

ALCOHOL AND CRIME

*A Student-Faculty Group Project**

The Temperance League of Hawaii inadvertently precipitated this research into the subject of "Alcohol and Crime," the results of which are herein reported. It all started when a representative of the Temperance League wrote up the following story of an interview with Oahu Prison officials for the organization's publication.

BOOZE HIT AS CHIEF CAUSE OF CRIME BY LOCAL WARDEN¹

"Eliminate liquor as causative factor in the cases of men and women incarcerated in Oahu Prison, and the population would drop to an appreciable extent," Warden Joe C. Harper said emphatically when asked recently concerning the relationship of booze and crime in Hawaii.

William P. Mottz, Deputy Warden of the prison and Mr. Harper's assistant who was also present at the interview, nodded his agreement.

"We have 645 inmates at present," Mr. Mottz said, "and of these, approximately 130 are at Kulani Prison Camp on Hawaii, 60 on Maui, and the remainder here at Oahu Prison. An undetermined percentage of these men and women are true alcoholic personalities and the crimes they have committed are either directly or indirectly the result of their alcoholism. Another, and somewhat larger group, are here because of crimes they have perpetrated under the influence of intoxicants, or which were committed when their activators were under the compulsion of obtaining money to buy liquor. Together, roughly, these two groups represent 50 to 65 per cent of the total prison population, so you can readily see that alcohol plays a major role in the incidence of crime in the community."

When questioned regarding the rehabilitation prospects of prison inmates in general and those with an alcoholic background in particular, Warden Harper was emphatic in stating that a primary concern should be to eliminate the use of alcohol from the men's lives.

*Observations regarding the Association Between the Use of Alcohol and Criminality Among 689 Inmates of the Oahu Prison System as of December, 1949.

Student research by: Mrs. Shirley Anderson, '50; Clifford I. Arinaga, '50; Gordon K. S. Chee, '50; Dennis K. Hirose, '50; Douglas H. Kodama, '50; Gwendolyn G. Newton, '51; Pauline D. Pirtle, '51; James T. Ohashi, '51;

Student Editorial assistance by: Carol S. Sakuragi, '53; and Grace Y. Uejio, '53;

Faculty direction and editing of report by Harold A. Jambor.

¹The Fifth Freedom, II, 1 (1950). Temperance.

"Unless alcohol is relegated to the background and kept there," Mr. Harper said, "the prognosis for a parolee with an alcoholic background 'making good' on the outside when he is released from here, is very unfavorable. Our records show indisputably that a very high percentage of parolees retaken to serve the balance of their sentence for parole violations, is due directly to the use of alcohol. For this reason, we view very favorably any attempts at alcoholic education and rehabilitation conducted among the inmates by Alcoholics Anonymous, the Temperance League of Hawaii, or similar organizations. It is my conviction that many of the inmates here at present due to crimes arising from the use of alcohol might very well have been useful citizens today had they received an earlier education in the dangers inherent in drinking."

"It costs the Territory approximately \$1,000 annually to feed, clothe and maintain an inmate at Oahu Prison," Warden Harper said, "and when you multiply this by the several hundred inmates who are incarcerated directly or indirectly as the result of alcohol, it becomes apparent at once that alcohol is costing the taxpayers of this community a great deal of money we don't ordinarily consider as a liquor bill."

The prison authorities, subsequent to the publication of this report, thought that their views had been oversimplified, and that the conclusions drawn from them were inadequately qualified. It was further realized that they had been expressing judgments based on many years of experience and not judgments based on facts derived from any systematic study of the subject. A request was therefore, made to have some students do research on this matter.

It was agreed that the method of procedure was to consist solely of searching the case records of all inmates under the jurisdiction of the Oahu Prison System as of December, 1949, for data on "alcohol using characteristics" of the prison populations classified in the prison records. A total of 689 inmates fell into four classes as follows:

	Number	Per cent
1. First Offenders	327	47%
2. Probation Violators	102	15%
3. Parole Repeaters	219	32%
4. Parole Violators	41	6%
Total	689	100%

The following terms and definitions denoting the status of the inmates in relation to the use of alcohol were established.

1. Chronic Alcoholic: one who has had previous charges of drunkenness, one who is unable to hold a job, who has a general continuous pattern of heavy drinking.
2. Periodic Drinker: one who had a fairly steady work record, had only occasional bouts, and who has frequently been a problem to his family.

- 3. Social Drinker: one who has no previous drinking charges, whose drinking in no way disrupts his life, and usually does not become seriously inebriated.
- 4. Abstemious: non-user.

It was also agreed that the relationship between the "use of alcohol" and "criminality" would be denoted as follows:

- 1. General: Contributed in an indirect manner to the commission of a crime.
- 2. Specific: Involved directly with the crime, i.e., drunk while committing the crime, stealing money to buy liquor, etc.

It was realized that the case record material would have to be evaluated in order for data to be tabulated according to the rather roughly defined characteristics which had been stipulated. A maximum of objectivity in evaluation was sought through preliminary orientation of the students doing the research to the nature of the records, and by having the students occasionally "cross check" their tabulations of the cases being read.

Use of Alcohol Among First Offenders

The "alcohol-using" characteristics of the 327 first offenders who constituted approximately one-half of the prison population studied, were found to be distributed as follows:

	Number	Per cent
Chronic Drinker	35	11%
Periodic Drinker	69	21%
Social Drinker	169	52%
Abstemious	35	11%
No Record	19	5%
Total	327	100%

This indicated that over 50% of these inmates were social drinkers, while slightly over 10% were chronic drinkers.

There were 78 cases found in which a specific relationship existed between the use of alcohol and the commission of a crime and in 52 cases a general relationship was found to exist. There was no relationship found in the other 197 cases in this particular group. It was observed that among the chronic and periodic drinkers, the use of alcohol had a more specific relationship to the crime committed.

There was no strong indication one way or another that the use of alcohol was related to the commission of crimes by persons alone or in groups. The data in Table I does not suggest a predominant pattern of any sort.

TABLE I

Relation Between Types of Drinkers and Commission of Crime Alone or in Groups Among 327 Inmates of Oahu Prison, December, 1949.

Situation		Type of Drinker								
		Chronic		Periodic		Social		Abstemious		No Record
Totals	Totals	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	327	35	100	69	100	169		35		13
Alone	205	23	66	51	74	110	65	21	60	-
In Groups	86	10	28	17	25	53	31	6	17	-
Unknown	36	2	6	1	1	6	3	8	23	19

A few other interesting facts about this group of inmates was collected. The educational level, as might be suspected, was low with a majority lacking anything above an eighth grade education. The median age of these first offenders was 26 while the median age of the chronic alcoholic was 33 which agrees with a commonly held notion that the chronic alcoholic is usually an "older" person.

The social histories of these inmates, in almost all cases, revealed personal instability and social disorganization. The commission of crime seemed impulsive, rather than planned, based on decisions of the moment consistent with well-established patterns of erratic behavior. The use of alcohol seemed also to be associated with these psycho-social characteristics, and thus is indicated a general association of alcoholism with criminal behavior.

Use of Alcohol Among Probation Violators*

The "alcohol-using" characteristics of the 102 probations violators, were found to be distributed as follows:

	Number	Per cent
Chronic Drinker	14	14%
Periodic Drinker	32	31%
Social Drinker	35	34%
Abstemious Drinker	17	17%
No record	4	4%
Total	102	100%

*A probation violator is one who fails to meet the conditions of a probation such as, reporting to the probation officer, abstaining from the use of liquor, avoiding disreputable places, remaining off the streets late at night, avoiding the use of narcotics, not carrying firearms and other specified conditions.

Criminology, Donald R. Taft (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1947) p. 588.

There were 29 cases found in which a specific relationship existed between the use of alcohol and the commission of a crime and in 36 cases, a general relationship was found to exist. There was no relationship found in the other 37 cases in this particular group.

The median age of the probation violators was 24 while the median age of the chronic alcoholics in the group was nearly identical with what was found among the first offenders.

The social histories of these inmates in most instances revealed personal instability and social disorganization.

Use of Alcohol Among Parole Repeaters

The 219 parole repeaters represent those inmates in Oahu Prison who were placed on parole more than once and whose paroles were revoked because of their committing another crime and thus violating parole regulations. This is the recidivist group, the "three time losers." This group is significant because a large proportion of all crimes committed can be attributed to them. A large part of the work of the police, the courts, and the penal and reformatory institutions is concentrated on recidivists. They provide more than their share of the failures on parole and more than their share of disciplinary problems in the institution.

The parole repeaters are those persons in the prison population who, because of such factors as personal inadequacies, economic situations beyond their individual control, and association with the criminal milieu, have failed to make a satisfactory social adjustment. Their social histories include one or more periods of "rehabilitation", which must be considered unsuccessful.

The 219 parole repeaters were found to be distributed, according to "alcohol-using" characteristics, as follows:

	Number	Per cent
Chronic Drinker	36	16%
Periodic Drinker	71	33%
Social Drinker	64	29%
Abstemious	21	10%
No Record	27	12%
Total	219	100%

This shows that approximately one-third were periodic drinkers, which when added to the number of chronic drinkers, constitutes roughly fifty per cent of the group. The proportion of "heavy drinkers" is thus somewhat greater here than among the probation violators and much greater than among the first offenders studied.

A specific relationship between alcohol and the latest crime committed was found in 91% of the cases involving those inmates classed as chronic drinkers. A little over 80 per cent of the cases involving periodic drinkers showed a similar relationship. These same inmates were also found to have had alcohol mixed up with earlier offenses but to a markedly lesser extent, 61 per cent in the case of the chronic drinkers and 29 per cent in the case of periodic drinkers. The difference between the earlier and later situation suggests that the inmates involved, instead of having their alcohol-using habits constructively modified, got these "habits" more firmly established. The data on this point for all parole repeaters studied indicated that:

1. 25 per cent of their first offenses were specifically associated with the use of alcohol.
2. 55 per cent of their second offenses were specifically associated with the use of alcohol.

There was no real indication, one way or another, as with first offenders, that any relationship existed among parole repeaters as far as use of alcohol and commission of crimes alone or in groups was concerned.

The median age at the time of first commitment to Oahu Prison was found to be about 21 while the median age at last commitment was about 30, facts which differ from the findings on first offenders.

A total of 100 cases of the 219 parole repeaters under jurisdiction of the Oahu Prison System as of December, 1949, were selected at random for special study as to the extent of social disorganization, as evidenced by certain conditions reflected in their social histories as compiled by the prison authorities. The following facts were ascertained:

1. 67 per cent of the inmates came from broken homes where one parent had died, or where the home was disorganized due to divorce, separation, or desertion.
2. 96 per cent of the inmates were 12 years of age or under when their homes were broken.
3. 71 per cent of the broken homes in which the inmates grew up were in the low economic group.
4. The inmates from broken homes, on the average, had only a fifth grade education.
5. These inmates committed their first legal offenses against society, on the average, when they were 23 years old.
6. 64 per cent of the inmates from broken homes spent time in reform schools as juvenile delinquents.
7. A great deal of neglect, mistreatment, and lack of supervision of the inmates as children, by parents and others, was noted.
8. The existence of many adverse socio-psychological factors among these inmates' parents as evidenced by alcoholism, crime, mental illnesses and deficiencies, suicide, multiple marriages, common-law relationships, and illegitimacy, was frequently noted.
9. 79 per cent of the inmates were single men.

These results of a study of 100 cases, if they may be considered at all typical, suggest that alcoholism is just another part of the total situation. The developmental pattern, in most cases, seems to follow a particular sequence, as lack of supervision in childhood makes for truancy, delinquencies follow, then reform school, and finally, Oahu Prison. The use of alcohol to excess apparently is a later development, and is a factor associated with, rather than causative of criminal behavior.

Use of Alcohol Among Parole Violators

The 41 parole violators represent those inmates in Oahu Prison who were recommitted because of some violation of parole conditions. A parole

violation may involve the commission of a crime, or, as is usually the case, some infraction of parole regulations, e.g., failure to report regularly to the parole officer or failure to abstain from liquor.

The findings on this group of inmates indicated that about 68 per cent could be classified as heavy drinkers. A third of them were found to have committed their original (first) criminal acts while using or attempting to procure alcohol, while about the same proportion returned to prison from parole because of the use of alcohol.

The median age of these inmates at the time of first commitment was 24 while the median age on reimprisonment was 30, a situation comparable to that existing for parole repeaters.

The educational background of these inmates were found to be limited with 37 of them having had the equivalent of a ninth grade education or less.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The data collected regarding the "alcohol using characteristics" of the 689 inmates of the Oahu Prison system according to their prison classifications as of December, 1949, is summarized in Table II which plainly shows that a very high percentage of the inmates studied used alcohol to a greater or lesser extent. A relatively small proportion however could be classed as "chronic drinkers" while a larger group, approximately 27 per cent, could be classed as "periodic drinkers." These two groups combined, represented about 41 per cent of the prison population. This is a pretty high figure, but whether it is markedly different from what one would find, assuming it were possible to do so, with respect to the "alcohol using characteristics" of the adult population, especially the male adult population of the community at large, is a moot question.

Table II

"Alcohol Using Characteristics" of 689 Inmates
of the Oahu Prison System According to Their
Technical-Legal Classifications, December, 1949.

	Totals		Chronic Drinkers		Periodic Drinkers		Social Drinkers		Abstemious		No Record	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Totals	689	100	95	100	187	100	279	100	77	100	51	100
First Offenders	327	47	35	37	69	37	169	61	35	45	19	37
Probation Violators	102	15	14	15	32	17	35	13	17	22	4	8
Parole Repeaters	219	32	36	38	71	38	64	23	21	27	27	53
Parole Violators	41	6	10	10	15	8	11	3	4	6	1	2

The data collected regarding the relationship between the "use of alcohol" and commission of crimes by the 689 inmates studied is summarized in Table III, and here again, assessing the figures on a comparable

basis, one finds that a "specific relationship between alcohol and crime" could only be counted in about 24 per cent of the cases examined. The figures on the same point when related to the inmate classifications, do not differ from the over-all figures, percentage-wise, enough to warrant special attention.

Table III

Relation Between Use of Alcohol and Commission of Crimes
By 689 Inmates of the Oahu Prison System, According to
Their Technical-Legal Classifications, December, 1949.

	Totals		Specific Relationship to Alcohol		General Relationship to Alcohol		No Relationship to Alcohol*	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Totals	689	100	162	100	249	100	278	100
First Offenders	327	47	78	48	52	21	197	71
Probation Violators	102	15	29	18	36	14	37	13
Parole Repeaters	219	32	41	25	157	63	21	8
Parole Violators	41	6	14	9	4	2	23	8

These figures do not tally with the "50 to 65 per cent" figures attributed by the Temperance League of Hawaii to represent the calculated judgment of the officials of the Oahu Prison System some time late in 1949.

This study did reveal the significant fact that the "use of alcohol" is essentially one of many symptoms or evidences of personal-social disorganization. The social characteristics of the 100 parole repeaters whose records were specially examined, can not leave one in any doubt on this point.

A person is thus led to conclude further that it isn't the social cost of "excessive drinking" that should concern us so much as it is the vastly higher social cost of personal-social disorganization. It behooves us to learn the causes of these conditions and to set to work to prevent and control them by improving those social institutions which are supposed to be concerning themselves with the social well-being of each and every individual living in our social milieu.

March 1953

*This category includes all those cases in which the record did not indicate a specific or general relationship between the commission of a crime and the use of alcohol.