DEMographic Profile of Offenders

in Long-Term Disciplinary Segregation*

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Abstract

This paper seeks to identify inmate demographic characteristics which may help to classify troublemaking offenders. Data were obtained from the Georgia Department of Offender Rehabilitation for all adult male inmates completing the diagnostic process between 1971-1978 (n=19,363). For purposes of analysis, this population was then dichotomized into those inmates who had required long-term disciplinary segregation and those who had not. Analysis of these data revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups on numerous demographic variables including sentence length, crime type, self-reported education, and prior living arrangement.

Introduction

Violence, attempted escapes, thefts, persistent rule violations and other extreme forms of maladaptive prison behavior[1] have created problems for correctional authorities since congregate confinement became the watchword in American corrections. Penal measures dealing with recalcitrant incarcerated offenders have largely proven unsuccessful. Although isolation has been the major vehicle of discipline in the past, it has provided little help with the long-range problem of maladaptive inmate behavior.

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The evolution of prisoner classification programs has aided prison administrators in their attempts to recognize potential behavioral problems but the subjective nature of a number of state classification models has resulted in a continuous wave of litigation and fiscal constraints. Objective models of classification have thus emerged which are typically either predictive or equity based (Austin, 1983).

The troublemaking inmate necessitates security measures within the prison that are generally too severe and strict for the majority of inmates (Allen and Simonsen, 1981). The refinement and use of predictive based classification models can allow expansion of medium and minimum security facilities which will benefit those who would normally be housed in facilities of maximum security (Austin, 1983).

In this paper we will develop a demographic profile of troublemaking offenders by comparing certain characteristics of a sample of adult male inmates housed in long-term disciplinary segregation with baseline data from the general inmate population confined in the State of Georgia's Department of Offender Rehabilitation. The variables chosen for analysis are those typically available to Classification Center staffs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior research has identified demographic variables that are indicative of prison troublemakers. Included among these are age, race, education, achievement, and marital status. Two judicial variables that have served as significant indicators of prison adjustment in published research include crime type and sentence length.

Findings in the literature concerning age and prison adjustment have been varied. Akman (1966) found those in the 20-29 age group accounted for over 60% of the reported institutional assaults. In research on North Carolina prisons Ellis et al. (1974) found the higher the percentage of inmates under 21 years of age, the higher the rate of aggressive behaviors. Other researchers have indicated younger offenders are typically guilty of the most institutional transgressions (Pope, 1975; Jensen, 1977; Meyers and Levy, 1978). Cooper and Pearson (1972) discovered the majority of long-term disturbed and disruptive inmates fell in the 22-39 year range while Coe (1961) found poorly adjusted inmates tended to be older that the general inmate population.

Race is also a variable that has received attention in prison adjustment research. Toch (1976) evaluated victim/aggressor relationships and found that race played a significant role in the incidence of institutional violence.