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Prison Visiting: A Background for Change

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UNTIL quite recently, visits to prisoners have been widely viewed as privileges to be granted or denied the prisoner on the basis of his or her institutional behavior. Certain court decisions concerning the prisoner's right of access (*Carothers v. Follette*, 1970; *Duren v. Proctor*, 1972; and others) have led some penologists to view the visit as a right of the prisoner. The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973) took this position and recommended, in Standard 2.17, that correctional authorities encourage visitors rather than merely tolerate them (p. 68). An additional basis for the Commission's recommendation is the current tendency of correctional specialists to view the visit, not as a rehabilitative technique for control of behavior, but as rehabilitative in and of itself.

There is some empirical evidence for this position. Glaser (1964), in a study of the Federal system, found that prisoners categorized as having "active" family interest during the period of their incarceration were significantly more successful in completing parole than were prisoners who had no family interest. Holt and Miller (1972) reported in a California study that "loners" were six times more likely to return to prison during the first year following release than were prisoners who had three or more visits.

The maintenance of outside relationships appears, then, to be significantly linked to parole success. This link has resulted in recommendations for encouraging visitors as well as practical suggestions for this encouragement (National Advisory Commission, 1973; Fenlon, 1972; Weintraub, 1976; and others). Lacking in these recommendations and suggestions is an analysis of the opportunities which currently exist in the Nation's correctional institutions for prisoners to maintain these beneficial outside relationships. A survey conducted in 1976 (Schaffer, 1977) provided some general information on current visiting policies in correctional institutions throughout the United States.

For this survey questionnaires were mailed to

TABLE 1. Days per week available for visiting by state

No. of Days					
1	5	6	7	Mixed	
(Sun. only)	Sat., Sun., Holiday)				
ALA.	ARK.	VT.	CAL.	DEL.	CONN.
	ARIZ.		COLO.	IDA.	N.J.
	FLA.		NEBR.	ILL.	OHIO
	GA.		N.M.	IND.	ORE.
	HA.			IOWA	TENN.
	N.C.			KAN.	UTAH
	OKLA.			KY.	WISC.
	S.C.			LA.	
	TEXAS			MASS.	
	VA.			MAINE	
	WA.			MD.	
	W. VA.			MICH.	
				MINN.	
				MO.	
				MONT.	
				N.H.	
				N.Y.	
				N.D.	
				PA.	
				R.I.	

230 state correctional facilities for adult offenders. Federal facilities were not included for geographical reasons: each of these may draw its population from any state in the Union, making comparisons difficult. Local and county facilities were excluded because they are so numerous and varied. Though some state corrections departments set visiting policies for all state institutions, many permit considerable variation. For this reason, the questionnaire was sent to the individual institutions, rather than to the state corrections bureau or department. A total of 168 responses was received.

Visiting schedules were assumed to be indicative of the extent to which opportunities for prisoners to visit with their families and friends are made available by correctional authorities. Responses revealed wide variation in the visiting schedules. Some facilities provide visiting hours just one day per week; others seven. To some extent these variations are regional. Table 1 lists the states according to the number of days per week available for visits.

Since more than one institution in each state

TABLE 2

<i>State</i>	<i>No. of Institutions Responding</i>	<i>Total Visiting Hours Per Week (Range)</i>	<i>No. of Visits Per Resident Per Month (Range)</i>	<i>Permitted Length of Visit (Range in Hours)</i>
Alabama	4	6½-16	4	6½-7
Arizona	4	14-22	no response	2-9
Arkansas	1	4	2-4	4
California	8	30-42	1-18	3½-48½
Colorado	3	24-32½	4-unlimited	2-8
Connecticut ^a	4	19-35	5-16	1-3
Delaware ^a	1	49	4-5	1
Florida	8	12	4	6
Georgia	7	6-16	8-16	2-4
Hawaii	3	12-16	8-10	1-3
Idaho	1	45½	unlimited	3-3½
Illinois	3	41½-48	3-4	1-5
Indiana	4	12-50½	3-4	1-4
Iowa	3	21-47½	unlimited	3-4
Kansas	2	36-48	3-13	2-2¾
Kentucky	5	21-52½	4-unlimited	1½-7
Louisiana	4	8-56	N.A.	1½-4
Maine	1	42	12	1-2
Maryland	1	56	5	2
Massachusetts	4	18-56	12-16	1-8
Michigan	4	49-89	4-unlimited	3-12
Minnesota	5	21-50	5-10	1-3
Missouri	7	22-49	4-10	4-6½
Montana	1	42	20	3
Nebraska	2 ^c	20-43½	4-N.A.	3-7
New Hampshire	1	40	8	2
New Jersey	5	3½-42	4-unlimited	1-6
New Mexico	1	40	4	2
New York	12	42-52½	4-15	6-14
North Carolina	3	4-6	4-8	1-4
North Dakota	1	28	4	2
Ohio	4	30-56	2-4	2½-7½
Oklahoma	9	11-48	2-8	1-7½
Oregon	4	6-39½	N.A.	3-6½
Pennsylvania	7	42-89	3-12	2-12
Rhode Island	1	28	15	2
South Carolina	5	7½-12	2-8	2-6
Tennessee	3	16-37½	8-13	2-6
Texas	1	16	2	2
Utah	3	6-24½	4-21	1½-8
Virginia	6	12-26½	4-12	1-8
Vermont ^a	3	3-5	12	1-2
Washington	4	6-39½	8-unlimited	3-6
West Virginia	1	18	4	1½
Wisconsin	6	18-52½	8-30	3-6

^a States assume responsibility for felons and misdemeanants and pretrial detainees.

^b California permits family visits for as long as a week-end.

^c States have one penal complex which contains more than one unit, each with different policies.

may have responded to the survey, each state was categorized according to the dominant pattern. Alabama, for example, was placed on the 1-day column because three of four respondents reported a Sunday-only schedule. The majority of facilities with 1- or 2-day schedules are in southern or southwestern states; the majority with 7-day schedules are in the eastern or midwestern states.

Some states do not have a state policy regard-

ing visitors; many of these reported such wide variation that they could not be categorized and were therefore placed in a "mixed" column. An example of a mixed schedule is New Jersey where two facilities reported a Sunday only schedule, one a weekend schedule plus summer Wednesdays, one a weekend contact schedule with daily screened visits, and one a 7-day schedule.

Five states are not represented: Alaska, Mississippi, Nevada, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

Though questionnaires were sent to facilities in these states, no responses were received.

Comparisons of the number of days each week when visiting periods are available are not entirely useful. In table 2 the visiting schedules have been expressed by a figure representing the total number of hours available for visiting per week (days per week x hours per day). This figure makes more refined comparisons possible, and indicates an even greater range of existing visiting opportunities. The total number of hours available per week ranged, nationwide, from a low of 21½ hours to a high of 89.

A number of factors can be associated with this variation. One is, of course, the extent to which visiting is considered a priority. Related to this are personnel and budget considerations. It can be assumed that in institutions where visits are viewed as rehabilitative, staff will be made available for visit supervision and visitor processing.

Other factors are overcrowding, location, type of facility, and visiting room capacity. In institutions where the population exceeds capacity it may be necessary to expand the schedule to accommodate the large number of visitors. The location of the facility may also affect the schedule. Evening visiting hours are not cost-effective if the institution is geographically isolated, due to low visitor volume; where the institution is easily accessible evening hours may accommodate a large number of visitors.

The measurable factor which correlates most closely with schedule is visiting room capacity; where the capacity of the visiting area is low, relative to the total institutional population, the visiting schedule tends to be generous; where it is large, the schedule tends to be limited. The capacity of the visiting area is related to the age of the institution. Of 50 responding institutions constructed more than 50 years ago, 70 percent have visiting room capacities of under 25 percent of their populations. Assuming just one visitor per person, this means that 12.5 percent of the prisoners can receive visitors at any given time. Such institutions must increase visiting hours in order to make visits available for all prisoners.

It should be noted, when analyzing visiting schedules and visiting room capacities, that some correctional institutions *do not have visiting rooms as such*. These facilities must utilize for visiting, areas which serve another purpose dur-

ing the week and which are, therefore, available for visiting only on weekends and in the evening. Many use classrooms for visits. The educational area is often well-suited for this purpose since it is usually somewhat segregated from other activity areas, and is often located quite close to the entry point from "outside."

Although the visiting schedule is an indicator of the opportunities available for the prison population to maintain outside relationships, limits on the length of the visit and the frequency of visits have the greatest impact on opportunities for the individual prisoner. Responses from states on all three factors are indicated in table 2. Because visiting policies may vary from institution to institution, the range of responses is given for states where more than one facility responded. In some states the range is extreme; in others, state policy is evident (e.g., New York, Pennsylvania, Florida).

With regard to the number of visits permitted per resident per month some correctional facilities place restrictions on the visitor rather than on the prisoner. Among those which limit prisoner visits the range nationwide, was from two per month to no limit at all. Most of the respondents (59 percent) report that prisoners are permitted visitors at least twice a week (eight per month or more). Nearly one-quarter (24.7 percent) permit 20 or more visits per resident per month.

The nationwide range of permitted visit length is also very great. The shortest visit was 45 minutes, the longest more than 9 hours.¹ Only 9.3 percent of the respondents reported visits of 1 hour or less in length; 29.8 percent limit visit length to 2 or fewer hours. Visits of 6 or more hours' duration are permitted by 37.2 percent of the responding institutions.

The permitted length of visit column in table 2 does not include limits which are placed on weekend visits. Of those facilities which provide more than a weekend schedule, 70.3 percent reported limits on the length of weekend visits. Since these are peak visiting times such a policy is necessary in order to accommodate all visitors. Facilities which permit outdoor visits in pleasant weather may limit visits only during the winter months. Many respondents report that the limit is enforced only when visitor volume makes it necessary to do so.

Several institutions report the existence of "special visits." These are visits of greater than usual length, and they may occur during other

¹ In California the family visit, may last as long as 48 hours, but this type of visit is not available in most other states.

than regular visiting hours. They are generally arranged in advance and are primarily intended for visitors who must travel especially long distances.

The survey data indicated that visiting opportunities in general have expanded in the last two decades. A 1956 survey of visiting found the dominant visiting pattern to be twice a month for not more than 2 hours. (Zemans and Cavan, 1958). The most common pattern in the 1976 survey was once a week for more than 4 hours. Although this change is indicative of increased interest in visiting on the part of correctional authorities, many institutions have not expanded visiting opportunities beyond the 1956 level. These can hardly be considered to be concerned with the National Advisory Commission's recommendation to encourage visits.

One way in which some correctional facilities encourage visitors is by mailing visiting rules and regulations to potential visitors. This policy helps to assure that few visitors will have to be turned away at the institution. Some respondents indicate that this is the prisoner's responsibility; a few send letters to people on each visiting list encouraging them to visit and requesting background information. In one state, Virginia, authorities can be quite certain that prisoners have notified friends and relatives of the visiting schedule and rules; these are printed on the back of the stationery that the state provides for prisoner correspondence.

The National Advisory Commission's recommendation to encourage visitors has served as the basis for numerous suggestions related to visiting and visitor services. These include subsidized

transportation to and from the institution, provision of child care, community involvement to provide lodging for visitors, and counseling of visitors. (Fenlon, 1972; Weintraub, 1976). While such suggestions are laudable in terms of potential prisoner rehabilitation, they must be preceded in many institutions by preliminary policy changes.

In many jurisdictions solutions must be found for the practical logistical problems inherent in maximizing visiting opportunities. Means of increasing visiting hours, visit length and visit frequency must precede the implementation of visitor-services programs. The significant link between visits and parole success found by Holt and Miller (1972) suggests that maximizing opportunities for the prisoner to maintain his or her relationship with family and friends may be the most valuable way to encourage visitors and increase prisoner rehabilitation.

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THE OFFENDER population is as heterogeneous as the rest of society. Each man and woman has a different set of needs to help him or her make the decision to give up criminal activity and to take a respected place inside rather than outside the law.—NORMAN A. CARLSON

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