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## This Issue in Brief

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**A Diversionary Approach for the 1980's.**—Various changes in social thought and policy of the past several years carry important implications for the treatment of young offenders. These changes include a marked decrease in public willingness to spend tax money for social programs, a shift in focus from offender-rights to victim-rights, and an increase in the desire for harsher treatment of serious offenders. The general social ethos reflected in those positions has prompted a reassessment and new direction for the delivery of juvenile diversion services in Orange County, California. Authors Arnold Binder, Michael Schumacher, Gwen Kurz, and Linda Moulson discuss a new Juvenile Diversion/Noncustody Intake Model, which has successfully combined the collaborative efforts of law enforcement, probation, and community-based organizations in providing the least costly and most immediate level of intervention with juvenile offenders necessary to protect the public welfare and to alter delinquent behavioral patterns.

**Home as Prison: The Use of House Arrest.**—Prison overcrowding has been a major crisis in the correctional field for at least the last few years. Alternatives to incarceration—beyond the usual probation, fines, and suspended sentences—have been tried or proposed. Some—such as restitution, community service, intensive probation supervision—are being implemented; others have simply been proposed. In this article, authors Ronald P. Corbett, Jr. and Ellsworth A.L. Fersch advocate house arrest as a solution to prison overcrowding and as a suitable punishment for many nonviolent, middle-range offenders. The authors contend that with careful and random monitoring of offenders by special probation officers, house arrest can be both a humane and cost-effective punishment for the offender and a protection to the public.

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explains that exclusionary rules developed to keep illegally obtained evidence from being used in court and that both arrests and searches can occur without a warrant in specific circumstances.

*Assessing Correctional Officers:*—Authors Cindy Wahler and Paul Gendreau review the research on correctional officer selection practices. Traditionally, selection of correctional officers was based upon physical requirements, with height and size being a primary consideration. A number of studies have

employed the use of personality tests to aid in the identification of the qualities of "good" correctional officers. These assessment tools, however, have provided qualities that are global and not unique to the role of a correctional officer. Noting a recent trend towards a behavioral analysis within the field personnel selection, the authors argue that a similar type of analysis may provide a more fruitful avenue for assessment of correctional officers.

All the articles appearing in this magazine are regarded as appropriate expressions of ideas worthy of thought but their publication is not to be taken as an endorsement by the editors or the Federal probation office of the views set forth. The editors may or may not agree with the articles appearing in the magazine, but believe them in any case to be deserving of consideration.

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# Assessing Correctional Officers

BY CINDY WAHLER AND PAUL GENDREAU\*

One of the more interesting anomalies in the history of corrections, is the manner in which the role of the correctional officer (CO) has been ignored. Alexander Paterson (1951) of the British Prison Commission opposed any time being allocated to the study of COs, on the basis that, "It is much better to leave them to their own natural good will and common sense than to stuff their ears and memories with scientific jargon" (p. 401). On the other hand, another view has it that the CO can be the single most important person in terms of influencing the inmate and having the potential for enhancing or minimizing, through his or her actions, the effectiveness of the various treatment programs (Glaser, 1964; Teske and Williamson, 1979; Wicks, 1980). The above opinions, however, are based on anecdotal evidence—although recently some empirical evidence supporting these views was generated in some successful intervention studies that employed correctional staff as treatment agents (cf. Ross and Gendreau, 1980).

Unfortunately, despite the assumed importance of the correctional officer, little attention has been directed to the fundamental issue of recruitment. That is, what are perceived to be the desirable characteristics of effective correctional officers?

## *Historical Selection Criteria*

Over a quarter of a century ago, Lundberg (1947) wrote, "methods of selection of the prison guard are generally loose and have little empirical validity. Of some 13,000 guards in this country, it is safe to say that over three-fourths have been selected by unscientific methods" (p. 38). In 1983, the warden of Jackson Prison, Michigan outlined his description-based hiring criteria, "We would hire them if they were warm and alive" (American Correctional Association, 1970, p. 67). One of the state officials responding to a survey of United States selection procedures indicated that "any warm body passing the test would likely be hired" (Goldstein, 1975, p. 11). The "test" referred to comprised a routine civil

service written examination of general information and a 5- to 10-minute oral test on "human relation skills." As recently as 1981, Toch stated that "the correctional officer is a residue of the dark ages. He requires 20/20 vision, the IQ of an imbecile, a high threshold for boredom and a basement position in Maslow's hierarchy" (p. 20).

A concrete example of the hiring process taken from the Canadian penitentiary system is illustrative. Willet (1973) found that selection procedures were neither standardized nor formalized. Basic information was lacking at interviews, references were not required, and objective assessment tools were not employed. The interviewers did not appear to be trained in selection techniques and functioned as a group with minimal prior consultation. The pre-selection briefing of candidates was often based on incorrect information about their work, and as a rule, no member of personnel was present to answer any questions pertaining to the details of the work. Once selected, officers were enrolled in a training course, presumably specifically related to the job; however, due to the course's perceived low-credibility by the staff members and their supervisors at the host prisons, candidates were treated as if they had been on "holiday."

By and large, even when job descriptions have depicted the CO as a person with multifaceted roles—including inmate counseling—the actual criteria for selection have usually been based on physical requirements, security considerations, and an assumed position of authority as in any military hierarchy (Cressey, 1959). Schrag (1961) remarked that it is an illusion that COs are able to control inmates because they have unlimited authority and their orders carry the full sanctions of prison administration. Rather, Schrag regarded skill in interpersonal relations and the ability to obtain voluntary cooperation as being the crucial factors in securing and maintaining control. A high school diploma is no guarantee of the possession of such skills. Without a training program where officers may acquire the necessary skills, the recruitment of officers with the necessary ability is entirely fortuitous.

There are some data bearing on the CO's role within a security-oriented setting. Wilkins' (1975) pilot project surveyed three institutions and collected data through the use of interview and observation of COs. All the COs considered maintenance

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of inmate security to be the primary function of their role and ranked counseling inmates as secondary. The relative importance of these two tasks varied with each institution. But even in the case of the treatment oriented institution studied, the security role was still prominent.

Williams and Soutar (1984) administered rating scales to assess COs' attitudes towards various dimensions of their role. The sample included 402 COs who were employed at 14 different institutions. The subjects were divided into two groups according to the level of security at each institution, i. e., minimum/medium or maximum. Based upon a discriminant analysis, the authors stated that "COs in maximum institutions had a much more custodial view of their job, with consequently more negative stereotyping of inmates" than their colleagues employed in minimum/medium institutions. "Staff at the minimum/medium security institutions were more treatment oriented and perceived less need for disciplinary control of inmates" (p. 90) than COs working in maximum security institutions.

#### *Studies Involving Personality Assessment*

In 1958, Downey and Signori asserted that "so far as one can discover, there are no attempts to investigate the problem of prison guard selection in terms of interest and personality testing procedures" (p. 234). It did not, however, take an inordinate amount of time before the use of psychological tests were claimed to be an effective means of improving the selection process. It was assumed that these assessment tools effectively identified candidates who had the potential to become "good" COs. The Report of the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Penitentiary Services in Canada advocated personality testing to help ensure that COs had the aptitude and self-discipline required for their job (MacGuigan, 1977). In a review sponsored by the American Bar Association (Goldstein, 1975) a belief in psychological tests as effective screening procedures was further affirmed. All but 4 of the 46 jurisdictions surveyed claimed to test prospective employees. Most, however, did not specify what psychometric instrument they used. Five reported using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI); two of them administered it only after hiring and one only if indicated after a routine psychological interview. One jurisdiction reported the use of the Cattell 16PF during training; 10 used "general information tests" and 3 used in-house CO examinations. No data were presented that would allow an assessment of the efficacy of these methods in selection.

There have been a few studies employing psychological tests that actually reported data as to the tests' effectiveness as screening devices. Psychological tests were used to differentiate between guards rated as "good" by their supervisors and those rated as "poor." For example, Downey and Signori (1958) administered four objective, ability, and personality tests: the Wessman Personnel Classification Test, the Kuder-Preference Record-Vocational Test, the MMPI, and the Manson Evaluation. They found that 14 out of an aggregate 38 scales discriminated between "good" and "poor" job performance-rated COs. On the MMPI significant negative correlations in the range of  $r = -.26$  to  $-.30$  were obtained on the *F* scale, Psychasthenia, Depression, Hostility, and Social Introversion. The highest positive correlations were obtained on the Verbal scale ( $r = .49$ ,  $p < .01$ ) of the Kuder Preference Record Vocational Test. Despite the obtained significance, the above-noted correlations cannot be considered high for practical use.

In another study by Hammer (1968) MMPI subscales did not discriminate between "good" and "poor" COs. Perdue (1964, 1966) reported the use of the Johnson Temperament Analysis in screening applicants for custodial work. This test purports to measure nine basic behavioral characteristics: Nervous, Depressive, Active, Cordial, Sympathetic, Subjective, Aggressive, Critical, and Self-Mastery. The test was administered to the total guard force ( $n = 160$ ) of the institution. From this group, 37 officers with "superior" job performance ratings were selected and the test profiles were compared with the guard force as a whole. Statistical tests of significance were not conducted. Inspection of the results indicated that the differences between the two groups did not appear to be significantly large, and all the subscale scores for both groups were within the average range of published norms for the general population. The author concluded, however, that the "good" COs were distinguished by several traits. "Those employees with better stability on such variables as nervousness and work habits, more self-control and self-mastery and perhaps more reserve and caution in dealing with others, make the better type of custodial officer" (p. 18). Schuerger, Kochevar and Reinwald (1982) administered Cattell's 16PF questionnaire and found that male officers with the highest performance ratings appeared on the 16PF as bright, controlled, conservative and self-sufficient. High rating female officers appeared to have a similar pattern except they were rated as more group-dependent than their male counterparts. The correlations between the

high- and low-rated male and female COs were not significant, and the authors stated that "their results may represent only chance variations in the data" (p. 227).

Shusman, Inwald and Landa (1984) assessed the predictive validity of two psychological inventories, the MMPI and the Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI) for 716 male COs for retention or termination as well as absenteeism, lateness, and formal disciplinary interviews. The IPI consists of 26 scales designed to measure stress reactions and deviant behavior patterns by focusing on absence and lateness problems, alcohol or drug use, and antisocial behaviors. The IPI accurately classified subsequent retention or termination of 73 percent of the recruits. The MMPI classified 63 percent of the COs. Together, the IPI and MMPI correctly assigned 73 percent of the recruits as to job status. Terminated officers had higher means on scales including such items as family conflicts, substance abuse, absenteeism, lateness, disciplinary interviews, trouble with the law, and spouse conflict. The 665 officers who were not terminated were then randomly divided into two groups for cross-validation purposes. The MMPI and IPI were used to predict absenteeism, lateness, and occurrence of disciplinary interviews. On these variables, the IPI produced classification rates in the range of 67 to 69 percent and the MMPI between 60 and 67 percent. Upon cross-validation the classification rates of both tests shrank by several percent. Regardless of the statistical significance of the test results, there still appears to be a large percentage of COs whose behaviors were not correctly identified by these psychological inventories.

The literature pertaining to the recruitment and selection of COs does not appear to be of sufficient quantity or empirical quality to render drawing conclusions about the efficacy of psychological testing in the selection process. It is apparent, as Goldstein has remarked, that the design of many of these studies does not provide an adequate basis for drawing conclusions about the utility of the instruments for future selection purposes. The results, when significant, are not statistically potent. In addition, almost all these studies have been post-dictive. Selection criteria have been based on global qualities, which not only may not have predictive power because they are so general, but appear not to be unique to the job requirements of a CO.

#### *Behavioral Skills as a Basis for Selection*

One of the trends in the field of diagnostics has been to move from the assessment of global per-

sonality traits to the measurement of specific behavioral skills. In the field of industry and organizational psychology, personnel selection criteria and job evaluation are based upon behavioral analysis (Ghorpade and Atchinson, 1980). The United States Department of Labor views a job as a collection of behaviors that comprises the work assignments of one or more workers (O'Leary, 1976). The development of a behaviorally based instrument depends upon the judgment of those employees and supervisors who are closest to the job itself. The result is a pool of specific items describing effective and ineffective behavior in the language of those closest to the job (Szilagyi and Wallace, 1980). The necessary approach toward officer selection should be from a behavioral perspective (McGregor, 1957; Ross and McKay, 1981). This approach is based on the assessment of the skills necessary to perform the actual tasks of the job. Selection should be based on assessment of the applicant's skills and/or potential to acquire such skills through training.

A study conducted by Willis, Jessup, Savage, Cooper and Slesser (1979, a, b) reported data from a preliminary development of a behavioral rating scale designed to measure officer performance on the job. This Correctional Personnel Rating Scale (CPRS) is a broadly based behavioral scale which attempts to measure common CO behaviors that are considered important by correctional personnel.

Forty staff members were interviewed at a minimum security center for young adult offenders. The interviewees were composed of correctional staff, supervisors, and professional staff. They were asked to describe behaviors regarded as important components of the CO's job. Both desirable and undesirable behaviors were requested. A second group composed of senior COs, supervisors, and superintendents were provided with the list of behaviors and were asked to identify a set of categories that would be useful in making employment selection, placement, promotion, and training decisions. Five categories and the definition of these categories were generated. The categories were routine job tasks, leadership, emotional control, and staff and inmate relations. Each of the items were then assigned to a category. Item reliability and internal reliability for each subscale were high, and low correlations were obtained between the individual items and the subscales other than to which they were assigned, therefore indicating that the subscales do measure different aspects of the correctional officer's job.

The result is a rating scale that is composed of the

actual tasks of the CO position, with a behavioral or skill orientation. Unfortunately, this research was never followed up.

### *Perceptions of the CO's Role*

Implicit throughout the literature, although never directly addressed, is that a clearly defined notion of the ideal functioning CO exists. For all practical purposes the ideal CO is a myth; it depends on whose perception the ideal is based—COs, supervisors, or the inmates themselves.

The Willis *et al.* (1979) study approached this issue by interviewing supervisors and COs, and studies such as Perdue's (cf. 1966) ratings of "superior" COs are an indirect assessment of supervisors' views of the appropriate CO role. What are needed are direct assessments of the CO's role by supervisors and a comparison with the assessments of the COs themselves.

There is some literature on inmates' views, mainly descriptive, of effective COs. Glaser (1964) requested inmates to outline the qualities of an effective correctional officer. The inmates described an effective correctional officer as being friendly, accommodating, fair, dependable, predictable, nice, flexible, and sociable. Those officers who were viewed as ineffective were described as being hostile, weak, stupid, rigid, and aggressive. From the study by May (1976, p. 42) a typical inmate quote was: "I act respectable and they give me respect. I want an officer that has understanding, knows how to talk to inmates, helps the inmates as much as he can, an officer who can do his job." Homant (1979) had inmates rate correctional officers on job performance based on a five-point rating scale. They were then requested to describe the qualities of the officers who had received both poor and excellent ratings. The officers who were attributed an excellent rating were described as being "extremely good with making men feel they are genuinely concerned about their welfare and problems. They are fair, consistent and in every sense of the word humane." The officers that received poor ratings were described as being "disrespectful, insensitive and to a large degree without much of a positive personality to display to the resident" (p. 59).

These data, like those reported in the psychological test literature, are of questionable value because of their lack of specificity. A possible resolution to the issue raised in this section is to resort to a behavioral skill assessment contrasting the ratings on specific skill/job dimensions by supervisors, COs, and inmates.

Finally, the perceptions of the CO's role may be

related to individual differences. Age and length of experience in correctional settings are two such examples. We are not advocating that such factors should guide selection policy; that is an unworkable notion. It is, however, a dimension that must be considered in our perception of what a CO should do or be.

### *Situational Factors*

It is worth speculating that the preoccupation with the assessment of general traits in CO selection reflected much of what was occurring in the general area of personality assessment in psychology. The history of diagnostic testing after World War II in North America was oriented towards the assessment of global personality traits, and the tests developed, such as the MMPI and 16P, were very much oriented in this way. Another point of view, which subsequently became much more forceful in the last two decades (cf. Bowers, 1973), was that individuals' behavior may be situationally determined. This debate is still ongoing within the field of psychology. It is, nevertheless, worth alluding to because, with the exception of the Wilkins (1975) and Williams and Soutar (1984) studies, the issue of whether the COs' roles may differ because of the situations they work in has been ignored. It is very much an open question as to whether the characteristics of an effective CO are common across different types of correctional centers whose functional roles may differ markedly. This notion would seem to have at least face validity, as the role of a CO in a small jail would appear to differ, in some ways, from that of a CO in a large maximum security institution or one working in a minimum setting which emphasizes in-house and community programming.

### *Summary and Policy Implications*

The selection and recruitment of COs has focused upon physical attributes with security considerations foremost. Attempts at "sophisticated" assessment of COs have relied on global psychological personality psychometrics which has not turned out to be fruitful.

With such a sparse literature on a corrections topic of so much importance any policy implications would appear to be presumptuous. In the authors' view, despite minimal data, a behavioral skills approach holds the most promise and needs to be pursued vigorously. Even though several important moderating factors have rarely been explored, i.e., situations, at the very least, assessment of COs will join the mainstream of personnel selection research.

Simply put, assessment of COs has fallen far behind that witnessed in other occupational areas. Indeed, when one considers the traditional barriers between management and COs in corrections institutions it is worth speculating that when better definitions of the appropriate role of COs evolve through good basic applied research then the traditional frictions may be mitigated somewhat by a better understanding of what the CO should accomplish.

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