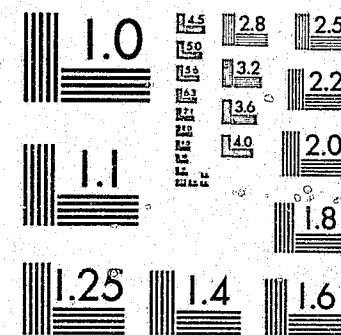


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QUESTIONNAIRE ASSESSMENT OF INMATE RECREATIONAL
PREFERENCES IN A COUNTY JAIL

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QUESTIONNAIRE ASSESSMENT OF INMATE RECREATIONAL PREFERENCES
IN A COUNTY JAIL

by
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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was used to assess, evaluate and prioritize recreational preferences of 362 inmates in a county jail. Preferences were analyzed according to age, ethnicity, length of time in jail, gang affiliation and on sexual preference.

INTRODUCTION

The systematic analysis and planning of recreational programs is a relatively new field of operations in county jails. In many jails, inmate rights to adequate recreation is no longer at the whim of a jail administration but mandated by court orders. The Sacramento County Main Jail was mandated in 1980 to improve its operations in a number of areas. One issue given high priority was inmate recreation.

Prior to 1980, there had not existed an organized, structured or viable recreational program for inmates at the jail. Inmates were allowed a few activities to participate in, but basically the jail used the "Corral Approach" to inmate recreation, that was to place the inmates into the enclosed outdoor recreation area and let them fend for themselves. This type of approach offered no structured recreation or physical fitness direction, assistance, coaching, guidance or program/activities design to the inmates.

In response to this need to develop a working and viable inmate recreation program, the jail administration hired six trained, skilled and experienced civilian Recreation Technicians and one civilian Recreation Supervisor and requested them to design a comprehensive recreation program, which would be responsive to inmate physical fitness, competitive sports and general recreational activities participatory needs, in reference to, the jail administrations' need to meet the Court Mandate requirements and time tables.

PROBLEM

The Court Consent Decree underlined three basic problem areas with the jails' current recreation time periods allotted to inmates; 1. There was no organized recreation program plan, 2. Inmates were not being offered recreation on a scheduled,

timely and regular basis, and 3. Inmates' needed trained, skilled and experienced civilian technicians in the field of recreation to design, implement and operate a program which would meet their physical fitness, leisure time availability and recreational needs.

The staff was faced with the challenge of designing effective recreational programs without knowing inmate recreational preferences or needs. Four approaches to obtaining such information were considered, including; 1. Asking the inmates what they needed verbally during their recreation periods, 2. Using a Suggestion Box to request their input, 3. Personally talking to the head Trustee on each housing floor to seek general inmate input, and/or 4. Utilizing a survey questionnaire to assess inmate recreational needs and preferences.

SOLUTION

A survey questionnaire was felt by the staff to be the most effective, convenient and economical method to efficiently and effectively assess inmate recreational preferences.

The questionnaire was short, simple and easy to distribute and score. The measurement tool selected was a questionnaire containing 43 activity choices and three preference categories. The background information included age, ethnicity, education, length of time in jail, and the inmates' classification status. A sub-study was conducted using the same questionnaire but assessing two additional groups; gang affiliations and those inmates who identified themselves as homosexual. There was an area left open for further comment.

The questionnaire was distributed on a single evening during the hours of 6 and 8:00 p.m. The recreation staff went to each tank/cell per floor to administer the survey. Each inmate was given a questionnaire. When the questionnaire was completed, the recreation staff proceeded to the next tank/cell until all inmates had been surveyed. A total of 466 questionnaires were distributed, but only 362 were completed fully and correctly. A separate Spanish-language questionnaire was distributed to Hispanics inmates.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

Of the 362 inmates who responded, nine percent were under 21, 20 percent between 21-24, 40 percent between 25-35, and 13 percent over 36. Another 19 percent refused to state their ages.

Slightly under half had at least a high school education, and 16% had college degrees. About a third of the sample had been in jail for a month or less, another third had served 1-3 months, and another third had been there longer than three months. The sample included 50 percent Whites, 25 percent Blacks, 20 per-

cent Hispanic, three percent Native Americans, and one percent Asians. Only three inmates overtly identified themselves as homosexuals. Among the five gang affiliations on the questionnaire, 10 inmates belonged to the Mexican Mafia, another 10 the Black Guerilla Family, 8 to the Nuestra Familia, 7 to the Texas Syndicate, and 4 to the Aryan Brotherhood.

Diagram 1

Ten Most and Least Desirable Activities

<u>Most Desirable</u>		<u>Least Desirable</u>	
1st	Weight Lifting	43rd	Dance Workshop
2nd	Universal Gym	42nd	Crossword Puzzles
3rd	Video Games	41st	Puzzles
4th	Exercise Program	40th	Etching
5th	Ping Pong	39th	Jazzercise
6th	Pinball	38th	Mural Painting
7th	Exercise Bike	37th	Bingo
8th	Cards	36th	Poetry Workshop
9th	Handball	35th	Arm Wrestling
10th	Speedbag/Heavybag	34th	Chess

Due to space within the jail activities such as football, soccer, baseball, volleyball, rugby, softball, track and field sports, lacross and other outdoor sports were not included in this assessment tool.

RESULTS

Diagram 1 summarizes the 10 most desirable and least desirable activities for the total sample. While this information can be useful in recreation planning, it is important to interpret the responses carefully. An activity that is preferred by only a quarter of the sample, but requires a minimum amount of staff time and effort, may still be useful adjunct within the jail program even if it is less desirable, from the standpoint of the total sample, than other activities.

Although there was a general similarity of recreational preferences among the ethnic groups, there were some significant differences. Basketball was among the least desirable activities for Whites, Hispanics and Asians, but it was the single most desirable activity for Blacks, and somewhat desirable for Native Americans. Video games were the third most desirable activity for Whites, Hispanics and Asians, but among the least desirable for Blacks and Native Americans.

The 4 most desirable activities for Blacks and Native Americans were almost the same; basketball, dominoes, weight lifting and cards,

and the least desirable activities were puzzles, video games and foosball. Though, Hispanics liked handball more than any other group, Hispanics and Whites appeared to desire basically the same activity preferences; weight lifting, cards, video games and exercise activities. Both groups generally found such activities like bible study, basketball, jazzercise, the workshop activities and arm wrestling least desirable. Asians found weight lifting their most desirable activity, but also found ping pong, video games and reading as desirable over such activities as pinochle, basketball and pinball.

As inmate age increased, a preference for the more physical and active activities, such as competitive active sports, speedbag/heavy-bag and exercise workouts, and weight lifting declined. There was little difference in activity preferences according to length of time in jail. Gang membership was associated with the need for strong physical and competitive sports activities. None of the gang affiliated inmates considered the non-physical or passive activities to be desirable. Homosexual inmates preferred more passive activities than competitive active activities, such as video games, reading, jazzercise, table games and the workshop activities.

DISCUSSION

The assessment was valuable in the ability to expose the differences in recreational and physical fitness activities preferences among the various cohorts.

One of the most significant pieces of information that this assessment presented was that only Black Inmates preferred basketball to other activity choices while Whites, Hispanics and Asians found basketball a least desirable activity. Blacks also rated bible study as one of the most desirable activities while the other racial groups found bible study the very least desirable activity.

Most inmates found such activities as weight lifting, video games, individualized exercise programs for the inmate while in his cell/tank, handball, ping pong, and other active/physical activities more desirable than the non-physical/passive activities like the workshop activities, (dance/writing/theatre/poetry), bingo, table games, foosball, pinochle and etc.

There existed no differences in the types of activity preferences

based on gang affiliation and though homosexual inmates preferred more passive activities over physical/active activities, most all inmates expressed a strong desire to keep active and physical, in reference to, the types of activities they preferred.

SUMMARY

The purpose of the assessment at the jail was to find out what differences did exist in recreational activity preferences among various different inmate groups as part of the PIRA(Positive Indirect Recreation Approach) Program Design Strategy in meeting inmate recreational needs.

It is hoped, that the data presented will be used by Correctional Facilities Planners, Correctional Recreationalists and others in the field of Corrections to better plan, design and develop their institutions' Inmate Recreation Programs and Facilities.

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END