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A STUDY OF SOME ASPECTS OF BORSTAL ALLOCATION

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Office of the Chief Psychologist
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Introduction

The Borstal System in England and Wales contains two major administrative elements: the borstal institutions and two allocation centres. Every offender sentenced to borstal training goes first to the allocation centre, and then on to a selected borstal. The purpose of this procedure is described in the recent HMSO publication "People in Prison" (1969):

"The staff of an allocation centre make an assessment of each young offender, taking account of his background before sentence, his mental and intellectual ability, his age, his degree of criminal sophistication and the likelihood of his seeking or taking an opportunity to abscond. The offender then goes to one of the training borstals which aim to provide a range of regimes to deal with the various types of offender."

Explicit in this arrangement is the notion that borstal trainees should be segregated to receive separate borstal experience, and furthermore, that by this process, overall penal success will be increased. This notion is an attractive one. But its implementation has necessarily preceded scientific investigation of the efficacy of specific combinations of types of offender and types of regime. It is an empirical problem to identify and test the effects of such combinations, and one requiring the experimental manipulation of the allocation of trainees to borstal regimes. The experiment about to be described is such an attempt.

The experimental design

The experiment took advantage of the fact that there existed three open borstals, of roughly equal size, exemplifying three important approaches to the treatment of the young offender. They may be conveniently labelled as a "case-work" regime, a "group-counselling" regime, and a "traditional" regime. The definition in depth of these regimes was not attempted, but descriptions of them are available, (Fisher, 1967). They represented comparatively sophisticated developments of ideas current in the Prison Service, but of course reflected to some degree individual attempts to translate them into existing practice. The normally high

staff-turnover, however, which generates great changes in regimes, was considerably reduced, although the initial intention to prevent any staff changes during the experiment was in the event not possible. Normal borstal rules held in all three institutions; the indeterminate sentence was maintained throughout, with individual achievement being related to promotion through the various grades.

The role of the allocation staff in the experiment was to select a pool of young offenders considered suitable for open conditions. This would automatically exclude both sexual- and violent-offenders (unless there were very unusual circumstances), as well as the more criminally experienced. Added constraints on eligibility for this pool were twofold: the age range was from 16 to 18½ years, and the intellectual ability had to be in the upper 70% of the borstal population, according to both verbal and non-verbal intelligence tests. The effect of the latter was to exclude illiterates and dull-normals, rather than to select abnormally intelligent offenders. Hence the final experimental sample was drawn from the younger, brighter and less criminally sophisticated of the total borstal population.

Having been selected for the pool, the trainee was interviewed by a prison psychologist, and this interview, along with the normal prison documentation, provided the material for standardised individual assessments. Personality tests were also given (in the form of questionnaires), quite independently of the psychologist's ratings. Finally, and only after this procedure had been completed, the trainee was randomly allocated to one of the three training institutions.

The random allocation of trainees was maintained for the period from February 1964 to June 1967. The middle 18 months of this period provided the main sample of 610 borstal trainees. The whole borstal experience of members of this group was as part of a randomly constituted sample (as long as they remained within the experimental regimes).

The criterion of failure.

On release from borstal training, all trainees are subject to compulsory supervision order of two year's duration. The records of this after-care period provide information on the events subsequent to each trainee's discharge. In particular, all re-convictions, together with date of occurrence and final court decision, were noted. These data were analysed in various ways, but different measures of failure were highly correlated. So the final criterion of failure adopted in the following results is any re-conviction within two years of release. Although this takes no account of the seriousness of subsequent delinquency, it has the advantage of objectivity as an index of borstal effectiveness.

Results: the whole sample.

Knowledge of the date of re-conviction allowed presentation of the results in the form of a cumulative rate-of-failure curve. For each successive month at risk, the percentage who had failed was plotted. Figure 1 shows the result

for the whole sample. The slight positive acceleration in the first two or three months is in part an artifact. Following the committing of an offence, the date of re-conviction may be delayed by the exigences of police and judicial procedures. So by the definition of failure, few can fail immediately on release. Apart from this, however, the curve has the form of a negatively accelerating function, approaching an asymptotic value towards the end of the two-year period. The proportion having failed by the end of this period is 62.62%. This is high, but it must be borne in mind that it is from the widest definition of failure; a re-conviction, however trivial.

A trainee arriving at a borstal need not necessarily remain there for the whole period of his detention. Individuals are transferred to alternative institutions, and there is a fairly steady flow of trainees from open to closed borstals. The most common cause of these transfers is absconding, although other forms of difficult behaviour may also result in a move. Of the 610 members of the sample, 106 (17.4%) were in fact transferred. Figure 2 shows the failure-rate for these, together with that of those who remained. For the former, a final figure of 78.3% failing, demonstrates just how poor is the prognosis for these early casualties in open conditions. With these removed, the failure-rate of the remainder drops to 59.3%.

Attributes predictive of failure.

It has been demonstrated in many studies that outcome subsequent to penal measures correlates with indices of criminality prior to institutionalisation. The number of previous convictions, the age at which offending began, and the types of previous offending are among those commonly found to be so related (Home Office, 1964). The present experiment sampled a restricted range of criminal careers (as described earlier). Despite the increased homogeneity resulting from this, the correlations between previous criminality and subsequent outcome still appeared. An example is provided in an index that has been extensively used with young offenders: the age at their second conviction (Johnson, 1964). The results are tabulated below:

Age at 2nd Conviction :	8.0-13.10.	13.11-15.7	15.8-16.11	17.0-18.6
Number in sub-group :	150	144	140	156
% Reconvicted in 2 yrs:	71.3	62.5	60.0	57.0

The evidence is of a tendency for the greater probability of borstal failure to be associated with early onset of delinquency.

The scales derived from the personality questionnaires, taken individually, proved to be unrelated to subsequent failure. The Maunsley Personality Inventory gave measures of Extraversion and Neuroticism, as well as a Lie score. In addition, the Cattell Ipat Anxiety test was given. However, one questionnaire, not strictly speaking a test of personality, did correlate with eventual outcome. It was produced by a prison psychologist (Smalley, 1964), and presents a series of

forced-choice questions to the inmate about his feelings on the occasion of his last offence. The result of the test is to divide the respondents into three groups, who may be described as having experienced low, medium, or high anxiety (or conflict) at the time of their last offence. Figure 3 shows the rate-of-failure curves for these three groups. Clearly, the greater the anxiety at the last offence, the greater the probability of success subsequent to release. The numbers in these three groups (and associated failure-rates) are:

Low anxiety:	162 (72.2%)
Medium anxiety:	234 (62.4%)
High anxiety:	208 (55.8%)

Psychologist's prediction of failure.

As a part of the standardised assessment, the psychologists were asked to rate each individual on a four-point scale, ranging from "probable success" to "probable failure". Figure 4 shows the rates-of-failure for the groups so formed. Inspection of this result reveals a clear discrimination between the four categories. However, this discrimination was achieved at the expense of generality, since the numbers in the extreme categories were much smaller than those in the intermediate. The relevant figures are as follows (number in the category followed by failure-rate):

(probable success) I	35, 48.6%
II	230, 58.3%
III	269, 65.4%
(probable failure) IIII	69, 75.4%

Thus approximately 17% of the total were in categories I and IIII, and 83% in II and III.

In addition to this global prognosis, the raters were asked to make separate predictions for each institution. Every trainee therefore had a general prediction, and a specific prediction for the institution to which he was ultimately allocated. But the additional information of destination reduced rather than increased the ability of psychologists to predict outcome. The results are tabulated below:

(probable success) I	81, 63.0%
II	210, 57.1%
III	214, 65.9%
(probable failure) IIII	94, 68.1%

In this case, the two extreme groups were more readily utilised, accounting for 29% of the total judgements, but the differentiation no longer has a consistent relationship with outcome. These results, together with the last, demonstrate that what marginal ability psychological staff have to predict borstal outcome, may disappear given knowledge of the specific treatment

(eg case-work) actually applied. This result has, of course, considerable implications for allocation procedures.

Some light is thrown on this result by considering the effect of the individual regimes. In addition to the prognosis, the psychologists assessed, on a similar four-point scale, the degree of disturbance of each trainee. Figure 5 shows the final failure-rate of each category of disturbance, within each institution. Taking the two middle categories (accounting for 38 and 39% of the total) there is a consistent relationship between disturbance and failure, for all regimes. But at the upper extreme (the most disturbed) the traditional regime does best, and at the lower extreme (the least disturbed) it does worst. In so far as this is contrary to generally held beliefs about ways of dealing with disturbed adolescents, it goes some way to explaining the reduced agreement between psychologist's predictions and actuality, when the former is influenced by knowledge of specific treatments.

The three institutions.

The sample of 610 trainees were allocated in the following proportions (to the nearest whole%):

Group-counselling	36
Traditional	32
Case-work	32

However, the percentage of their population that they transferred, was for the three institutions:

Group-counselling	15
Traditional	16
Case-work	23

The slight initial difference in representation was increased, albeit marginally, by differential rates of transferring. For those who remained, cumulative rate-of-failure curves are shown in Figure 6. The case-work institution was significantly more successful (at the 5% level), with a final failure-rate of 51.0%, compared to the 63.0% of the other two. That this is not due simply to the effect of transfers is shown by a straight comparison of all allocations, when the difference is substantially sustained.

Conclusions.

The results presented so far arise out of a preliminary analysis of the considerable amount of data generated by this project.

The major step will consist of separate similarity analyses of each of the three treated groups to see whether different attributes (or combinations of attributes) distinguish success and failure within each regime. Ideally, specific attributes

will be associated with success in specific regimes, so that allocation using such attributes may maximise success rates. But these results suggest that the outcome may be very different from current expectations. It may be that it is this quality of these treatment effects (rather than their magnitude) that will influence future policy. Certainly the results emphasize the importance of on-going research into the procedures we readily accept in the internal organisation of the penal system.

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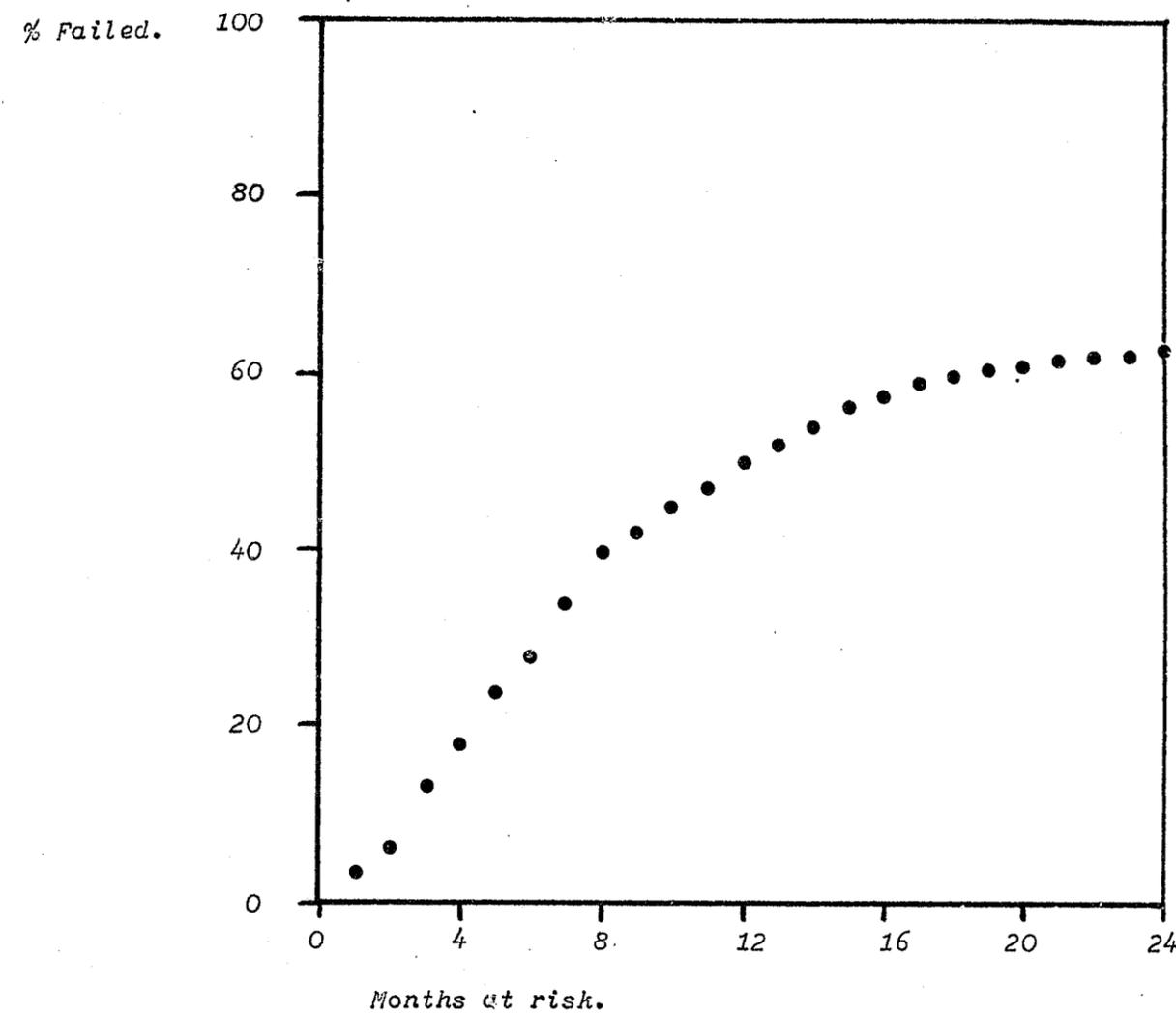


FIGURE 1: CUMULATIVE RATE-OF-FAILURE, THE WHOLE SAMPLE.

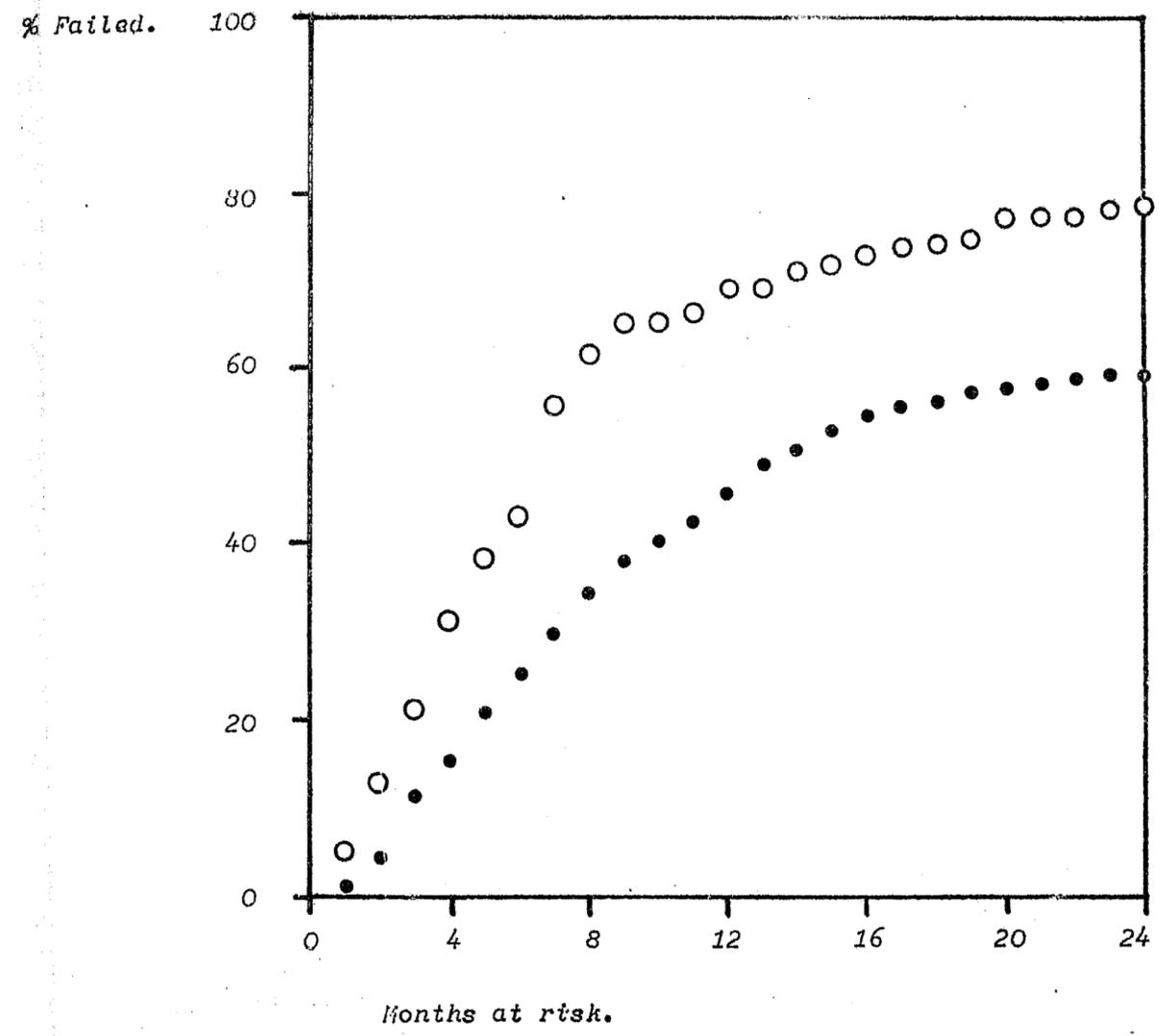
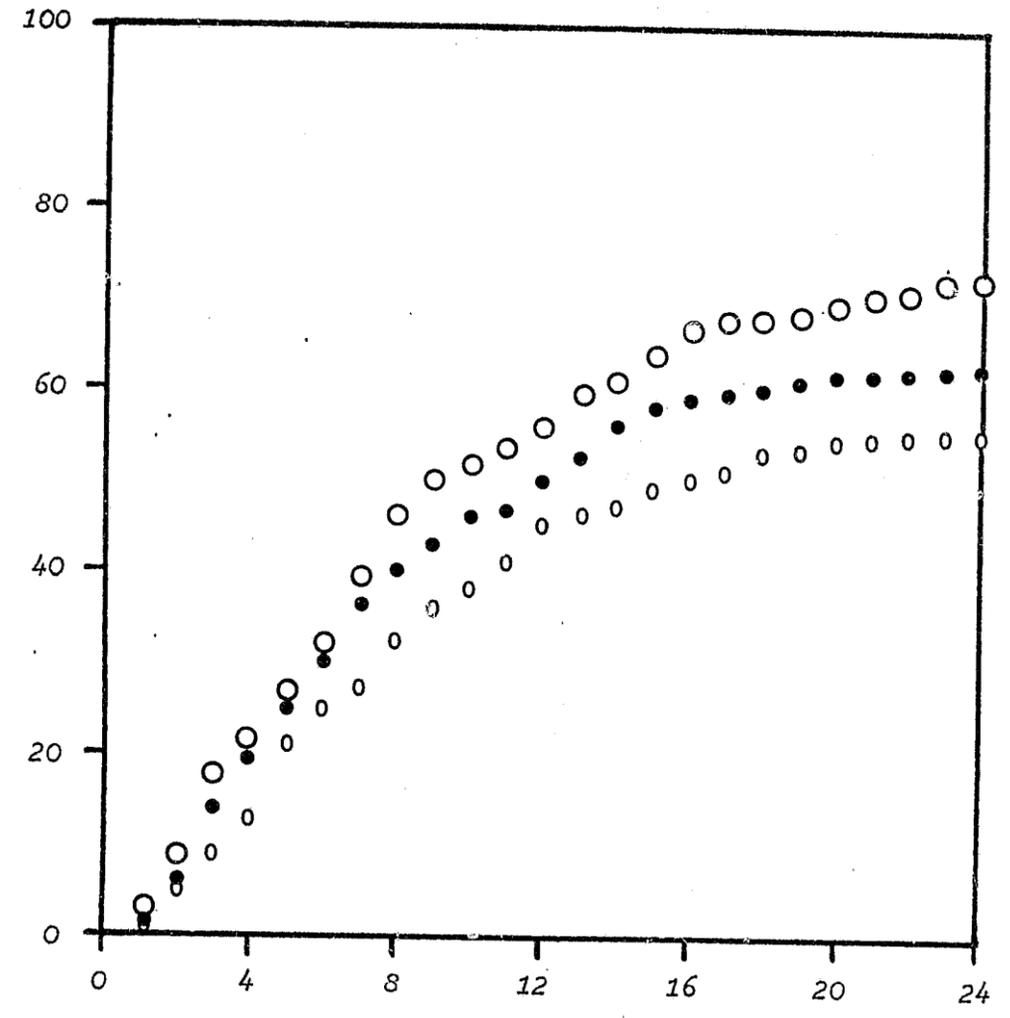


FIGURE 2: CUMULATIVE RATE-OF-FAILURE, TRANSFERS.

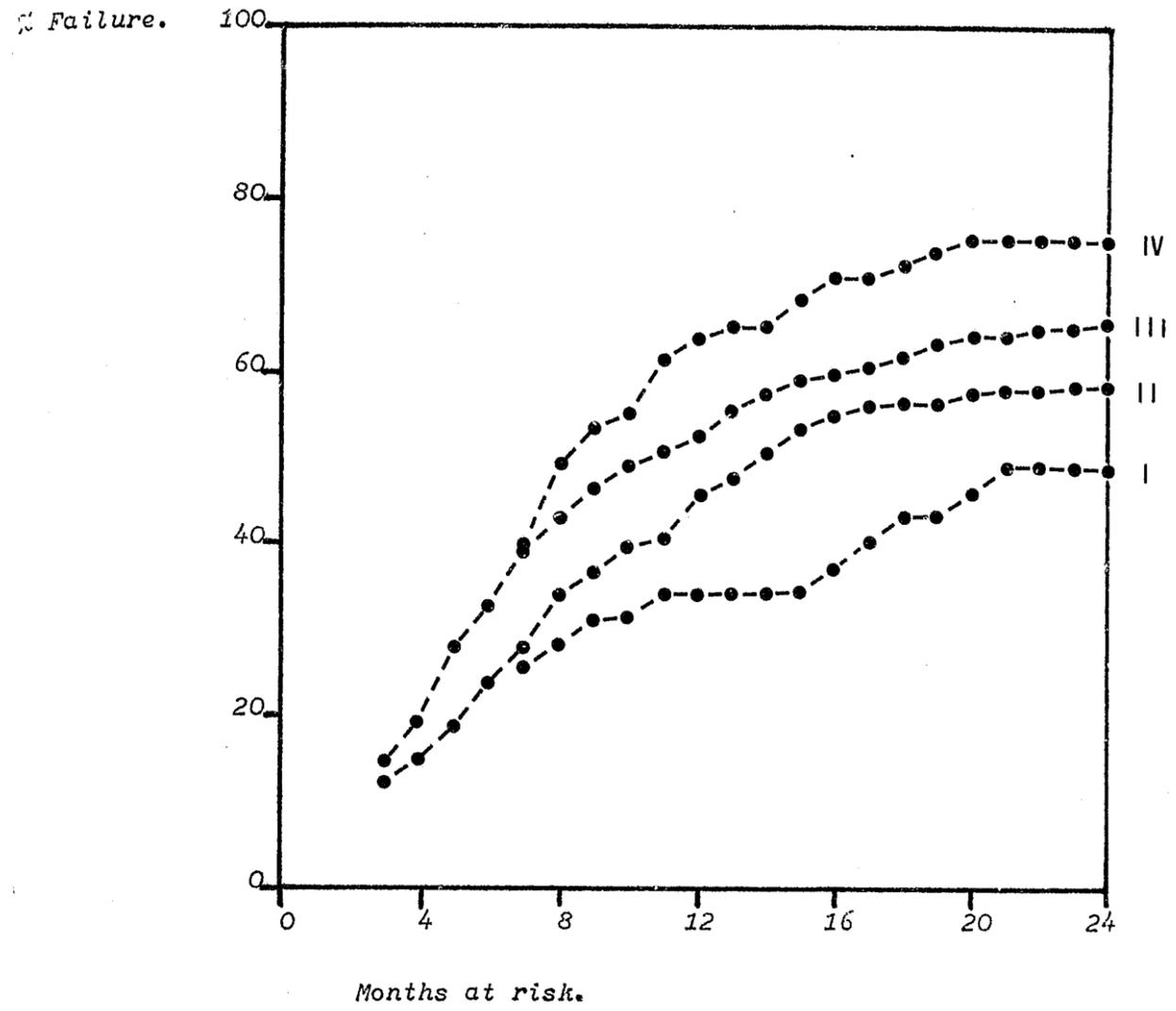
% Failed.



Months at risk.

- ○ Low scorers
- ● Medium scorers
- ○ High scorers

FIGURE 3: CUMULATIVE RATE-OF-FAILURE, SMALLEY TEST.



I probable success
 II, III intermediate groups
 IV probable failure

FIGURE 4: CUMULATIVE RATE-OF-FAILURE, PSYCHOLOGISTS' RATING OF OUTCOME.

% Failed:

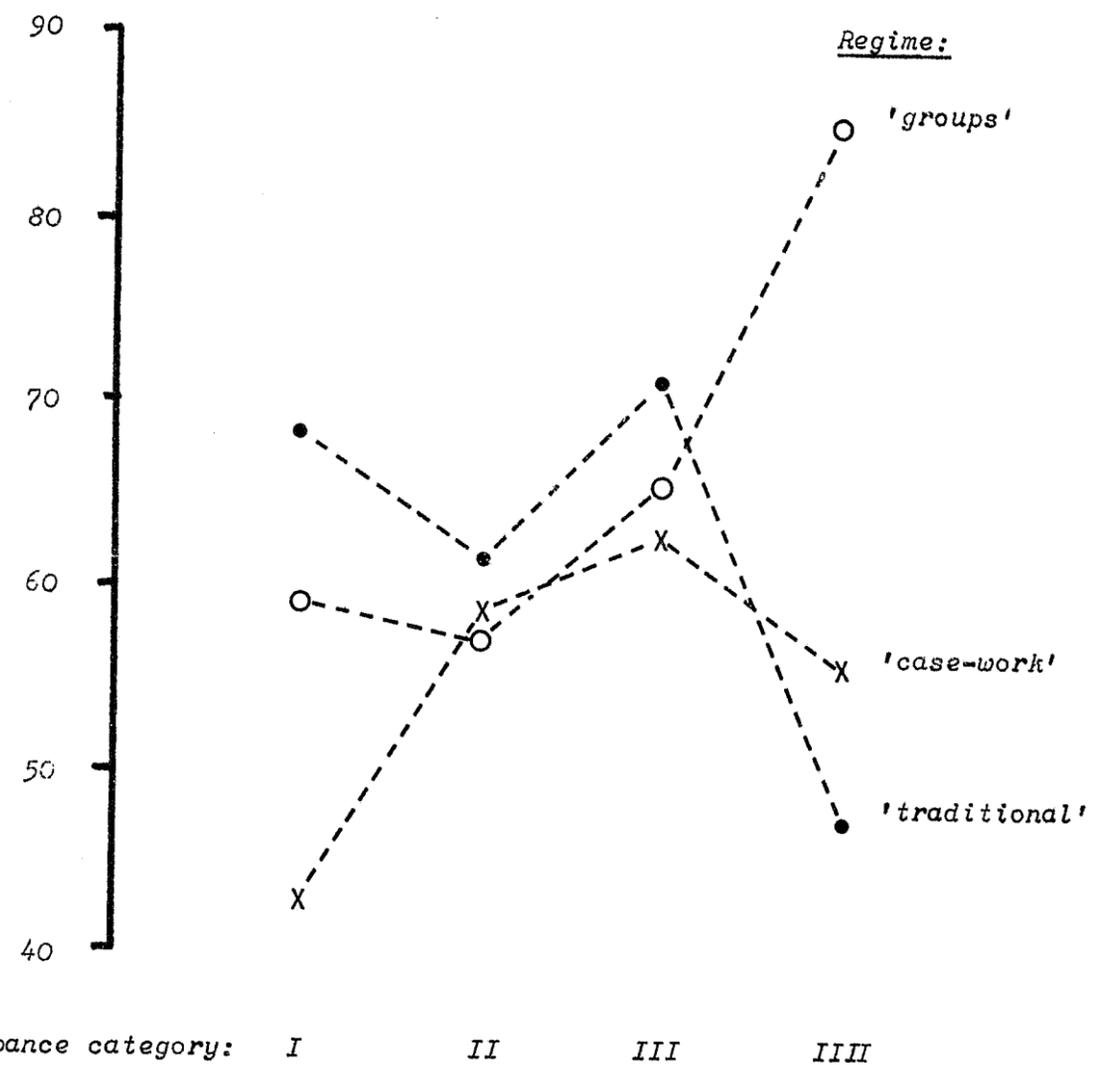
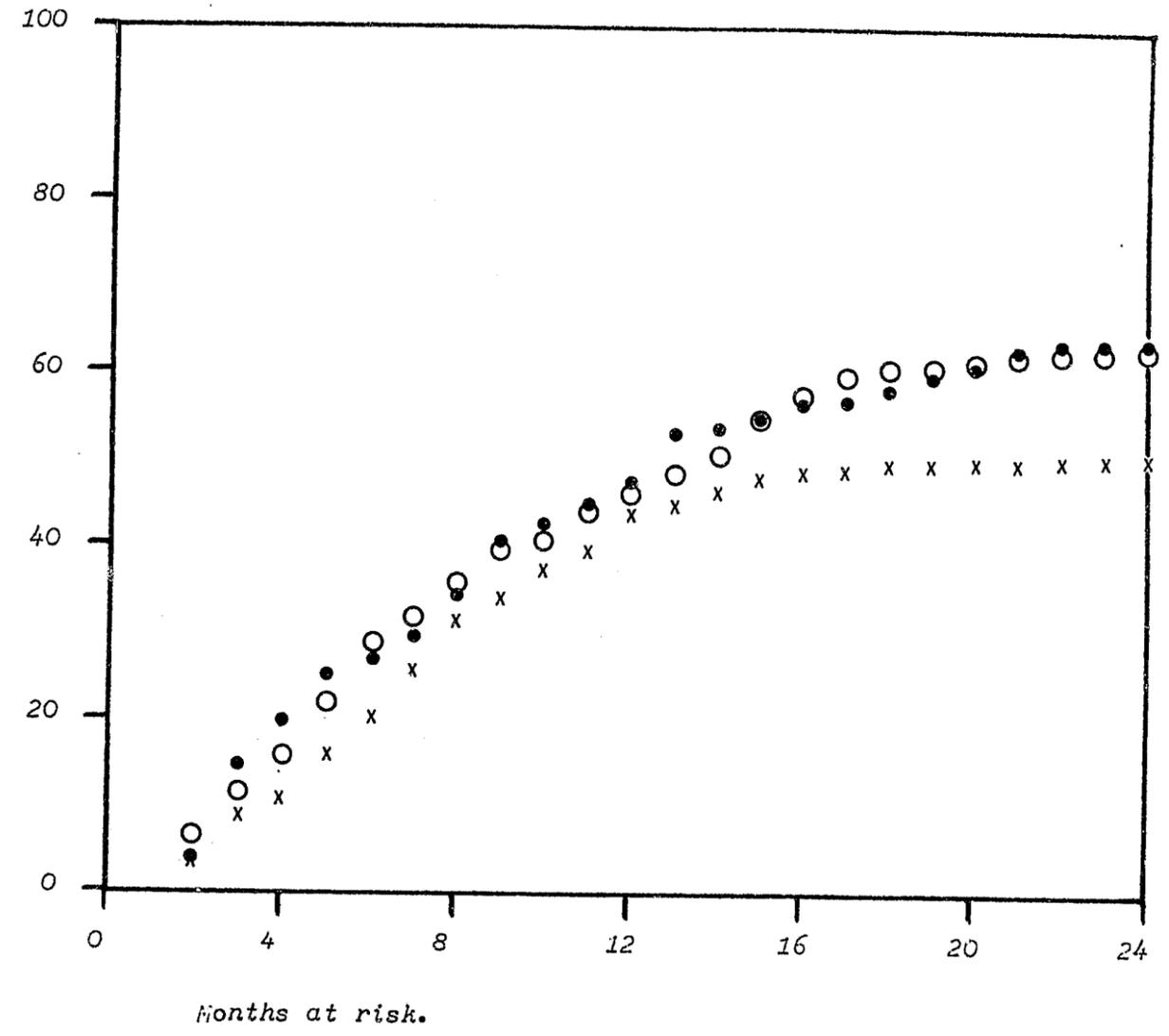


Figure 5: Rated Disturbance and Failure at the three Regimes.

% Failed.



○ Group-counseling
x Case-work
● Traditional

FIGURE 6: CUMULATIVE RATE-OF-FAILURE, THE THREE REGIMES.

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