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FOLLOW-UP STUDY SAMPLE OF
 FAMILY REUNION PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the request of the Department's Assistant Commissioner for Ministerial and Family Services, this report was designed to generate statistical data pertinent to the basic question, "Does satisfactory participation in the Family Reunion Program reduce the participant's likelihood of return to the Department's custody following release?"

This report was designed to expand and update the Department's previous research in this area by (a) drawing a sample of program participants from all current program sites and (b) tracking these program participants for longer time periods.

To generate a sample of similar cases, this survey selected the first 50 inmates who participated at the eight male facility program sites in 1982. (Due to the differences in the return rates of male and female offenders, a separate report on the Bedford Hills program will be issued at a later date.) Of these 400 male program participants, 204 had been released as of December 31, 1984. This cut-off date for releases was used to insure a follow-up period of at least 12 months, which is the standard policy in Department recidivism research.

A projected return rate was computed for the sample of program participants based on the number of months since their release. The actual return rate (19.6%) of this group was thus notably less than in their projected rate (26.5%) based on the Department's overall return rate.

The findings of this research and the prior studies suggest that participation in the Family Reunion Program is positively related to successful post-release adjustment (as measured by return to the Department).

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NCJRS

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FOLLOW-UP STUDY SAMPLE OF
FAMILY REUNION PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

The present report examines the return rate of a sample of participants in the Family Reunion Program.

Description of Family Reunion Programs

One of the major programmatic initiatives of the New York State Department of Correctional Services has been the establishment of the Family Reunion Program. Under the direction of the Department's Assistant Commissioner for Ministerial and Family Services, this program is currently operating in nine correctional facilities.

Program Objectives

The basic goal of the Family Reunion Program is to enable eligible inmates and their families to meet in private on the grounds of the facility for extended periods of time. The Family Reunion Program is designed to accommodate those inmates who, because of length of sentence or other reasons, are ineligible for participation in the regular furlough program.

The Family Reunion Program addresses two interrelated major objectives. Its primary objective is to enable the inmates to preserve and strengthen their family relationships while incarcerated. A second objective is to facilitate the adjustment of the involved inmates in the community after their release by improving family relationships and thus reducing the probability of further criminal activity.

Program Operation

Under the Department's Assistant Commissioner for Ministerial and Family Services, the Division of Ministerial and Family Services has the day-to-day operational responsibility for the implementation and operation of the Family Reunion Program.

This program was initially established under a Federal grant on a pilot project basis at the Wallkill Correctional Facility in June 1976. Based on the successful operation of this demonstration project, the Federal grant was incrementally supplemented to include Attica (July 1977); Bedford Hills (September 1977); and Great Meadow (September 1978). The program was subsequently assumed under State funding at the end of the Federal grant. It has since been further expanded to additional facilities under State funding--Eastern (October 1980); Green Haven (November 1980); Auburn (November 1980); Clinton (January 1982); and Fishkill (July 1982). The Fishkill program also serves Downstate inmates; the Bedford Hills site likewise serves Taconic inmates.

Description of Program Policies and Procedures

Appendix A provides a summary description of this program's policies and operating procedures for the interested reader.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Due to the innovative nature of this program, the Department's Division of Ministerial and Family Services and the Division of Program Planning, Research and Evaluation have collaborated on an ongoing series of research projects on the Family Reunion Program. These studies were designed to assess the degree to which the program has addressed its expressed objectives. The results of the three major reports in this research series are summarized in the following section. (The appended references section provides the full cites for these reports as well as subsequent articles.)

1. Preservation of Family Ties: Number of Program Participants Living with Family Members Upon Release. An initial survey in this area (February 1979) sought to assess the degree to which the Family Reunion Program at Wallkill assisted inmates in maintaining family ties.

In order to ascertain the program's assistance in enabling inmates to maintain and strengthen their family ties while incarcerated, information was compiled on the number of program participants who were released to living arrangements with family members.

This 1979 survey found that 58 (87%) of the 67 released program participants for whom information was available were scheduled to return to living arrangements with family members (generally their spouses) upon release. Another seven program participants were initially released to a special halfway house program operated by the Division of Parole. Only two were scheduled to reside alone after release.

In view of the fact that 62 of these 73 program participants had served over 2 years, this finding is seen to be indicative of the program's contribution in assisting inmates in maintaining family ties during substantial periods of incarceration.

2. Recommitment Research on Family Reunion Program Participants. As a follow-up to this report, a May 1980 report examined the post-release criminal behavior of Family Reunion Program participants.

The purpose of this survey is to compare the post-release "recommitment" rate of a sample of Family Reunion Program participants to an overall recommitment rate of Department releases.

For purposes of this follow-up study, "recommitment" is defined as a return to Department custody either (a) for a rule violation or (b) with a new sentence following conviction for a new felony.

All 540 program participants who had been released as of February 1980 were selected as the survey sample.

Of these 540 released program participants, only 4% (20) have been returned to the Department's custody by February 1980 with a new sentence or by the Board of Parole for a rule violation.

Based on the overall return rate of Department releases, it may be projected that 12% (59) of these 540 released program participants would have been returned to Department custody. As such, the number of program participants actually returned (20) was substantially less than the expected number (59).

3. Impact of Family Reunion Program on Inmate Discipline. Although it is generally accepted that the primary purpose of prison progress is to assist offenders in preparing for return to society, correctional administrators frequently believe that progress also serves an institutional control function.

Institutional programs are commonly seen to assert a positive influence on inmate discipline in two principal ways. Inmates with few or no disciplinary infractions may be encouraged to continue this behavior due to their desire to participate in a program which requires a good disciplinary record. Conversely, inmates with poor disciplinary records may be encouraged to change their behavior in order to participate in this program.

In view of the importance of this issue in correctional program administration, a 1981 study examined the possible impact of the program on the behavior of inmates who were initially disapproved for program participation due to poor disciplinary records.

This survey sample consisted of 55 inmates at three maximum security facilities (Auburn, Green Haven, and Eastern) who, during a specified period, were selected as a sample. Each of these facilities are maximum security facilities for adult male offenders which were initially disapproved for the program due solely to poor disciplinary records and who remained at the project sites for the follow-up period (approximately 8 months).

This survey found that 65% (36) of these 55 offenders were subsequently approved for program participation due to improved disciplinary records. Another 4% (2) had applications pending at the conclusion of the study.

This finding may be seen to be especially noteworthy since nearly all of these cases had prior histories of numerous, as well as serious, disciplinary infractions.

The findings of this research suggests that the Family Reunion Program may have a positive influence on improving the behavior of a considerable percentage of potential program participants who are initially disapproved due to disciplinary reasons.

PRESENT EXPANSION OF FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH

The present study was initiated at the request of the Assistant Commissioner for Ministerial and Family Services to update and expand the previous (1980) follow-up research on the Family Reunion Program.

The current research was designed to both (a) involve a broader sample of program participants drawn from the significantly expanded number of program sites and (b) track these program participants for longer follow-up periods than previously possible.

Due to the relatively recent establishment of the program, two-thirds (67%) of the sampled cases in the earlier study had participated in only one program (the initial project site at Wallkill). Since the 1980 report, the program has been expanded to five additional sites, including four more maximum security facilities. The Division of Ministerial and Family Services requested that the current study involve a broader sample which is more representative of the program's current operation.

In addition, the follow-up period available in the majority of the cases in the earlier study was relatively short. Due to the recent initiation of the program, 60% of the sampled cases in the previous study had been in the community for less than one year. The present research was designed to track all cases for at least 12 months (which is the Department's current policy on all recidivism research).

Sampling Procedure. In line with the above objectives of the present study, the Division of Ministerial and Family Services requested that each of the nine current project sites submit the names of the first 50 inmates who participated in the Family Reunion Program in 1982.

This sampling frame (early January 1982 program participants) was stated in order to secure a relatively recent cohort of program participants of whom a substantial percentage would have been released.

All nine current project sites responded promptly to this request and submitted the needed information on the first 50 participants in their respective programs in 1982. A total sample of 450 program participants has thus been generated.

Separate Research on Female Program Participants. Since Department research has found that female offenders are typically returned to Department custody at a lower rate than male offenders, it was decided to conduct separate research on male and female program participants. As such, a subsequent report will be prepared on female participants in the program.

Follow-Up Procedure. The Department's computer file was then utilized to determine (a) the number of program participants who were subsequently released and (b) the number of program participants returned to Department custody.

A cut-off date of December 31, 1984 was utilized for releases to permit at least a 12 month follow-up period as of December 31, 1985. As such, program participants who were not released until 1985 or early 1986 were excluded from this survey as well as inmates who have not been released to date.

Program Participants Released by December 1984. Of the total sample of 400 male inmates who participated in the program in January 1982, 51% (204) had been released by December 31, 1984.

Upon initial inspection, the fact that only half had been released in the following two years, might seem somewhat surprising. However, this finding underlines the focus of the Family Reunion Program on inmates who are ineligible for furloughs (largely due to sentence length).

Of these 204 released program participants, 57% (117) were reported by the six maximum security program sites and 43% (87) were reported by the two medium security sites. As might be expected, a higher percentage of the medium security facilities (87% or 87 of total 100 cases) were released within two years than participants at the maximum security sites (39% or 117 of total 300 cases).

Some readers might question this apparently disproportionate representation of the two medium security sites in this sample. However, it should be noted that the major distinction between program participants at the maximum and medium security sites is their time to potential release at the point of program participation. In fact, a number of program participants at the maximum security sites may well be transferred at a later point in their sentences to the medium security program sites.

Development of Projected Return Rate for Comparison Purposes. For general comparison purposes, the average return rate of Department releases is used in Department recidivism studies. The projected return rates of program participants in various programs are computed based on this overall return rate.

This approach permits a comparison of the actual return rate of the participant groups to their projected return rates based on the Department's overall return rate.

The Bureau of Records and Statistical Analysis tracks all Department releases for a five year period to generate return rate statistics. Using the average return rate of all Department releases from 1972 through 1980, a projected return rate can be developed for the satisfactory program participants based on the number of months since their release.

<u>Release Year</u>	<u>Months Since Release</u> (as of 12/31/85)	<u>Projected Percent Returned</u>
1984	13 - 24 months	21.0%
1983	25 - 36 months	28.0%
1982	37 - 48 months	32.2%

For example, the program participants released in 1983 would have been in the community between 25 and 36 months as of December 31, 1985, depending on their respective release dates. Based on the Department's average return rate, it may be projected that 28% of these individuals released in 1983 would be returned to Department custody for a parole violation or with a new sentence by December 31, 1985.

These projected return rates can then be applied to the number of program participants released in each of these years to generate the number of expected returns.

<u>Release Year</u>	<u>Number Released in Year</u>	<u>Return Rate</u>	<u>Projected Number Returned by 12/31/85</u>
1982	51	X 32.1%	= 16
1983	79	X 28.0%	= 22
1984	74	X 21.0%	= 16
TOTAL	204	X 26.5%	= 54

Overall, it can be projected that 54 (26.5%) of the 204 program participants would have been returned by December 1985.

Comparison of Actual and Projected Return Rates. The following table compares the actual and projected return rates of the program participants.

As illustrated by this table, the actual return rate of the program participants (19.6%) was considerably lower than their projected return rate based on the Department's overall release population (26.5%).

	<u>Projected Return Rate</u>		<u>Projected Return Rate</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Program Participants	54	26.5%	40	19.6%

Comparison of Findings of Follow-Up Studies. Some readers may wish to compare the findings of the present follow-up study of Family Reunion Program participants with the preceding 1980 report. However, a word of caution in comparing the two reports is appropriate.

Upon initial review, it may appear that the earlier sample did "better" than the current sample since only 3.9% of the previous sample was returned to Department custody as opposed to 19.6% of the present sample. Such a comparison ignores the fact that these two samples were followed for substantially different time periods.

As previously noted, the earlier study was able to track 60% of the sampled cases for less than 12 months due to the recent establishment of the program. As such, it was projected that 11.7% of the participants would be returned by the end of the follow-up period. In fact, only 3.9% were returned.

On the other hand, the current study tracked the surveyed program participants for significantly longer periods. In contrast to the previous study, all of the program participants were followed for at least 12 months. Due to the longer follow-up periods, it was projected that 26.5% of the program participants would be returned by the end of the study period. In fact, only 19.6% were returned.

In effect, the difference between the projected and actual return rates for both samples of program participants was very similar.

	<u>1980 Study</u>	<u>Current Study</u>
Projected Return Rate	11.7%	26.5%
Actual Return Rate	<u>3.9%</u>	<u>19.6%</u>
Difference	7.8%	6.9%

As illustrated by the preceding table, the return rates of the program participants in these two follow-up studies were consistently lower than their projected return rates.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In view of this finding of a lower than projected return rate among Family Reunion Program participants, a number of questions may be logically asked about the significance and implications of this positive finding.

Question of Selectivity in Choosing Program Participants for the Family Reunion Program. A basic comment can be made that Family Reunion Program participants are carefully selected and thus it could be expected that they should have a lower return rate than the overall release population.

As noted in the earlier report, the Family Reunion Program participants are selected following a multi-phase screening process that involves a number of criteria. Certainly not the least important of these criteria is that the inmate must necessarily have family members willing to visit him or her, which indicates a certain degree of family cohesion. As such, it may be rightly pointed out that the surveyed Family Reunion Program participants may not be a representative sample of the inmate population, particularly with respect to family ties.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the possible existence of this self-selection bias does not logically lead to the conclusion that the provision of the Family Reunion Program to these offenders is unnecessary or uneconomical. On the contrary, it may be argued that it is the appropriate correctional policy to offer such individuals with opportunity to maximize their potential for successful reintegration into the community.

Issue of Control Group. In view of this possible self-selection bias, it may then be asked how the impact of these programs (if any) can be clearly and conclusively identified. A definitive analysis of program impact would ideally require a controlled experiment in which comparable groups of eligible inmates were randomly approved for or denied program participation for research purposes. Such an approach in a correctional setting raises ethical, legal and operational questions.

In light of these considerations, this research was designed to analyze the relation of Family Reunion Program participation and post-release recidivism without attempting to attribute any observed differences wholly to the impact of the program. As such, the lower return rate of the sample of program participants may be jointly attributed to the offenders' motivation, family ties, and the impact of the program.

Conclusion. In conclusion, these research considerations caution against any definitive conclusions concerning the impact of the Family Reunion Program. However, the consistent findings of this report and the earlier research do suggest the Family Reunion Program does serve to maintain family ties, which in turn appears to reduce the likelihood of post-release criminal behavior.

APPENDIX A
DESCRIPTION OF FAMILY REUNION PROGRAM

Project Staffing

At each of the program sites, the program staff consists of one Correction Counselor (Family Reunion) SG-19, who coordinates the program at the facility level, and one Stenographer, SG-5, who handles the clerical work required for program operation.

In 1986-87, a Family Services Assistant, SG-14, was added at each Family Reunion Program site to make possible a much broader and more integrated delivery of services to inmate families.

In addition, the involved facilities provide the necessary security coverage and maintenance services.

Eligibility for Program Participation

Inmates are eligible for consideration to participate in the program if they:

1. Are considered to be of the same or lesser security status as the program site.
2. Have exhibited a pattern of good institutional adjustment.
3. Have a record of successful program participation and have not had any recent major or chronic disciplinary problems.
4. Are not eligible to participate or have been denied for participation in the Department's Temporary Release Program.

Inmates are not eligible to participate in the program if they:

1. Are eligible and approved for furloughs.
2. Have exhibited a pattern of chronic disruptive behavior in the facility.
3. Are assigned to special housing or reception units.

Inmates may be eligible upon conduct of a special review if they:

1. Have been designated Central Monitoring Cases.
2. Have outside warrants or show cause orders.
3. Have been convicted of heinous or unusual crimes.
4. Are returned parole violators.
5. Are in protective custody or mental health programs.
6. Have been diagnosed as having a communicable disease.

The following family members are eligible to visit an inmate:

1. Legal Spouses--persons who are legally recognized as wives or husbands of inmates.
2. Children--if under 18 years of age, they must be accompanied by the inmate's legal spouse, parents, their legal guardian, or approved designated escort.
3. Parents--step-parents or other relatives who have acted in the parental role for the inmate and grandparents.
4. Brothers and sisters.
5. Uncles and aunts. Nieces and nephews.
6. Foster parents.
7. Mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law, and brother-in-law.

Selection Process

Processing an application. An inmate who believes to be eligible to participate in the program must submit an application to the Program Coordinator.

Processing of an approval. If the initial application has been approved, the family contact made and the visiting list approved, the Program Coordinator schedules a date with the inmate and then informs the family and verifies their availability. Once the date is confirmed, the family and inmate are sent a list of instructions.

Processing disapprovals. Should an inmate's application be disapproved, the Program Coordinator meets with him to state and explain the reason for denial.

If a family member is disapproved, that individual and the inmate are notified as to the reason "why."

All disapprovals are encouraged to reapply. There is no limit to the number of applications that an inmate may submit. A reapplication does not assure approval for a visit, it does assure reconsideration.

Scheduling Visits. Once an application is approved, visits are scheduled on a first come-first serve basis, i.e., applications completed at the earliest time will be given first consideration in scheduling a date.

The Visit. When family members arrive at the facility, the same inspection standards are used as for regular day visitors.

Accommodations are provided by the Department without cost, but visitors will be responsible to provide transportation and meals which shall be prepared on equipment supplied in the mobile

homes. For those unable to afford travel and food expenses, the Department will contact church and community groups in an effort to provide assistance.

Upon completion of a visiting cycle, the family members are escorted to the gate and the inmate stays at the site to clean up and check over the mobile home inventory. The upkeep of the program site is the responsibility of the inmate and family. Finally, the inmate is returned to the facility.

Housing Arrangements. The mobile homes are self-contained units that include one, two, or three bedrooms, full kitchen facilities, bathroom and living room with furniture included. Each unit has its own separate plumbing, heating and electricity. Play areas are provided for children.

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