

COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION OF PRISON RELEASES:  
RESULTS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS EXPERIENCE

Prepared by:

Daniel P. LeClair, Ph.D.  
Deputy Director of  
Research

Massachusetts Department of Correction

Louis M. Berman

Commissioner

March, 1981

Publication # 12335

Approved by: John Manton State Purchasing Agent

# COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION OF PRISON RELEASES:

## RESULTS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS EXPERIENCE

By Daniel P. LeClair, Ph.D.

Deputy Director of Research, Massachusetts Department of Correction

A popular contemporary debate in the field of corrections focuses on whether or not rehabilitative treatment within the prison setting has fulfilled its promise or has reached its demise. Those who argue that the rehabilitative ideal has failed give full credence to the results of the several recent surveys of research evaluations of rehabilitative programs. They also cite continued high crime rates, continued high recidivism rates, and a growing prison population as supportive evidence.

On the other side of the debate, however, a relatively few still argue that desertion of the rehabilitative ideal has been too hasty, that the evidence is not all in. In this group, a few argue that not enough attention has been placed on differential treatment effects, not enough quality research has been conducted, or that more money or more and better qualified professionals are needed.

---

Author's Note: This paper is based on material that the author originally presented in an address to the Massachusetts Association for the Professional Treatment of Offenders, at Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, January 7, 1981. I would like to thank Daniel Glaser for his valuable comments and suggested edits of the original draft.

To date the demise position has gained ascendancy, but a desertion of the rehabilitative ideal may prove to be a premature move. To make this contention, however, need not be to reject the accumulated findings in our literature which suggest that rehabilitative treatment has shown little or no promise. Although findings of failure exist, understanding their causes may provide an alternative conclusion.

### Prisonization and Reintegration

A particularly powerful position traces the failure of rehabilitation to the counterproductive influences of the prison culture, and to the very nature of the traditional process of incarceration. That is to say, whatever is gained through rehabilitative treatment programs may be greatly overshadowed and diminished by the counterproductive forces operating within the prison community. This explanation is consistent with a long tradition of criminological theory and research, the vast literature on the "prisonization" process.

If we attribute the failure of rehabilitative treatment to the counterproductive forces of the prisonization process, may we not propose that efforts aimed at reducing prisonization may influence or alter treatment results in a positive direction? In addressing this point, I would like to suggest that some things done by prison administrators to reduce the future criminal

behavior of their charges should, instead of being included in the broad category of "rehabilitative treatment", be labeled "reintegrative efforts". Their distinction is that their goals are neutralization of the negative effects of the prison culture, along with facilitating, supporting, and reinforcing positive outside community links that may have existed prior to or may be initiated during the period of incarceration. These efforts may be made in all stages of incarceration, but become particularly intensive during its late phases.

The specific programs that I am calling "reintegrative efforts" include prison furloughs, work and education release, organized pre-release activities, and half-way houses. Other examples may be more liberal visiting privileges, conjugal visits, co-ed institutions, and classification programs that provide movement among institutions in descending order of security level and population size. Whereas the goal of the traditional rehabilitative program was to "correct", to "cure" or to "treat" an individual, the goal of the reintegration program is to impact the prisonization process and to link each inmate to the outside society.

Two important questions arise. First, are the negative research findings concerning the effectiveness of traditional rehabilitative treatment also applicable to reintegration efforts? Second, can the introduction of reintegrative support complement rehabilitative treatment to render it effective? To answer these

questions I would like to draw on Massachusetts' experience with reintegration programs, as well as on research evaluations of these efforts.

### The Massachusetts Reforms

In June 1972, following a series of prison disturbances and a general state of prison unrest, the Massachusetts State Legislature passed a "Correctional Reform Act". This legislation was strongly influenced by the growing national skepticism toward the traditional rehabilitation model. The Act specifically authorized establishment of several correctional programs that were reintegrative in orientation, some to be operated outside the confines of the existing correctional institutions.

Though programming occurred at all stages of the incarceration cycle, emphasis was placed on the pre-release stage. For example, from their entrance into incarceration to the period of release, inmates were eligible for community furloughs. During the middle phase of incarceration, in addition to community furloughs, they were eligible for a series of movements from maximum to medium to minimum security institutions. At a later stage of incarceration (within 18 months of parole eligibility), they also qualified for community work-release programs, community education-release programs, residence in community pre-release centers, and a variety of additional program related community release time.

Program-related release time allows 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 pre-release center in the evening. The model allowed for ongoing public and private community agencies to participate in the treatment of the offender. What is important is that this treatment occurred in the community, not in the prison setting. The model also allowed for the periodic removal of the inmate from the sole influence of the prison culture.

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

#### Research Results

Our research has shown that since the introduction of the reintegration model in the Massachusetts correctional system, overall recidivism rates have declined. In the year 1971, one year prior to the introduction of the model, the recidivism rate for the combined population of state prison releases was 25%. In the successive seven years, with the introduction and expansion

of the model, the recidivism rate dropped to its current level of 16%. This reduction was found to be statistically significant.

Research efforts next focused on specific components of the reintegration model as an attempt to relate the observed decline in recidivism rates to the operation of specific programs. The home furlough program was singled out first for this purpose. 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 state correctional institutions in the years 1973 through 1978 was conducted. Our data revealed that those individuals who had experienced one or more furloughs prior to their release from prison had significantly lower rates of recidivism than did individuals who had not experienced a furlough prior to release. This trend continued in a consistent pattern for the six successive years for which data is currently available. These figures are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1  
Yearly Recidivism Rate Differentials by Furlough Program  
Participation, 1973 Through 1978

Year of Release	Number of Releases	Recidivism Rate Furlough Participants	Recidivism Rate Furlough Non-Participants	Recidivism Rate Total Population
1973	966	16%	25%	19%
1974	911	14%	31%	19%
1975	806	14%	30%	20%
1976	925	9%	25%	16%
1977	1138	7%	23%	15%
1978	1118	8%	24%	16%
TOTAL	5864	12%	26%	17%

In interpreting these results, it is important to be aware of the fact that the process of granting furloughs to individuals may have worked in such a way as to chose low recidivism risks for furloughs and to exclude high risks. Therefore, to test the validity of the finding that having received a furlough reduced the incidence of recidistic behavior, a test for selection biases was necessary. This was accomplished through the use of Base Expectancy Prediction Tables by which an expected recidivism rate was calculated for the subsamples of furlough participants and non-participants. Analyses revealed that the lower rates of recidivism for furlough participants was not due to selection factors. Furlough participants had significantly lower actual rates of recidivism than their calculated expected rates. In contrast, there was no significant difference between actual and expected rates for non-furlough participants. Table 2 summarizes these data.



Table 2

Expected and Actual Recidivism Rates by Furlough Participation,  
Male Population Only\*

Group A: Releases In Year 1973	Expected Rate Of Recidivism	Actual Rate of Recidivism
I. All Males Released in 1973 Who Received a Furlough	25%	16%
II. All Males Released in 1973 Who Did Not Receive a Furlough	27%	27%
III. Total Group of All Males Released in 1973	26%	19%
Group B: Releases In Year 1974	Expected Rate of Recidivism	Actual Rate Of Recidivism
I. All Males Released in 1974 Who Did Receive a Furlough	24%	16%
II. All Males Released in 1974 Who Did Not Receive a Furlough	26%	31%
III. Total Group of All Males Released in 1974	25%	20%

\* Data in this table differs from material presented in Tables 1 and 4 to that extent that females were removed from the sample for the Base Expectancy Analysis. Departmental Base Expectancy Tables have been constructed for male populations only.

The research findings were interpreted as initial evidence that participation in furlough programs reduces the probability that an individual will recidivate upon release from prison. It was concluded that the various functions of the furlough program converged to contribute to a process of societal reintegration, and that this process reduced the incidence of reincarceration.

A second component of the reintegration model that was singled out for research evaluation was the pre-release program. The purpose of this program was to provide a more gradual process of societal reintroduction for prisoners completing their sentences. This was accomplished in several ways. First, selected inmates live in a reintegration residence located outside of the walled institution, and often in the community where they are eventually to return. Presumably, this action separates the inmate from what has been called the "anti-rehabilitative prison culture" of the walled institution. Secondly, in pre-release centers most inmates are employed at jobs in the community during the day and return to the residence during non-working hours. This allows for interaction with non-inmates at work in the community, and provides an opportunity for the offender to participate in major economic roles. Thirdly, inmates in pre-release centers may enlist in educational programs in area schools and colleges, attending classes during non-working hours. This allows the inmate to interact further with individuals in the outside

community, as well as to establish ties with educational system prior to release on parole. Finally, the pre-release centers try to meet the need of gradual reintegration to the community by utilizing public and private community services. In summary, the pre-release programs provide needed institutional supervision, but at the same time allow the inmate to perform major societal and economic roles in the outside community.

A series of research studies conducted by the Department of Correction found that individuals who had completed the pre-release programs had significantly lower rates of recidivism than a comparison group of similar types of inmates who had not participated, and a significantly lower actual recidivism rate than their expected recidivism rates. Analysis indicated that the determined reduction in recidivism was due to the impact of the pre-release programs and not simply to the types of inmates selected for participation. Table 3 summarizes our data on differential participation in pre-release programs.

Table 3

Yearly Comparison of Recidivism Rates  
By Pre-Release Participation

Year of Releases	Number of Releases	Percent of Population Released Pre-Release Centers	Recidivism Rate: Participants	Recidivism Rate: Non-Participants	Recidivism Rate: Total Releases
1971	1107	0%	--*	25%	25%
1972	1550	1%	--*	--*	22%
1973	966	11%	12%	20%	19%
1974	911	25%	12%	21%	19%
1975	806	28%	14%	22%	20%
1976	925	40%	9%	21%	16%
1977	1138	42%	8%	19%	15%
1978	1118	36%	9%	21%	16%

\* Figures not available for sub-samples in this year.

An interesting trend that emerges from the data sets is that when 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 one was released from prison via a pre-release program and the overall recidivism rate was 25%; in 1972, 1% of the population was released through pre-release and the overall recidivism rate was 22%; 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. These quite astonishing results are supportive of the reintegration model.

Returning to the data presented in Table 3, note that recidivism rates also drop, though to a less notable degree, for pre-release non-participants. If the reduction in recidivism rates for the pre-release group is to be attributed to participation in pre-release centers, the question arises as to why a similar reduction also occurred for the non-pre-release group. Since furlough participation has already been linked to lower recidivism rates, and since pre-release non-participants may have experienced furloughs, the furlough variable was explored at this stage of the analysis. A fourfold matrix was constructed and contained the following categories:

- I. Released from prison without participation in either pre-release or furlough programs.
- II. Ended their term of incarceration in a pre-release center but had not participated in the furlough program.
- III. Released from prison without placement in a pre-release center but participated in the furlough program.
- IV. Ended their term of incarceration in a pre-release center and also participated in the furlough program.

Analysis revealed that the lowest rate of recidivism occurred in the combined situation in which individuals participated in both components of the graduated reintegration model, receiving both furloughs and pre-release center placements. The next lowest rate was for individuals who did not participate in pre-release programs but had participated in the furlough program. (This answers our former question.) Individuals with neither pre-release placements nor furlough participation had the highest rate of recidivism. Table 4 summarizes this analysis.

When we used Base Expectancy Tables to control for selection factors analysis revealed statistically significant differences between expected and actual rates for categories III and IV above. In each case the actual rates were significantly lower than the expected rates. In contrast to these findings, however, those in categories I and II exhibited higher actual rates of recidivism than their calculated expected rates.

Table 4

Recidivism For Males Released From 1973 Through 1978  
According to Pre-Release and Furlough Experience

Pre-Release	Furlough	1973		1974		1975		1976		1977		1978		TOTAL	
		N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)
No	No	294	(30)	225	(25)	265	(33)	353	(38)	422	(37)	486	(43)	2045	(35)
Yes	No	2	(1)	12	(2)	39	(5)	73	(8)	124	(11)	85	(8)	335	(6)
No	Yes	563	(58)	460	(50)	317	(39)	207	(22)	243	(21)	224	(20)	2014	(34)
Yes	Yes	107	(11)	214	(23)	185	(23)	292	(32)	349	(31)	323	(29)	1470	(25)
TOTAL		966	(100)	911	(100)	806	(100)	925	(100)	1138	(100)	1118	(100)	5864	(100)

Our research results provided clear evidence that participation in graduated reintegration programs such as pre-release centers and the home furlough program reduces the probability that an individual will recidivate upon release from prison. Data supported the research hypothesis, and it was therefore concluded that these programs which contribute to the process of societal reintegration are effective in reducing recidivism. It is noteworthy that the most significant impact on recidivism occurred for those who participated in both pre-release programs and furlough programs. This finding underscores the fact that the furlough program is a critical element in the reintegration process.

A final area of our research activity focused on the process of graduated movement among institutions in descending level of security and size and found that reduced rates of recidivism were associated with such movement. Recidivism rates were lowest for those who completed the movement cycle and thus were released from the lower security institutions. (Categories III & IV) The next lowest rate of recidivism was for individuals released from medium security institutions; (Category II) and the highest rate for those released directly from maximum security institutions. (Category I). Base Expectancy Table analysis again revealed that the differences were not accounted for by the selection process. Table 5 summarizes these differential recidivism rates for security level of release, for males released in 1974.



Table 5

Differential Recidivism Rates by Security Level of  
Institution of Release for Male Population  
1974 Releases

Category	Number of Releases	Expected Recidivism Rate	Actual Recidivism Rate	Difference	Significance Level
I. Maximum Security	418	27.9	26%	- 1.9	Not Statistically significant
ii. Medium Security	130	21.1%	19%	- 2.1	Not Statistically Significant
III. Minimum Security	81	22.1%	9%	-13.5	Statistically Significant
IV. Pre-Release	212	21.1%	12%	+ 9.1	Statistically Significant
V. Total Male Releases	841	24.6%	20%	- 4.6	Statistically Significant

I have tried to summarize briefly an enormous amount of research data that my colleagues and I have been generating over the past 10 years. We believe that our findings have wide range theoretical and policy implications. A theme emerges which appears to underlie many of the individual patterns that were isolated. This theme deals with the specific process of reintegration and graduated release; it also deals with the more general process of maintaining or reestablishing links between the offender and the general society to which he is eventually to return.

The Furlough Program may begin very early in the period of incarceration, serves to maintain and strengthen links that existed before incarceration, and provides an opportunity to establish new ties. Participation in pre-release centers and the broader process of movement from maximum to medium to minimum security levels also functions to reintroduce offenders gradually to the relative freedom in the community that they will experience upon release.

The wide use of work and education release programs in the pre-release centers, and to a lesser extent in the medium and minimum security level institutions, also plays an important reintegrative role. Individuals are allowed to work or attend classes in a normal societal setting, to earn wages, to pay taxes and retirement fees, and to pay room and board expenses. They are provided an opportunity to budget and save wages.

To those fully aware of the nature of traditional incarceration, the findings of our research should really come as no surprise. Traditionally, we take an offender out of our society and place him in another social system, the prison, that in no way constructively resembles the society to which he will eventually return. Family ties, heterosexual relationships, economic roles, and political participation is severed. In short, the individual enters the prison society and gradually loses touch with some of the most basic aspects of normal societal life. In prison, one is no longer expected to pay rent, to shop for and buy food, to pay taxes, or to contribute to a pension fund. One no longer has to budget a week's wage for there are no bills to pay. Medical bills, utility bills, all bills in fact are paid by the taxpayers in the outside society. It is no wonder, then, that after a period of incarceration a tremendous shock is faced upon societal reentry.

The major findings of our research is that programs generally geared to maintain, establish or reestablish general societal links in terms of economic, political, and social roles led to a reduction in recidivism. Additionally, it was found that when an individual has been gradually re-introduced to society, the chances of recidivism lessen. The research demonstrates the effectiveness of the recent establishment of the community-based correctional apparatus in the state of Massachusetts.

### Bibliography

The principal data referred to in the paper were drawn from a series of research publications of the Massachusetts Department of Correction. A listing of these studies is contained below. Individual copies of any of the listed studies can be obtained by written request to the following address:

Research Unit  
Massachusetts Department of Correction  
100 Cambridge Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02202

Landolfi, Joseph "An Analysis of Differential Rates of Recidivism for MCI-Walpole Commitments by Institution of Release", Massachusetts Department of Correction Report No. 114, May, 1976.

Landolfi, Joseph, "Charlotte House Pre-Release Center for Women: A Profile of Participants and a Recidivism Follow-Up", Massachusetts Department of Correction Publication No. 125, October, 1976B.

LeClair, Daniel P., "An Analysis of Recidivism Among Residents Released From Boston State and Shirley Pre-Release Centers During 1972 - 1973", Massachusetts Department of Correction Research Report No. 100, August, 1975.

LeClair, Daniel P., "An Analysis of Recidivism Among Residents Released From Massachusetts Correctional Institutions During the Year 1972 in Comparison with Releases in the Year 1966 and 1971", Massachusetts Department of Correction Publication No. 111, March, 1976.

- LeClair, Daniel P., "An Analysis of Recidivism Rates Among Residents Released From Massachusetts Correctional Institutions During the Year 1974", Massachusetts Department of Correction Publication No. 136, September, 1977.
- LeClair, Daniel P., "Societal Reintegration and Recidivism Rates", Massachusetts Department of Correction Report No. 159, August, 1978.
- LeClair, Daniel P., "Home Furlough Program Effects on Rates of Recidivism", Criminal Justice and Behavior, Vol. 5, No. 3, September, 1978B.
- LeClair, Daniel P., "Community-Base Reintegration: Some Theoretical Implications of Positive Research Findings", Massachusetts Department of Correction Report No. 180, November, 1979.
- Massachusetts Department of Correction Yearly Recidivism Studies 1971 Through 1978, Massachusetts Department of Correction Report Numbers 98, 111, 126, 133, 136, 148, 155, 156, 164, 179, 182, and 210.
- Mershon, Randi, "An Analysis of Recidivism Rates Among Residents Released From Massachusetts Correctional Institutions in the Year 1976; Massachusetts Department of Correction Publication No. 156, July, 1978.
- Smart, Yvette, "An Analysis of Recidivism Rates Among Residents Released from Massachusetts Correctional Institutions in 1977", Massachusetts Department of Correction Report No. 182, November, 1979.
- Williams, Lawrence, "Inmates Released Directly From a Maximum Security Institution During 1977 and 1978", Massachusetts Department of Correction Report No. 183, November, 1979.
- Williams, Lawrence, "An Analysis of Recidivism Rates Among Residents Released From Massachusetts Halfway Houses, Inc. 1977-1978 Releases", Massachusetts Department of Correction Report No. 198, July, 1980.