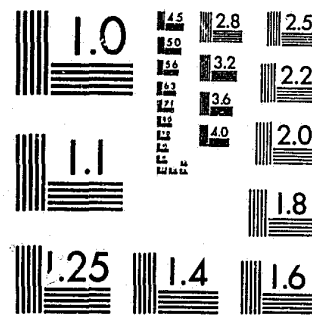National Criminal Justice Reference Service

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ARCHIVAL DATA ON INMATE VIOLENCE

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Introduction

This paper is structured loosely to address both the clinical prediction of violent behavior and FPS issues of inmate classification.

Base Rates

According to various social scientists (e.g., Monahan, 1981; Megargee, 1976) base rate information, measured as the percentage of individuals in a given population who engage in a particular activity, is important to the clinical prediction of violence. From two separate samples of Federal inmates, we have obtained data useful for estimating FPS baselines of violent behavior. First, is a sample of 2,026 releasees from FPS institutions in 1978; second, we have a sample of 671 Federal offenders studied while incarcerated in FPS facilities in 1980. For each of these samples, misconduct was measured by recording information from incident reports contained in the inmates' jackets. As Table 1 reveals, in both samples the base rate of involvement in violent activity (classified on misconduct reports as an assault) is 7%. In the absence of any other information about an individual's tendency toward violence, then, the chances that inmates in the FPS will become involved are about 7 in 100.

Actuarial Data

Experts on violence further encourage the use of "actuarial" data -- e.g., information about social background or criminal history -- to complement base rate information and enhance the accuracy of prediction.

Presumably, actuarial data enhance predictions because they signify characteristics of individuals who have been raised in a subculture where the use of violence is acceptable and expected. Presumably, a subculture of violence educates its members about the utility of coercive or harmful methods for resolving interpersonal problems or conflict and for achieving personal goals. "Actuarial"

variables such as race or (lesser) education do not explain the use of violence. But they serve to "predict" it (statistically) because they are categorical stand-ins for the complex subcultural experiences which have prepared the individual to readily employ violence in a wide variety of situations. The "actuarial predictors" of inmate violence in the FPS include the criminal, drug, and employment history variables listed in Table 6.

Designation/Classification. The FPS Security Designation and Custody Classification instruments employ "actuarial" background information about inmates. These classification techniques categorize offenders according to levels of risk of involvement in problem behavior while incarcerated. To statistically validate these techniques the security and custody scores assigned to inmates would be tested for correlation with involvement in disruptive behavior.

Additionally, such correlations for subcomponents of the Security Designation (e.g., severity of current offense) or Custody Classification instruments would indicate validity. For our 1980 sample (N = 671) Security Designation total scores (and subcomponent measures - see Table 2) were available. Unfortunately, Custody Classification scores were not. However, the Salient Factor Score (SFS) total and subcomponent measures (see Table 3) were available; and the SFS sub-component, history of heroin or opiate dependence, is a criterion of the Custody Classification procedure.

A. Security Designation (SD). The total SD score and several of its components were found to be related significantly to inmate violence.[1] (The "predictive" subcomponents are displayed in Table 4 under major heading "A".) Hence, our analyses have attributed considerable validity to the FPS method (i.e., 4 specific

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[1] The SD total correlated significantly with violence regardless of whether the history-of-violence subcomponent was included in or excluded from the total score. This qualification is necessary because the history of violence criterion could include the violent institutional behavior we are studying as the focus of these analyses.

decision criteria) for the assignment of inmates to institutions in terms of the level of security required.

B. Custody Classification and the Salient Factor Score. As mentioned above, we did not have access to scores from the FPS Custody Classification instrument, but one of its subcomponents was indirectly accorded validity. The element of the SFS, also a criterion for custody classification, which indicates prior opiate/heroin dependence was significantly related to involvement in institutional violence.

As Table 4 (Section B) reveals, two other subcomponents of the SFS were "predictive" of institutional violence - (1) age at first commitment and (2) lack of pre-incarceration employment. It is plausible that each of these criteria signifies, at least remotely, prior experience which would have encouraged the instrumental use of violence or coercion to achieve personal goals.

Situational Variables

Experts also recommend increased clinical emphasis on situational or environmental variables to enhance accuracy in the prediction of violence. Family, peer, and work environments and more specific elements such as the availability of weapons, victims, and alcohol are considered important.

Our 1980 data set (N = 671) revealed that, although only a small proportion of Federal inmates become involved in violence (assaults, fights, or threats), these incidents can be very dangerous to employees who must respond to them. Table 5 indicates that inmate violence frequently involves the presence of a weapon or the occurrence of injury. Also, staff themselves became the target of violence in many instances.

FPS Research Applications. The current FPS research project on inmate violence (see outline, Appendix I), has been designed to be comprehensive of factors which could function independently or conjunctively to precipitate inmate violence. Eventual applications of findings are expected for employees involved in classification, psychologists, and line correctional officers.

Much of the base rate, actuarial, psychological and situational (e.g., family background) information useful for consideration in the clinical prediction could be made available to psychologists and case managers in the FPS. (Of course, this presumes demonstrated predictive validity through research.)

But it is impractical to expect line correctional staff to be able to access, much less to spontaneously synthesize, such information while supervising inmates. More immediate and observable situational factors, such as presence and number of inmate bystanders or the content of communication between inmate antagonists, can be studied for application by line staff. With increased correctional officer sensitivity (through training) to specific "situational predictors," staff control of violence-prone situations would be enhanced.

November 20, 1981

TABLE 1

FPS INMATES INVOLVED IN ASSAULTIVE BEHAVIOR

	None	1 or More Occurrences
1978 Releasees (N = 2,026)	93%	7%
1980 Inmates (N = 671)	93%	7%

TABLE 2

COMPONENTS OF THE SECURITY DESIGNATION SCORE

1. Type of Detainer
   (similar to severity of offense)

2. Severity of Current Offense

3. Expected Length of Incarceration

4. Seriousness of Prior Commitments
   (based on severity of offense)

5. History of Escapes or Attempts

6. History of Violence
   (including criminal offenses and institution violence)

7. Pre-Commitment Status
   (own recognizance; voluntary surrender)

TABLE 3

COMPONENTS OF THE SALIENT FACTOR SCORE

1. Number of Prior Convictions

2. Number of Prior Incarcerations

3. Age at First Commitment

4. Auto Theft Involved in Commitment Offense

5. History of Parole Revocation

*6. History of Heroin or Opiate Dependence

7. Employment Prior to Incarceration

* Also included in FPS Custody Classification Instrument

TABLE 4

SIGNIFICANT "ACTUARIAL" FACTORS: RELATED TO THE LIKELIHOOD OF
INVOLVEMENT IN VIOLENT BEHAVIOR[1]

A. Security Designation Score Subcomponents

    1. Severity of Current Offense

    2. Expected Length of Incarceration

    3. Seriousness of Prior Commitments

    4. History of Violence

B. Salient Factor Score Subcomponents

    5. Age at First Commitment

   * 6. History of Heroin or Opiate Dependence

    7. (Lack of) Employment Prior to Incarceration

C. Demographic

    8. Race: Non-whites more likely than Whites

    9. Ethnicity: Hispanics more likely than Non-hispanics

    10. Age: younger inmates more likely...

    11. Education: inmates with less education more likely...

1 All relationships are statistically significant, p < .05.

* Also included in FPS Custody Classification Instrument

TABLE 5

DETAILS OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS
(FROM 1980 DATA SET: N = 671)

	Assaults (n = 49)	Fights (n = 71)	Threats (n = 47)
Weapons Present	47%	22%	35%
Injury Sustained	56%	34%	21%

TABLE 6

ACTUARIAL PREDICTORS OF INMATE VIOLENCE

Type of Current Offense (property and violent offenses)

Time Served on Present Commitment (time-at-risk)

Number of Prior Commitments

Number of Prior Arrests

Prior Heroin Dependence

Age at First Commitment

Prior Employment History (being less successful)

Education (having less)

Race (non-white)

Age (being younger)

OUTLINE: STUDY OF THE DETERMINANTS OF VIOLENCE AMONG INMATES

I. Research Questions

   A. What situational factors increase or decrease the likelihood of violence between inmates?
   For example:

   1. Behavior of the inmates involved; i.e., insults, threats which may escalate conflict.

   2. Bystanders (inmates):

      a. may contribute to violence directly, by becoming physically involved or by providing a weapon.

      b. may contribute to violence indirectly by encouraging (goading) the inmates in conflict.

      c. may help to prevent violence by intervening as a peacemaker.

   3. The number of inmates involved on each side of the conflict; i.e., an imbalance means strength-in-numbers for one side versus the other.

   4. Proximity of staff when conflict initiates: inmates' estimate of the probability of detection.

   5. Weapons held by either party would increase the likelihood of violent conflict and injury.

   6. Staff behavior: did the type of staff intervention (verbal commands, physical restraint) increase or decrease eventual violence.

   B. What personal factors are related to an inmate's involvement in prison violence?
   For example:

   1. Age

   2. Length of expected incarceration; sentence length

   3. History of violence: violent offense; institutional violence

   4. Attitudes toward violence: how necessary or useful does the inmate see violence as being to resolve various types of conflict?

   5. Developmental history: e.g., children from broken families or who have been exposed to parental conflict and aggression may be more likely to use violence as adults.

   6. History of opiate or alcohol abuse.

   7. MMPI profiles, after Megargee and Levinson, would be included in analyses.

   C. What social factors are related to an inmates' involvement in prison violence?
   For example:

   1. Peers' attitudes toward violence

   2. Family attitudes toward violence

   3. Visits from family/peers who would influence the inmate's attitudes

   4. Jobs, program involvement: would jobs or programs (e.g., education) valued by the inmate be interfered with by involvement in violence and the punishment which is likely to follow

   D. How do situational, personal, and social factors combine to influence inmates' involvement in violence?

II. Sources of Data: inmates involved in violence versus a control group of nonviolent inmates.

   A. Inmates who recently have been involved in a fight or assault directly as a protagonist or indirectly as a bystander/witness would be interviewed.

   B. For comparison on personal and social dimensions (above) a randomly selected control group, with no history of institutional violence, would be interviewed.

III. Applications of Findings

   A. Basic Staff Training: particularly with respect to situational factors which make violence more or less likely to occur, to escalate, to involve injury to inmate or staff.

   B. For Psychologists: findings on personal or social factors would be useful for clinical "prediction" of violence.

   C. Classification: some personal and social factors may prove useful as criteria for custody classification or security designation.

END