

A SUMMARY OF STUDIES ON THE DERIVATION OF BASE  
EXPECTANCY CATEGORIES FOR PREDICTING RECIDIVISM  
OF SUBJECTS RELEASED FROM INSTITUTIONS OF THE  
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

The Massachusetts Department of Correction has recently been developing a rather substantial body of data relevant to recidivism in the correctional institutions under its auspices. Base expectancy categories for predicting recidivism have been derived for the three major male institutions - MCI, Walpole, the maximum security institution; MCI, Concord, the maximum security institution for younger offenders; and MCI, Norfolk, the medium security institution. Also at MCI, Framingham, the adult female institution, two complementary studies have been done - one predicting recidivism for parolees originally committed for other than drunkenness and the other predicting recidivism for drunkenness offenders. (Drunkenness offenders are released from the institution without parole supervision.)

Before presenting the findings of these studies, it would be well to consider briefly some of the major uses of base expectancy categories. These categories may be used as an adjunct in several decision making contexts - e.g. parole decisions, classification decisions, treatment decisions, transfer decisions, etc. Perhaps more important is the role these categories play in the area of research. For example they provide the necessary base-line information for empirical evaluation of treatment programs, policy changes or any innovation affecting the institution. One example: A control group could be established with the same expected recidivism rate as another group selected for experimental treatment. Subsequent analysis of the actual recidivism after release of the treated group as compared with the control group would provide useful information about the efficacy of the experimental treatment. Further, base expectancy categories can give an indication of what type of individual is most likely to benefit from various treatment programs, as well as what type is likely to do just as well (or perhaps even better) without the treatment.

For the base expectancy studies of the three male institutions, a recidivist was defined as any subject who was recommitted to a federal, state or county correctional institution for a period of one month or more. In the Walpole and Norfolk studies the follow-up period was four years. In the Concord study it was two and one-half years. The Walpole and Norfolk samples were made up of all inmates released in 1960; the Concord sample was all those released in 1959. The recidivism rates were: Walpole 68.1%, Norfolk 54.5%, Concord 55.9%. (The projected recidivism rate of Concord based on a four year follow-up period would be approximately 61.5%.)

PROPERTY OF  
STAFF LIBRARY CENTRAL OFFICE  
MASSACHUSETTS DEPT. CORRECTION

*Please return to - 100 Cambridge St., Boston, Mass.*

For the two studies on the female institution, a recidivist was defined as any subject who was returned to MCI, Framingham. The follow-up period for the study on parolees was four years; for the study on drunkenness offenders it was one year. The parolees sample included 200 inmates paroled in 1959 and 1960. The other sample included all the drunkenness offenders who were released between July 1, 1962 and June 31, 1964. The recidivism rates were: parolees 48%, drunkenness offenders 44.6%. Table I summarizes these studies.

TABLE I

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Number In Sample</u>	<u>Follow-up Period</u>	<u>Recidivism Rate</u>
Walpole	Max.security - males	155	4 yrs.	67.1%
Norfolk	Med.security - males	363	4 yrs.	54.5%
Concord	Max.security-younger males	311	2½ yrs.	55.9%
Framingham	Parolees - female	200	4 yrs.	48.0%
Framingham	Drunkenness offenders - female	251	1 yr.	44.6%

An analysis of these five studies reveal an emerging pattern. In all five studies the most important factors in terms of predicting recidivism tended to be the combination of age at present commitment and prior record. Older inmates with short prior records were the least likely to become recidivists, while younger inmates with long prior records were the most likely to become recidivists. This pattern is rather striking inasmuch as it tended to be consistent despite differences in the type of institutions - e.g. maximum vs. minimum security - and differences in the types of inmates - e.g. males vs. females.

This finding spotlights the need for further research along these lines for two reasons, one practical and one theoretical:

1. It suggests the possibility of deriving a "universal prediction table" which would be valid despite differences in inmate populations.
2. It generates hypotheses which, when tested, may make a significant contribution to the development of theoretical formulations to aid in our understanding of recidivism in particular and crime and deviance in general.

Copies of most of these studies are available upon request.

Francis J. Carney  
Director of Psychological Research  
October 1966