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Delinquency Adjustment to Group Homes

DR. NATHAN G. MANDEL* AND H. K. LEE**

ABSTRACT — Group homes are becoming increasingly important as community-based corrections treatment gains in acceptance. The material reported here represents a relatively early attempt to establish research feasibility and procedures. The findings may serve as guidelines for group home programs.

Many theorists have argued that imprisonment not only does no good, but actually creates and confirms delinquency. In response to mounting pressure for community based treatment of crime and delinquency, the Minnesota Department of Corrections created a network of community based, small group facilities and residential services for the treatment of young delinquents.

Group homes are privately owned facilities in the community and are intended to permit juveniles to maintain normal or nearly normal relations with their home surroundings while receiving the benefits of surveillance and treatment for delinquency alternative to the more open situation of probation and the more closed condition of incarceration in traditional institutions.

In a typical group home four to eight selected juveniles are placed in the care of a husband and wife. Preferably, the wife is home full-time and the husband continues his usual occupation. Another desirable condition is that the family have children of its own, natural or adopted.

In Minnesota the juvenile's stay in the group home is from one to 54 months, though the majority have been released between two and six months. Readiness for release is determined by the parole agent in consultation with the group home parents. Adjustment to the home, progress in school, adequacy of future plans outside the group home, and other pertinent factors are taken into consideration. Juveniles may return to their original homes or be released to independent placement status.

The data were collected by an examination of 166 juveniles referred from Minnesota juvenile institutions to group homes and released from group homes during the period from July 1, 1969, through June 30, 1972. For purpose of study, "adjustment" was classified into two major categories: "adequate" and "inadequate."

Adequate adjustment includes: a) "satisfactory adjustment" to group home residency, leading to recommendation for discharge from group home settings; b) release by the Youth Conservation Commission for military service; c) relocation at other institution because of termination of the group home; and d) marriage with the consent of the parole agent. Inadequate adjustment includes: a) committing new offense; b) pregnancy; c) inability to adjust during the initial two-week trial period; and d) chronic violations of parole rules.

"Offenses" at the last adjudication were potentially an important factor in adjustment. The term "offense" was operationally defined into three categories; serious offenses,

minor offenses, and drug and liquor law violations. "Serious offenses" included all offenses against property, such as arson, burglary, forgery, theft, and vehicle theft. Two assault cases were also included in this category. "Minor offenses" included all types of misdemeanor and statutory offenses for juveniles: curfew violations, incorrigibility, runaway, tampering, truancy, vandalism and others. All violations of the "drug and liquor laws" are classified into a separate category.

Adjustment by type of offense

Adjustment to the group home meant that the juvenile residents had successfully adapted to the group home during their period of residence until released to the community or other institution. Of the total 166 juveniles placed in state supported group homes, 60 (36.1%) were released for successful adjustment, and 106 (63.9%) adjusted inadequately and for this reason were returned to juvenile institutions. Female residents tended to adjust more successfully than male residents; 39.3% of the females adjusted adequately while 34.4% of the males did so.

The relationship between "type of offense" and "adjustment" was found to be statistically significant. More drug

TABLE: Adjustment to Group Home Settings by Offense

Variable (Offense)	Total Sample	Juveniles Who Adequately Adjusted	
		Number	Percent
By Offenses (N=166)			
Serious Offenses:	57	17	29.8
Assault	2	1	50.0
Arson	4	3	75.0
Burglary	20	3	15.0
Forgery	2	0	0.0
Theft	19	8	42.1
Vehicle Theft	10	2	20.0
Minor Offenses:	97	33	34.0
Curfew and Loitering	2	0	0.0
Incorrigibility	34	12	35.5
Runaway	41	12	29.3
Tampering	2	1	50.0
Truancy	10	5	50.0
Vandalism	4	1	25.0
Miscellaneous	4	2	50.0
Drug and Liquor Law Violators:	12	10	83.3
Drug Laws	7	6	85.7
Liquor Laws	5	4	80.0

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and liquor law violators adjusted adequately in group home settings than did other types of violators. Ten (83.3%) of the drug and liquor law violators adjusted adequately while two (16.7%) adjusted inadequately, whereas 17 (29.8%), of those who committed serious offenses adjusted adequately with 40 (70.2%) adjusting inadequately. Some 33 (34.0%) of the minor offenders adjusted adequately and 64 (66.0%) adjusted inadequately.

Despite the lower rate of successful adjustment in most serious offense categories, three offenders guilty of arson adjusted satisfactorily and only one arsonist failed to adjust. Of the two assault offenders, one adjusted adequately and the other did not. Analysis of characteristics of minor offenders revealed the fact that juveniles committed for "incurability," "runaway," and "vandalism" tended towards inadequate adjustment in group home settings. Because the greater proportion of females came from unstable homes which offered little support, supervision, and affection, they usually demonstrated delinquency by "incurability" and "runaway."

Further data sought

While this Minnesota sample is relatively small, some of the findings are reported here to open discussion and to encourage the reporting of data from other programs.

A notable difference in successful adjustment appears in the Minnesota data by type of offense: serious offenses being correlated with the lowest adjustment rates; violation of drug and liquor laws being correlated with the highest. It is also noted that apart from violation of drug and liquor laws, only assault, arson, tampering, truancy and miscellan-

ous minor offenses were correlated with a 50% or better adjustment rate.

The data suggest that types of offenses may be part of total life patterns which, in turn, are particularly susceptible to community based treatment. To actually conclude this from the Minnesota sample on other than most tentative grounds, would be premature. However it does at least, open discussion.

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The Social Basis of Trust in Government

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ABSTRACT — The relationship between the attitude of trust in government and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents is examined. Survey research data permit an empirical assessment of political trust as the dependent variable. The concept of political trust is operationalized through an interview question, and the independent variable is given empirical reference by the use of demographic data. The evidence suggests that a low level of political trust is pervasive throughout all the segments of the American society and that trust in government is not highly correlated with any social group.

Public opinion polls have shown a consistent decline of trust in the United States government. In a 1958 study, 22 percent of the total adult population felt that they could not "trust the government in Washington to do what is right" all or most of the time. That figure had risen to 45 percent by the fall of 1972 (Miller, 1974). Lack of credibility in governmental institutions was further exacerbated by the Watergate revelations and the continued unearthing of political scandals in Washington. There are convincing indications in national survey data that widespread, basic discontent and political disaffection now exist in the United States (Harris, 1975).

It has not been known whether this skepticism towards the government in Washington is pervasive throughout all the segments of the society or whether only certain social groups have become alienated from the nerve center of the

national politics. This study attempts to correlate social background variables with political trust, and to determine whether some groups show more or less trust in the government than others.

Review of structural approaches

Generally, formal structures of a political system are constructed so as to promote a high degree of confidence in the political institutions. Political scientists of both normative and empirical persuasion are agreed that trust in government is an essential ingredient of its legitimacy, promoting stability within the system, and granting a wide latitude of discretionary powers for leaders to act on behalf of citizens. For democratic political systems, the attribute of political trust as a condition for the continued equitable allocation of authoritative values is crucial, since distrustful behavior on the part of its citizens may be an indication of loss of legitimacy by the government in power. In virtually every democratic political system the paramount concern of government in office is to encourage voluntary acceptance

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