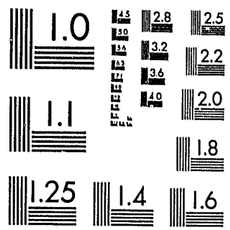

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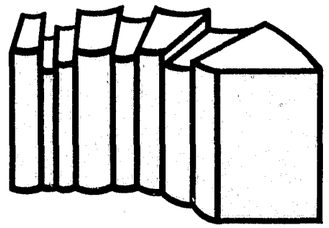

Success on Parole

Introduction

Why do some juvenile parolees succeed in staying out of trouble while others commit new offenses? The California Department of the Youth Authority investigated this critical issue by interviewing 193 young males at the end of their first stay in Youth Authority institutions in 1979, and again after several months on parole. It also measured the cohort's official parole performance for 2 years. The interviews covered topics theorists consider important sources of delinquency —early and current associations with families and peers, ties to schools and communities, economic and environmental conditions, and social skills. The data gathered on arrests and incarcerations show that many of these youth were highly delinquent both before and after commitment to the Youth Authority. However, 23.4 percent did avoid all types of arrest for the entire 2 years, and an additional 34.1 percent were arrested but continued on parole status. Analyses of the interview and justice data produced a comprehensive picture of all parolees' backgrounds, attitudes, and experiences along with evidence supporting some theories for predicting parole success.

The final report contains the Youth Authority's findings and their application for correctional and probation programs.

Interviews with the Youth Authority wards

The summarized interview responses represent a rare collection of the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of typical Youth Authority wards. This section examines responses to some of the major topics covered in the interviews.

Pre-Youth Authority life

Youths felt close to their mothers, but not to their fathers. Almost 80 percent of the respondents felt close to their mothers before coming to the Youth Authority facility, but fewer than half reported such closeness to their fathers. Overall, responses revealed a high level of either literal or psychological father-absence in the youths' background.

Over 80 percent reported physical punishment. While only 23.8 percent said they had been bruised or really beaten up when punished, over 80 percent reported physical punishment as being hit with objects. Fewer than half of the respondents reported having heroes while growing up, and almost one-third had at least one foster home placement.

Impressions of school were negative. Only 27.6 percent described their school attendance as regular, and only half had ever taken part in extracurricular activities, usually sports. The cohort had a low mean reading level of 6.78, suggesting that school was problematic; however, 69.3 percent said at least one teacher had been special and helpful to them.

Over half said their family received public assistance. Parents typically worked in low to semiskilled occupations and most wards had held at least one paying job. The typical family seemed to live slightly above the subsistence level, with occasional periods of unemployment when the family lived on public assistance.

Life in Youth Authority institutions and camps

Most youths felt the school program was important. The school program was rated important by 73.1 percent, and many earned significant high school credits during incarceration. Only 39.4 percent reported receiving help in planning a job or career, and wards in vocational classes said that, on the average, their longest attended vocational course was slightly over 8 months.

Summarized from *Success on Parole* by Mark R. Wiederanders with permission of California Department of the Youth Authority, 1983.

Success on Parole is available at no charge from State of California, Department of the Youth Authority, Program Research and Review Division, 4241 Williamsbourgh Drive, Sacramento, CA 95823.

Perceptions of living unit programs were generally positive. When asked to describe their living unit, only 52.1 percent described programs as having a definite counseling emphasis. Despite vast differences among living unit programs, interviewers were left with an overall impression that such programs were not too systematic or focused, but that wards highly valued their interactions with counselors.

Approximately 80 percent felt safe in their living units, although half reported many fights. These responses make sense when compared to their lives on the streets outside. A small proportion of the respondents admitted to receiving disciplinary transfers out of living units (14 percent) or facilities (11.4 percent), and to being involved with gangs (12.5 percent) while incarcerated.

Most wards claimed that their attitudes and values were anticrime. Over 90 percent of the wards believed that crime was not worth the risks involved, and over one-half arrived at this belief during Youth Authority stays.

Life during the first 6 months of parole

Parolees revealed the same disparity between feelings towards mothers and fathers. Respondents, however, reported slightly more closeness toward both parents than in pre-Youth Authority days.

Number of youths with delinquent friends declined markedly. Only 21.8 percent, compared with 68.8 percent in pre-Youth Authority days, said they had delinquent friends, and only 8.5 percent admitted to involvement in street gangs during parole.

Social control elements were low. Only 18.1 percent belonged to organizations and only 38.2 percent were enrolled in school or training while on parole. The 28.1 percent who reported religious activities was a sharp decrease from the 60.8 percent who claimed religious activity while incarcerated.

The most typical job pattern for parolees was intermittent work at low-paying jobs. While 76.8 percent of the parolees found at least one job after an average time of only 3.43 weeks from release, the jobs tended to end quickly. Approximately 27 percent admitted to using illegal means to get money sometimes. Aside from the typical pattern of low-paying, sporadic work, some parolees had not worked at all while others had been steadily employed at well-paying jobs with some future. The latter group included an airplane mechanic, a bookkeeper, a computer operator, a few small store managers, and a few skilled craftsmen.

Overall, parole agents got positive responses. Seventy-five percent of the respondents said their parole agents had been helpful, and 85.7 percent rated the style of these agents as being that of helper rather than police officer.

Parole success factors

Analyses of the data demonstrated that three theories of delinquency are particularly successful predictors of parole behavior in that they explain over 30 percent of the total variance in parole performance scores as measured by good street-time. The equations used included the same demographic items (age, number of offenses prior to Youth Authority, type of committing offense, and ethnicity), plus some unique items taken from delinquency theories.

The three theories were:

- **Differential association** whose key predictors were describing pre-Youth Authority friends as being delinquent, not belonging to gangs while in Youth Authority facilities, positive ratings of one's parole agent, and describing current friends as being nondelinquent.

- **Social ecology** whose key predictors were neighborhood education level, residing outside of Los Angeles County and most other southern California counties, and no problems with drugs or alcohol. In this formula, which stresses environmental conditions, physical location appears to have been a strong determinant of parole performance.

- **Social competence** whose key predictors were wards' own estimates of their chances of parole success, absence of disciplinary transfers from living units or other institutions during Youth Authority stays, no problems with drugs or alcohol, and proportion of time on parole spent employed or in school. These predictors support the idea that offenders tend to make decisions about future behavior at some point during incarceration.

Considerations in operating a program or establishing policy

- **Staff should pay close attention to what wards in institutions and parolees have to say.** The parolees in this study were not very articulate, but what they said had definite meaning in predicting their future behavior. Perhaps those who described themselves as non-gang-affiliated while inside, as behaving well in their living units, and as having higher chances for parole were describing tentative decisions to try to behave well on parole. These tentative decisions were being positively reinforced in the community by those paroleees who reported good relationships with their parole agents. Staff should pay special attention to general optimism expressed about any key areas of adjustment—friends, drugs, jobs, school, parole agents—to make sure wards receive positive reinforcement.

- **Local environments should be studied for different success rates.** If studies confirm that living in, or coming from, poorer neighborhoods produces a lower rate of parole success, then a preventive tactic might be to relocate parolees from blighted areas to better locales. Another likely reason for the effects of geography on parole outcomes has to do with local justice systems.

- **Drugs, alcohol, work, and school can be used as barometers of parole performance.** Youth Authority programs should actively encourage and reinforce school enrollment, employment, and participation in substance abuse programs.

- **Staff should exploit their status as valued role models.** The positive evaluations given Youth Authority staff might have reflected actual conditions or relative perceptions of conditions in the Youth Authority compared to wards' lives on the streets. Regardless of the reason, staff must fully exploit this role-model status which may be particularly influential for juveniles who had missed earlier stages of socialization and positive attitude formation.

Research methodology and considerations for future research

The project used a naturalistic rather than experimental method because it was interested in the effects of attitudes, events, and characteristics of parolees as they were, rather than in manipulating them in a controlled experiment.

The sample

The research staff chose 193 male first-commitments by reviewing computer lists of individuals scheduled for parole hearings in the summer of 1979. Their ages, ethnicities, committing offenses, geographic locations, and other background items were closely comparable to backgrounds of all Youth Authority wards in recent years.

The median age of the cohort was 17.9 years; whites constituted 37.8 percent, blacks 32.6 percent, Hispanics 28.0 percent, and others 1.6 percent. Of these youths, 40.6 percent were committed for violent offenses, 56.2 for property offenses, and 3.2 percent for narcotics and other offenses. Over half came from two-parent homes, while about 40 percent had one-parent homes and 6.1 percent did not live with a parent. The income level of the home was adequate for 53.6 percent, less than adequate for 43.6 percent, and more than adequate for 2.8 percent.

The interview

The preparole assessment interview was conducted in private administrative offices at Youth Authority facilities, and each ward was offered $5.00 as an incentive to participate. Followup interviews were conducted at times and places convenient for parolees. Consequently, this effort involved thousands of travel miles and many frustrations for researchers before all members of the cohort were interviewed.

Procedures

The study conducted three assessments of a representative sample of male wards as they left Youth Authority facilities for their first parole in 1979.

First assessment. Each offender was interviewed extensively during his final days of incarceration concerning events, programs, and people encountered before and during incarceration. Data on prior offenses, institutional behavior, and residence before incarceration were collected from official files.

Second assessment. Each subject was interviewed in his parole community between the third and sixth months of parole about jobs, schools, peers, family, attitudes, and problems.

Third assessment. Detailed information was gathered from parole sources about the parole period arrests, convictions, and sentences served by those in the sample at both 12 and 24 months.

Measures of parole success

This study incorporated four measures: arrests, official dispositions, good or confinement-free street-time, and self-reported criminal acts. The performance measure with the highest commonality (i.e. the highest correlations with all of the other variables) was good street-time. Thus, good street-time was chosen as the best outcome measure for examining the relationship between the interview responses and parole behavior.

In an average of 4.5 years between first contact with police and commitment to a Youth Authority facility, the 193 males had accounted for 760 arrests and had served time in a secure facility 337 times. They then spent an average of 1.16 years in a Youth Authority facility.

Some parolees did turn away from delinquency—23.4 percent avoided all types of arrest for the 2-year period and an additional 34.1 percent were arrested but subsequently continued on parole status. Parole disposition data showed that 42.5 percent were considered total failures because they returned to prison, jail, or Youth Authority facilities. Honorable discharges were given to 20.2 percent, and the cases of 37.3 percent were still pending or had mixed outcomes at the end of the followup period.

Theories of delinquency

Using parole outcomes as measured by good parole street-time, the study tested the predictive abilities of five theories of delinquency: (1) differential association, which states that criminal behavior results from associating with people and in situations that are favorable to lawbreaking; (2) social control theory, which claims that all people have tendencies toward lawbreaking and would do so if they "dared"; (3) economic theory, which views a crime as the result of weighing perceived costs of the behavior versus perceived benefits; (4) social ecology, which explains deviance as due primarily to environmental upsets in the natural order of things; (5) social learning concepts, which emphasize personality development through imitation of role models, reinforcement of imitated behavior, and development of a sense of competence and mastery over one's environment.

Research issues

Future research could be improved by carefully measuring the strength of personal decisions to change delinquent behavior patterns into lawabiding ones.

Personal interviews used by this study did not produce better mathematical results than less costly methods, but they did provide strong guides for the direction of future research. As respondents continually emphasized the importance of their desire to change, interviewers began to feel that some individuals had made such strong personal decisions that negative environmental influences were effectively tuned out.

The original report contains the structured questionnaires used in preparole and parole assessments and summarizes responses to each question.

Sources on this topic:

American Correctional Association
4321 Hartwick Road
College Park, MD 20740
(301) 699-7600
[Provides brochures and publications with information on specific topics; hosts annual conferences.]

American Youth Work Center
1346 Connecticut Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 785-0764
[Provides membership application, general juvenile justice information, brochures, publications, and support to youth workers; monitors legislation and initiatives.]

Commission on Accreditation for Corrections
Suite 750
6110 Executive Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20852
(301) 770-3097
[Publishes manual on facility standards, annual report, and brochures; will work with individual facilities and programs on accreditation process.]

Further readings:

Assessment of Parolee and Parole Officer Characteristics Related to Successful Parole Among Delinquent Youth. NCJ 56485. By S.A. Vexler. 1978. 179 p. Availability: University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 (stock order no. 7817724).

It's Me Again—An Aftercare Manual for Youth Workers. NCJ 57093. By M. Beyer and P. Puritz, National Youth Work Alliance. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. 1978. 74 p. Availability: American Youth Work Center, 1346 Connecticut Avenue NW., Washington, DC 20036.

Manual of Standards for Juvenile Probation and Aftercare Services. NCJ 49949. By the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections. Sponsored by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. 1978. 83 p. Availability: Commission on Accreditation for Corrections, 6110 Executive Boulevard, Suite 750, Rockville, MD 20852.

Probation and Parole Directory—First Edition—Adult and Juvenile Probation and Parole Services, United States and Canada. NCJ 81073. By the American Correctional Association. 1981. 479 p. Availability: American Correctional Association, 4321 Hartwick Road, College Park, MD 20740.

Project CREST (Clinical Regional Support Teams)—Gainesville, Florida. NCJ 70868. By W. DeJong, and C. Stewart, Abt Associates, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice. 1980. 77 p. Availability: NCJRS microfiche (free).

Serious 602 Offender Project of the Contra Costa County Probation Department—Final Evaluation Report. NCJ 85006. By M. Jamison, Urban and Rural Systems Associates, San Francisco, California. 1981. 122 p. Availability: NCJRS microfiche (free).

Microfiche copies are available from National Institute of Justice/NCJRS Microfiche Program, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850. Specify title and NCJ number on all requests.

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