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CHARACTERISTICS OF WELL ADJUSTED AND POORLY ADJUSTED INMATES*

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In this article, Mr. Coe reports on the results of a recent study aimed at determining what social characteristics can be relied upon in determining which new inmates will readily adjust to prison routine and which will adjust either not at all or with great difficulty. The author expresses the hope that his findings, based upon a study of 200 inmates in an Illinois maximum security prison, will provide a first step toward the construction of an easily administered prediction instrument which will provide valuable information for administrators, classification committees, and other officials.—EDITOR.

Of the many problems facing correctional administrators, one of the greatest concerns inmate adjustment to institutional routine. To date, the most promising aid for the solution of this problem is the classification process, although even this has been deficient in many respects.[1] These deficiencies are evident when one considers that, as a matter of daily routine, correctional officials must make many decisions regarding disposition of cases of violations of institutional regulations. In effect, these decisions are actually predictions, based on the case study method. Glaser has said that "the typical correctional official, at almost every level and type of correctional activity, must make predictions as to the probable future behavior of his charges."[2] Moreover, Loveland has stated that officials concerned with treatment "can use diagnostic and treatment tools only as they are developed by the arts and sciences concerned with human behavior."[3] George Train, who studied prison riots, has also indicated a need for a device to determine instances of maladjustment

before the problem becomes acute.[4] To this end, it is felt that a prediction instrument for determining probable degree of adjustment to institutional routine would be a valuable aid for classification committees, wardens, and other correctional officials.

The investigation described in this paper was designed to provide a start toward construction of such an instrument. The purpose of the study was to determine whether there are characteristics which would differentiate those inmates who have a record of good adjustment from those who have a record of poor adjustment.[5]

The data for this study were obtained at the Illinois State Penitentiary at Menard. This is one of Illinois' three maximum security institutions for male felons and, at the time of the study, housed approximately 2300 inmates.

OTHER STUDIES IN ADJUSTMENT

A review of the literature was made to obtain suggestions on methodology and characteristics for study. The studies in adjustment relevant to this investigation are few in number and, with one exception, provide little information regarding methodology. For this reason, studies in parole

[1] Loveland, *Classification in the Prison System*, in TAPPAN (ed.), CONTEMPORARY CORRECTION 91 (1951). See also Coe & Shafter, *Survey of Classification Systems in the United States*, 49 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 316 (1958).

[2] Glaser, *Testing Correctional Decisions*, 45 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 679 (1955).

[3] Loveland, *op. cit. supra* note 1, at 104.

[4] Train, *Unrest in the Penitentiary*, 44 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 277 (1953).

[5] For this study, "good" adjustment has been defined as no more than one minor disciplinary report in the past six months, long time on a preferred job, long time in the same cell and/or with the same cell partner. Conversely, "poor" adjustment has been defined as three or more major infractions or five or more minor violations of institutional regulations, frequent changes in work assignments, frequent changes in cell assignment and/or cell partner.

prediction were investigated for methodological suggestions.

Schnur studied the relationship between institutional conduct and recidivism. He concluded that (1) the older a man is at commitment, the less likely he is to misbehave in prison; and (2) the more serious a man's criminal activity prior to commitment, the more frequently he is cited for violations of institutional rules.[6]

Driscoll reported on an attempt to devise an instrument for predicting institutional adjustment using an Adjustment Analysis Rating Scale, the MMPI, and a locally devised prison projective test patterned on the TAT. The four general areas of interest were social, vocational, personal, and behavioral factors. One conclusion was that maladjusted inmates are usually younger and single.[7]

Hand and Lebo attempted to predict institutional adjustment of delinquent boys. They correlated results on the California Test of Personality with an Institutional Adjustment Inventory. The IAI was found by dividing the total score for misbehavior in the institution (the more serious the misbehavior, the higher the score) by the number of months spent in the institution. The total score was found by addition of scores on the personal adjustment and social adjustment sections of the IAI. Despite correlation coefficients ranging from .3 to .4 the authors concluded that the CTP is a valid instrument for predicting adjustment.[8]

One of the most recent investigations in this area was conducted by Zink who studied two groups of inmates in a county workhouse. Of the twenty-six factors considered, sixteen were studied quantitatively and only age at first arrest, age at present sentence, and the length of present sentence were statistically significant. In addition, ten factors were reported only in terms of percentages with no statistical analysis.[9]

While not directly concerned with prediction, the study described in this article was aided by parole prediction studies since the latter contain

information regarding characteristics previously studied and procedures used, and, even more important, they provide a rationale by which data of this type can be used in scientific investigations. It should be recognized, however, that factors found to be positively associated with success on parole may not necessarily be predictive of good prison adjustment. From these studies, however, it has been possible to select a list of characteristics for study.[10]

METHOD OF PROCEDURE

The method of procedure in this study involved three basic assumptions. First, it was assumed that inmate adjustment runs on a continuum from poor to good. Second, all inmates have characteristics which can be objectified and studied. Third, on the basis of these characteristics, inmates can be placed in more or less stable categories. The null hypothesis is that no significant differences exist between the characteristics of those inmates who adjust to institutional routine and those who do not adjust.

The selection of the two samples for comparison was accomplished in two steps. First, a panel of nine institutional officials acting as judges submitted a list of names of inmates whom they considered to be the best adjusted and the most poorly adjusted according to the criteria.[11] These lists were collated and those names which appeared more than once were selected for initial investigation. The total N in each group was brought to one hundred by restricted random selection of names which remained on the lists. Secondly, institutional records were investigated for corroborating evidence of level of adjustment. Moreover, where necessary for clarification or completion of information, personal interviews with inmates were held.

This method of sample selection, rather than a random selection, was chosen in order to obtain a larger sample of inmates who would fall at either extreme of the continuum of adjustment. If the simple random sample method had been used, the majority of inmates would have been placed in the "middle range" of the continuum and only a few would have fallen at either end. Since a comparison

[6] Schnur, *Prison Conduct and Recidivism*, 40 J. CRIM. L. & C. 36 (1949).

[7] Driscoll, *Factors Related to Institutional Adjustment of Prison Inmates*, 47 J. ABN. & SOC. PSYCH. 593 (1952).

[8] Hand & Lebo, *Prediction of Institutional Adjustment of Delinquent Boys*, 45 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 694 (1955).

[9] ZINK, AN INVESTIGATION OF CHARACTEROLOGIC AND/OR ENVIRONMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TROUBLEMAKERS AND NON-TROUBLEMAKERS IN A PRISON SOCIETY (unpublished thesis, University of Delaware, 1956).

[10] For an extensive review of the same literature, see Monachesi, *The Prognosis of Recidivism: American Studies*, 20 MIDWEST SOCIOLOGIST 1 (1957), and Monachesi, *American Studies in the Prediction of Recidivisim*, 41 J. CRIM. L. & C. 268 (1950).

[11] For the criteria utilized, see note 5, *supra.*

of the inmates at the extremes would provide a sharper contrast in characteristics, it was felt that sample selection by judges would better yield the desired results.

The data collected were limited to precommitment characteristics and initial classification factors, since it was assumed that it is desirable to predict probable institutional adjustment before the new inmate is removed from segregation and placed in the general prison population. While it would be interesting to trace the adjustment or nonadjustment of prisoners in relation to such factors as parole denial, family interest, enrollment in correspondence and trade courses, anticipated date of release, influence of group associations in the institution, etc., this is another type of study. No attempt was made at longitudinal case studies to determine the effect of post-classificatory institutional factors on adjustment.

Although some overlap existed, the data generally fell into four broad categories: (1) personal data, (2) early social data, (3) present (precommitment) data, and (4) criminal data. The forty-one characteristics collected from institutional records are outlined below.

1. Age at admission
2. Race
3. Citizenship
4. Religion
   a. Protestant
   b. Catholic
   c. Jewish
   d. None
5. Educational level
   a. None
   b. Less than eighth grade
   c. Eighth grade
   d. Some high school
   e. High school graduate
   f. Some college
   g. College graduate
6. Occupational status
   a. Professional and managerial
   b. Sales
   c. Farm owner
   d. Service
   e. Laborer.
7. Employment record
   a. Continually employed
   b. Intermittently employed
   c. On relief
   d. Unemployed

8. Type of military discharge
   a. Honorable
   b. Dishonorable
   c. Other (BCD, Undesirable)
   d. No service
9. Intelligence rating (Army Alpha or AGCT)
   a. Extremely superior
   b. Very superior
   c. Superior
   d. High average
   e. Average
   f. Low average
   g. Dull normal
   h. Borderline
   i. Mental defective
10. Home status
    a. Superior
    b. Average
    c. Inferior
    d. Unknown
11. Home conditions
    a. Organized
    b. Broken—death
              —divorce
              —desertion
              —separation
12. Number of children in family
13. Sibling rank
    a. Only child
    b. First
    c. Middle
    d. Last
    e. Other
    f. Unknown
14. Inmate reared by
    a. Parents
    b. Mother
    c. Father
    d. Other relatives
    e. Institution
    f. Foster parents
15. Economic status of parental home
    a. Dependent
    b. Marginal
    c. Comfortable
16. Marital status
    a. Single
    b. Married
    c. Divorced
    d. Separated
    e. Widowed
    f. Common law

17. Number of times married
18. Number of children
19. Economic status of inmate's home
    a. Dependent
    b. Marginal
    c. Comfortable
20. Length of residence in community
21. Area classification
    a. Urban
    b. Rural
22. Personality evaluation
    a. Normal (no gross defects)
    b. Inadequate
    c. Egocentric
    d. Unstable
    e. Psychopathic
23. Mobility
    a. Stable
    b. Moderate
    c. Unstable
24. Drinking habits
    a. Abstinate
    b. Moderate
    c. Intemperate
25. Emotional stability
    a. Stable
    b. Moderate
    c. Unstable
26. Offense
    a. Robbery
    b. Burglary
    c. Larceny
    d. Fraud
    e. Murder
    f. Sex
    g. Miscellaneous
27. Type of sentence
    a. Definite
    b. Indeterminate
28. Length of sentence (Maximum term)
29. Classification type
    a. Improvable
    b. Questionably improvable
    c. Doubtfully improvable
    d. Unimprovable
30. Type of offender
    a. First
    b. Occasional
    c. Juvenile recidivist
    d. Recidivist
    e. Habitual
31. Age at time of first arrest

32. Number of previous arrests
33. Number of previous convictions
34. Number of commitments to juvenile institutions
35. Number of previous commitments to adult institutions
36. Total time served
37. Number of times paroled
38. Number of times violated parole
39. Number of associates in current offense
40. Type of commitment
    a. Court
    b. Transfer
    c. Parole violator
41. Prognosis
    a. Favorable
    b. Problematic
    c. Doubtful
    d. Guarded
    e. Unfavorable

When the data had been collected, the distributions of inmates for each factor were determined. Statistical analysis utilized the t-test for fourteen items which had continuous distributions and the chi square test for the remaining twenty-seven items.

In the process of gathering data, four methodological problems arose. First, information such as highest academic grade completed, length of residence in community, drinking habits, etc., is obtained from the inmate, and frequently is not verified. It must be remembered, however, that this situation is typical in research involving the use of official prison records. Reckless' statement that "the information in agency records which sociologists must use for computation of risk is just about as good as the information which life insurance actuaries must use"[12] would seem to indicate that these data are useful despite the fact that they are not always verified.

Secondly, the selection of inmates by the judges is open to criticism on grounds that their choices could have been determined by personal factors rather than according to the criteria. This problem was at least partially solved by the spot check of names submitted by the judges. It should be added that in only one case was an inmate's name rejected because he did not meet the criteria for selection. Actually, if an error in selection occurred, it probably was one of omission rather than com-

[12] Reckless, *The Implications of Prediction in Sociology*, 6 AMER. Soc. REV. 471 (1941).

TABLE 1

NON-SIGNIFICANT CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic	Test Used	Degree of Freedom	t Value or X^2 Value
A. Personal Data			
Citizenship...............	X^2	2	3.10
Religion.................	X^2	2	.04
Education level..........	X^2	6	6.98
Type military discharge...	X^2	3	6.00
Intelligence rating.......	X^2	7	9.86
B. Early Social Data			
Number of children in family...............	t	—	.90
Sibling rank.............	X^2	5	2.48
C. Current Social Data			
Number of times married.	t	—	.38
Number of children......	t	—	.44
Area classification........	X^2	1	1.62
Mobility................	X^2	2	4.18
Drinking habits..........	X^2	2	.98
Emotional stability......	X^2	2	4.76
D. Criminal Data			
Type of sentence.........	X^2	1	.74
Number of previous arrests.................	t	—	.66
Number of previous convictions..............	t	—	.81
Number of commitments to juvenile institutions.................	t	—	.36
Number of previous commitments to adult institutions.............	t	—	.20
Total time served........	t	—	.28
Number times paroled....	t	—	.10
Number times violated parole................	t	—	.00
Number of associates in current offense........	t	—	.26

mission, i.e., only those names submitted by the judges could be checked for accuracy. It was not feasible to investigate the records for those inmates not selected to determine if they also met the criteria for selection.

Third, information for factors such as mobility, drinking habits, emotional stability, etc., was not specific enough to provide adequate classification, but rather permitted only very rough categories. This factor could account for the non-significance of these data.

Fourth, it was necessary to use the categories already determined for most of the criminal data. The categorization for characteristics of personal-ity evaluation, classification type, and prognosis does not provide mutually exclusive and non-overlapping items. Some of the categorizations are more or less on a continuum making placement of inmates in a category somewhat unreliable. However, this paper has not tried to determine a new system of classification but rather to determine the effectiveness of the system now in use.

FINDINGS

The statistical analysis revealed that twenty-two of the forty-one characteristics studied did not significantly differentiate well adjusted from poorly adjusted inmates. (See Table 1) Personal characteristics found not to be significant were citizenship, religion, educational level, type of military discharge, and intelligence rating. Two early social characteristics—number of children in the family and sibling rank—did not indicate a significant difference. The following present social characteristics also have no discriminatory ability: number of times married, number of children, area classification, mobility, drinking habits, and emotional stability. The remaining non-significant characteristics are concerned with criminal data: type of sentence, number of previous arrests, number of previous convictions, number of commitments to juvenile institutions, number of previous commitments to adult institutions, total time served, number of times paroled, number of times violated parole, and number of associates on current offense. With the exception of Ohlin, who had found the number of associates to be a discriminating factor, there has been general agreement between this study and the literature as to the non-significance of these factors.[13]

The nineteen statistically significant characteristics (shown in Table 2) provide a basis for comparison of well adjusted and poorly adjusted inmates. First, well adjusted offenders tend to be white men (82%) who are older at the time of admission to prison. They have had good employment records, most often as laborers. The majority of poorly adjusted prisoners are also white (65%), but that group contains a significantly high proportion of Negroes. Many in this group have records of haphazard employment and unemployment.

Secondly, early social data indicate that 49% of the well adjusted inmates come from homes classified as average or superior. They tend to

[13] OHLIN, SELECTION FOR PAROLE 128 (1951).

have been raised by both parents in economic situations that have been called marginal or comfortable. In contrast, the poorly adjusted prisoners come from average or superior homes in only 29% of the cases, while the remainder come from inferior homes. These homes also were very often lacking in one or the other of the parents and tended to be classified as economically marginal or dependent.

Third, only 37% of the well adjusted inmates were single compared to 61% of the poorly adjusted group. In addition, most of the former group had a higher economic status due, in part, to their generally better employment records. Over half (53%) of the well adjusted inmates had resided in the same community most of their lives compared to only 24% of the poorly adjusted men. On the basis of the prison staff's evaluation of personality, well adjusted inmates were rated as having "better" personalities than poorly adjusted prisoners.

Fourth, a comparison of characteristics related to criminal data would indicate that well adjusted inmates committed offenses of theft and stealth less often than the poorly adjusted group (49% and 69% respectively) and more frequently were involved in offenses of violence and emotion (29% and 23% respectively). As a result, well adjusted offenders received the longest sentences. Classification reports showed that well adjusted prisoners were generally classified as improvable or questionably improvable and tended to be first or occasional offenders (57%). In contrast, poorly adjusted inmates received questionably or doubtfully improvable classifications and tended to have fewer first or occasional offenders (39%). Recidivists make up 30% of the well adjusted group and nearly half (47%) of the poorly adjusted group. The prognosis for self-improvement was generally better for well adjusted prisoners who tended to be older at the time of arrest than for poorly adjusted inmates.

A successful effort was made in this study to show that there are factors which differentiate well adjusted inmates from poorly adjusted inmates. These data provide clues which, supplemented by further research, can lead to the development of a formula for prediction of institutional adjustment.[14]

[14] Certain corroborating evidence from an advanced study, not available when this investigation was completed, may be found in Wolfgang, *Quantitative Analysis of Adjustment to the Prison Community*, 51 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 607 (1961).

TABLE 2

SIGNIFICANT CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic	Test Used	Degree of Freedom	t Value of X^2 Value
A. Personal Data			
Age at admission	t	—	2.52*
Race	X^2	1	8.11†
Occupational status	X^2	4	17.76†
Employment record	X^2	3	22.60†
B. Early Social Data			
Home status	X^2	3	11.62†
Home conditions	X^2	4	17.76†
Inmate reared by	X^2	5	13.06*
Economic status (parents)	X^2	2	6.85*
C. Current Social Data			
Marital status	X^2	5	28.06†
Economic status (inmate)	X^2	2	8.54*
Length of residence in community	X^2	7	20.00†
Personality evaluation	X^2	4	12.40*
D. Criminal Data			
Offense	X^2	6	22.94†
Length of sentence	t	—	2.00*
Classification type	X^2	3	12.28†
Type of Offender	X^2	4	23.72†
Age at first arrest	t	—	3.34†
Type of commitment	X^2	2	20.80†
Prognosis	X^2	4	13.20*

* Significant at the five per cent level.

† Significant at the one per cent level.

AREAS FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

The analysis of data for this study indicates several areas where additional research is needed. The design was intended to be exploratory rather than conclusive and the data reflected this in seven more or less related areas.

First, since this investigation was limited to precommitment data and classificatory factors, a need for longitudinal studies using the case study method has become apparent. Research is needed on the effects on institutional adjustment of such factors as parole denial, influence of group associations, family interest, enrollment in correspondence courses, anticipated date of release, etc.

Secondly, as reported in the literature, some characteristics noted as significant in studies of parole prediction have also been found significant in studies of adjustment to institutional routine. However, additional investigation is needed to determine the relationships between prison adjust-

ment characteristics and parole adjustment characteristics. There is some question whether those factors which contribute to good institutional adjustment always make for good parole adjustment, or whether there may be factors peculiar to each of these two areas of adjustment.

Third, differences noted between the results of this study and those found in studies on parole prediction should be resolved. Specifically, a discrepancy has been found in the significance of the number of associates in the current offense.

Another area in which there is some disagreement concerns prison experiences conditioning adjustment. Clemmer had found that "individuals who get in trouble are usually the inexperienced and relatively non-criminal inmates."[15] This study, however, indicated that fifty-seven per cent of the well adjusted group is made up of first offenders and occasional offenders while only thirty-nine percent of the poorly adjusted inmates were placed in these categories.

Fourth, further research is needed on results of this study for which no clear explanation could be found. For example, well adjusted inmates are nearly bi-modal in the distribution of types of offenders, but this situation does not exist for the poorly adjusted inmates. Thirty-one percent of the well adjusted inmates were found to be occasional offenders and thirty percent were classified as recidivists while almost half of the poorly adjusted inmates were categorized as recidivists. A test is needed for the hypothesis that there are two types of well adjusted prisoners: the novice who follows the institutional regulations because he is unsure of and fears the consequences of violating them and the experienced inmate who can break the rules without getting caught. In addition, it was found that nearly as many well adjusted as poorly adjusted inmates were classified as occasional offenders, but the distinction between these two groups is not clear.

Fifth, it was found that correlations exist between significant characteristics, i.e., home status and home conditions, type of offender, and prognosis. To devise a valid prediction instrument, these interrelationships must be measured and controlled statistically.

[15] CLEMMER, THE PRISON COMMUNITY 195 (2d ed 1958).

Sixth, further study is needed on the relationships of the data presented here and the theoretical frameworks presented by some penologists. For example, Clemmer had assumed that all inmates are subject to the process of prisonization and had contrasted the factors involved in the least degree with the greatest degree of that phenomenon.[16] For the purposes of this analysis it has been further assumed that (1) prisonization is an important factor in the institutional adjustment of the inmate, and (2) poorly adjusted inmates are prisonized to a lesser degree than well adjusted inmates.

Of the seven factors used by Clemmer to indicate the least degree of prisonization only three are applicable to this study, i.e., length of sentence, personality evaluation, and by inference, employment record. The other four factors involve group relationships both inside and outside the institution and, therefore, are not applicable to this research. According to Clemmer, the inmate prisonized to the least degree would (1) be serving a shorter sentence, (2) have a stable personality, and (3) be more willing to engage seriously in work. The data from this study would agree that poorly adjusted offenders are serving shorter sentences, but would not agree that this type of inmate has a more stable personality and is more willing to engage seriously in work than well adjusted offenders.

Two methodological problems become evident in this analysis. First, the inferences to Clemmer's concept of prisonization must, of necessity, be general. Secondly, the data from this study may not be directly comparable to Clemmer's data. For these reasons, further research is indicated.

Seventh, progress in penology depends in part on control of factors and ability to predict behavior. There exists today a need for a device by which institutional adjustment could be predicted, thus giving correctional officials an earlier indication of maladjustment and enabling them to effect a more rapid, longer lasting rehabilitation of the inmate.

[16] *Id.* at 301–02. Prisonization is defined as "the taking on in greater or less degree of the folkways, mores, customs and general culture of the penitentiary." *Id.* at 299.