-2020, with an increase of 125 people. Similarly, the number of convicts with life sentence also grew by 240 inmates for the same period. Yet, despite the overall decrease in the convict population, upward trends were found among those serving sentences of less than three months (increased by 41 inmates), more than 10-15 years (96), more than 15-20 years (954), and life sentence (70). In short, this means that there was an increase in the number of those who committed offences that lead to longer imprisonment terms as shown in Table 1, which details the length of sentences of convicted persons from 2018-2022.

Table 1 Length of sentences of convicted prisoners (2018 – 2022)

Length of prison sentences	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Less than 3 months	174	0.06	136	0.04	128	0.05	169	0.08	216	0.10
More than 3-6 months	2,553	0.84	2,574	0.84	1,868	0.66	1,414	0.63	1,266	0.60
More than 6 months – 1 year	5,836	1.91	5,008	1.63	3,329	1.17	2,966	1.32	4,051	1.93
More than 1-2 years	28,111	9.20	28,277	9.20	24,098	8.49	21,406	9.54	26,906	12.82
More than 2 -5 years	**132,640**	**43.40**	**135,141**	**43.97**	**119,407**	**42.07**	**84,518**	**37.67**	**75,117**	**35.80**
More than 5-10 years	62,589	20.48	59,648	19.41	55,685	19.62	41,146	18.34	35,465	16.90
More than 10-15 years	20,512	6.71	22,875	7.44	22,563	7.95	22,659	10.10	23,811	11.35
More than 15-20 years	14,909	4.88	12,695	4.13	12,429	4.38	13,383	5.97	10,588	5.05
More than 20-50 years	32,015	10.47	34,457	11.21	37,961	13.37	27,317	12.18	22,612	10.78
More than 50 years	1,190	0.39	1,372	0.45	1,497	0.53	1,121	0.50	973	0.46
Life sentence	4,402	1.44	4,450	1.45	4,690	1.65	2,943	1.31	2,908	1.39
Death sentence	296	0.10	360	0.12	35	0.01	70	0.03	43	0.02
Unidentifiable	414	0.14	339	0.11	152	0.05	5,233	2.33	5,871	2.80
Total	**305,641**	**100**	**307,332**	**100**	**283,842**	**100**	**224,345**	**100**	**209,827**	**100**

Source: Department of Corrections, accessed on 14 June 2022

2. COVID-19 Transmission in Prison

Once data was gathered on the total prison population in Thailand during the pandemic as outlined above, the research team then explored the infection rate in prison settings for that same period. From the data obtained from the Division of Medical Service, Department of Corrections (accessed on 25 May 2022), which reported infected cases in prisons nationwide between 2020-2022, it was found that the total number of infected people in prison amounted to 125,180 as can be seen in Table 2 which shows the figures of infected inmates from prisons and correctional institutions nationwide (2020-2022).

Table 2 COVID-19 infected inmates from prisons and correctional institutions nationwide (2020 – 2022)

Month	2020	2021	2022
January			1,459
February			5,095
March	3		42,487
April	4	7	10,342
May		7,845	459
June		7,133	
July		10,785	
August		10,195	
September		11,608	
October		4,493	
November		10,342	
December		2,923	
Total	**7**	**65,331**	**59,842**

Source: Division of Medical Service, Department of Corrections, as of 25 May 2022

Data on COVID-19 vaccine administration in prison and correctional institutions between 2021-2022, when Thailand started to import vaccines from overseas to mitigate the severity of the pandemic, were retrieved from the Facebook Page of the Public Relations Section, Department of Corrections. It was found that inmates received the first and second doses of the vaccine within October 2021, when the cumulative infected cases in prison stood at 69,721, among which, 4,350 people were undergoing treatment. The vaccine rollout for the fourth dose began among detained persons in February 2022. However, it was observed that even after receiving the fourth booster shot, infected inmates still continued to rise from March to June 2022, increasing by 1,933 cases in March, 2,860 in April, 1,309 in May, and 383 in June, respectively. The data can be seen in Table 3, which outlines the administration of vaccines in prison and correctional institutions in 2021 – 2022.

Table 3 Vaccine administration in prisons and correctional institutions (2021 – 2022)

Month/year	Number of infected cases (cumulative)	Undergoing treatment	Vaccine administration				Death rate (cumulative)
			1st dose	2nd dose	3rd dose	4th dose	
May 21	26,272	16,272					9
June 21	27,072	14,588					12
July 21	36,184	2,501					43
August 21	47,369	7,924					61
September21	57,851	3,739					123
October21	69,721	4,350	137,291	57,363			153
November21	74,431	2,522	236,056	136,504			168
December 21	84,424	3,857	270,619	186,045	14,170		183
January 22	87,384	920	195,844	238,370	31,381		185
February 22	88,796	716	244,038	195,122	83,472	961	190
March 22	90,729	1,387	236,716	213,879	120,297	3,686	192
April 22	93,589	696	228,130	212,082	136,968	11,173	201
May 22	94,898	464	226,276	212,596	152,825	14,211	205
June 22	95,281	229	22,840	213,935	167,390	33,060	206

Source: Facebook Page of the Department of Corrections' Public Relations Section

After analysing the total number of infected cases in prison settings calculated from the monthly confirmed cases reported on the 1st of every month, it was found that the number of infected inmates significantly increased in July 2021, with 8,312 more cases when compared to the previous month (June, 2021), and peaked at 11,870 cases in October, 2021. After that period, the monthly confirmed cases in prisons clearly began to decline in January 2022 onwards, with the lowest number of infected cases reported in June 2022 as shown in Figure 3, which captures the monthly infected inmates calculated from cumulative infected cases as of the first day of every month from June 2021 – June 2022.

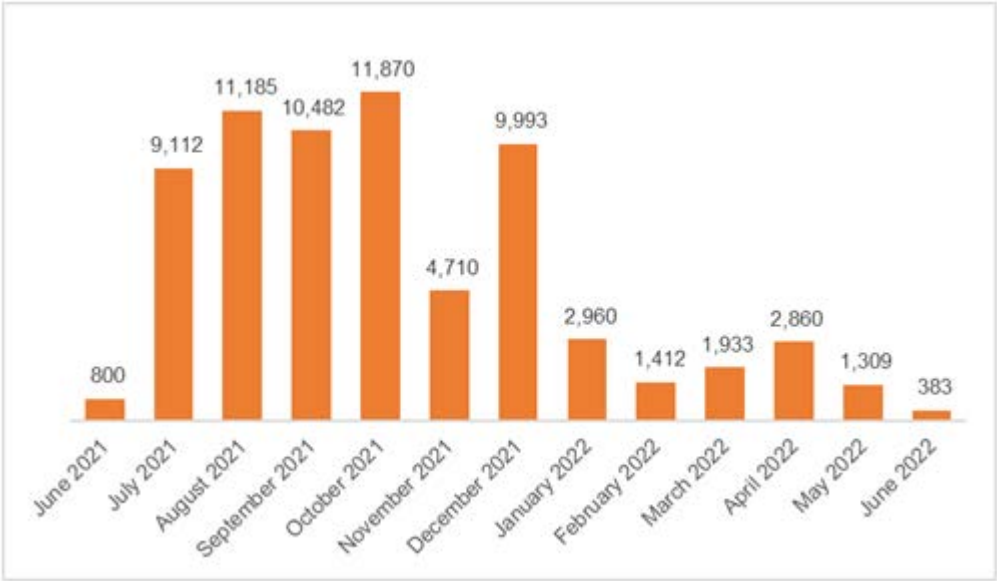

Figure 3 Monthly infected inmates, calculated from cumulative infected cases as of the first day of every month from June 2021 – June 2022

Source: Department of Corrections, accessed on *14 June 2022*

In November 2021, however, the cumulative number of detainees reported to be infected with the COVID-19 virus in prisons decreased. The number decreased significantly in October 2021, but increased again in December 2021 before decreasing again in January 2022, marking the beginning of the end of the epidemic. However, since this study is a compilation of statistics reported solely by the Department of Corrections, it cannot be generalized. It may be difficult to explain why November's numbers have decreased. This could be used in the next round of research to ascertain the cause of the population decline during this time period.

3. Prison release and reoffending of those during the pandemic

Besides the overall prison population statistics during the outbreak, the research team also looked at the rates of recidivism among individuals released from prisons between 2017-2022, which captured the period before and during the pandemic as Thailand started to relax its restrictive measures. It was found that the number of prison releases markedly increased in 2021, with a total of 246,802 prisoners, when compared to that of other years. This was due to the fact that the COVID-19 situation in Thailand was extremely severe at the time. Measures for early release varied, with the most common being through royal pardon (77,331), completion of prison sentence (58,892), and parole (39,498), respectively. It is worth noting that there was a significant increase in the number of prisoners released through royal pardon and parole compared to other types of release in other years as seen in Table 4, which illustrates the number of released prisoners between 2017-2022.

Table 4 Number of released prisoners between 2017 - 2022

Types of release / year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
End of prison sentence	74,652	69,375	67,348	73,025	58,892	39,610
On parole	2,592	4,502	7,606	15,663	39,498	9,796
Good conduct allowances	4,485	11,260	9,724	17,651	6,130	1,439
Good conduct allowances (public)	159	227	135	118	20	0
Royal pardon	34,516	312	48,742	26,249	77,331	37,765
End of confinement sentence	7,659	11,917	13,604	12,177	6,568	11,465
End of relegation sentence	21	12	21	27	10	42
Fine payment	3,121	4,069	5,024	3,840	1,737	1,915
End of prison sentence and fine payment	1,841	1,149	885	725	256	229
End of custodial sentence	2,862	1,564	1,140	1,140	820	887

Table 4 Number of released prisoners between 2017 - 2022 (continued)

Types of release / year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Completion of the sentence of confinement in lieu of fine	29,968	26,997	26,854	25,394	15,102	11,690
End of sentence	29	1,329	1,592	1,785	1,728	2,053
Others	44,309	43,721	39,736	37,898	38,710	28,046
Total releases	**206,214**	**176,434**	**222,411**	**215,692**	**246,802**	**144,937**

Source: Department of Corrections Accessed on 10 June 2022

According to the statistics on recidivism rates of convicted prisoners between 2018-2022, the research team found that more than half of the convicts were first-time offenders, with a clear difference between the ratio of first timers and reoffending during 2018-2020. However, this difference became less apparent between 2021-2022. These figures depicted an increase in recidivism rates during the COVID-19 outbreak in Thailand, whereby ex-convicts reoffended only once (hence 2nd time in detention). By contrast, it can be observed that the number of those who reoffended more than once (more than 3rd times in detention) continued to increase from 2018 to 2022. This means that once released, ex-convicts had a high tendency of recidivism as illustrated in Table 5 on the number of convicted prisoners categorized by the number of times in detention from 2018-2022 and Figure 4 on Rates of first timers and recidivists in 2018-2022.

Table 5 Convicted prisoners, categorised by the number of times in detention (2018-2022)

Time in detention	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	Total	**%**	**Total**	**%**	**Total**	**%**	**Total**	**%**	**Total**	**%**
1st time in detention	209,950	68.69	205,336	66.81	181,903	64.09	127,580	56.87	119,261	56.84
2nd time in detention	71,297	23.33	75,008	24.41	74,038	26.08	67,654	30.16	61,973	29.54
3rd time in detention	17,015	5.57	18,947	6.16	19,720	6.95	19,369	8.63	18,418	8.78
4th time in detention	4,630	1.51	5,136	1.67	5,285	1.86	5,087	2.27	4,784	2.28
5th time in detention or more	2,633	0.86	2,667	0.87	2,627	0.93	2,402	1.07	2,207	1.05
Uncategorisable	116	0.04	238	0.08	269	0.09	2,253	1.00	3,184	1.52
Total	**305,641**	**100**	**307,332**	**100**	**283,842**	**100**	**224,345**	**100**	**209,827**	**100**

Source: Department of Corrections, accessed on 14 June 2022

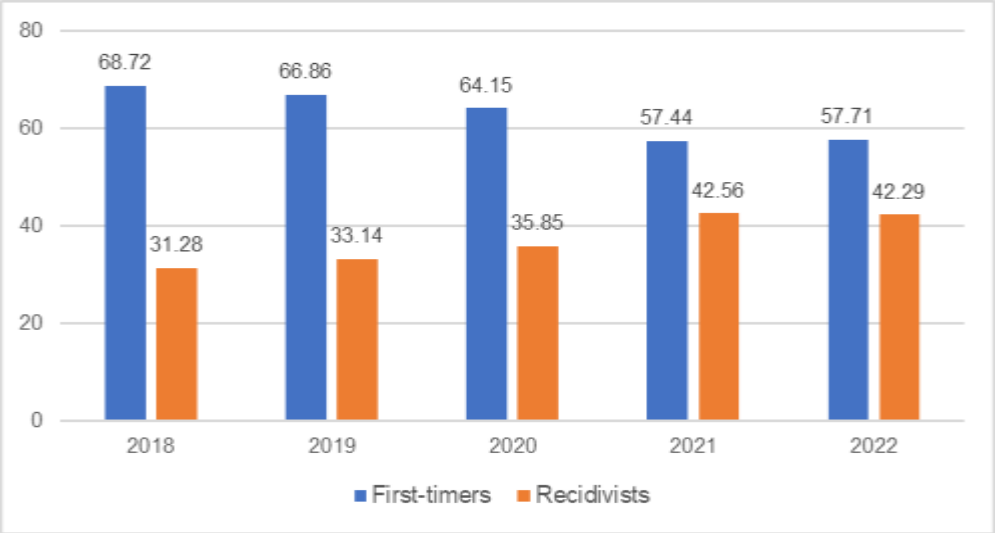

Figure 4 Rates of first-timers and recidivists (2018 – 2022)

Source: Department of Corrections, accessed on 14 June 2022

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study on prison population trends in Thailand during the pandemic lead to the following notable observations.

Firstly, it has been found that in 2021, when the pandemic raged across the country, the number of prisoners dropped to a total of 285,406 or a 71,000 decrease in prison populations compared to the preceding year. This also means the lowest incarceration rate compared to that of the previous four years, from 2017-2021. Moreover, the analysis of the number of convicted prisoners from 2018 – 2021 also indicates a downward trend in the convict population in 2021, decreasing by 59,497 compared to the year before. It can then be concluded that, during the pandemic, especially at its peak in 2021, Thailand witnessed a sharp decrease in prison population levels.

Nevertheless, data on infected cases in prisons and correctional institutions nationwide in 2020-2022 indicate that the first seven reported cases were detected sometime between March and April 2020. It is worth noting that early cases of coronavirus were found in the city of Wuhan, the People's Republic of China, towards the end of 2019. Thailand reported its first case of COVID-19 infection, who was a tourist from China, on January 12, 2020, followed by the first local coronavirus transmission in a Thai patient who had not travelled abroad. As a result, January 31, 2020, marked the beginning of the country's battle against the pandemic (Section of Emerging Infectious Diseases, 2021) as the number of new infections started to surge rapidly. It is, therefore, surprising to learn that there was no further report of confirmed cases among people living in prison in Thailand after April 2021, despite

the fact that the coronavirus is airborne and can spread quickly and easily in enclosed spaces or densely packed settings. In order to seek clarity on this issue, the research team would like to propose a further study on the reasons or factors that lead to the lack of reports on the number of infected inmates from prisons or correctional institutions between May 2020 to Mach 2021. This data can be of great benefit to the Department of Corrections in the development of different policies to prepare for future pandemics. Nonetheless, another seven infected cases were reported among detained persons in April 2021, followed by a sudden spike of new cases, especially in March 2022, as the rate of infections in prison settings peaked at 42,487 before it clearly dropped in May 2022, as COVID-19 began to wane around the world.

Another key observation concerns the Department of Corrections' response to the pandemic. After the confirmed cases were officially reported among incarcerated people in May 2021, the research team found that the Department of Corrections swiftly took actions to control the spread of the virus, including isolation of infected persons from other prisoners to receive medical treatment, as well as the provision of vaccines to all inmates, hoping to reduce transmission and death rates. However, despite the administration of as many as four doses of vaccines among people in prison, this research found that the number of cumulative confirmed cases of COVID-19 did not seem to decline as it should. This is evident in the statistics of vaccine administration in prisons from May 2021 to June 2022, which were published by the Public Relations Section, Department of Corrections. This data clearly illustrates that the number of infected cases was likely to increase though some prisoners already received the fourth booster shot, especially from February to June 2022. For this issue, the research team suggests that the Department of Corrections develop some guidelines or preventive measures to prevent or reduce the spread of serious communicable diseases in the future, especially those that are airborne or transmissible through touch, such as the coronavirus.

The third observation is the length of prison sentences imposed by courts among convicted prisoners between 2018-2022. It was found that from 2020 to 2021 when the pandemic was at its peak, crime rates declined. The only exception to this trend was in 2020, when the number of convicts with long imprisonment terms, namely those with more than 20-50 years, over 50 years, and life sentences, seemed to increase. The most common type of serious crime that often leads to long prison sentences is an offence against life and body, which was found to be prevalent in 2021 as convicts were sentenced to varying long imprisonment terms. i.e., longer than 10-15 years, more than 15-20 years, or even capital punishment. Additionally, an increase in petty crimes, which leads to a sentence term of less than three months, was also noted in 2021. These figures led the research team to deduce that the main causes of this rise in convict population during the given time period include an

individual's inability to cope with the uncertainties amidst the ever-changing pandemic landscape, while being subject to unemployment, mobility restrictions, prohibition of professional activities, and limitation on business hours. These issues culminated in stress and pressure among the general public, which may eventually lead to the commission of serious crimes. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this research focuses primarily on the categorisation of convicts based on the length of prison sentences. What is missing from this study is the classification of convicts based on offences committed during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is believed that future research should fulfil the gap in this area in order to clearly and realistically analyse the causes of certain offences that seemed to significantly increase during the pandemic.

The last observation pertains to the number of prisoners released during 2017-2022. Reducing prison population has been a common approach many countries implement to mitigate prison overcrowding and curb the spread of COVID-19 among inmates. The prison release statistics from 2017 to 2022 clearly indicate that more people were released from prison in 2021 compared to other years, especially through royal pardon, which is the primary mechanism for early release from prison. As many as 77,331 detained persons were released in 2021 through royal pardon or a 51,082 increase from the previous year. However, for prisoners to be eligible for this scheme, they are either required to apply and meet certain criteria and conditions or wait to be granted a collective royal pardon on auspicious national events such as the occasion of His Majesty the King's birthday. Consequently, it is not clear whether an early release from prison in this manner correlated with the spread of COVID-19. Another prominent mechanism for higher early release rates in 2021 was through parole, by which 39,498 people were released from incarceration or a 23,835 increase from the year before. Again, it remains unclear whether these prisoners were granted parole because they were qualified based on pre-existing criteria, or it was a response to the pandemic in order to keep the spread under control. More importantly, though, is the fact that relevant agencies such as the Department of Corrections were able to use parole as a measure to reduce the prison population, which eases prison overcrowding and curtailing the spread of this viral disease in prison settings in ways that are consistent with international practices as mentioned earlier.

According to the findings of this study, the number of inmates in the prison has dropped. However, as shown in charts 1 and 2, because this is a study based on prison statistics, it is possible that the specific cause of the increase of inmates is unknown. During that time, the number of people declined. The researchers hypothesized that this could be due to two major factors: During the COVID-19 epidemic, the Thai government imposed a temporary travel ban outside the country to prevent the virus from spreading. Curfew 10:30 p.m. and 5:00 a.m., when crimes such as property violations are most likely to occur. It

excludes offenses related to drug usage, etc., which, when moving beyond the homestead during that time, has indirectly lowered the number of crimes. As a result, the number of crimes committed during these hours fell, which likely resulted in a fall in the number of inmates in the prison as well.

In addition to the factors listed above the researchers also assume that the release of certain groups of prisoners prior to the specified time period is likely to contribute to a decrease in the number of prisoners held in prisons during this time period. As a consequence of reducing prisoner overcrowding, the risk of the COVID-19 virus spreading within prisons is indirectly reduced. However, this study did not reveal that Thailand's prisons released inmates prior to the expiration of their sentence in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 virus transmission. It relied on existing grounds for release, such as receiving a regal pardon, requesting a pardon, or requesting a day of imprisonment reduction. Therefore, according to the research team, the Department of Corrections should learn from the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus, which flourishes in densely populated areas. In the event of a future health emergency comparable to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, use the acquired knowledge to modify the criteria for the release of temporary detainees or to release prisoners prior to the expiration of their sentence.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only inflicted damage to the economy and people's livelihood, but also impacted the crime rates and national prison population, especially with the imposition of measures to control the viral spread or reduce its severity, including physical confinement, travel restrictions, and limitations on daily activities. It was, therefore, reasonable to expect lower crime incidents during the outbreak. However, this research found that the opposite was also true, especially at the beginning of the spread of the disease in Thailand, which saw an increase in both serious offences with longer imprisonment terms, and petty crimes with a sentence term of less than three months. The rise in crime rates may be due to various reasons, including an individual's inability to cope with the rapidly and ever-changing situation concerning the pandemic, having to face economic problems such as unemployment and prohibition of professional activities and curfew on business hours, being physically confined as well as constraints imposed with travel restrictions. All of these may culminate in stress and severe pressure, eventually leading to a path of crime. This research also examines the use of early-release measures to ease prison overcrowding in Thailand. Although the research team has not been able to find evidence to prove whether these early release measures were used in response to the COVID-19 pandemic directly, the sheer severity and problems brought about and exacerbated by the outbreak can be used to support the decision to grant parole to people living in prison during the given period.

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