

PRE-RELEASE SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

The following study presents a review of the utilization of pre-release centers throughout state and federal corrections systems. Of the 52 corrections systems surveyed, 39 have established pre-release centers. These centers play an important role in gradual community reintegration.

A review of research on pre-release programs done by corrections systems or affiliated universities was also conducted. Many systems had done descriptive or empirical studies that serve as a national assessment of pre-release programs. These studies generally support previous findings by the Massachusetts Department of Correction that graduated release programs are a significant factor in reducing recidivism.

I would like to thank the many people in my department who gave of their time to read and evaluate the contents of this study. A special thanks to my supervisor Dr. Daniel P. LeClair and my colleague Linda Holt for without their criticisms this study would not be as complete.

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INTRODUCTION

Community based corrections is a new dimension of offender rehabilitation. One of the main purposes of community corrections is aiding in the reintegration of the offender into the community. An inmate in a pre-release center has not yet completed his sentence and serves the last portion of it in a community setting.

The pre-release center is located outside of the prison in a community where an offender might settle after completing his sentence. Pre-release programs hope to provide a gradual process of societal reintegration. This is achieved by providing minimal institutional supervision and allowing the inmate to take personal responsibility for his own life in the community through regular employment or education.

Most inmates have jobs away from the center during the day and return to the center in the evening. This allows for interaction with community residents. Other inmates attend educational programs at area schools and colleges. Such a program should provide for favorable reintegration into the community, reducing recidivism rates for offenders who are released from pre-release centers.

Since community corrections is a new idea, any information about the initial outcomes of this concept will be useful to corrections' policy makers. A review of research conducted by individual correction systems will serve as a comparison to the experiences of pre-release in Massachusetts and as a tool for further planning and refinement of pre-release programs. This report will review research that has been done on pre-release in an attempt to determine if any generalizations on the effects of pre-release are beginning to emerge from these independent studies.

The questions addressed in this study are: How extensively used are pre-release centers throughout the United States?, of the states that do have programs, how many have done research on the success of the program? and What has that research shown?

METHODOLOGY

A letter and questionnaire was sent to each state's corrections department (or research unit), the District of Columbia, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. With follow-up, responses were received from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Federal system.

Questions were asked concerning the existence of pre-release centers and the availability of descriptive information and research on pre-release programs.

Research done on pre-release centers was reviewed for comparison of pre-release outcomes (program cost, recidivism, program completion) with non-pre-release outcomes through established research methods (matching, base expectancy tables, control groups and systems review). It is these studies that will be reviewed extensively.

FINDINGS

Use of Pre-Release Centers

Of the 52 systems, 37 states, the District of Columbia, and the federal system had pre-release centers. Two other systems were developing pre-release centers and eleven had no pre-release programs. These findings are summarized in Tables I and II.

TABLE I

STATUS OF PRE-RELEASE IN UNITED STATES CORRECTIONS SYSTEMS

HAVE PRE-RELEASE

PLANNING PRE-RELEASE

NO PRE-RELEASE

Alabama
Alaska
Arizona
Arkansas
Colorado
Connecticut
Delaware
Federal Bureau of Prisons
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
Minnesota
Mississippi
Missouri
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New York
North Carolina
North Dakota
Ohio
Oklahoma
Oregon
Pennsylvania
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Vermont
Virginia
Washington
Wisconsin
District of Columbia

Nebraska
New Mexico

California
Idaho
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Montana
Nevada
Rhode Island
South Dakota
West Virginia
Wyoming

TABLE II
SUMMARY OF PRE-RELEASE PROGRAMS

| | <u>NUMBER</u> | <u>(PERCENT)</u> |
|----------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Have Pre-Release | 39 | (75) |
| Planning Pre-Release | 2 | (4) |
| No Pre-Release | 11 | (21) |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| TOTAL | 52 | (100) |

Descriptive Materials

Of the 39 correctional systems with pre-release centers, 15 reported that descriptive materials were available. Descriptive materials included reports on programs, participants and general program evaluation. These findings are presented in Table III and IV. A review of this descriptive material will not be attempted at this time. However, the concept of pre-release has been interpreted in many different ways by the 39 individual systems using it. It is used extensively in some systems and only in a limited manner by others. The type of inmates referred to pre-release, the content of the programs, services offered and amount of supervision vary widely.

Empirical Research

Of the 39 systems that have pre-release programs, 14 had empirical research available.¹ These findings are presented in Tables V and VI. The findings of 13 systems will be reported briefly and then compared, to determine if any generalizations on the effects of pre-release can be made. While the conclusions that are drawn will be limited because of the small number of programs doing research and the variety of programs, the review should be useful if it shows trends in pre-release outcomes and costs.

¹Due to reproduction costs, Colorado's research was not available for review.

TABLE III

DESCRIPTIVE MATERIALS AVAILABILITY ON PRE-RELEASE CENTERS

DESCRIPTIVE MATERIALS
AVAILABLE

Alabama
Arizona
Arkansas
Colorado
Connecticut
Federal Bureau of Prisons
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
New Hampshire
Texas
District of Columbia

DESCRIPTIVE MATERIALS
NOT AVAILABLE

Alaska
Delaware
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Maine
Minnesota
Mississippi
Missouri
New Jersey
New York
North Carolina
North Dakota
Ohio
Oklahoma
Oregon
Pennsylvania
South Carolina
Tennessee
Utah
Vermont
Virginia
Washington
Wisconsin

TABLE IV

SUMMARY OF AVAILABILITY OF DESCRIPTIVE MATERIALS

| | <u>NUMBER</u> | <u>(PERCENT)</u> |
|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Available | 15 | (38) |
| Not Available | 24 | (62) |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| TOTAL | 39 | (100) |

TABLE V

AVAILABILITY OF EMPIRICALLY-BASED RESEARCH

AVAILABLE

Colorado
Iowa
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
Minnesota
New Hampshire
New Jersey
North Carolina
Ohio
Oklahoma
Pennsylvania
Federal Bureau of Prisons
District of Columbia

NOT AVAILABLE

Alabama
Alaska
Arizona
Arkansas
Connecticut
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Illinois
Indiana
Maine
Mississippi
Missouri
New York
North Dakota
Oregon
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Vermont
Virginia
Washington
Wisconsin

TABLE VI
SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AVAILABILITY

| | <u>NUMBER</u> | <u>(PERCENT)</u> |
|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Available | 14 | (36) |
| Not Available | 25 | (64) |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| TOTAL | 39 | (100) |

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The District of Columbia began its community corrections program in 1969. Results from their research indicate that the program is a "sound investment". In 1971, community corrections had a recidivism rate of 18% compared with a rate of 28% for institutional releases. After controlling for selection into the program the difference in recidivism rates remained. Because of these results increases in the proportion of inmates sent to community corrections facilities is planned.

IOWA

Offenders in work release, vocational training and educational programs had slightly higher recidivism rates than non-participants. However, they were also high risk offenders. Because of the risk involved, expected return rates were calculated for pre-release individuals. This was done by applying observed recidivism rates of non-pre-release individuals in various risk categories to pre-release individuals. Controlling for risk status with this technique, recidivism differences between pre-release and non-pre-release groups disappeared.

MARYLAND

In a 1979 study, recidivism rates one year after release were much lower for pre-release inmates than for inmates released from traditional populations (8% compared to 15%). No methods were used to control for selection into pre-release. A 1971 study of a single pre-release center also found lower recidivism rates among pre-release participants.

MASSACHUSETTS

The Correctional Reform Act, passed in 1972, was the first major revision of the Massachusetts correctional laws since 1955. With the passage of this act an inmate who is within 18 months of parole eligibility (with the limitation that certain violent offenders and those serving life sentences must receive special approval) is eligible to be transferred to a pre-release center. As of January 1, 1979 the Massachusetts Department of Correction had 321 inmates housed in 15 pre-release centers. The Massachusetts pre-release system was modeled after the pre-release guidance centers of the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

MASSACHUSETTS (continued)

Since the graduated reintegration model has been part of the Correctional System, the recidivism rates have decreased progressively from 25% in 1971 to 15% in 1977. The average daily cost of pre-release incarceration is forty dollars a day. This figure is higher than more secure institutions. However, inmates pay up to $\frac{1}{4}$ of their salary to the center for room and board.

Base expectancy tables were used to test the effects of pre-release programs on recidivism. Massachusetts found that individuals who have participated in pre-release programs exhibit significantly lower rates of recidivism than do similar individuals who have not participated in pre-release programs.

MICHIGAN

Michigan established pre-release centers in 1963. The state considers the program successful and continues to expand pre-release although no research was available using statistical controls to substantiate this opinion. In 1978, cost of incarceration in a pre-release center was \$11 per day compared with \$20 per day in institutions.

MINNESOTA

Residential community corrections programs received generally unfavorable comments in a preliminary evaluation. Later analysis produced more favorable results.

Costs of community corrections were very high in Minnesota. This is a result of the fact that residential community corrections facilities were underutilized by the Criminal Justice System. Costs varied greatly between the different pre-release centers. Only 42%

MINNESOTA (continued)

of the adult inmates successfully completed the pre-release programs. Usually, termination resulted from lack of cooperation rather than criminal activity. Successful completion was related with lower recidivism rates.

From time of entry into pre-release to 12 months after termination, 42 percent of the inmates were arrested and 25 percent had been convicted. A further 13 percent still had cases pending. The pre-release programs performed no differently in this respect than traditional institutions even though the most high-risk offenders are generally put into pre-release.

NEW JERSEY

The residential Community Release Program (RECORE) found an average savings of \$8.00 per inmate day at their facility over other traditional facilities. No studies are known to be available that compare the outcomes of RECORE with that of other programs.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

From June, 1975 to May, 1979 New Hampshire's pre-release center has a recidivism rate of 11% compared with a 20% rate for releases from the state prison. This does not control for selection into the program. The cost of pre-release is much lower than the state prison, \$6,600 per inmate year compared with \$14,000.

NORTH CAROLINA

Pre-release and other re-entry programs are voluntary in North Carolina. Pre-release is a four-week training program helping the inmate develop release arrangements. Inmates released with pre-release training between 1974 and 1977 had an 18% recidivism rate, the same as the total rate for all paroled inmates.

OHIO

Ohio's reintegration centers were studied after their second year of operation. Data were collected only for residents of these centers. It was collected twice during their stay at the center and twice after their release. Reintegration centers were found to be a "viable and promising alternative to both institutionalization and unsupervised freedom". Further, the centers were found to be cost effective and helping inmates adjust to parole.

A study of Ohio Halfway Houses found that offenders who were released through halfway houses were more successful than those released from more traditional places. Measures of success included employment stability, legal problems and participation in self-improvement programs. This finding is important given that houses are generally assigned the higher risk client.

OKLAHOMA

A cost study done in fiscal year 1978 found community treatment centers to be more expensive than other institutions. Daily cost was \$14.65 at institutions and \$15.35 at community treatment centers.

PENNSYLVANIA

In 1969 the Pennsylvania Department of Correction began its community residential program with fifteen community-treatment service facilities. As of December 31, 1978 there were 281 inmates in community treatment service centers. A 1974 study concluded that the average cost per day is \$14 compared with a cost of \$22 for institutionalized inmates.

In 1977, on a variety of outcome measures community based corrections were found to be effective. These results were obtained after matching offenders released from pre-release and traditional institutions. After 22 months on parole 733 of every 1000 prison parolees would still be free while 891 of pre-release parolees would remain free.

FEDERAL SYSTEM

The Federal System was established in 1961 with three centers in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. One third of all federal offenders are released through a community treatment center. The Federal Bureau of Prisons currently operates 12 community treatment centers (C.T.C.'s) and contracts to 250 houses.

The 1978 Community Treatment Field study concludes that residents most likely to fail in the C.T.C. program are those with lengthy prior records. Compared to a control group, referrals to a C.T.C. were found to have better employment records after release to the community. Earlier recidivism studies of C.T.C. releasees (1964, 1969, 1970) found aggregated recidivism data alone did not show a statistically significant difference between offenders who are referred through C.T.C.'s and those who are not. However, there are some types of offenders who do seem to benefit more than others. For example,

high-risk offenders have relatively improved recidivism rate. It is this high-risk offender group on the federal level that is most comparable to the population of the Massachusetts state correctional facilities. The 1978 study found no difference among risk groups. Community treatment centers were found to improve employment adjustment of inmates. C.T.C. releasees had higher wages and more stable jobs than traditional releasees in the first months after release.

Summary of Findings

In summarizing the findings of these different pre-release programs it is important to remember that cost and recidivism figures cannot be compared across systems. Each system reported findings from different years, operationalized their variables in different ways and used distinctive research designs.

Despite the limitations of comparisons, each study can be thought of as an independent test of the concept of community-based corrections. As such, a summary of their collective findings can be useful.

Cost Analysis

Eight systems provided information of the cost of pre-release programs in comparison with traditional forms of incarceration. Comparisons are made in terms of costs of keeping an inmate for a day. Three programs found pre-release to be as expensive or more expensive than traditional prisons. Five systems found pre-release to be considerably less expensive than traditional prisons. Because of differences in programs and accounting procedures it is difficult to interpret these results, although most programs would indicate

pre-release could reduce costs to the community, as well as providing the benefits of an inmate in the labor force, and repaying some of the costs of incarceration.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Ten systems provided analysis of outcomes that compared program outcomes (usually recidivism) of pre-release inmates with traditional programs. No analysis found pre-release to have negative effects, that is, pre-release never had higher recidivism rates than traditional programs.

Five systems presented research using careful statistical controls (constructing base expectancy tables or matching inmates on background characteristics). Three found lower recidivism rates and two found no differences.

Four systems simply compared pre-release and traditional releasees. Two programs found differences in recidivism rates and two found no differences.

One system provided a pre-test/post-test experiment and found pre-release centers were effective in changing an inmate's social adjustment, as measured by a variety of scales. One system also found pre-release inmates had more employment stability and higher wages during the first few months after release than other inmates.

In all cases pre-release proved to be at least as effective as traditional methods of incarceration. Although the number of systems providing careful research in this area is limited, the findings generally show pre-release to have positive effects.

CONCLUSION

This national survey of correctional systems about their use of pre-release and their experiences with it, has provided some useful and interesting information. Conclusions that can be drawn are:

(1) pre-release or community based corrections is currently widely used throughout the United States; (2) Pre-release has been interpreted in many different ways by the various correctional systems. The proportion of offenders going to pre-release varies from system to system. The nature of the offender population assigned to pre-release also varies. A more systematic survey of correctional systems about their pre-release programs would show exactly how pre-release is used; (3) Little careful research has been done to test this concept. Massachusetts is one of only a few systems that has carefully evaluated the effects of this program; (4) Most research supports the effectiveness of pre-release programs both in reducing recidivism and in lowering the costs of incarceration. Pre-release also was found to have other positive outcomes for inmates.

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