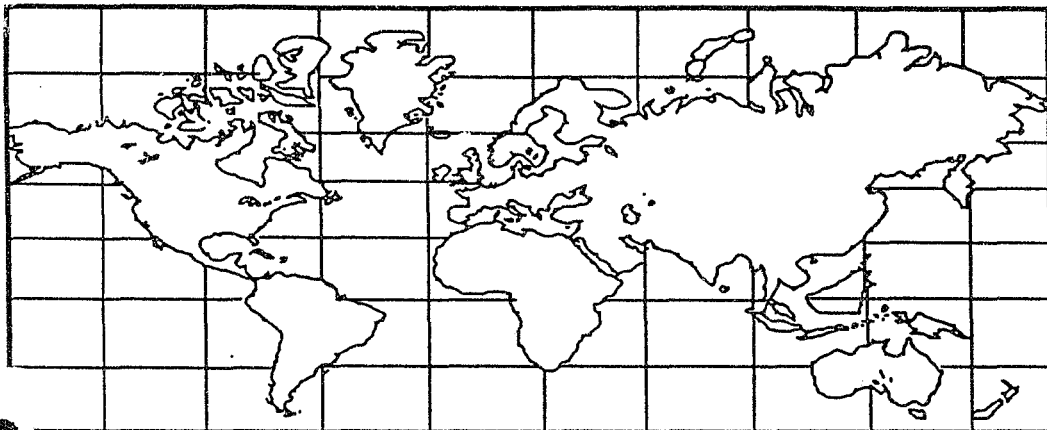


# OBSERVATIONS ON PAROLE:

A COLLECTION OF READINGS FROM  
WESTERN EUROPE, CANADA AND THE  
UNITED STATES



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ASSOCIATION OF PAROLING AUTHORITIES

INTERNATIONAL

NOVEMBER 1987

OBSERVATIONS ON PAROLE:  
A COLLECTION OF READINGS FROM  
WESTERN EUROPE, CANADA AND THE  
UNITED STATES

Proceedings of the First  
International Symposium on Parole  
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NCJRS

NOV 10 1987

November 1987

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## FOREWORD

On April 6-9, 1986, the Association of Paroling Authorities International (APAI) hosted the first International Symposium on Parole at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas in Austin, Texas.

The Symposium brought together over 150 parole and criminal justice professionals from Europe, the United States and Canada. For three days the participants discussed the many complex issues, and problems impacting on their respective jurisdictions. Of significance were the attendance and presentations by representatives from five European countries and Canada.

A majority of the presentations made during the Symposium are included in this document. They have not been edited or revised. Rich in detail, they cover a wide array of topics confronting paroling authorities in much of the Western world. The articles offer a "sympathetic" assessment concerning the current status and future prospects of parole, as well as the relationship of parole to the other components of the criminal justice system. Together, the articles provide far-reaching proposals and insightful analyses--written from the point of view of policymakers and committed advocates of criminal justice reform.

The National Institute of Corrections is making these papers available so that those who did not attend the Symposium can review the proceedings. The presentations contained here offer an opportunity to reconsider the issues and concerns voiced during the First International Symposium on Parole in the United States.



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PART I

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

ON PAROLE



PAROLE RISK ASSESSMENT: A TOOL FOR  
MANAGING PRISON POPULATIONS AND RECIDIVISM

By  
Daryl R. Fischer

Risk Assessment: An Introduction

Risk assessment and parole guidelines have become hot topics of discussion within the parole community over the last several years. The impetus toward early release as a population control mechanism, the concerns with community safety thereby engendered, as well as the movement toward greater fairness and consistency in parole decision-making have combined to foster an increasingly fertile atmosphere for the movement toward objective criteria.

The primary focus in what follows is on the issue of risk assessment in lieu of a discussion of the broader concept of parole guidelines. Although I do have considerable experience with the latter while serving as guidelines coordinator in Iowa for four years, nonetheless, I am of the opinion that the specific issue of recidivism and violence prediction is the more pressing of the two at this particular point in the evolutionary process; this is because serious recidivism by parolees is much more visible to potential critics than is inconsistency in decision-making.

I have been involved with recidivism research on almost a continuous basis since 1975, first in Iowa, and now in Arizona. Since August of 1985, I have held the position of Director of Research, Statistics, and Risk Assessment with the Arizona Board of Pardons and Paroles, where we are involved in validating and implementing a modified version of the so-called "Iowa Model" of offender risk assessment.

Parole Decision-Making and the Prediction of Recidivism

I would like to itemize some of the major findings of our research on recidivism prediction, and to briefly introduce the model now in use in Arizona. To begin, I am going to put forward a rather rash sounding statement, namely, that paroling authorities may realistically move toward increasing the frequency of parole grants, while simultaneously slashing the absolute frequency of serious recidivism and violence by parolees. It has actually been demonstrated in Iowa that such a scenario can work in practice. Beginning in 1981 and continuing to the present, the Iowa Board of Parole, with the assistance of various versions of the Iowa model of offender risk assessment, has been able to more than double the parole rate while simultaneously reducing the rate of violence by parolees by a third or more. Indeed, the increased parole rate was made possible in part by the confidence which the board has placed on the violence prediction component of the model.

Of course, the basis for the opinions as expressed above, and for the observed impact of risk assessment on parole decision-making in Iowa, lies in the fact that, despite popular sentiment, and in contrast to the prevailing wisdom in the field, serious recidivism and violence by released prisoners can be predicted with a high degree of accuracy by objective methods. The major reason that prediction and risk assessment have fallen

into ill repute is that historically the most popular instruments have been able to improve on chance or random selection by no more than 35-40% (MCR values). However, we're now talking a whole new ballgame, as all the most recent versions of the Iowa and Arizona models show a 65-70 percent improvement on chance, which translates into a "hit rate" or level of accuracy of 85-90 percent. This takes risk assessment out of the realm of educated guesswork and into the domain of what I believe to be informed insight.

#### Validation Study of Risk Assessment Instrument Underway in Arizona

To illustrate the predictive validity of the Iowa/Arizona instruments, I will submit to you a few of the early results of the current validation study underway in Arizona. Our initial efforts at validation have focused on paroling activity during 1985, examining pre-release risk assessments of parole candidates, of parolees, and of serious and violent parole violators. With reference to the validity of the violence prediction component of the model, we find that 12 percent of Arizona parole candidates, and correspondingly 4 percent of Arizona parolees, account for 64 percent of the 36 cases of parolees returned to prison for new violent crimes during 1985. This group, which we refer to as Very Poor Violence Risks, constitute a potential target group for future efforts at selectively incapacitating potentially violent offenders. To reiterate, 12 percent of parole candidates and 4 percent of parolees, PREDICTABLY account for 64 percent of the violent recidivists among parole violators.

In the broader context of predicting serious recidivism by parolees, including violent, property, weapons, and drug-related crime, 18 percent of Arizona parole candidates, and correspondingly 10 percent of Arizona parolees, account for 52 percent of the 61 cases of parolees returned to prison during 1985 with new prison sentences. This group, which we refer to as Very Poor Safety Risks, includes the Very Poor Violence Risks plus those highly likely to commit other serious but non-violent crimes while on parole. This latter group would provide a somewhat more expansive and potentially higher impact group for reducing serious recidivism by parolees, since the volume of criminal activity thereby effected is much larger, including burglary, larceny, forgery, drug dealing and others.

On the other end of the risk assessment spectrum, we find that 55 percent of Arizona parole candidates, and correspondingly 67 percent of Arizona parolees, account for no more than 17 percent of the serious recidivists, and no more than 15 percent of the violent recidivists among 1985 parole violators. This group, which constitutes "Good" and "Excellent" Risks both for serious recidivism and violence, would provide a generally suitable target for accelerated release and a means of reducing prison population pressures without increasing recidivism. Further, a mixed strategy of early release of Good Risks and delayed release of Poor Risks, the true "Selective Incapacitation Scenario," could hypothetically lead to what may seem to be strange bedfellows, namely an increase in the parole rate, coupled with a reduction in violence and serious recidivism by parolees.

(Post-Conference Note: As indicated above, the early Arizona samples of 36 violent recidivists and 61 serious recidivists [new prison sentences] are too small to allow sweeping conclusions as to the validity of the instrument in question. The results on these samples are no more than

hopeful indications of the final validation findings.

The basis for the claims made above lies for the most part in the results of a three-year study undertaken while the author was employed by the Iowa Statistical Analysis Center. The results of that study reveal a few of the findings of the same type as those given above for Arizona data. We found, for example, with a combined construction/validation sample of 1,000 cases of released prisoners followed for approximately four years each, that 15 percent of the cases, the Very Poor Violence Risks, accounted for 90 or 46 percent of the 196 cases exhibiting new violent felonies [charges or convictions] during the follow-up period. Similarly, 22 percent of the cases, the Very Poor Safety or Violence Risks, accounted for 53 percent of the cases of releases returned with new prison sentences. On the other extreme, the Good Risks, both for serious recidivism and violence, constituted 52 percent of the sample, yet accounted for no more than 9 percent of the violent recidivists and 19 percent of the serious recidivists. Both the construction [814 cases] and validation [186 cases] portions of the sample showed MCR values in the range of .65 to .75 for violence prediction and .55 to .65 for recidivism prediction [MCR indicates the fractional improvement over chance in prediction.] A statistical report on the subject gives extremely detailed findings on the predictive results using 16 separate measures of recidivism, with one, two, three and four-year follow-up results with selected measures.)

There are at least two alternative scenarios for implementation of the selective incapacitation philosophy via risk assessment. The first would maintain an unchanged level of paroles, but would correlate time served and the parole rate with risk (the Poor risks to serve more time and the Good risks less). The second scenario would maintain the correlation of risk with parole rate, but would incorporate also a total increase in paroles. We estimate that in Arizona the first scenario might lead to a 43 percent reduction in serious recidivism by parolees and a 50 percent reduction in violence, that is, 43 percent and 50 percent reductions with no increase in paroles. If paroles were to be increased as in the second scenario, let's say by 13 percent, we would estimate a 15 percent reduction in serious recidivism and a 30 percent reduction in violence. In either case, we have a highly significant impact on recidivism through the use of actuarial methods. These results can be obtained without seriously compromising the other major concerns present in the parole decision, such as consistency, fairness and desert, prison population control, and to an extent, rehabilitation and community reintegration.

#### Seven Basic Predictors of Risk

Perhaps the major advance during the last two years of research lies in the refinement of the scoring of predictive factors to enhance the apparent simplicity, reliability, fairness, and believability of the instrument. During this recent two-year period, techniques have been developed to synthesize predictors of a much more elegant and sophisticated nature than was previously the case, with the result of a tremendous increase in "economy," for lack of a better word. This increase in economy means greater simplicity, consistency, reliability, and fairness in scoring individual cases and a corresponding increase in attractiveness to potential users. There are seven basic predictors, plus what we refer to as a "Violent Offender Classification." (See Appendix A at end of article for a listing of parole risk assessment criteria.) The seven predictors are scored individually on simple unit-weighting scales, the results of which

are added to arrive at a single "Risk Score" which varies from 0 to 21. Offenders scoring high on the scale, "8-11" or "12 or more" are rated as Poor or Very Poor Safety Risks. In addition, if they are classified as Violent Offenders, that is, if they exhibit at least one clear violence-related factor, they will in addition be rated as Poor or Very Poor Violence Risks.

Of the seven predictors, the following items show the highest levels of predictive validity, as reflected in the greater variation in scores up and down the scale: Current Violent Recidivism (Item B), Prior Violence (Item C), Criminal History (Item D) and Substance Abuse History (Item F). The Prior Violence and Criminal History factors (Items C and D) deal with past incidents and reflect the number, recency and seriousness of such crimes. For the prior Violence factor, which deals with prior charges (or convictions) for violent felonies, age is scored in calendar time. For Criminal History factor, on the other hand, which deals with prior felony convictions, age is scored in street time. Thus offenders are not given credit for time off the street in measuring the age of their prior convictions. Both the Prior Violence and Criminal History factors are scored as twice the severity of the crime (on a 10 to 80 scale; e.g., Murder = 80; Robbery = 60; Burglary = 30, etc.) divided by one plus the age of the prior years--or in symbolic form  $25/1-A$ . This makes the indices directly proportional to severity and inversely proportional to age, which I believe is the most logical method for rating priors.

This type of dually-weighted measure of priors improves by leaps and bounds on the more traditional measures based only on the numbers of priors of various types. Particularly worthless as predictors, without reference to age or severity, would be the factors (1) number of prior adult convictions, (2) number of prior adult felony convictions, and (3) number of prior adult incarcerations (or prison terms). Such measures are insufficiently sensitive to the dynamics of criminal careers to suit them for purposes of effective risk assessment. I'm not saying that they have no validity for predictive purposes, but just that the degree of validity is only very marginal compared to what the weighted measures exhibit.

Two other key factors in the assessment are Items B and F, Current Violent Recidivism and Substance Abuse History. The recidivism factor takes note of any new charge or conviction for a violent felony after the first arrest leading up to the present incarceration, such as during pre-trial release, on probation, while incarcerated, or while on a previous parole on the current sentence. This item is particularly useful for violence prediction. With respect to Substance Abuse History, PCP use, glue, paint, or other vapor sniffing, and the injection of non-opiate substance such as speed or cocaine, provide the best substance abuse predictors of violence, while opiate addiction and heavy hallucinogen use provide good predictors of non-violent but serious recidivism.

Our research indicates that high risk offenders generally exhibit one or more of the following characteristics

- 1) A recent close concatenation of felony convictions, such as in cases of a recent prior conviction or a new sentence while on a current probation or parole or while serving a current sentence.
- 2) A relatively recent prior conviction for a violent felony (as measured in street time).
- 3) Current violent recidivism (as in Factor B).

- 4) A recent prior arrest for a violent felony (as measured in calendar time).
- 5) A serious drug use history, particularly of the bizarre type such as PCP use, vapor sniffing or non-opiate injections.
- 6) Current major institutional violence (scored in Factor G).

Factors found not to predict serious recidivism or violence with any significant degree of accuracy include:

- 1) The severity of the instant offense without the presence of other good predictors of recidivism (instant violence enhances the prediction of future violence if other predictors of serious recidivism are present).
- 2) The number of priors of any type (except the number of juvenile delinquency adjudications or commitments, etc.), without reference to recency or severity.
- 3) A history of alcohol abuse (too many inmates exhibit such a history for this to be a good predictor of anything serious).
- 4) Institutional behavior (with the exception of major institutional violence or repetitive major misconduct).
- 5) Psychological/psychiatric evaluations (based too much on test results and not enough on the actual record of the inmate).
- 6) Time served (risk does not diminish much with time in prison, nor is risk higher in the case of early release).
- 7) Treatment and rehabilitative endeavors (many don't benefit because they are too low risk for treatment to have much of an impact on future serious criminal activity; others too intractable exhibit much change while in prison; NONETHELESS, DESPITE THE STATISTICAL EVIDENCE, WE AGREE THAT REHABILITATION PROBABLY WORKS FOR SOME PEOPLE--THE QUESTION IS "FOR WHOM?").
- 8) Reintegrative factors (probably reduce technical violation but not serious recidivism).

### Conclusion

As unpopular an idea as this may seem, for the most part (70%), we can predict serious recidivism and violence at the point of admission to prison. However, we definitely need parole and discretion to deal with the remaining 30 percent and to adequately and consistently measure all of the pre-institutional factors that feed into the release decision.

APPENDIX A

ARIZONA BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES  
Parole Risk Assessment Criteria

A	CURRENT OFFENSE	F	SUBSTANCE ABUSE HISTORY	
3	Robbery/Larceny from a Person	5	Use of PCP/Animal Tranquilizer	
3	Arson/Aggravated Burglary	5	Injection of Non-Opiate Substance	
3	Extortion/Terrorism	5	Use of Inhalents	
2	Homicide	4	Heavy Opiate Use	
2	Rape/Sex Offense	3	Heavy Hallucinogen Use	
2	Kidnapping	2	Drug Problem	
2	Aggravated Assault	1	Opiate/Hallucinogen Use	
2	Other Violent Crime	1	Alcohol Problem	
2	Major Drug Crime	0	No History as Above	
2	Escape/Jailbreak/Flight			
2	Burglery	G	INSTITUTIONAL RATING	
2	Motor Vehicle Theft			
2	Forgery	4	3+	Total
1	Weapons Crime	2	2	Misconduct/Custody
1	Other Drug Crime	0	0-1	Score
1	Other Property Crime			
0	Non-Safety Crime			
*	All categories include attempts, conspiracy, solicitation, etc.		TOTAL RISK SCORE	

= A + B + C + D + E + F + G

B CURRENT VIOLENT RECIDIVISM

5	80+	Total Raw Current
4	40+	Violent Recidivism
0	0	Score

= \_\_\_\_\_

VIOLENT OFFENDER CLASSIFICATION

C	PRIOR VIOLENCE	Yes	Current Conviction for Violent Crime
		Yes	Prior Conviction for Violent Crime in Last Five Years of Street Time
4	80+		
3	40+	Total Raw	Yes Major Institutional Violence During Last Five Years of Incarceration
2	20+	Prior Violence	Yes History of Use of PCP/Angel Dust or Other Animal Tranquilizer
1	10+	Score	No No Factor as Above
0	0+		

D CRIMINAL HISTORY

7	640+	
6	320+	
5	160+	Total Raw
4	80+	Criminal
3	40+	History
2	20+	Score
1	10+	
0	0+	

RISK RATINGS	E = Excellent
	G = Good
	P = Poor
	VP = Very Poor

SAFETY/VIOLENCE RISK ASSESSMENT

E	STREET TIME AGE	Total Risk Score	Non-Violent Offender	Violent Offender
3	0-19 Years	0-3.....	E/E.....	E/G
2	20-24 Years	4-7.....	G/E.....	G/G
1	25-29 Years	8-11.....	P/G.....	P/P
0	30+ Years	12+.....	VP/G.....	VP/VP