

RESEARCH REPORT NO. III

MASSACHUSETTS CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION,  
FRAMINGHAM

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Base Expectancy Categories for Predicting  
Parole Failure \*

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## INTRODUCTION

As part of a larger research project to evaluate changes in inmate behavior at MCI Framingham, an initial study was conducted to establish categories of expected parole performance for female prisoners released to parole supervision. Such categories have come to be designated Base Expectancy Categories and are groupings derived from statistical analysis of inmate characteristics associated with parole performance. In this study the Base Expectancy Category predicts a rate, stated as a percentage, of unsuccessful performance of failure on parole. The characteristics chosen for investigation were those which were relatively easy to score, which were known at the time of the woman's commitment to the institution, and which were indicated as relevant by prior experience both in Massachusetts and elsewhere.

A Preliminary Report of findings for the first sample of 100 cases was prepared. In this report, seven categories predictive of unsuccessful parole performance ranging from 0% failure to 91% failure were derived from the analysis of five variables: age, prior arrests, prior commitments, use of alcohol, and use of aliases. A second sample of 100 new cases was analyzed in order to validate these results; however, the validation study only partially supported the original findings. A comparison of the two sample populations revealed statistically significant differences between them which suggested that pooling the two samples into a single sample would provide a more accurate sampling of the parolee population under study. The pooled sample of 200 cases was re-analyzed. The final results of that analysis are detailed in this report.

## PROCEDURE

### Sample

The sample included 200 inmates of MCI Framingham released to parole supervision in 1959 and 1960. Only those inmates actually released from the institution to parole supervision were included. No inmates released under other conditions (mainly expiration of short, non-parolable sentences which largely involves the drunkenness offenders) were included. Also excluded were inmates paroled to a new sentence in an institution. For those few individuals who were paroled twice during the study period the first parole was included, but the second parole release was discarded. The sample thus included all of the inmates released once to parole supervision during the years 1959 and 1960; 2 cases released in early 1961 were added to bring the second sample up to 100 cases. As reported above, significant differences were found in the two small samples of 100 inmates. These samples were first selected principally upon the basis of year released to parole; thus there was a 1959 sample, Sample A, and a 1960 sample, Sample B; although a small degree of overlap was present. Table I presents a comparison of Samples A and B which reveals that the significant differences are a greater incidence of alcohol abuse and a greater

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frequency of use of an alias in Sample B. The five other variables show a remarkable degree of similarity between the two groups.

TABLE I

Comparison of A and B Samples of Women Released to Parole

Variable		Sample		Difference
		A N=100	B N=100	
Race:	White Negro	76 24	75 25	Not Significant
Age at Commitment:	Mean S.D.	26.3 9.59	28.3 9.47	Not Significant
Prior Arrests;	None Some	14 86	14 86	Not Significant
Prior Commitments:	None Some	59 41	57 43	Not Significant
Marital Status:	Single Other	54 46	42 58	Not Significant
Alias:	None Some	67 33	52 48	Significant P > .05 < .02
Alcohol:	Use Abuse	83 17	58 42	Significant P > .01

Method

1. Variables Selected for Study

Data on each paroled inmate was drawn from the case record on file at the Central Office of the Department of Correction. Information was collected on 15 variables which included 1. age, 2. race, 3. marital status, 4. education, 5. intelligence quotient (I.Q.), 6. age at first arrest, 7. number of prior arrests, 8. number of prior commitments (including Youth Service Board commitments), 9. number of probation and/or parole violations, 10. crime for which presently sentenced, 11. drug addiction, 12. alcohol use, 13. use of aliases, 14. means of support immediately prior to present commitment and 15. persons in household immediately prior to commitment. In addition to this information, dates of release to parole and subsequent discharge, revocation, or other actions were noted.

2. Criteria of Parole Success and Failure

Each case was classified either a parole success or a parole failure, based on departmental records. Board of Probation searches were not carried out to check on subsequent arrests, jail sentences or county house of correction sentences. Only return to MCI Framingham or its

equivalents was regarded as a failure. Thus parole failure was defined as 1. revocation of parole and return to MCI Framingham (73 cases), 2. revocation of parole; warrant outstanding; whereabouts unknown (8 cases), 3. new crime following discharge from parole (7 cases), 4. new crime while on parole (6 cases), and 5. sentenced in another state (2 cases). Parole success was defined as 1. discharge from parole with no evidence of further record (86 cases), 2. still on parole with no record (5 cases), 3. written up for revocation, but warrant withdrawn for whatever reason (8 cases), 4. paroled out of state with no evidence of further record (3 cases), 5. deported with no evidence of further record (1 case), and 6. inebriate commitment, but no return to MCI Framingham (1 case). The guiding principle followed was to classify according to the explicit or implicit decision that the release should be returned or not returned to the institution.

3. Length of Follow-up Period

The follow-up period was arbitrarily terminated at January 1, 1965. This means that for the entire sample of 200 cases the follow-up period ranges from 4 to 6 years. It should be noted again that the follow-up is also limited in terms of information collected. Only return to MCI Framingham or involvement with the Parole Board is included as follow-up information, excepting 2 cases where information about commitment out-of-state was available.

4. Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed according to a statistical method called successive dichotomization. In this method each variable is dichotomized (divided into 2 segments such as some-none, above-below, more-less, etc.) and a failure rate computed for each of the two segments. That variable which when dichotomized yields failure rates which depart most widely from the overall failure rate of the total sample is retained. After the sample has been dichotomized on the first variable, the two segments are each treated as separate samples and the dichotomization process repeated successively on each separate segment as many times as necessary to produce a category that cannot be further divided.

In this study six variables were retained and nine variables were discarded. The six variables that were retained yielded eight categories predictive of parole failure ranging from 6% to 79% failure.

RESULTS

The overall rate of parole failure for the entire sample of 200 cases was 48%. Conversely, the overall success rate was 52%. Table II presents the data derived from the analysis of this sample by the method of successive dichotomization.

TABLE II

Sample N=200  48% return	Short record (0 or 1 prior arrest)  N=70  33% return	Older (30 years and over)  N=16  6% return		
		Younger (under 30) N=54 41% return	Class III crime N=41 32% return	
			Class I & II crime N=13 4% return	
	Long record (2 or more prior arrests)  N=130  56% return	Older (30 and over) N=52 44% return	Alcohol use N=15 7% return	
			Alcohol abuse N=37 59% return	
		Younger (under 30) N=78 61% return	White N=59 59% return	Married N=25 52% return
				Single N=34 62% return
			Negro N=19 79% return	

Examination of Table II reveals that the variables of arrest record, age, class of crime, alcohol abuse, race, and marital status are capable of deriving eight predictive categories. Arrest record is defined as Short if the record includes 0 or 1 prior arrest and Long if it includes 2 or more prior arrests. Age is defined as Older if the age at commitment is 30 years and above and Younger if the age at commitment is under 30 years. Class I crimes are defined as crimes against persons, Class II crimes are defined as crimes against property, and Class III crimes are defined as crimes against public order, decency or morality. Alcohol abuse is defined as any mention of alcoholism in the record or 2 or more arrests for Drunkenness\* while all others are assumed to be users of alcohol. Race is divided into White and Negro categories. Single is defined as no history of marriage and Married is defined as any history of marriage regardless of the current marital status.

From these data utilizing the definitions given above, the following Base Expectance Categories can be defined.

\*This definition is taken from the manual of BE Scoring for Women, California Department of Correction.

BASE EXPECTANCY CATEGORIES

Description	Number of cases N=200	% of Return (Failure)
1. Short record, older	16	6%
2. Long record, older, non-alcoholic	15	7%
3. Short record, younger, Class III crime	41	32%
4. Long record, younger, white, married	25	52%
5. Long record, older, alcohol abuse	37	59%
6. Long record, younger, white, single	34	65%
7. Short record, younger, Class I & II crime	13	69%
8. Long record, younger, negro	19	79%

It should be noted that Category 8, the longer record, younger, negro parolee that has the highest rate of failure also contains the majority of the drug addicts. In fact use of the dichotomized variable drug addiction - no drug addiction instead of race would have produced very similar results. Race was finally selected for use because it is more directly scorable and included a somewhat larger number of cases.

CONCLUSION

This report has presented the findings of research investigation into factors known at the time of the woman's commitment which are predictive of parole failure for female inmates at MCI Framingham. These factors have been analyzed in such a manner as to derive Base Expectancy Categories, which provide baseline data on convicted female offenders regarding their expected rates of recidivism.

Base Expectancy Categories are essential for research and useful as an adjunct to decision making. As a research tool BE Categories can be used as a variable for matching or equating groups selected for comparison along some dimensions thought to be related to parole performance. For example in studying the number of months of the current sentence served in prison in relation to recidivism, the subject's need to be comparable with respect to expected rates of return. Also, in evaluating the effects of a treatment program such as education or group psychotherapy, the BE Categories provide an expected rate of success for various types of inmates against which actual rates of success following exposure to treatment may be compared. This type of control is now virtually mandatory for meaningful research involving parole success or failure.

Apart from its research uses, BE Categories can function as parole prediction tables when applied as a supplementary source of information to the parole decision. Thus the expected parole performance of a category of inmates

who possess certain characteristics may shed some useful light on the question of what parole performance may be expected of this specific inmate who possesses the same characteristics.

A final word about Base Expectancy Categories. It should be emphasized that predictive groupings derived in this way are constantly subject to change. Any change in the administration of criminal justice that alters the nature of the population of women committed to MCI Framingham or any change in the administration of parole services that alters the definition of parole performance must automatically alter the predictive groupings based on these factors. As these factors emerge from the interactions of complex social processes including new information such as these research findings, they of necessity undergo constant, if subtle, change. Therefore, predictive groupings are continually shifting and changing. There will never be a final set of Base Expectancy Categories that will stand unchanged for all time. Constant modification of groupings through continuous analysis of parole performance is the only way of insuring maximum predictive power and accuracy.