

COMMUNITY-BASE REINTEGRATION: SOME THEORETICAL  
IMPLICATIONS OF POSITIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

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November, 1979

PUBLICATION # 11625

Approved By Alfred C. Holland, State Purchasing Agent

## ABSTRACT

A review of recidivism research conducted by the Massachusetts Department over the past 10 years demonstrates that programmatic contributions to the process of societal reintegration are effective devices for reducing the repeated criminal behavior of the prison releasee. The success of the reintegration model stands in direct contrast to the cited failures of so many of the attempts at "rehabilitative treatment". After a review of some of the theoretical implications of the reintegration model, it is concluded that efforts which do not directly impact the counterproductive influences of the prisonization process are doomed to failure.

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, November, 1979.

Over the past several decades the sociology of corrections has devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to the issue of the effectiveness of treatment modalities and rehabilitative programs within the prison setting. As we now well know, the vast accumulation of the resultant literature in this area supports the current belief that rehabilitative treatment within the prison setting has shown little or no promise. There exists a variety of lines of speculation as to the reasons for such a dismal failing, but a particularly powerful position - consistent with a long and vast tradition of criminological theory and research - traces the failure to the counterproductive influences of the prison culture and to the very nature of the incarceration process. Whether the prison culture is viewed as arising out of the inmates' adjustment to the pains of imprisonment and to the structural nature of imprisonment or as imported to the prison by the inmates from an outside criminogenic subculture, the suggestion is that the resultant situation enhances rather than inhibits the future development of a criminal career. Whatever is gained by rehabilitative programs and treatment efforts is greatly overshadowed and diminished by the counterproductive forces operating within the prison community.

It is important to stress, however, that not everything done by prison administrators in their efforts to reduce the future criminal behavior of their charges necessarily falls under the broad category of "rehabilitative treatment". Recent penal practice has witnessed the development and expansion of a series of programs, which may be better labeled as "reintegrative efforts", that have as their goals the neutralization of the negative effects of prison cultures along with facilitating, supporting, and reinforcing posi-

tive outside community links that may have existed prior to incarceration or that may be brought to exist during the period of incarceration. Such efforts may be directed throughout all stages of the incarceration cycle but become particularly intensive during the late phases of imprisonment.

Specific examples of programs which I am calling "reintegrative" are home-furlough programs, education release programs, work-release programs and pre-release programs. Here the general label of community-based corrections may be the most appropriate. Other examples may be more liberal visiting privileges, conjugal visits, co-ed institutions, and classification programs that provide a movement among institutions in descending order of security level and population size. In contrast to the programming of the traditional rehabilitative ideal, the goal of reintegrative programs is not to "correct" or to "cure" or to "treat" an individual. Instead, it is to minimize the negative effects of imprisonment, to maximize the retention of any positive community links that may have existed prior to confinement, and to maximize the establishment of any new community links that may be brought about to exist during the period of imprisonment. This distinction between "rehabilitative treatment" and "community-based reintegration" may be a subtle one, but I think it may be quite important. Do the current negative research findings concerning the effectiveness of the traditional rehabilitative treatment ideal also apply to reintegrative efforts? This is the important question that I want to address in this paper.

My reason for focusing on this question is tied to my research involvement with a series of community linked reintegration programs currently operating in the state of Massachusetts. In 1972, new

legislation was passed in the state of Massachusetts creating a series of programs in the state prison system which could best be classified as "reintegrative" in orientation. Each of the newly created programs was designed to strengthen links between the inmate and the outside community. To this extent the programs were community-based. Though programming occurred at all stages of the incarceration cycle, emphasis was placed on the pre-release stage. For example, at the outset of the period of incarceration and through to the period of release, inmates were eligible for community furloughs. During the middle phase of incarceration, in addition to community furloughs, inmates were eligible for a series of movements from maximum to medium to minimum security institutions. But at the later stage of incarceration (within 18 months of parole eligibility) inmates also qualified for community work-release, residence in community pre-release center, community education release, and a variety of other program related community activity release time. Program related activity time allowed inmates to seek out public and private community services such as therapy, drug counseling, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and adult education and to participate in those services in the free community returning to their institutions in the evening. The model allowed for ongoing public and private community agencies to participate in the treatment of the offender; but what is important is that this treatment occurred in the community setting, not in the prison setting. The model also allowed for the periodic removal of the inmate from the sole influence of the inmate culture.

Collectively the new legislation created a network of programming geared to: (1) maintain whatever positive community links

the inmate may have had prior to prison entry (use of furlough); (2) modify the development and subsequent influence of negative impact of incarceration due to "prisonization" (use of furloughs, movements among institutions of descending security level and size and community release programs); and (3) encourage the development of newly established positive links with the community, particularly at the period of incarceration of anticipated release (use of work-release-education-release-and community activity release time.)

With the introduction of this reintegrative model, a carefully planned research effort was coordinated to test the effect of these efforts on the post-prison release behavior of the participating inmates. Recidivism, as defined as return to prison within one year of release, was the measure of effectiveness chosen.

The first completed research effort dealt with the effects of the community furlough program on the participants' post-release adjustment (LeClair, 1978). Controlling for selection factors via the use of Base-Expectancy Tables, the data revealed significantly lower rates of recidivism for furlough participants than for non-participants. The data were interpreted as providing preliminary evidence that the use of the community furlough program during the period of incarceration provides a positive reintegration 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.

A second study (LeClair, 1978) looked at the effect of pre-release programming in the community at the final stage of the

period of incarceration, as well as furloughs, on post-prison release behavior. Analysis provided clear evidence that participation in graduated reintegration programs such as pre-release centers and community furloughs reduces the probability that an individual will recidivate upon release from prison. In this second study, it is noteworthy that the most significant impact on recidivism occurred for those individuals who participated in both pre-release programs and community furloughs.

A third study (Mershon, 1978) looked at the process of graduated movement among institutions in descending level of security and size and found that reduced rates of recidivism was associated with such movement. Recidivism rates were lowest for those individuals who completed the movement cycle and thus were released from the lowest security institutions. The next lowest rate of recidivism was for individuals released from medium security institutions; and the highest rate for those released directly from maximum security institutions.

These research findings, and the results of other studies conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Correction but not specifically mentioned here, have led us to conclude that evidence does support the fact that the use of community-based graduated reintegration programs has a positive effect on post-prison behavior. It should be remembered however, that in order to control for the selection processes which allowed differential participation in the reintegration model, a statistical technique known as Base Expectancy Rates had to be employed in each of the cited research studies. These statistical procedures are recognized as techniques not without limitations. Therefore, in addition to the statistical controls on

selection factors, it becomes necessary to look at the system wide effects of the reintegration model. For example, it becomes important to determine whether or not the recidivism rates for the total releasee population changed over time during the successive operation and expansion of the reintegration model. Research activity therefore was conducted along these lines. A population of individuals released in the year 1971 was chosen as a base line for comparisons since this population was closest in time to the implementation of the model under study. We then looked at the subsequent releasee populations for a six year period in which there was a gradual development and expansion of the reintegration model - the years 1972 through 1977. Data revealed that the overall rates of recidivism systematically dropped after the introduction of the reintegration model. More importantly, evidence revealed that the drop in recidivism was directly proportional to the number of individuals participating in the programs. For example, hand-out number I dichotomizes the releasee populations according to the proportion of individuals participating in pre-release reintegration programs.



HAND OUT NUMBER I

YEARLY COMPARISON OF RECIDIVISM RATES BY PRE-RELEASE PARTICIPATION

<u>YEAR OF RELEASES</u>	<u>NUMBER OF RELEASES</u>	<u>PERCENT OF POPULATION RELEASED FROM PRE- RELEASE CENTERS</u>	<u>RATE OF RECIDIVISM FOR PRE-RELEASE .... PARTICIPANTS</u>	<u>RATE OF RECIDIVISM FOR NON-PRE- ..... RELEASE PARTICIPANTS</u>	<u>RATE OF RECIDIVISM FOR TOTAL RELEASES</u>
971	1107	0%	-	25%	25%
972	1550	1%	-*	-*	22%
973	966	11%	12%	20%	19%
974	911	25%	12%	21%	19%
975	806	28%	14%	22%	20%
976	925	40%	9%	21%	16%
977	1138	42%	8%	19%	15%

Figures not available for sub-samples in this year.

As you can see from the hand-out, as the proportion of individuals released from prison through pre-release centers increases over time, the total recidivism rate decreases. For example, in the base year, 1971, no individual was released from prison via a pre-release program and the overall recidivism rate was 25%; in the year 1972, 1% of the population was released through pre-release and the overall recidivism rate was 22%; and by 1977, 42% of the population was released through pre-release centers and the overall recidivism rate went down to 15%. It is particularly noteworthy that as more and more individuals are selected for participation in the reintegration model the rate of recidivism for the pre-release population as well as the total population continues to drop. I find these results quite astonishing and supportive of the reintegration model.

It is important to consider some of the theoretical implications of these research findings. In attempting this task, I find that it becomes necessary to draw heavily on a long tradition of work in the sociology of the prison - specifically, the material dealing with the concept of "prisonization". Clemmer's (1940) early work in this area is important because it introduces the original concept of an inmate culture operating in direct opposition to the formal organizational structure. This resultant force is seen as counter-productive to rehabilitative efforts and to post release adjustment.

Building on this theoretical base, Sykes and Messenger (1960) and Goffman (1961) made important contributions by linking the development of "prisonization" to the very structure of prisons and to the process of incarceration. They postulate that

"prisonization" develops as a coping mechanism in an attempt to alleviate the deprivations and frustrations encountered as part of the "pains of imprisonment".

A subsequent collection of theoretical work looked at the importance of extra-prison influences on the development of prisonization. For example, stress was placed on the importance of criminogenic cultural influences imported into the prison, on the importance of outside community links during the period of incarceration, and on the importance of specific social psychological correlates of prisonization such as "post-release expectations" and "changes in world views associated with confinement", (Irwin and Cressey, 1962; Schrag, 1961; Garrity, 1961; and Thomas, Petersen, and Zingraff, 1978). The recent work by Thomas, Petersen and Zingraff is of particular importance in that it attempts an integration of existing theories of prisonization by postulating the dual influence of both structural and social psychological correlates of prisonization.

A final area of theoretical activity concerning prisonization that I would like to draw on is the material on "phase of imprisonment". Theoretical work in this area postulated that the level of prisonization varies through the stages of incarceration; low at entry, gradually increasing during the middle phase, and falling off as anticipated release approaches, (Wheller, 1961; Garabedian, 1963; Glaser, 1964; and Willford, 1967). This notion of a U-shaped curve seems to provide a bridge in mediating the differential impact of prison specific and extra-prison influences on the prisonization process.

By drawing on several of these contributions, particularly the recent contributions by Thomas, Petersen and Zingraff, a theoretical explanation for the successes associated with the implementation of the reintegration model in the Massachusetts Correctional System may be constructed. I would like to offer a theoretical model whereby it is assumed that the failure of traditional rehabilitative programs operating within the prison setting is linked to the counterproductive influences of a prison culture. A process, defined as prisonization, develops as a result of both structural and social psychological forces that are associated with the process of incarceration and operates in direct opposition to formal organizational goals. The model further assumes that the level of prisonization changes along critical junctures of the incarceration process and that the relative importance of structural variables and social psychological variables also changes along these junctures.

The reintegration model avoids the pitfalls experienced by traditional rehabilitative programs precisely because the forces of prisonization are taken into account. The reintegration model attempts to facilitate the successful movement of an individual through the stages of incarceration and subsequent community reentry by neutralizing the negative effects of prisonization. For example, an attempt is made to impact structural correlates of prisonization such as "alienation" or "structural powerlessness" by the movement of inmates among institutions of progressively decreased security level and population size. Presumably, as security level and population size decreases, the necessity for structural coercion concomitantly decreases. Lower levels of

structural coercion may mean a reduced pressure toward prisonization. Furthermore, the very process of transferring inmates among facilities insures that the prison population is constantly changing, thus inmate friendship ties and other commitments to the informal prison culture are continually interrupted and neutralized.

An attempt is also made to impact social psychological correlates of prisonization such as "degree of community linkage", "post release expectations", and "changing levels of satisfaction". The reintegration model maximizes continued contact with the outside community during the early and middle phases of incarceration through the use of the community furlough program. Here the possibility of maintaining pre-existing positive community links is enhanced. Additionally the use of furloughs may bring about, during the period of incarceration, newly formed community links. As the inmates reach the pre-release stage, a whole array of community-based activity, in addition to furloughs, becomes possible: employment in the community, educational opportunities in the community, shopping and recreational activities in the community, attending rehabilitative programs in the community. In this setting the reintegration model is functioning in such a way as to maximize the potential for positive external influences. As positive external influences increase, the effects of prisonization lessen.

Pre-release programs impact "changing levels of satisfaction" by providing inmates with increased options and alternatives during the period of incarceration. These programs also affect "post release expectations" by locating the inmate in work, education, and community-based treatment programs prior to release.

If we accept the proposition that the level of prisonization

begins to weaken as inmates approach the stage of anticipated release, the effects of the greatly intensified efforts at community linkage provided by the reintegration model at the pre-release stage become crucial. As the inmates naturally turn their attention away from the prison culture and toward the free community, the reintegration model strongly supports this transition by allowing the inmate to spend increasing amounts of his time in that outside community.

I would like to summarize the explanatory position that I am proposing for the success of the Massachusetts reintegrative efforts by referring to the diagram presented in Hand-out II.

## HAND OUT II

### PROGRAMMATIC ATTEMPTS AT NEUTRALIZING EFFECTS OF PRISONIZATION



	<u>STAGE</u>	<u>REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS</u>	<u>ANTICIPATED AREA OF IMPACT</u>
TAGE I:	Prison Entry and Early Phases of Incarceration	Community furloughs and given orientation as to which programs are available in the future (i.e., different security levels, and community based pre-release)	Community linkage
TAGE II:	Middle Phase	Community furloughs; and graduated movement among institutions in descending levels of security and in descending levels of population density	Community linkage and prison-specific structural variables such as "alienation" and "contextual powerlessness"
TAGE III:	Anticipated Release	Community furloughs; movement to lowest security institutions-pre-release centers; broadest participation in community based reintegration programs: work-release, education release and other program related community release passes	Major focus on social psychological variables such as "post-release expectations" and "changes in world view associated with confinement"

Almost ten years of recidivism research conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Correction has collectively uncovered a series of patterns which I believe to have wide range theoretical and policy implications. Underlying these patterns is a common theme, one which deals with the specific process of community reintegration through a system of graduated release. The success of this reintegration model stands in direct contrast to the cited failures of so many of our attempts at "rehabilitative treatment". I propose that efforts which do not directly impact the counter-productive influences of the prisonization process are doomed to failure.



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