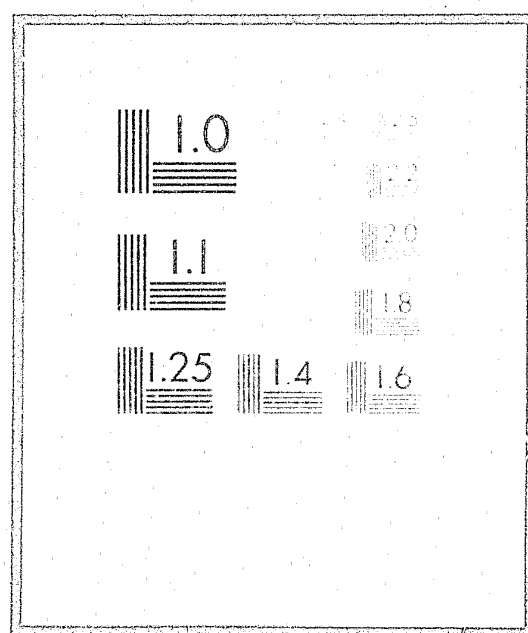


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THE VANIER CENTRE FOR WOMEN  
RESEARCH REPORT NO. 2  
LENGTH OF TIME IN VANIER, ATTITUDES  
AND FIRST YEAR RECIDIVISM

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ABSTRACT

## RATIONALE

ACQUAINTANCE

One of the most significant findings discussed in the Vanier Centre Study Report #1 was the relationship between the time spent in a cottage and the social climate scores of residents.<sup>1</sup> The longer a resident had been in her particular cottage, the more negative were her responses to a series of questions designed to measure her perceptions of her environment. The social climate scores took a sharp drop among residents who spent six months or more in the cottage. This was especially true for those residents in Cottages 1, 2, 3 & 5 who had been more positive than those in Cottage 4 in the early months of their stay.

This finding has prompted further investigation on the variable measuring total length of incarceration as well as time in the cottage. The purpose of this report is to assess the relationship between specific attitudes, recidivism within one year of the residents and time spent in Vanier. The attitude measures used for this part of the study were selected from the pre-discharge questionnaire which was administered to each of the residents shortly before release from Vanier. Recidivism data were gathered from F.P.S. Reports supplied by the R.C.M.P. and from institutional files. For the purposes of this report, recidivism rates are defined as the percent of the sample who were convicted of any subsequent offence during the first year following release from Vanier. This also includes those returning because of parole violations, even if no additional charges were laid.

It was felt that in measuring the relationship between length of incarceration and the chosen attitude and recidivism data, the effects of prior incarcerations on each of the variables should be considered. The sample was, therefore, divided into two parts: those who had served any previous time in a correctional institute and those who had not. The preliminary findings justified this approach, since the length of time spent in Vanier was found to be related to attitudes and recidivism quite differently for each of the two groups. For this reason all data presented in this report are given independently for prior incarcerates as compared to residents with no prior incarcerations.

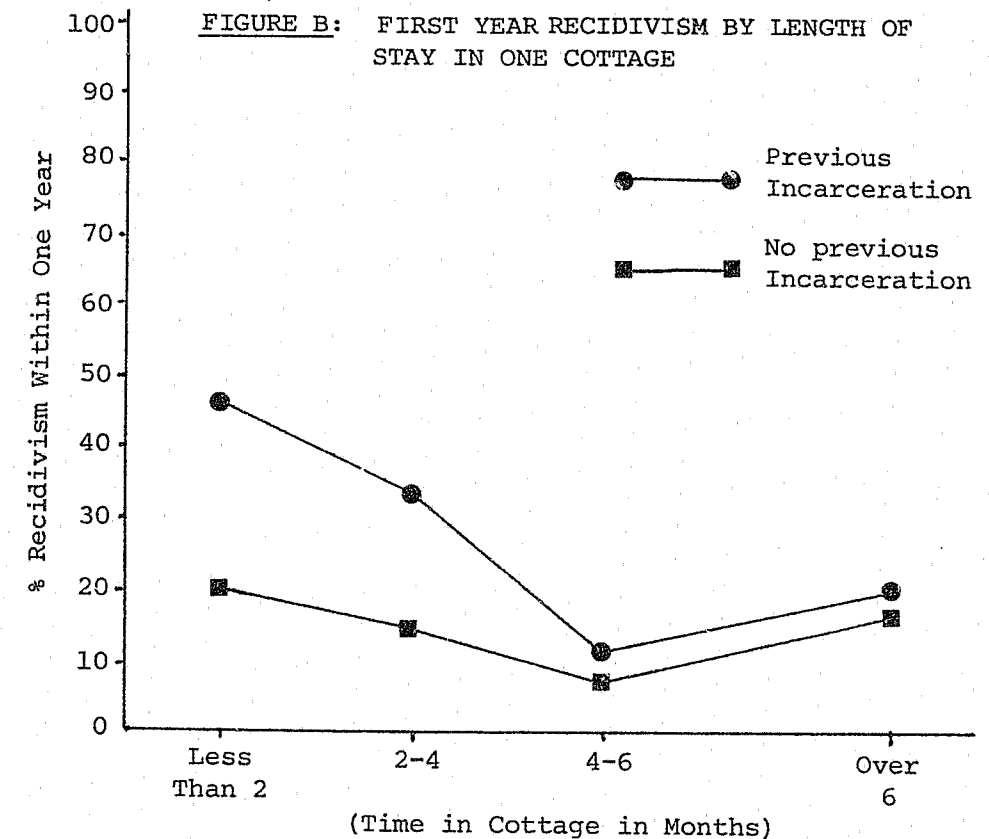
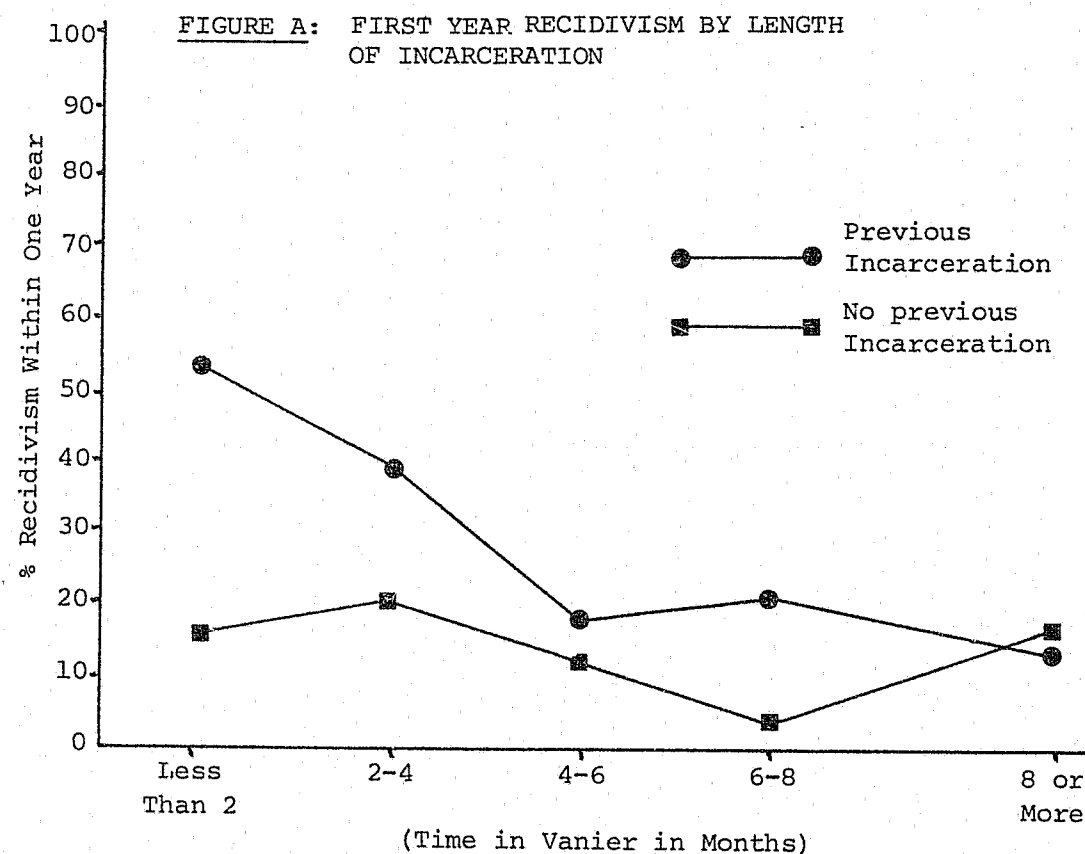
<sup>1</sup> LAMBERT, L.R. and Madden, P.G., "The Vanier Centre for Women, Research Report No.1, An Examination of the Social Milieu", Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services, May, 1974.

## FINDINGS

### First Year Recidivism

The one year recidivism rate for the entire sample was 23.7%. For the group with previous incarcerations it was 34.6 and for those incarcerated for the first time it was 16.7. For both groups, this recidivism was higher among residents in Vanier for very short sentences and then dropped among residents serving between five and eight months. The group with previous incarcerations, however, showed the most significant range, with the recidivism rate dropping from 54.5% for the group in for less than two months, to 18.5% for those in from four to six months. Beyond this point, however, the change levels off. For the group with no prior incarcerations, the decrease in recidivism among those with short stays to longer is less dramatic, but beyond eight months the rate actually increases to 18.8%, higher than the mean for the entire sub-group. (See Figure A.)

Findings on the length of stay in a single cottage show more congruence between the two groups. While the difference in rate of recidivism for those in a cottage for different lengths of time is again greater for the prior incarcerate group, both groups show the lowest recidivism among those in a single cottage setting between four and six months. (See Figure B.)



### Attitudes

The questions chosen from the pre-discharge questionnaire fall into two main groups in terms of the types of attitudes measured. The first three measure attitude towards Vanier and its staff in rather general terms. *Did they like it? Did they get a square deal? Were staff understanding?* These questions should give an indication of the receptiveness of the residents to Vanier and its program. The remaining questions deal more with their perceptions of the results of their incarceration. *Did Vanier help them? Do they now understand themselves better? What are their chances of staying out of trouble?* These questions should show the residents' perception of the success or failure of the program.

The results to the first group of questions each show basically the same pattern, with prior incarcerations having little effect on the relationship. With some slight deviations the pattern was basically that the longer the resident was in Vanier, the more negative were the responses. This result agrees basically with the results from analysis of the cottage survey data and may help explain the recidivism patterns given earlier. (See Figures C, D, E.)

The remaining questions on the result of incarceration did not yield the same consistent pattern. One question asked residents whether or not they felt they understood themselves better. Very similar results were found for both first time incarcerates and those with previous incarcerations. In each case those serving between two and four months gave the most positive responses. (See Figure F.)

When asked whether the stay in Vanier had helped them and about their future chances of remaining out of trouble, first incarcerates showed little variation in their response based on length of stay in Vanier. Women with prior incarcerations did show variation, with those in for less than two months or between four and six months giving the most negative response. Even though there is a slight tendency within this group for women incarcerated beyond six months to express more positive feelings about the effect their stay at Vanier had had on them, it does not exceed the proportion of positive responses expressed among those sentenced for two to four months. (See Figures G & H.)

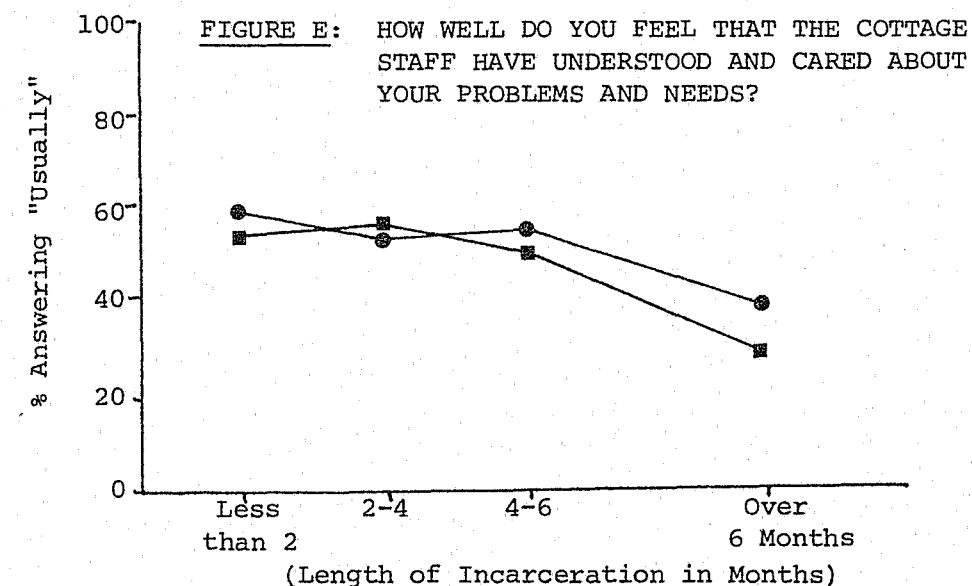
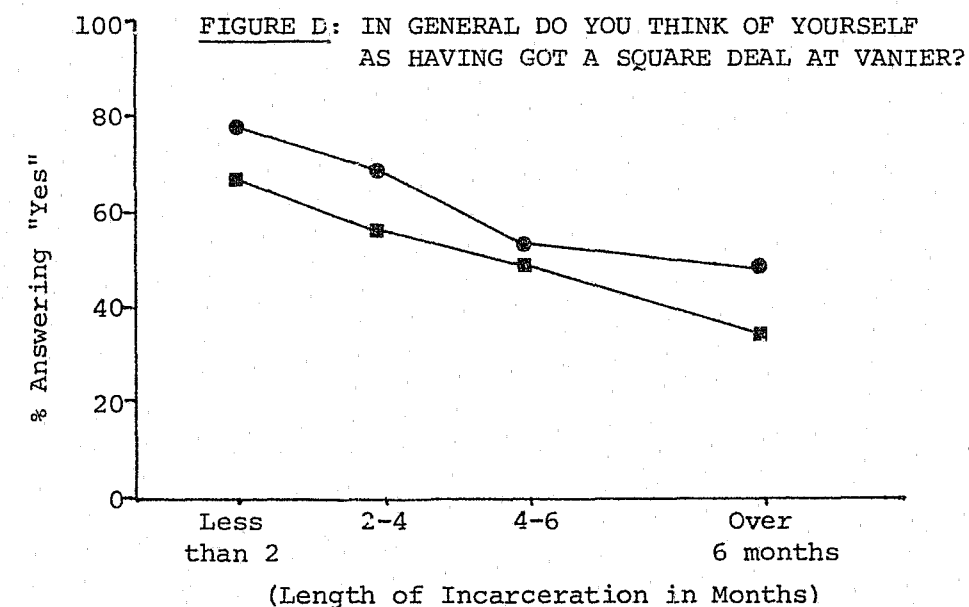
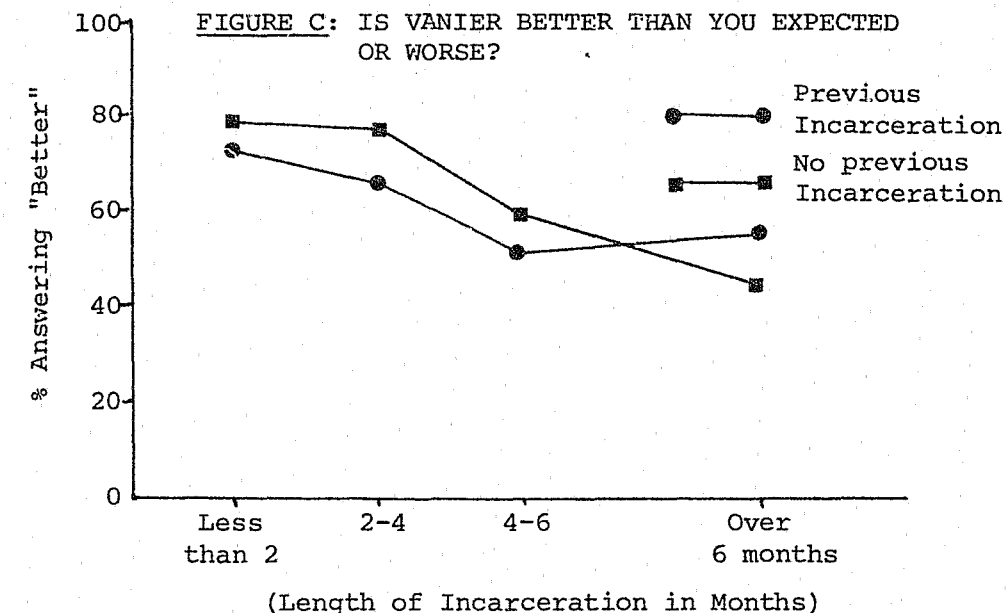


FIGURE F: DO YOU THINK YOU UNDERSTAND YOURSELF BETTER NOW THAN WHEN YOU CAME IN?

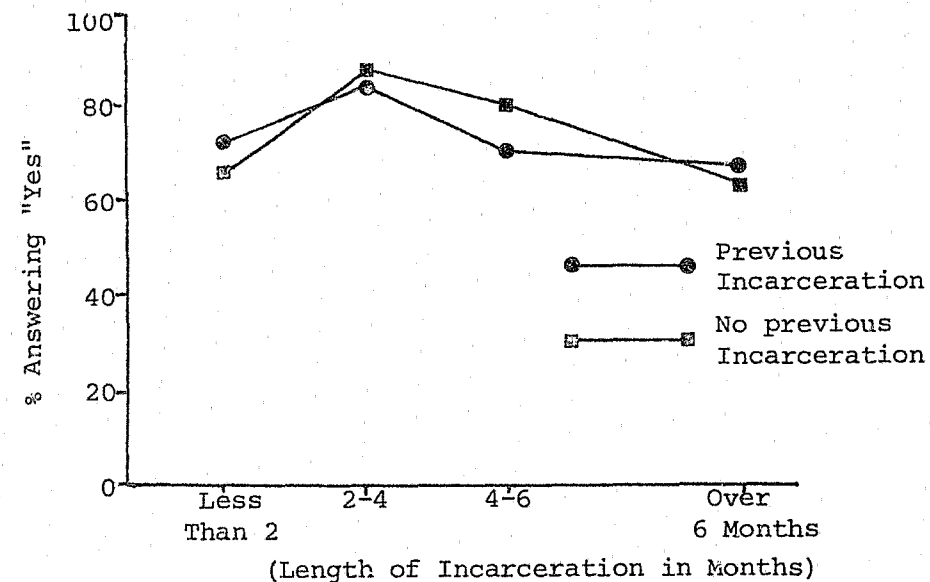


FIGURE G: HOW MUCH WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR STAY HERE HAS HELPED YOU?

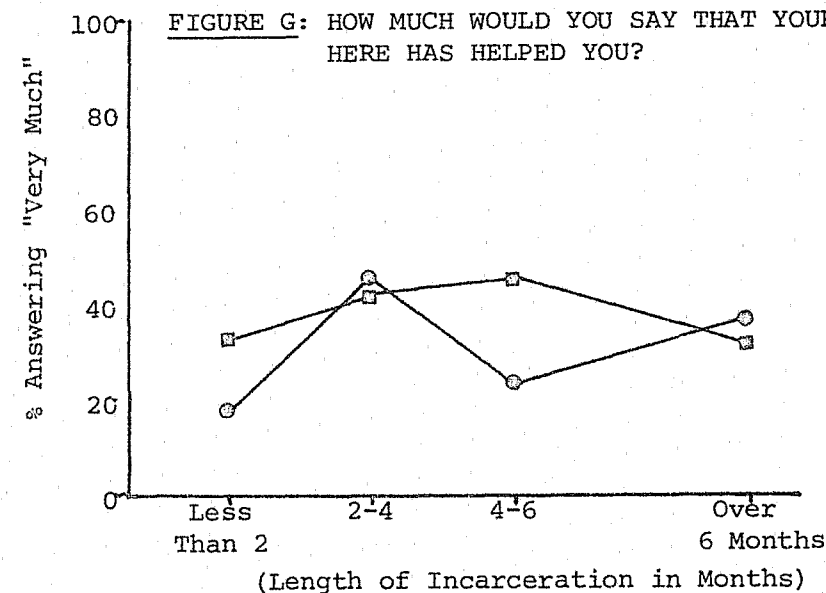
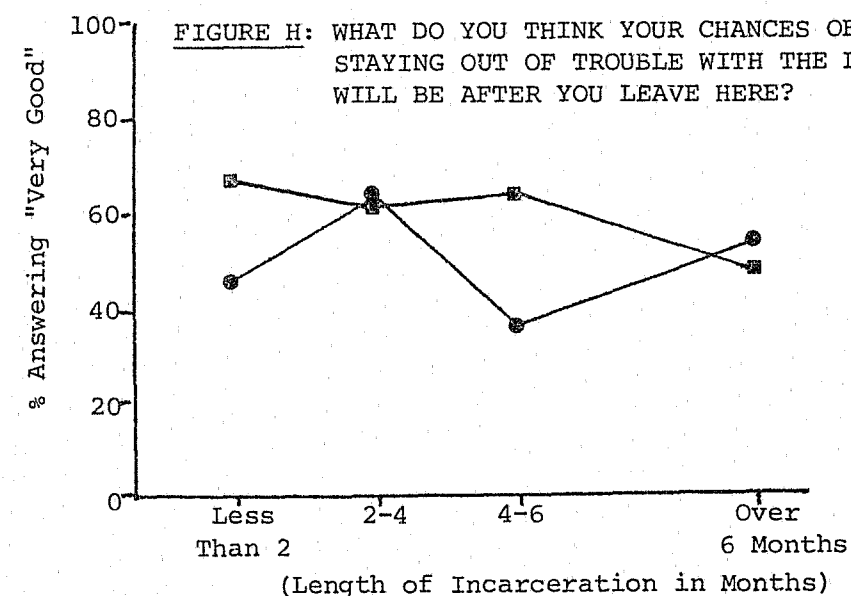


FIGURE H: WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR CHANCES OF STAYING OUT OF TROUBLE WITH THE LAW WILL BE AFTER YOU LEAVE HERE?



## CONCLUSIONS

At this point it must be cautioned that no causality can be proven for any of the relationships demonstrated here. Thus, it cannot be assumed that the program or length of incarceration is responsible for the expressed attitudes or post-institutional criminality. The length of time spent in Vanier is probably influenced by some of the same factors which influence attitudes and recidivism. For example, perhaps women receiving very short sentences or very long sentences have committed offences which are more likely to lead to further difficulty (e.g., alcohol, drugs, prostitution, etc.).

Furthermore, this analysis relates to recidivism data for only one year of post-institutional experience. There is expected to be some increase in the total proportion of recidivists after two or more years. Although such an increase may show that in the long term assessment, the length of an incarceration is not as significant as it is during the first year, we cannot dismiss the importance of a decreased probability of recidivism during the first year.

These data have demonstrated that very short sentences and those in excess of eight months are related to higher recidivism rates, as well as to more negative attitudes towards Vanier. These relationships between recidivism, attitudes and length of time are so strong, particularly for the group which had prior incarcerations, that the potential usefulness of very short sentences and very long sentences should be considered. In some cases total community supervision may be preferable for economic as well as rehabilitative reasons; in some cases gradual or earlier discharge may be an answer. Certainly, in terms of the one year recidivism rates, the resources provided at Vanier seem to be most usefully deployed when residents are there no more than 4 - 8 months. Worst results occur among those with very short terms, particularly if the resident has had a prior incarceration. Of the group with some previous experience in a correctional institution and serving less than two months in Vanier, 54.5% were either convicted of some further offence or returned because of parole violation within the first year after incarceration.

Although prior incarcerates institutionalized more than eight months show lower recidivism rates than those serving less time, the attitudes toward the institution become increasingly negative. Because of this, and also

because attitudes expressed about the effects of the stay at Vanier on the resident's own future are more positive among those who were incarcerated two to four months compared to those in Vanier over six months, it would appear that incarcerations lasting much beyond six months serve little purpose for this group.

For the group institutionalized for their first time, the relationships are not nearly so clear. The attitudes show the same drop, becoming more negative with increased time served in most cases. For this group, probably the most important finding is that those serving over eight months also show a rate of recidivism which is beyond the level of those serving less than two months.

While the length of sentences is more relevant at the sentencing stage, the program planners may find the information concerning time spent within a single cottage of more interest. Although the variation is more dramatic for the group with previous incarcerations, the implications are the same for both groups. Residents remaining in a single cottage between four to six months showed the lowest rate of recidivism regardless of their prior criminality.

**END**