

A FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION OF THE PRE-RELEASE
TRAINING EXPERIENCE (T.N.T.)

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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to reduce the level of unsuccessful terminations from departmental pre-release centers, a pre-release training program was implemented whereby selected inmates deemed high risks for pre-release placement would participate in an intensive workshop before being sent to a final pre-release destination. The purpose of the present study was to determine whether or not this program has any impact on reducing non-completion rates for program participants. The specific research questions addressed were as follows: (1) Are individuals assigned to participate in the program in fact at higher risk of non-completion than individuals transferred directly into pre-release? and (2) Does successful completion of the training program have any effect on reducing pre-release non-completion rates?

Analysis determined that there was no evidence that high risks of pre-release non-completion were selected for training, and that there was no evidence that the training reduces an individual's chance for pre-release completion. Some implications of these findings are discussed.

T.N.T.: A FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION OF THE PRE-RELEASE TRAINING EXPERIENCE

After an individual has spent a period of time incarcerated in a walled institution, the transition to life in the community with its relative lack of restrictions is often difficult, at times resulting in a return to criminal activity. For this reason the Department of Correction, with the passage of the Correctional Reform Act of 1972, established pre-release centers as a middle ground between the discipline of maximum security institutions and a free existence in the community. Through his experience in pre-release, a resident may take advantage of a gradual re-entry into the community by being allowed to participate in work or education release where he may interact in the community during the day, returning to the grounds of the pre-release facility in the evening. Thus, the resident is given some exposure to life outside the institution, but since he is still under supervision he is allowed to test himself before he is actually released into the community.

At Times, however, the transition from a walled institution to a pre-release center may prove to be just as difficult as the transition from total incarceration to release into the community. The sudden decisions a resident must make in a pre-release facility, as well as the relative freedom it represents after an extended period of time of traditional incarceration where decisions are made for him, often proves too much for an individual to handle. This difficult adjustment to pre-release could result in a high non-completion rate for pre-release centers if many residents are returned to higher custody for disciplinary reasons.

In an attempt to address this problem, in 1975 the Department of Correction implemented a pre-release training program whereby selected inmates deemed high risks for pre-release placement would participate in an intensive workshop before being sent to a final pre-release destination. The pre-release training program was originally subcontracted to Today Not Tomorrow Workshops, Inc. (TNT) and although the program is presently supervised by Department of Correction staff the program has retained the name T.N.T. MCI-Shirley, a pre-release center, was selected as the site at which this training program was conducted.

Residents are transferred to MCI-Shirley from the major walled institutions to participate in the T.N.T. program when an institutional board deems them ready to participate in pre-release with the condition that they complete T.N.T. training prior to their pre-release placement. The workshops are administered in three-week cycles, with approximately fifteen residents assigned to each cycle, and the sessions are led by staff designated as "facilitators". Through such techniques as group discussions, lectures and role-playing (such as mock job interviews or parole board hearings) the resident learns to deal with issues that may present problems in a pre-release setting by beginning to think about goals, values, peer influence, self-image, and responsibilities he must face. Upon successful completion of the T.N.T. cycle (as judged by the T.N.T. facilitators), the resident then may be transferred to his original pre-release destination, or remain in the MCI-Shirley population if he was so classified.

Thus, participation in this three week training program hopefully would make the resident more receptive to the benefits that pre-release offers, thereby reducing the possibility of his return

to higher custody before completion

However, a previous study of the first eight cycles of the T.N.T. program (Chayet, 1977) did not support this contention. The study revealed that while T.N.T. participants had a non-completion rate of 41.6% when placed in pre-release facilities, individuals transferred directly to pre-release from MCI-Concord who did not go through T.N.T. had a non-completion rate of 16.9%, which was considerably better. The author concluded that although the study implied that the pre-release training concept did not have a positive impact on program non-completion rates, further study was necessary that might deal with issues such as the possible selection of high risk individuals for the T.N.T. program which would explain their low completion rate. Another facet of a further study would be to explore the long term effects of T.N.T. on recidivism rates as well as its shorter range effects on pre-release non-completion rates.

The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to conduct a follow-up study of the previous research evaluation to assess whether the T.N.T. program in its present form, as run by Department of Correction staff and after the experience gained since the time of the first study, has any impact on reducing non-completion rates of pre-release for program participants.

The specific research questions to be answered are:

- 1) Are individuals assigned to participate in the T.N.T. program in fact at higher risk of non-completion than individuals transferred directly into pre-release?
- 2) Does successful completion of T.N.T. have any significant effect on reducing pre-release non-completion rates?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Samples:

T.N.T. sample: The T.N.T. sample will consist of all individuals who were transferred to MCI-Shirley and participated in the T.N.T. program during the year 1977. The 16 cycles during that year yielded a total of 223 residents for this sample.

Base Expectancy sample: A sample will be drawn from existing Department of Correction files of all individuals admitted to pre-release during 1975 and 1976. This sample will be used to construct the base expectancy tables that will be used as a control in this study. The resulting base expectancy tables can be used as a means of calculating an expected non-completion rate to be used as a comparison.

1977 Comparison sample: A final sample was drawn consisting of all non-T.N.T. individuals transferred to a pre-release status during 1977 for purposes of comparing actual non-completion rates with the T.N.T. sample.

Data Collection:

Variables to be used in this analysis will be collected from the computerized data base of the Massachusetts Department of Correction. These variables will include information about commitment, social background, criminal history, and present offense. Additional data relative to the T.N.T. experience such as transferring institution, date of arrival at MCI-Shirley, T.N.T. cycle, completion status, date of transfer, and destination will be collected from files at MCI-Shirley. Pre-release completion data will be obtained from Central Office files.

Procedure.

To answer the first research question, whether high risk individuals are being assigned to T.N.T., the Base Expectancy sample will be used to construct a prediction device for pre-release completion. For the purposes of this study, pre-release completers will be defined as individuals paroled or discharged from a pre-release center directly into the community within one year of transfer into pre-release (or via T.N.T.). The Base Expectancy sample will be divided into risk groups according to characteristics which contributed most to non-completion rates for that sample. The T.N.T. sample will be divided into those same risk categories so that an expected non-completion rate can be calculated for that sample. If the expected non-completion rate for the T.N.T. sample is significantly higher than the actual observed rate for the 1975, 1976 and 1977 sample, it can be concluded that higher risk individuals are being assigned to T.N.T.

The second research question deals with what effect successful completion of T.N.T. has on reducing non-completion rates of pre-release. In this analysis, those individuals who were returned to higher custody for negative reasons or who escaped before the end of the three-week cycle (negative non-completers) and those who failed to complete the cycle due to non-negative reasons such as early parole, medical reasons, transfer to another pre-release facility, or return to higher custody for a non-negative reason ("other" non-completers) will be eliminated from the sample. The T.N.T. completers, therefore, will be defined as those individuals who completed the three-week training cycle and were designated by their T.N.T. facilitators

as successful completers. As in the first research question, an expected non-completion rate will be calculated for the T.N.T. completer sample. This will be compared to their actual non-completion rate. Statistical tests of significance on these rates will determine whether successful completion of T.N.T. has in fact had any effect on lowering pre-release non-completion rates.

RESULTS

T.N.T. Completion:

The 16 T.N.T. cycles that were conducted during 1977 yielded a total of 223 individuals. Of this sample, 205 individuals were considered to have successfully completed their T.N.T. training workshops. Of the remaining 18 individuals, one resident did not complete because he was paroled from MCI-Shirley before completing his cycle, and another resident did not complete due to a language barrier. The other 16 residents were considered to be negative non-completers due to reasons of escape, return to higher custody, or if they were deemed to be non-completers by their T.N.T. facilitators. The rates of T.N.T. completions were, therefore, as follows:

Successful T.N.T. Completions	205	(92%)
Negative T.N.T. Non-Completions	16	(7%)
Other T N.T. Non-Completions	2	(1%)
TOTAL	223	(100%)

Pre-Release Completion:

The 205 T.N.T. completers were then assessed as to their pre-release completion rates. One resident was returned to higher security, but for a medical reason, and therefore could not be considered a negative non-completer and was eliminated from the sample.

The pre-release completion rates for the remaining 204 individuals were as follows:

Pre-release Completers	114	(56%)
Pre-release Non-Completers	90	(44%)
TOTAL	204	(100%)

Therefore, the non-completion rate for the T.N.T. completer sample during 1977 was 44%. When we compare this non-completion rate of 44% with the departmental wide pre-release non-completion rate, we find that the T.N.T. sample has a higher non-completion rate. Specifically, the departmental wide pre-release non-completion rate was 40% in the year 1975, 38% in the year 1976, and 40% in the year 1977. Despite this difference, however, it has not yet been determined whether in fact high-risk individuals are selected for participation in T.N.T. due to the very nature of the program. This will be assessed in the next section through the use of base expectancy tables.

Base Expectancy Analysis:

As mentioned previously, the relatively high pre-release non-completion rate for T.N.T. participants may have been due to the fact that individuals at high risk of non-completion are chosen to participate in the T.N.T. program. For the purpose of determining whether or not such a selection process, in fact, occurred, a Base Expectancy Table was constructed to gauge the actual risk potential of the T.N.T. sample. The Base Expectancy Table was constructed on the sample of individuals admitted to pre-release programs during the years 1975 and 1976. This data is presented below in Table I and the eight risk categories identified in that table are listed below in Table II in order of their level of risk for pre-release non-completion.

TABLE I

THE EXPERIENCE TABLE DEVELOPED ON CONSTRUCTION SAMPLE

Construction Sample 1975 & 1976 CRS Releases Non-Completion Rate = 39% N = 1372	Number of Charges For Property Offenses 3 or More Rate = 45% N = 820	3 or More Total Incarcerations Rate = 49% N = 350	No Prior Furloughs Rate = 75% N = 112
			Some Prior Furloughs Rate = 45% N = 238
Number of Charges For Property Offenses 2 or Less Rate = 30% N = 552	2 or Less Total Incarcerations Rate = 41% N = 470	9 Months or Less at Longest Job Rate = 37% N = 261	6 Months or Less at Most Skilled Position Rate = 46% N = 267
			7 Months or More at Most Skilled Position Rate = 36% N = 203
10 Months or More at Longest Job Rate = 23% N = 291			Age at First Arrest 16 or Younger Rate = 53% N = 76
			Age at First Arrest 17 or Older Rate = 30% N = 185
			Last Grade Completed 9th or Less Rate = 34% N = 106
			Last Grade Completed 10th or More Rate = 17% N = 185

TABLE II

BASE EXPECTANCY RISK CATEGORIES

<u>Category Number</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Pre-Release Non-Completion Rate</u>
I	Three or More Property Offense Charges, Three or More Total Incarcerations, and No Prior Furloughs	57%
II	Two or Less Property Offense Charges, Nine Months or Less at Longest Job and Age at First Arrest 16 or Younger	53%
III	Three or More Property Offense Charges, Two or Less Total Incarcerations, and Six Months or Less at Most Skilled Position	46%
IV	Three or More Property Offense Charges, Three or More Total Incarcerations, and Some Prior Furloughs	45%
V	Three or More Property Offense Charges, Two or Less Total Incarcerations, and Seven Months or More at Most Skilled Position	36%
VI	Two or Less Property Offense Charges Ten Months or More at Longest Job, and Last Grade Completed 9th or Less	34%
VII	Two or Less Property Offense Charges, Nine Months or Less at Longest Job, and Age at First Arrest 17 or Older	30%
VIII	Two or Less Property Offense Charges, Ten Months or Less at Longest Job, and Last Grade Completed 10th or More	17%

The constructed Base Expectioncy Table was applied to the T.N.T. sample to determine the expected rate for pre-release non-completion. It was found that the T.N.T. population had an expected non-completion rate of 40%. From this result we conclude that there is no evidence that the T.N.T. population was at higher risk of non-completion than the general population of individuals placed at pre-release centers without T.N.T. training. While the departmental wide non-completion rate for pre-release centers has been about 40% for the years 1975 through 1977, the calculated expected non-completion rate for those individuals selected for T.N.T. training was also 40%.

When we compare the T.N.T. sample's expected rate of pre-release non-completion (40%) with its actual rate of non-completion (44%), we find that the expected rate is lower than the actual. Therefore, we conclude that there is no evidence that participation in T.N.T. training improves the chances of an individual's successful completion of pre-release programs. In fact, it would appear that there is some evidence that T.N.T. training may hurt an individual's chances for successful completion of a pre-release program.

In order to test this possibility of negative program impact, the chi-square goodness of fit test was used to determine whether or not the difference between expected and actual rates was statistically significant. It was determined that the difference between actual and expected rates was not statistically significant at the .05 significance level but significant at the .10 level. These results are summarized below:

<u>EXPECTED RATE</u>	<u>ACTUAL RATE</u>	<u>CHI SQUARE</u>	<u>SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL</u>
40%	44%	3.41	1df, p .05 p .10

We conclude that the evidence of negative program impact is not strong but cannot be totally disregarded.

In summary, analysis has determined that there is no evidence that individuals with high risk of pre-release non-completion were selected for T.N.T. training, and that there is no evidence that T.N.T. training reduces an individual's chance for pre-release non-completion. Finally, there is some evidence that T.N.T. training may actually increase an individual's chances of an unsuccessful pre-release placement.

In the next stage of the analysis, attention was focused on differential completion rates according to the specific pre-release receiving institution. We were interested in determining whether or not the results cited above on the whole sample consistently occurred for each of the participating pre-release centers. It was found that considerable variation in completion rates occurred among the individual pre-release centers. For example, T.N.T. participants placed in Massachusetts Halfway Houses, Inc. facilities (MHHI) had a relatively high completion rate. This was also true for Norfolk Gralton Hall, and Framingham Pre-Release Centers. On the other hand, T.N.T. participants in Boston State and South Middlesex Pre-Release Centers had relatively low completion rates. These results, cited below in Table III are extremely tentative due to the small sample sizes that occur when a breakdown by individual receiving institution is made. It is also important to note that considerable variation occurs in completion/non-completion rates for the general population of inmates placed in pre-release centers without T.N.T. training prior to placement. It is therefore difficult to determine whether or not T.N.T. participation has had a differential impact on the various individual pre-release centers without the existence of a larger sample and a non-T.N.T. trained control group for each of the individual pre-release centers. However, the evidence does suggest that we cannot conclude that T.N.T. is uniformly unsuccessful for all pre-release placements. It would appear that in some facilities such as M.H.H.I., Norfolk and Gralton Hall Pre-Release Centers, some reduction in non-completion rates may have occurred. On the other hand, in other facilities, such as Boston State and South Middlesex Pre-Release Centers, a negative impact may have occurred. (For

a discussion of the completion/non-completion rates for non-T.N.T. participants, see Landolfi, 1978).

TABLE III
COMPLETION RATE BY RECEIVING INSTITUTION

<u>INSTITUTION</u>	<u>COMPLETERS</u>		<u>NON-COMPLETERS</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	
	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
Wilton Hall Pre-Release	4	(80)	1	(20)	5	(100)
Folk Pre-Release	6	(75)	2	(25)	8	(100)
M.H.I. Facilities	11	(73)	4	(28)	15	(100)
Birmingham Pre-Release	2	(67)	1	(33)	3	(100)
Wester Pre-Release	11	(61)	7	(39)	18	(100)
Prison Camps	14	(56)	11	(44)	25	(100)
Wiley Pre-Release	56	(55)	45	(45)	101	(100)
Wisconsin State Pre-Release	9	(36)	16	(64)	25	(100)
Witch Middlesex Pre-Release	1	(25)	3	(75)	4	(100)
TOTAL SAMPLE	114	(56)	90	(44)	204	(100)

DISCUSSION

The Massachusetts Department of Correction's attempt to reduce pre-release non-completion rates through a pre-release training program called T.N.T. was not found to be successful. Pre-release completion rates for individuals experiencing T.N.T. training prior to their pre-release placements were not higher than those for individuals placed directly in a pre-release center without T.N.T. training. When selection factors were controlled via the use of base expectancy tables the same conclusion was reached. There was no evidence that higher risks for non-completion were selected for T.N.T. training. There was some evidence, though not statistically significant at the traditional significance level, that T.N.T. training may have actually reduced some participants chances of successful pre-release completion.

These findings do not come as a total surprise in that prior research (Chayet, 1977) demonstrated a similar finding. Both research efforts arrived at a similar conclusion: there is no evidence that T.N.T. training has a positive impact on the subsequent completion rates of pre-release program participation.

Some discussion of the implications of this conclusion is necessary however speculative, in order to place the findings in a proper perspective. Of utmost importance is the fact that analysis revealed that higher program non-completion risks were not found to be chosen for T.N.T. training. Since the goal of the T.N.T program was to train potentially high pre-release program completion risks, the failure of goal achievement may rest with the classification and selection process rather than with the actual program operation.

That is to say, the extent to which the classification process selected inappropriate placements for T.N.T. training bears a strong relationship to the eventual achievement of training goals.

A second area of concern is the labelling process that is bound to occur when certain individuals are earmarked for training before pre-release placement under the classification term of "high risk" or "potential pre-release non-completer" while other individuals are placed in pre-release without such training. There is likely to be some effect on the individual's self-image as well as on staff perceptions of the individual so labelled. This effect may translate into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

A third area of concern involves possible conflicts and disjunctures in the introduction and orientation phases of pre-release programs as they interface with T.N.T. training. Specifically, individuals classified for T.N.T. participation spend approximately three weeks in pre-release orientation training during which time they do not participate in work release, education release, program related activity time, and other pre-release programming. Upon completion of T.N.T. training and the subsequent placement in a pre-release center, they then undergo the introduction and orientation phase for a varying period of time at their new institution. This means that for a significant period of time individuals selected for T.N.T. training are in a pre-release environment but unable to participate in the programs for which that environment was designed. The extent to which this period of limbo affects successful completion rates remains, therefore, an important issue.

Policy implications of the findings presented in this study therefore, can be seen to go beyond the T.N.T. training program operation itself. Clearly, the role played by the classification process in selecting individuals for T.N.T. training and others for direct pre-release placement becomes of relevant concern. The resultant labelling effect on both clients and staff is of equal concern especially in view of the fact that empirical evidence failed to identify any real difference between the two categories. A final policy concern is the possible lack of fit between the T.N.T. pre-release orientation process and the pre-release orientation process normally run by individual pre-release centers. Does duplication and thus unnecessary delay occur? All these concerns point to the importance of a well integrated process in which classification goals, T.N.T. training goals, and individual pre-release center goals are in harmony. The T.N.T. program was designed to provide a departmental wide service. Therefore, the extent to which the various departmental components support the training efforts must have an effect on the eventual programmatic results.

REFERENCES

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