

FACTORS RELATED TO AGE  
IN FIRST INCARCERATES

Prepared by

PATRICK G. MADDEN  
Planning and Research Branch

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MINISTRY OF  
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MINISTRY OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

PROVINCE OF ONTARIO



PLANNING AND SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION

M. J. Algar  
Assistant Deputy Minister

PLANNING AND RESEARCH BRANCH

James J. Hug, Ph.D.  
Director

A. C. Birkenmayer  
Chief, Research Services

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ACQUISITIONS

In a recent study involving a large sample of first time incarcerates (Gendreau, Madden and Leipziger, 1977), it was found that the age at admission was one of the variables most strongly related to recidivism. On further analysis, many other factors which were related to recidivism were also related to age and in some cases age accounted for almost all of the association between recidivism and the variable in question.

This report examines the differences between age groups on a wide variety of factors chosen from the data collected for the recidivism study. Particular attention was paid to the sixteen and seventeen year olds because of their high recidivism rates and their recent entry into legal adulthood. Much discussion has gone on lately about changing services for juvenile offenders, and a description of this group should be of value in decision making in this area.

METHOD

The sample described consists of 740 first incarcerates admitted to the Guelph Correctional Centre during 1970-71. They represent those, from an original sample of 802, who had completed an extensive social history interview and whose age was available from institutional files.

Information used in this report was collected from an interview conducted shortly after each inmate's admission to Guelph and from institutional files after his release.

The breakdown for each variable was examined for each of four age groups: 16 and 17 (n=261), 18 to 20 (n=267), 21 to 25 (n=151) and 26 and over (n=61). These divisions were chosen after examination of smaller breakdowns and it is felt that they best showed the variation, while still providing large enough numbers in each group to provide meaningful results.

FINDINGSFamily Background:

Instability, while common in the backgrounds of the entire sample, was much more pronounced among the younger inmates. Almost half of the sixteen and seventeen year old group had lived in at least two completely different situations and over 21% had lived in three or more. More in this group (20%) had spent time in a foster home.

Lack of stability within the homes of the younger group was also common, with over half having parents who had been separated. More in this group reported parents not getting along than was true in the older group. In terms of the inmates' attitudes towards their homes, the difference existed mainly between those over and under twenty-five. Over 75% of those in the older group reported liking their living situations "a great deal" compared to only 35-40% for the younger groups.

Little difference existed among the age groups in the proportion who reported problems, where they had lived, with: alcohol, drugs, the law or finances. Other data indicated, however, that the younger group came from poorer homes. More had parents who had been on welfare (24%), and their fathers occupations ranked lower on a socio-economic scale. More (38%) in this group also reported that their siblings had been in some sort of legal trouble.

Given the more troubled situations in the childhood of the younger inmates, it is not surprising that more of their families (49%) had received some sort of community help. Further examination, however, reveals that the majority (57%) of these had this help imposed on them by agencies such as the police or probation offices. When only help which the families received by choice was considered, the proportion of each age group, receiving help, was similar.

At the time of their offence almost all of the sixteen and seventeen year olds were still single and the majority (56%) were still living with their parents. Most others, in this age group, were living either alone or with friends.

#### Criminal Involvement:

The designation, "first-incarcerates" may be misleading for much of this sample, especially those in the younger portion of the sample. About half of all groups had prior adult convictions and many had served terms of probation or had been in jail for short periods.

It is in the area of juvenile criminal involvement that there is a marked difference between age groups. Almost 70% of those sixteen or seventeen had court appearances prior to turning sixteen, compared with 16 to 43% of the older groups. Almost 40% of the youngest group had been in training school at least once. When adult and juvenile data were viewed together, over 85% of the sixteen and seventeen year old group had some previous contact with the legal system.

In terms of the types of crimes for which the inmates were incarcerated, almost all of the younger group (86%) were incarcerated for some type of property offence. While not to the same degree, this was the most common type of charge for all age groups. Other categories where differences existed between age groups were: charges against person, more common among the older groups, liquor offence, more common among the 18 to 20 year old group; and drug offences, more common among those between twenty-one and twenty-five.

As stated earlier, there was a strong relationship between age and recidivism. The older the inmate, the higher his chances of avoiding reconviction. Two years after their release dates, the reconviction rates ranged from 70% for the 16 and 17 year olds to 22% for those 26 and over.

#### Educational and Work History:

For the entire sample, work and educational experiences were very limited. As with other problem areas, however, the situation was much more pronounced for the younger members of the sample. The sixteen and seventeen year olds, at an age when most people are still in school, had for the most part, dropped out. Few had achieved any success in the area of work either, with 18% of those who were no longer students, never having worked, and another 59% having worked, but being unemployed at the time of their offence. Only 30% of those in this age group, and having worked, had ever held a job for over six months.

The types of jobs held by the younger groups were even lower in status than those of older inmates who, themselves, generally held jobs at the lower end of the socio-economic scale.

Almost none of the sixteen and seventeen year old group had achieved beyond grade ten and almost all showed some sign of problems in their school experience. Over half had been expelled or suspended, and a larger proportion of this group than the older groups reported not liking school and not getting along with teachers. In contrast, it was the group over twenty five who had the largest portion (28%) who had not completed elementary school.

### Drug and Alcohol Use:

Use of both drugs and alcohol varied greatly with the age of the inmates. Drinking was much more common among the older inmates while use of drugs was more common amongst the younger group. It is worth noting, though, that while under 30% of the sixteen and seventeen year olds reported using alcohol regularly, two thirds of this group said they began drinking before turning fifteen.

The types of drugs used varied with age, as well, with L.S.D. and amphetamines being the most popular among the younger group and opiates more common among the older drug users.

A caution should accompany this section, especially relating to drug use, as the situation may have changed considerably since these data were collected in 1970-71.

### DISCUSSION

The sample described in this report appears to come from two distinct groups. One group primarily the younger inmates, reported backgrounds which featured numerous legal contacts, family instability and low achievement in school and work. The other group, mainly older, showed more stable and productive backgrounds. While for most, even in this group, the current incarceration did not represent their first legal contact, they did have far less extensive criminal past than the younger group. Many in the sixteen and seventeen year old group, rather than really being first incarcerates, were continuing histories of institutionalization started in training school. They were, in many ways, very similar to a juvenile sample of returnees described in a study on Ontario's D.A.R.E. Project (Birkenmayer & Polonoski, 1973).

The existence of these two groups have definite implications for correctional programming as well as the interpretation of the reported relationship between age at admission and recidivism.

First, we must question the wisdom of classifying these diverse groups to the same institution, simply because they both meet a definition of "first incarcerates". Programs designed for a young inmate with an extensive delinquent history and negligible work experience would surely be inappropriate for an older first time offender who had been in the work force for several years. It is questionable, in fact, if some of the older inmates in this sample should have been incarcerated at all.

The relationship between age and recidivism is put in a new light by these findings. Clearly it is not the age of the younger group which results in its higher recidivism rate but their more troubled background and more extensive prior criminal involvement. The two should coincide in other first incarcerate samples but it must be remembered that it is not age itself which accounts for the difference in recidivism.

In examining other studies we found that this relationship generally held true. Where age at first incarceration or first offence was examined, there was a relationship between age and recidivism (Ganzer & Sarason, 1975; Smith & Langon, 1968; and Madden, 1976), on samples of juveniles and adults. In other studies, not dealing with first incarcerates, age was found not to be related to recidivism in adult females or delinquent males (Lambert & Madden, 1976; Roberts, Erikson, Riddle & Bacon, 1974). In one study, though, Sone (1976), found that recidivism after six months was related to age at release, for a sample made up of both first incarcerates and recidivists who had been selected for Community Resource Centres.

TABLES

<u>FAMILY BACKGROUND</u>	<u>Age</u>							
	16 - 17		18 - 20		21 - 25		26 +	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Number of Different Living Situations Subjects Grew Up In:</b>								
one	134	51.3	143	53.6	195	62.9	33	54.1
two	72	27.6	77	28.8	39	25.8	22	36.1
three	35	13.4	36	13.5	13	8.6	5	8.2
four or more	20	7.7	11	4.1	4	2.6	1	1.6
Ever Live In: A Foster Home	53	20.3	33	12.4	9	6.0	5	8.2
<b>How Subjects Liked Early Living Situations:</b>								
a great deal	92	35.8	106	40.3	56	37.6	44	75.9
somewhat	109	42.4	104	39.5	66	44.3	11	19.0
a bit	41	16.0	31	11.8	15	10.1	3	5.2
not at all	15	5.8	22	8.4	12	8.1	0	0.0
<b>Ever Live Where There Were:</b>								
Financial Problems	60	23.0	59	22.1	28	18.5	15	24.6
Alcohol Problems	68	26.1	70	26.2	30	19.9	8	13.1
Drug Problems	12	4.6	19	7.1	10	6.6	0	0.0
Legal Problems	31	11.9	25	9.4	18	11.9	5	8.2
<b>How Parents Got Along:</b>								
very well	114	47.3	132	52.6	92	63.9	37	67.3
so - so	85	35.3	79	31.5	37	25.7	16	29.1
not at all	42	17.4	40	15.9	15	10.4	2	3.6
Parents Ever Separated:	136	52.3	122	45.9	57	37.7	19	31.1

FAMILY BACKGROUND (Cont'd.)

Age

	<u>16 - 17</u>		<u>18 - 20</u>		<u>21 - 25</u>		<u>26 +</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Parents Ever on Welfare:	61	23.7	41	15.6	14	9.3	1	1.7
Siblings Ever in Trouble With the Law:	99	37.9	97	36.3	45	29.8	9	14.8
Families Ever Receive Help:	129	49.4	109	40.8	31	20.5	18	29.5
This Help Was Usually:								
imposed	74	57.4	55	50.5	12	38.7	2	11.1
voluntary	55	42.6	54	49.5	21	61.3	16	88.9
Father's Education:								
elementary school	33	20.6	44	27.0	12	18.9	11	44.0
at least some secondary	61	38.1	52	31.9	27	31.4	5	20.0
at least some post secondary	66	41.3	67	41.1	47	54.7	9	36.0
Father's Occupational Status: (Rated on Blisshen 1971 Scale)								
(lowest range) less than 30	68	30.0	59	23.8	31	22.0	20	35.1
30 - 39	107	47.1	116	46.8	55	39.0	22	38.6
40 - 60	52	22.9	73	29.4	55	39.0	15	26.3
How Often Father Worked:								
all or most of the time	214	90.3	230	91.3	129	90.9	33	86.8
off and on	20	8.4	17	6.8	12	8.5	4	10.5
never	3	1.3	5	2.0	1	0.7	1	2.6
How Good a Living Father Made:								
enough to live well	128	54.9	138	56.1	87	61.3	25	44.6
enough to get by	98	42.1	106	43.1	48	33.8	29	51.8
not enough to get by	7	3.0	2	0.8	7	4.9	2	3.6

Age

16 - 17		18 - 20		21 - 25		26 +	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%

How Often Mother Worked:

all or most of the time	67	26.5	68	26.8	37	25.0	9	16.4
off and on	97	38.3	86	33.9	42	28.4	10	18.2
never	89	35.2	100	39.4	69	46.6	36	65.4

CRIMINAL INVOLVEMENT

Ever to court as juvenile:	181	69.3	115	43.2	34	22.7	9	15.8
Ever to training school:	104	39.2	42	15.7	12	7.9	1	1.6
Previous Adult Convictions:								
none	126	50.0	102	39.4	73	50.0	27	49.1
one	49	19.4	68	26.3	30	20.5	10	18.2
more than one	77	30.6	89	34.3	43	29.5	18	32.7
Any juvenile court experience or adult conviction:	223	85.4	202	75.7	88	58.3	37	60.7

Charge Types Leading to Incarceration:

against person	11	4.2	22	8.2	18	11.9	6	9.8
against property	224	85.8	203	76.0	91	60.3	43	70.5
against public morals	3	1.1	2	0.7	4	2.6	4	6.6
against public order	33	12.6	36	13.5	20	13.2	8	13.1
liquor offences	4	1.5	16	6.0	1	0.7	1	1.6
drug offences	22	8.4	33	12.4	32	21.5	3	4.9

Any Reconviction Within Two Years:

	174	69.6	115	44.6	53	36.3	13	22.0
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EDUCATIONAL & WORK HISTORY

Educational Level Completed:

less than grade 8	14	5.4	32	12.0	16	11.0	16	27.6
grade 8	82	31.7	58	21.8	37	25.3	14	24.1
grade 9	113	43.6	70	26.2	38	19.2	7	12.1

EDUCATIONAL & WORK HISTORY (Cont'd)

	Age							
	16 - 17		18 - 20		21 - 25		26 +	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
grade 10	40	15.4	68	25.6	22	15.1	4	6.9
grade 11 to 13	10	3.9	36	13.5	48	32.9	14	24.1
some post secondary	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	3.4	3	5.2
<b>How Well Got Along With Teachers:</b>								
not well at all	56	21.5	52	19.5	17	11.4	1	1.7
some	115	44.1	99	37.1	53	35.6	15	25.0
quite well	90	34.5	116	43.4	79	53.0	44	73.3
<b>How Ell Enjoyed School:</b>								
not at all	95	36.5	79	29.6	41	27.5	10	16.7
somewhat	99	38.1	110	41.2	55	36.9	20	33.3
quite a lot	66	25.4	55	29.2	53	35.6	30	50.0
Ever Suspended or Expelled:	81	52.9	62	46.3	25	53.2	2	16.7
<b>Work History:</b>								
working when arrested	45	17.2	91	34.1	70	46.4	32	52.5
had worked previously	116	44.4	152	56.9	78	51.7	25	41.0
never worked (student)	65	24.9	11	4.1	2	1.3	0	0.0
never worked (not student)	35	13.4	13	4.9	1	0.7	4	6.6
<b>Longest Job Ever Held:</b>								
under 6 months	111	69.8	83	34.9	16	10.9	3	5.6
6 months to 2 years	48	30.2	125	52.5	71	48.3	11	20.4
over 2 years	0	0.0	30	12.6	60	40.8	40	74.1

Age

	<u>16 - 17</u>		<u>18 - 20</u>		<u>21 - 25</u>		<u>26 +</u>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
	Status of Jobs Held (rated on Blishen, 1971 Scale)							
(lowest status)								
less than 30	95	59.7	128	53.1	61	41.2	14	24.6
30 to 39	57	35.8	105	43.6	68	45.9	31	54.4
40 and over	7	4.4	8	3.3	19	12.8	12	21.1

ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

Ever use alcohol regularly:	75	28.7	102	38.2	75	49.7	31	50.8
Age Began Drinking:								
under 15	46	62.2	44	43.6	12	16.0	1	3.2
15 to 17	28	37.8	52	51.5	45	60.0	14	45.2
18 to 20	0	0.0	5	5.0	13	17.3	12	38.7
21 or over	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	6.7	4	12.9
Ever use drugs regularly:	117	44.8	109	40.8	53	35.1	5	8.2
Age Began Using Drugs:								
under 15	41	35.0	10	9.2	3	5.7	0	0.0
15 to 17	76	65.0	72	66.1	13	24.5	0	0.0
18 to 20	0	0.0	27	24.0	26	49.1	0	0.0
21 or over	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	20.8	5	100.0
Ever Use: L.S.D.	58	22.2	36	13.5	10	6.6	1	1.6
amphetamines	70	26.8	60	22.5	18	11.9	2	3.3
canabis	43	16.5	39	14.6	19	12.6	2	3.3
opiates	16	6.1	23	8.6	15	9.9	1	1.6

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