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Social Needs of Families of Prisoners:  
ate Rehabilitation .....

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James D. Jorgensen  
Santos H. Hernandez  
Robert C. Warren

APR 6 1987

Mediation: A National Survey .....

ACQUISITIONS

Mark S. Umbreit

e of Mental Deficiency Among Adult Offenders .....

Gordon H. Doss  
David W. Head  
J. Vernon Blackburn  
James M. Robertson

al Deficits and Treatment Needs of  
ality .....

Gary Field

: Job Analysis: Rural-Urban Differences .....

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DECEMBER 1986

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# Federal Probation

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## This Issue in Brief

**Estimates of Drug Use in Intensive Supervision Probationers: Results from a Pilot Study.**—Authors Eric D. Wish, Mary Cuadrado, and John A. Martorana present findings from a pilot study of drug use in probationers in the New York City Intensive Supervision Probation (ISP) Program, a study prompted by ISP staff need for on-site urine testing of ISP probationers. Confidential research interviews were conducted with 106 probationers in the Brooklyn ISP program, 71 percent of whom provided a urine specimen for analysis. The urine tests indicated a level of drug use strikingly higher than the level estimated by probation officers, who depended upon the probationers to tell them about their drug use. The authors contend that the costs of reincarcerating drug abusers who fail probation are substantial when compared with the costs of a urine testing program. They conclude that ISP programs, with their

small caseloads and emphasis on community supervision, provide a special opportunity for adopting systematic urine testing and for learning how best to intervene with drug abusing offenders.

**Felony Probation and Recidivism: Replication and Response.**—As a result of the Rand report on felony probation in California, probation supervision is attracting close attention. In the present study, author Gennaro F. Vito examines the recidivism rates of 317 felony probationers from three judicial districts in Kentucky and makes some direct comparisons to the Rand report. The general conclusion that felony probation supervision appears to be relatively effective in controlling recidivism rates is tempered by the limitations of both studies. The author stresses the need to closely examine the purpose and goals of probation supervision.

### CONTENTS

Estimates of Drug Use in Intensive Supervision Probationers: Results from a Pilot Study ..... Eric D. Wish Mary Cuadrado John A. Martorana	4	A Quick Measure of Mental Deficiency Among Adult Offenders ..... Gordon H. Doss David W. Head J. Vernon Blackburn James M. Robertson	57
Felony Probation and Recidivism: Replication and Response ..... Gennaro F. Vito	17	The Psychological Deficits and Treatment Needs of Chronic Criminality ..... Gary Field	60
Probation: An Exploration in Meaning ..... Richard Gray	26	Probation Officer Job Analysis: Rural-Urban Differences ..... Lori L. Colley Robert G. Culbertson Edward Latessa	67
The Butner Research Projects: The First 10 Years ..... Craig T. Love Jane G. Allgood F. P. Sam Samples	32	Thomas E. Gahl ..... Harry N. Huxhold	72
Prison Officer Training in the United States: The Legacy of Jessie O. Stutsman ..... Thomas Schade	40	Roberts J. Wright	72
Addressing the Social Needs of Families of Prisoners: A Tool for Inmate Rehabilitation ..... James D. Jorgensen Santos H. Hernandez Robert C. Warren	47	Departments	
Victim/Offender Mediation: A National Survey ..... Mark S. Umbreit	53	News of the Future	74
		Looking at the Law	78
		Reviews of Professional Periodicals	82
		Your Bookshelf on Review	86
		Letters to the Editor	90
		It Has Come to Our Attention	90
		Indexes of Articles and Book Reviews	91

# A Quick Measure of Mental Deficiency Among Adult Offenders

BY GORDON H. DOSS, PH.D., DAVID W. HEAD, PH.D., J. VERNON BLACKBURN, PH.D.,  
AND JAMES M. ROBERTSON, ED.D.\*

**T**HERE IS evidence which suggests that mentally deficient adults are incarcerated in jails and prisons in numbers disproportionately greater than their prevalence in the general population (Brown and Courtless, 1968). This has resulted in an increase in attention given to both the legal and humanitarian implications of sentencing persons without adequate identification, classification, or treatment. Of particular concern is that the offending behavior may be the result of decreased capacity for making appropriate social judgments.

Programs for the identification, classification, treatment, and rehabilitation of mentally deficient offenders have been slow to develop. A review of literature from the past 20 years indicates that little attention has been given to the needs of this group of mentally handicapped persons. Effective programs of identification, classification, and rehabilitation cannot emerge until there is additional knowledge based upon valid research to guide the rehabilitation specialist (Baroff, 1974). A review of related literature indicates that there does not now exist in our jails, prisons, and probation services a systematic program for identification and classification of mentally deficient offenders. Consequently, members of this potentially rehabilitative population are left to fend for themselves with the general offender population.

If the mentally deficient offender is to become a focus of research and program development, then there must first exist a reliable and economical method for identification and classification of these inmates who enter the criminal justice system each year.

## *Statement of the Problem*

Results of studies which deal with the prevalence of mental deficiency in adult offender populations vary, but they consistently cite a percentage higher than that for the general population. Baroff (1974) indicates that the most widely used estimate for mentally deficient persons in the general population is 3 percent. According to Blackhurst (1968), the estimates for mentally deficient persons in adult correc-

tional facilities range as high as 55 percent. Sykes (1958) cites a study of inmates in the New Jersey State Prison which indicated that 45 percent of prisoners were classified as dull normal, borderline, or deficient intellectually. A random sample of 335 male inmates from the Mississippi State Penitentiary were tested with the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) resulting in a mean IQ of 85.7, which is in the dull normal range of intelligence (Jackson and Rice, 1971).

According to the American Association of Mental Deficiency, mental deficit is manifested in diminished maturation, ability to learn, and social adaptability (Kirk, 1972). Mentally deficient offenders are typically denied adequate rehabilitative services by agencies which serve the mentally retarded, because these offenders are considered to be primarily offenders and only secondarily mentally deficient. In offender programs they are often denied access to services because they are considered least likely to benefit from treatment and rehabilitation programs (Brown and Courtless, 1968). This is in spite of the fact that basic rehabilitative efforts could produce some real change in this type of individual.

The March 1983 issue of *Corrections Digest*, quoting the U.S. Justice Department's Bureau of Statistics, states that the nation's local county jails held an estimated 210,000 as of June 1982 and that for the entire year, more than 7 million people had served some amount of time. These figures represent more than a one-third increase over the previous 5 years. For the mentally deficient among these people, rehabilitation services could focus on the reduced capacity for seeking employment, making judgments, or adjusting to various demands of society. However, pretrial service reports and probation reports are for the most part woefully lacking in the data necessary to identify these people. The lack of a quickly administered, reliable, validated, and economical screening device is a major reason for this inadequacy.

Another major deterrent to initiation of rehabilitation programs for mentally deficient offenders is the scarcity of research-based knowledge which describes the scope of the problem and addresses effective methods for treatment. More than 30 years ago, Kirby (1954) surveyed offender treatment programs and concluded that most were based on hope and

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speculation, rather than verified information. Glaser (1966) points to the need for more appropriately educated research personnel to assure that offender rehabilitation programs be based on factual information. There is little indication in current literature of programs to identify mentally deficient inmates. Without proper identification, programs are not developed which deal specifically with the needs of this segment of offender populations.

### *Purpose and Methodology of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the validity of two brief, inexpensive tests of intelligence for use in the area of offender rehabilitation. These tests could be used to quickly identify mentally deficient offenders in large or small offender populations, as well as provide a reliable tool for research in offender settings.

Specifically, the study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Does the level of intellectual functioning of adult offenders, as measured by the Kent E-G-Y Test, relate significantly to intelligence as measured by the WAIS?
2. Does the level of intellectual functioning of adult offenders, as measured by the Ammons Quick Test, relate significantly to intelligence as measured by the WAIS?
3. Does the level of intellectual functioning of adult offenders, as measured by the Kent E-G-Y Test, relate significantly to intelligence as measured by the Ammons Quick Test?
4. What is the probability of false negative indications of mental deficiency when using the Kent E-G-Y Test as a screening instrument for mental deficiency in a population of adult offenders?
5. What is the probability of false positive indications of mental deficiency when using the Kent E-G-Y Test as a screening instrument for mental deficiency in a population of adult offenders?
6. What is the probability of false negative indications of mental deficiency when using the Ammons Quick Test as a screening instrument for mental deficiency in a population of adult offenders?
7. What is the probability of false positive indications of mental deficiency when using the Ammons Quick Test as a screening instrument for mental deficiency in a population of adult offenders?

Tests used in this study were: the Ammons Quick Test, which is a rapidly administered, pictorial vocabulary test of intelligence which provides an index of overall cognitive functioning in the form of an IQ, a mental age, and percentiles (Ammons and Ammons, 1962). The Kent E-G-Y Test (Emergency

Test) is a simple and informal instrument which can be presented briefly as a preliminary measure of mental ability (Kent, 1932). This test may be administered in less than 10 minutes and does not require that the subject be able to read or write. The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) is an individually administered intelligence test designed specifically for adults. The WAIS consists of two scales, one verbal, composed of six subtests, and the other, performance, composed of five subtests. Language is required for the verbal subtests, but not for the performance subtests (Wechsler, 1958). Although discrimination exists in standardized IQ tests toward minorities, the Wechsler IQ tests have been widely used in various forms since 1939 for educational and clinical assessment of many populations including minorities. Both the Ammons Quick Test and the Kent E-G-Y emphasize test items which are not as dependent on culturally biased or verbally loaded concepts as does the WAIS.

The population selected for this study consisted of prisoners incarcerated in the Jefferson County Jail, Birmingham, Alabama. This population afforded the opportunity to test people who had been convicted of less serious crimes which resulted in sentences of shorter duration. It was felt that this population would be representative of adult offenders who have potential for rehabilitation. Due to the small number of female inmates, a decision was made to draw a random sample from the total population of male inmates.

Subjects chosen through this random selection process consisted of 34 male inmates. Chronological age ranged from 17 to 45 years with a mean age of 25 years. Educational level ranged from 5 to 15 grades with a mean level of 9 grades. Categorization by race consisted of 15 white and 19 non-white.

Statistical treatment of the data included Pearson  $r$  to determine the level of correlation between scores on the various tests. Chi square was used to evaluate the probability of obtaining false negative or false positive indications of mental deficiency when using either or both the Ammons Quick Test or the Kent E-G-Y Test.

### *Results*

Test results, using the Kent E-G-Y Test and the Ammons Quick Test, were compared to results obtained from the WAIS by the Pearson  $r$  test for correlation. Scores from the Kent E-G-Y Test, when compared to the WAIS full scale scores, yielded an  $r$  value of .67, significant at the .001 level of confidence. Scores of the Ammons Quick Test, when compared to the WAIS full scale scores, yielded an  $r$  value of .77, significant at the .001 level of confidence.

These tests were further evaluated which chi square to determine the likelihood of their producing false positive or false negative indications of mental deficiency. The Kent E-G-Y Test falsely predicted that 15 percent of the test population was mentally deficient when it was not. Approximately 6 percent of the population was predicted as not mentally deficient when it was. The chi square value obtained by comparing the relative frequency of predicting false negative, true negative, true positive, or false positive indications using the Kent E-G-Y Test was 9.60, significant at the .002 level of confidence. The chi square value, comparing the same frequencies, for the Ammons Quick Text was 9.60, significant at the .002 level of confidence.

Further evaluation of test scores indicated that the Kent E-G-Y Test and the Ammons Quick Test, when used in combination, yielded even stronger predictions. When both tests were administered, only three false positive and two false negative indications resulted. The chi square value obtained by comparing the relative frequency of the combined tests predicting false negative, true negative, true positive, or false positive indications was 13.62, significant at the .001 level of confidence.

### Implications

Independently, each test represents an instrument which can be used to screen offenders for mental deficiency in less than 10 minutes. Since the majority of the population selected for this study was non-white, the significant correlation of the three tests and the stronger prediction value of the Ammons Quick Test and the Kent E-G-Y when used in combination seem to counter some of the claims of discrimination in IQ testing. The error rate for false negatives, on each instrument, would be acceptable since initial screening could later be confirmed by further testing. However, when used together, the two instruments provided results at such a high level of significance that further screening should be unnecessary for simple identification purposes. This capability for quicker screening for intelligence could greatly enhance the planning of case management in correc-

tional settings, especially in the fields of pretrial services and probation. As a general rule, these two entities must make judgments about the rehabilitation potential of clients and report a plan of rehabilitation or supervision to the court or other authority. To devise plans which impact offender adjustment to employment, life skills, and interpersonal relationships seems ludicrous without some indication as to the offender's intellectual functioning. In the past, this capability to determine intellect has been limited by the economy of time and money. The validation of the Ammons and Kent tests seems to present a solution. Both tests can be administered by nonprofessionals in approximately 10 minutes for less than \$1 each. Pretrial services officers and probation officers should seriously consider their use in evaluations when basic screening for intelligence is essential to the process.

Naturally, intelligence screening is not always necessary or even appropriate; however, when the court or the probation office does feel a need for this type of screening, the use of the Ammons and the Kent appears to be a quick and economical alternative.

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