# THE EFFECT OF THE HOME FURLOUGH PROGRAM ON RATES OF RECIDIVISM

(Submitted for Publication)

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## ABSTRACT

In an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the furlough program as a correctional device, an analysis of rates of recidivism for individuals released from Massachusetts' state correctional institutions in the years 1973 and 1974 was conducted. The following research question was addressed: are inmates who experience one or more furloughs during the term of their incarceration less likely to be reincarcerated within one year of their eventual release from prison than are similar types of inmates who do not participate in the furlough program during the period of their incarceration? Selection factors were controlled via the use of Base Expectancy Tables. Analysis of the data indicated that the participation in the Home Furlough Program led to a significant reduction in recidivism rates. The data were interpreted as providing preliminary evidence that the use of furlough programs during the period of incarceration provides a positive reintegrative function. It was concluded that programmatic contributions to the process of societal reintegration can be effective devices for reducing the repeated criminal behavior of the prison releasee.

During recent years an increasing number of county, state and federal correctional institutions have begun the extensive use of unescorted leaves, or furloughs, as an integral part of the correctional treatment process. Frequently, furlough programs are specifically planned as an important component of a larger programmatic process of community reintegration.

Markley (1973) has pointed out five major functions of furlough programs as correctional devices: (1) to reinforce family ties where they exist; (2) to reinforce the self-esteem of the offender by creating a situation of trust; (3) to benefit the offenders children by allowing him to appear in the home periodically; (4) to contribute to release planning in a process of community linkage; and (5) to provide a positive aid to rehabilitation and crime prevention. Morris (1974) adds a further function in viewing the furlough program as a process of testing an individual's ability to adapt to increased increments of freedom thus allowing the correctional and parole administrator to better decide who and when to release from prison. Though a variety of functions have been anticipated, all share a common desired end result: a reduction in the repeated criminal behavior of the prison releasee.

Since the widespread adoption of furlough programs in the late 1960's and early 1970's several descriptive studies of the actual program operations have appeared (Reed, 1972, Holt and Miller, 1972; Markley, 1973; Farrington, 1974 and 1976; Serrill, 1975; University of Alabama, 1976). Additionally, several national surveys have been conducted in order to document the number of correctional systems in the United States that have implemented furlough programs (Smith and Milan, 1972; Markley, 1973; Wright, 1974; Corrections Magazine, 1975; University of Alabama, 1976). Despite the widespread use of the furlough programs in correctional institutions in the United States, little research material is available that concretely measures the effect of the program as a correctional device. The University of Alabama Study (1976) represents the singular example of an attempt to draw together any existing material in this area.

In Massachusetts, the Home Furlough Program was authorized for inmates of state correctional facilities on October 15, 1972. Under the provisions of the legislative authorization, inmates were allowed to leave their correctional institutions for up to 14 days in the course of a year but usually in periods of 1 to 3 days at any one time. All offenders were made eligible for participation in the program. Though legislative eligibility was very broad, the Department of Correction supplemented legislative eligibility requirements through an administrative policy directive. The directive specified that:

(a) A resident serving life sentences for murder in the first degree or a sentence of death shall be required to serve five years from the effective date of sentence, except for emergency furloughs under escort;

(b) A resident who upon initial commitment to the care and custody of the department is within eighteen months of parole eligibility shall be eligible immediately for a furlough;

(c) All other residents shall be required to serve twenty percent of the time between the effective date of sentence and their parole eligibility date, but no more than three years, except for emergency furloughs under escort.

The screening process through which an individual is granted a furlough involves an initial application by the inmate in which the intended purpose and time frame of the furlough are specified. A furlough committee consisting of institutional staff members, including at least one correctional officer, reviews the application and makes a recommendation of action to the institutional superintendent. The institutional superintendent makes the final decision unless the requestee is serving a violent offense. In the case of the violent offender, the superintendent makes a recommendation to the Commissioner of Correction and the Commissioner makes the final decision.

The present study attempts to measure the effectiveness of the use of the furlough program in the state correctional facilities in Massachusetts. The following research question is addressed: are inmates who experience one or more furloughs during the term of their incarceration less likely to be reincarcerated within one year of their release from prison than are similar types of inmates who do not participate in the furlough program? It is hypothesized that the various cited functions of the furlough program converge so as to provide a reintegration process that translates into reduced rates of reincarceration. It is therefore expected that inmates participating in the furlough program prior to release will have lower rates of recidivism than non-participants and that the difference will not be determined by program selection processes.

## METHODOLOGY

SAMPLES: For the purpose of the present study, two samples were drawn. Sample 1 consisted of all males released from Massachusetts' state correctional institutions during the year 1973 (N=878); Sample 2 consisted of all males released from the state correctional institutions during the year 1974 (N=841). Both populations were divided into two subsamples: a treatment sample and a comparison sample. The treatment subsamples consisted of all males released in the respective years who had experienced one or more furloughs during the term of their incarceration, while the comparison subsamples consisted of all males released who had not experienced a furlough during the term of their incarceration. A total of fourteen correctional institutions contributed to these samples including two maximum security, one medium security, and four minimum security institutions; and seven pre-release centers.

PROCEDURE: In measuring the reduction of further criminal behavior the standard used was the incident of reincarceration referred to as recidivism. A recidivist was defined as any subject who was returned or sentenced to a state or federal correctional institution, a county house of correction, or to a jail for 30 days or more. The follow-up period was exactly one full year from the date of each subject's release from prison. Within the scope of this definition, it is important to note that a subject could be returned to prison either as a parole violator or as a person convicted and sentenced for a new offense. Follow-up included both in-state and out-of-state incarcerations.

Because of the possible existence of a non-random selection bias in the decision making process of granting furloughs, an additional measurement contrasting treatment and comparison samples was calculated. Specifically, Expected Rates of Recidivism were determined for each of the sub-samples. This procedure allowed for a statistical determination of the existence of a recidivism risk differential between those granted and those not granted furloughs. The Chi Square Test was used to determine the statistical significance of any recidivism risk differential that may have been found to exist between the treatment and comparisons samples.

The expected rates of recidivism were also used as an additional measure of the furlough program's effectiveness as a correctional device. This was accomplished by comparing the expected recidivism rate for each of the sub-samples with their

respective observed recidivism rates.

Expected recidivism rates were calculated through the use of the Base Expectancy Table. In correctional research, the Base Expectancy Table has been developed as a device through which an estimation is made of the varying degrees to which individuals in a given prison population, or sub-group such as a particular treatment group, are at risk of continuing their criminal careers subsequent to release. It is a classification technique in which individuals are placed in risk groups. The basis for the assignment of individuals into the appropriate risk group is determined on the experience of a separate population of prisoners not receiving that specified treatment and for whom criminal behavior subsequent to release is already known. Background information known prior to release is collected on this separate population and these items are correlated with the known outcome criteria--subsequent criminality or recidivism. Those items found to have the most predictive value are combined into a table whose resultant interaction effects are believed to constitute a more powerful predictive instrument than the individual items alone. At this point, the treatment sample (whose outcome criteria is not yet known) is divided into the same risk categories and an expected outcome rate is determined. The degree to which the expected rate of the treatment group approximates the expected rate of the comparison group determines the degree to which non-random selection has occurred. Additionally, if persons to be given various treatments are classified according to the risks that would have been expected before treatment began, a base line is formed against which the outcomes of treatment can be assessed.

The specific technique utilized to construct the Base Expectancy Table for the present study was Predictive Attribute Analysis as developed by MacNaughton-Smith (1965). The Base Expectancy Tables were constructed on the population of inmates released from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions in the year 1971. This population was chosen because it represents a period in time just prior to the introduction of the furlough program (as well as prior to the introduction of pre-release programs and other community correctional programs) in Massachusetts. Thus, no one in the population had experienced a furlough.

DATA: Variables used in the construction of the Base Expectancy Table included the subject's personal background characteristics, criminal history characteristics, and the history of present offense characteristics. For a more complete discussion of the methodology

used by the author in the Base Expectancy Table construction, see LeClair, (1976, 1977A and 1977B).

Data was primarily derived from the computerized data base of Massachusetts Correction and Parole Management Information System. Additional data was collected from the files of the State Department of Correction, the State Parole Board, and the State Board of Probation.

## FINDINGS

EXPERIMENT 1: It was found that individuals experiencing a furlough during the period of their incarceration had lower rates of recidivism. A total of 610 individuals who had experienced a furlough were released from Massachusetts State Correctional Institutions in the year 1973. The recidivism rate for this group was 16%. By contrast, the 268 individuals released in 1973 without having received a furlough had a recidivism rate of 27%. This difference between sub-samples was found to be statistically significant ($X^2=13.9, df=1; p < .001$).

The prediction device revealed that no evidence of a selection bias existed. In controlling for selection factors in the process of granting furloughs, application of the Base Expectancy Table to the sub-samples resulted in an expected recidivism rate of 25% for the furlough sub-sample and an expected recidivism rate of 27% for the non-furlough sub-sample. The difference between these two expected recidivism rates was not found to be statistically significant ($X^2=0.39, df=1; p > .05$).

Additional evidence attesting to the fact that individuals experiencing a furlough while incarcerated had lower rates of recidivism upon release was provided through the use of the Base Expectancy Table. On the one hand, the expected recidivism rate and the observed recidivism rate for those individuals who did not receive a furlough was identical. The prediction device projected that 27% of the non-furlough sub-sample would recidivate. On the other hand, for the furlough sub-sample the prediction device projected that 25% of that population would recidivate. In fact, only 16% recidivated. This difference between the expected and observed recidivism rates was found to be statistically significant ($X^2=24.09, df=1; p < .001$).

EXPERIMENT 2: Replication of Experiment 1 on a subsequent releasee population obtained the same results. Again, it was found that those individuals experiencing a furlough during the period of their incarceration had lower rates of recidivism upon release from prison. A total of 621 individuals who had experienced a furlough were released from Massachusetts State Correctional Institutions in the year 1974. The recidivism rate for this group was 16%. By contrast, the recidivism rate for the 220 individuals

released in the year 1974 without having received a furlough was 31%. This difference in the recidivism rate between sub-samples was found to be statistically significant ($X^2=22.9, df=1; p < .001$).

Again, the prediction device revealed that no evidence of a selection bias existed. In controlling for selection factors in the process of granting furloughs, application of the Base Expectancy Table to the sub-samples resulted in an expected recidivism rate of 24% for the furlough sub-sample and an expected recidivism rate of 25.8% for the non-furlough sub-sample. The difference between these two expected recidivism rates was not found to be statistically significant ($X^2=0.29, df=1; p > .05$).

Additional evidence in support of the finding that individuals experiencing a furlough while incarcerated have lower rates of recidivism upon release from prison was obtained through the application of the Base Expectancy Table. In comparing the expected with the observed recidivism rate for each sub-sample it was discovered that for the furlough population the observed recidivism rate was below the expected rate and by contrast, for the non-furlough population, the prediction device projected an expected recidivism rate of 25.8%, whereas the observed recidivism rate was 31%. This difference was not found to be statistically significant ($X^2=3.00, df=1; p > .05$). For the furlough population, however, the prediction device projected an expected recidivism rate of 24%, whereas the observed recidivism rate was 16%. This difference between the expected and observed recidivism rates in the furlough population was statistically significant ($X^2=22.11, df=1; p < .001$).

## DISCUSSION

The current research provides initial supportive evidence that participation in Furlough Programs reduces the probability that an individual will recidivate upon release from prison. Analysis indicated that the determined reduction in recidivism was due to the impact of the furlough program and not simply to the types of inmates who were selected for furloughs. It is therefore believed that the various cited functions of the use of furloughs do converge so as to provide a process of societal reintegration and that this process contributes to a reduction in the incidence of reincarceration. More generally, it is concluded that programmatic contributions to the process of societal reintegration can be effective devices for reducing the repeated criminal behavior of the prison releasee.

While the current research provides tentative evidence of the positive effectiveness of the furlough program as a correctional device, the limitations of the research must be stressed. First, it was not administratively possible to utilize an experimental design with the random allocation of subjects into treatment and control samples. The selection process had to be controlled through the utilization of the Base Expectancy Table as an alternative strategy to the classical experimental design. The Base Expectancy strategy, though generally recognized as sound for the purpose of the current research, is not a procedure without limitations (Simon, 1971).

A second limitation is that a great deal more research is needed on the effects of the wide variety of other community reintegration programs that have been introduced, as well as the many other correctional system changes that have occurred, since the late 1960's and early 1970's. Therefore, in the absence of a total system design through which all the new programmatic developments and system changes are delineated, the results of research on separate correctional programs must be interpreted as tentative. A total system design has, in fact, been developed by the Massachusetts Department of Correction and the results to date, though preliminary, are in support of the findings presented in the current research (Wittenberg, 1977).

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