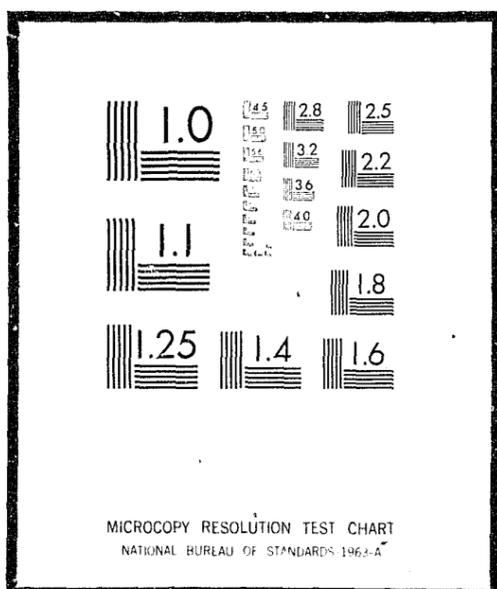


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COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Just as the inmate population has been steadily increasing over the years, so has the occurrence of incidents of disturbances in correctional institutions. Ruth Cavan, a well-known author in the field of criminology, has stated that when riots do occur, they are likely to come in series.² Frank Flynn theorizes that rumors of 'substantial concessions' gained by riots spread from institution to institution.³

Jackson, Michigan, in 1952, marked the beginning of an epidemic of riots that lasted until 1953. During this time, more than 25 riots occurred. The riot in Michigan and others in Pennsylvania and Ohio resulted in approximately \$2,000,000 damage each.

There was a relative calm in correctional institutions until 1955, when another series of outbreaks began in Walla Walla, Washington, and swept across the country. Utah, in 1957, and Montana, in 1959, experienced serious incidents because of the number of hostages involved, but the worst wave of riots in American penal history was over.

The calm was to prevail until 1968, when San Quentin experienced a unique happening in institutional disturbances. Although the incidents could

¹I wish to express my gratitude to the Research and Development Division of the South Carolina Department of Corrections for their assistance in preparing this article.

²Cavan, Ruth Shonle. *Criminology*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1962. p. 436.

³Flynn, Frank T. "Behind the Prison Riots". *Social Service Review*, vol. 27, 1953. p. 73.

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not rightly be termed "riots", they were unique in that they were coordinated with members of the 'outside community'. The disturbances consisted of striking and refusing to participate in week-end recreational activities. At best, one can only guess the impact the San Quentin incident will have upon future disturbances.

Violent and disruptive behavior is by no means novel to correctional institutions, however, the contagious nature and pervasiveness of riots and major disturbances is a recent phenomenon. Just as the trend on college campuses and the community at large seems to be one of protest over national involvement (e.g., Vietnam) and social reform, so the trend in correctional institutions appears to follow a similar direction. However, here too the exact causes are elusive. There are those who believe that riots occur as a result of monotony, boredom, and a sense of being hopelessly oppressed and stripped of human dignity.

The series of riots beginning in 1966 prompted the ACA to revise the Association's official position paper, A Statement Concerning Causes, Preventive Measures, and Methods of Controlling Prison Riots and Disturbances, published in 1953. I was asked by the ACA to select a committee to develop the revision. The revised publication, Causes, Preventive Measures, and Methods of Controlling Riots and Disturbances in Correctional Institutions, was completed in October, 1970.

Research into causes and preventive measures of disturbances has been one that, for all practical purposes, has been ignored or at least passed over with little consideration. Based on what information could be obtained

this report will demonstrate the need for more research into violence in correctional institutions, and is intended as a follow-up to the ACA's aforementioned position paper.

RESULTS OF DATA COLLECTION

In November, 1970 we sent letters to the heads of all state, county, and city correctional systems listed in the ACA directory, requesting information on the incidences of disturbances in their institutions since January 1, 1969. In all, 185 letters were sent; 56 replied that there were no incidents in their system, 28 reported incidents within their system, and 101 didn't respond at all. The affirmative replies represented information received from 19 states and the District of Columbia on 100 riots throughout the United States. The following facts are based on the 100 incidents that were reported.

The Pacific coastal area leads in frequency of disturbances, with 36 riots being reported between January 1, 1969 and January 1, 1971. The reason for the higher number of disturbances in this area cannot objectively be determined. However, it is possible that this area uses probation more extensively than other areas, leaving a higher concentration of the more hardened criminal in confinement. There are probably many reasons involved; however, more research must be conducted to determine exactly what these reasons are.

The Eastern coastal region also had a high frequency of occurrences, with 30 incidents reported. The Central region followed with 22, and the Western region with 12. One factor contributing to the frequency of disturbances in the coastal areas could possibly be that these are the more densely populated urban areas.

In most cases it could not be determined from the information received whether the incident was major or minor. In 1969, a total of 39 riots occurred. In 1970, a total of 59 occurred, representing a 51% increase over 1969. If this trend continues we can expect a substantial increase in the number of disturbances for the year 1971. The majority of these disturbances have been occurring in the last six months of the year, from July to December: In 1970, 74% of the disturbances (44) occurred in this period. Of the 100 institutions replying, only 12 indicated the type of institution in which the riot occurred. Of those, 5 occurred in a maximum security institution, as would be expected.

The objectives of these disturbances were numerous. The following tables show the objectives as reported by the institutions:

<u>Objective</u>	<u>Number of Institutions Reporting This Objective</u>
Against Correctional System	26
To Present List of Grievances	26
(e.g., better food, better personnel relations, better work time, better parole and probation procedures, more vocational training, higher wages, more yard time, and lower canteen prices)	
Racial	22
Inmate Sympathy For Other Inmates	14
Associated with Escape Attempts	5
Outside Forces	3
Observance of a Black Holiday	2
Cruel and Unusual Treatment	1
Bad Communications	1
Publicity	1

The inmates resorted to various dramatic means in presenting their demands and grievances. Most often (in 47 cases) they evoked fights, damaged property and protested violently with weapons. Food and work strikes accounted for 28 cases. There were 24 incidents that could be termed peaceful, or non-violent protests or marches, of which 3 were associated with escape attempts.

Most often (in 30 cases) these incidents began in the cell blocks or dormitories. The recreation yard and dining hall were other likely originating points (in 13 cases each). Incidents also began in the work shops (in 4 cases) and in other areas (in 4 cases).

The number of inmates participating in the incidents was between 1 and 2100, with the majority of the cases involving less than 100 inmates. A breakdown of number participating is as follows:

<u>Number of Inmates</u>	<u>Percentage of Incidents Involving This Number</u>
less than 25	31%
25 - 100	38%
101 - 300	13%
301 - 500	7%
501 - 1000	6%
over 1000	4%

In 65 incidents there was little or no damage reported; only 7 listed major damage. In 25 cases there were injuries to inmates, officers, or both. Hostages were taken in 5 instances, and there were fatalities to inmates in 3. Of 61 institutions, 35 replied that they seemed to be spontaneous; 24 were organized; and 2 were attributed to outside forces.

Seventy-two institutions stated the type of action they employed to quell the disturbance:

<u>Action Taken</u>	<u>Number of Cases</u>	<u>Percentage of Cases</u>
Force - gas, guns, lock-ups	25	35%
Persuasion	19	26%
Removed agitators	15	21%
Negotiated with inmate representatives	8	11%
Subsided of own accord	5	7%

Of 91 institutions, 74 (81%) reported their staff was adequate to control the disturbance; only 17 (19%) said they needed outside assistance, i.e., local police, sheriff, highway patrol. Only one state reported they had a definite riot plan and a well-trained staff.

DISCUSSION:

It should be emphasized that the foregoing information is based only on the replies received, and that there is not sufficient evidence to draw any general conclusions concerning causes and preventive measures of disturbances.

For example, some pertinent facts that should be known are:

- (1) Name and location of institution
- (2) Type institution - minimum, medium, maximum; adult, youth; male or female
- (3) Capacity of institution and current number being housed
- (4) Age of institution and adequate facilities
- (5) Personnel - inmate ratio
- (6) Existence of formal channels of communication between inmates and staff
- (7) Training program for new personnel
- (8) Characteristics of riot participants

Of course, these are only a few examples, and many questions still remain unanswered.

According to the information available, disturbances were more likely to occur in the last six months of the year, yet there is no evidence as to why this is the most probable time. What factors would contribute to a disturbance occurring from July to December? Several reasons need to be investigated: July marks the beginning of a new fiscal year when new personnel are hired. This July-December interval is an adjustment period when inmate-staff relations are new and may be on somewhat "shaky ground". Relations of personnel with inmates would definitely be a contributing factor to the outbreak of a disturbance.

Informal channels of communication are extremely important; however, they are not sufficient. There must also be formal channels of communication between staff and inmates as well as between staff and administrators and administrators and inmates. An informed and well-trained staff is likely to have higher morale and to have a higher degree of success in gaining the confidence and cooperation of inmates. New programs are also initiated in July. Inmate reactions to these programs need to be investigated; and much consideration should be given to an inmate's capabilities before he is assigned to a certain program. The parole/probation ratio in this period of time may also be a contributing factor.

August and September are the hottest months, the end of what may have been a long, hot, and harrowing summer for the inmates and staff alike. Institutions not adequately equipped with facilities such as air-conditioning may be more likely to experience a disturbance. All of these areas need to be investigated for their relevance to disturbances in institutions.

Several reasons were given for the purpose of the riots. Most often the main objective was to effect a change in the correctional system in general or to try to force actions on specific grievances. Racial conflicts were

another predominant cause for disturbances. Extensive research needs to be conducted to find ways through which issues which may be potential problems can be identified and preventive measures taken before open rebellion occurs.

Inmates are committed to an institution for the primary purpose of protecting society. Traditionally, this has meant the protection of society during incarceration. However, it has become increasingly obvious that corrections has a responsibility to modify unacceptable behavior patterns so that the inmates can be returned to society as productive citizens. When incarcerated, the inmates are subjected to an environment totally unlike that of the "outside world". They find themselves stripped of many of the rights they possessed as free citizens.

In recent years, however, the courts have identified many areas in the correctional process which they feel are counter-productive in rehabilitating the inmates. Correctional administrators are becoming aware of increasing judicial intervention in matters concerning the inmate, e.g., religious worship, visitation, legal services, discrimination, and grievances. Inmates have become more persistent in their demands that they be accorded the full rights of private citizens. Many call attention to the perceived inequities through petitions to the court, while others have pursued a more militant means to gain public support for their demands.

Not only should staff be well trained in handling disturbances, but they should also have had sufficient training in dealing with the type of individuals generally confined in institutions. Often, merely the type of individual incarcerated could account for a disturbance. When grievances are presented they may be legitimate complaints about inadequate institutional facilities, or they may

be only the inmate's general dissatisfaction with himself and his condition. In any case, there should be formal channels by which the inmates can make their grievances known and get some sort of reply. A negative reply is better than evasiveness.

Racial disturbances could stem from unbalanced racial proportions between inmates and staff and among inmates themselves. For example, a court desegregation order could be a major factor in racial disturbances. There are obviously numerous other factors that could precipitate a disturbance - e.g., lack of individual treatment for inmates, disparity in sentencing inmates, anti-social characteristics of inmates, inadequate finances, and unnatural institutional environment - but these may occur only on an individual basis and thus would necessitate individual research.

The number of inmates participating in the disturbance varied, but in most cases was less than 100. However, when determining this figure the problem arises of how to identify those participating in a disturbance from those who are involved not by choice. This number would seem to indicate that most disturbances are actively supported by only a minority of the inmate population. However, there are not figures available to indicate what proportion of the whole this group represents.

In most cases, the institutions reported that force was required to quell the disturbance, but 31% said their staff was adequate to restore order. However, only one institution reported they had a definite riot plan. The existence of a trained riot squad would possibly reduce the probability of a disturbance occurring; but again there is not enough supporting evidence of such.

It is obvious that as the crime rate increases, so does the possibility of institutional disturbances. With this increasing crime rate comes the need for more extensive research into institutional disturbances. If the factors precipitating a disturbance could be isolated and studied, then possibly the knowledge gained could be effectively used in preventing riots in other areas of society. There have been several ideas set forth concerning causes and preventive measures of incidents in correctional institutions, some of which may seem quite intuitive. However, they still warrant a thorough investigation of their validity before a successful program can be developed to ensure a peaceful and productive atmosphere in penal systems throughout the country.

In our continuing effort of striving to improve correctional systems, the South Carolina Department of Corrections has applied for a discretionary grant to conduct research into violence in correctional institutions. It is hoped that this research will answer many questions that have been raised in this article, thus providing information to implement preventive measures of institutional disturbances.

END

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