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Document Title: Religiousness and Post-Release Community Adjustment Graduate Research Fellowship – Executive Summary

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Document No.: 184509

Date Received: September 25, 2000

Award Number: 99-IJ-CX-0001

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**“Religiousness and Post-Release Community Adjustment”
Graduate Research Fellowship – Executive Summary
Melvina T. Sumter**

1994-1J-1X-0001

FINAL REPORT *Consent*
Reviewed By: *[Signature]*
8/24/94

INTRODUCTION

During the twentieth century there has been much speculation by scholars in the United States about the impact of religion on prisoners. Despite this interest, to date, only three studies (Clear, Stout, Dammer, Kelly, Hardyman, and Shapiro, 1992; Johnson, 1984; Johnson, Larson, and Pitts, 1997) have examined the effect of religious participation on institutional adjustment and the commitment of infractions within the prison, and only one of these (Johnson et al., 1997) have examined the effect of participation in prison religious programs on prison or post-release re-arrest rates. While the study by Johnson (1984) failed to find any identifiable impact of religious activity on prison adjustment, the study by Clear et al. (1992) found that a prisoner's religious participation had a significant and positive relationship to prison adjustment. Further, Clear et al. (1992) found that age interacts with religious participation in a way that may explain Johnson's earlier failure to find such an impact. A later study by Johnson et al. (1997) found that the level of participation in prison fellowship influenced institutional adjustment. This study also found that prisoners who attended the series of seminars sponsored by the prison fellowship groups of Washington, D.C., ultimately had lower recidivism rates than a statistical control group released during the same time period.

Although few in numbers, these studies suggest that it may be worth continuing the investigation of the impact of religious involvement on prisoners in order to determine the potential benefits of religious programs in terms of their capacity to influence behavior. It is clear, that no study has yet looked at the general impact of religious participation in a systematic manner. Thus, it remains to be determined whether inmates who participate in general religious programs and not just special seminars such as those Johnson studied, do better upon release than others who do not.

The Current Study

This study is an extension of the study by Clear et al. (1992) that examined the relationship between prisoners, prisons and religion, and found that a prisoner's religious participation has a significant effect on prison adjustment. Here, official FBI criminal reports are added to the existing database for the two earlier cohorts. This study evaluates whether the level of an inmate's religiousness is associated with his later adjustment to community living as measured by re-arrest rates. The presence of intervening factors that mediate the influence of an inmate's post-release community adjustment is also assessed. The main research question is, "Does an inmate's religiousness influence post-release community adjustment?"

Methodology

The Study Design

This research is designed to explore the relationship between an inmate's religiousness and their post-release community adjustment as measured by official FBI criminal history reports. The study was carried out by adding official criminal history information to an exiting data base that had been collected by Clear et al. (1992) in an earlier research project, which studied the relationship between religion and a prisoner's adjustment to the correctional setting.

The original study design by Clear et al. (1992) was that of a quasi-experimental design of two groups of prisoners; a religious group and a matched non-religious comparison group. In order to qualify for the religious group, an inmate had to complete at least weekly attendance at religious services or programs during their free time 90 days prior to release and score in the top 20th percentile of a self-report, The "Prisoner Values Survey" (a multifaceted religiousness instrument).¹

¹ The inmate religiousness instrument, a modified and expanded version of the King-Hunt religious belief and practice questions, was developed in conjunction with inmates as a part of previous research conducted by Clear et. al. A full discussion of the development and validation of that instrument can be found in the final report from that research; Clear, Todd, et al. Prisons, Prisoners, and Religion Newark, New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1992. The prison adjustment instrument was developed by Kevin Wright.

The matching group was comprised of inmate volunteers who did not score in the top 20th percentile of the "Prisoners Value Survey" and who did meet the church attendance criterion. Five factors were used to match inmates: date of release, age at time of release, ethnicity, number of prior incarcerations and length of time served. In order for an inmate to be considered a match, he had to be of the same age group and ethnicity, have with a release date within sixty days of that of the religious inmate. He also had to match on either their number of prior incarcerations or length of time served on the current sentence, or both, whenever possible. Analysis by Clear et al. (1992) indicate that the "religious" and "non-religious" groups in this sample are extremely comparable, not only on the selected matching criteria, but also with regard to other factors including educational status, marital status, commitment offense, and prior substance abuse history.

The inmates completed a battery of questionnaires about their background characteristics, religious beliefs and activities, and institutional experience, during the last weeks before their release from prison. Within three months after their release, telephone surveys were conducted with those inmates who could be reached by phone. The telephone survey included questions about the ex-inmates' emotional adjustment to freedom, civic and religious activity, drug and alcohol use and criminal behavior during the three month post-release period. A little more than half of the sample completed the telephone survey.

The original study contained no measures of post-release criminal behavior. This research combines these data with official arrest records. Four types of information are used in this research. The first three types are obtained by the original research team and include 1) an inmate religiousness instrument; 2) a pre-release questionnaire; and 3) a three-month follow-up phone survey. A fourth source of information in this study consists of official criminal history reports, which have been combined with the original data set. This comprehensive data set includes a six

year follow-up period, which makes it possible to directly assess the relationship between an inmate's religiousness in prison and their post-release community adjustment.

The Sample Population

The sample population for this study consists of 321 of 447 male inmates from twelve prisons scattered throughout the country, who participated in a series of studies examining the relationship between prisoners, prison, and religion. Of these inmates, 173 were classified in the earlier study by Clear et al. (1992) as being "religious" and 147 were classified as being "non-religious". The data consist of attitudinal and behavioral measures taken at the time of release, responses to a telephone survey conducted 90 days after release (58 percent of the subjects completed the follow-up survey) and criminal history information following the sample for more than six years after release.

Measures

The measures in the study consist of the principle variables of interest which are the religiousness measure ("religious" and "non-religious" classification), the religion measures (seven dimensions), the dependent variable (the failure measure), and the co-variates, which consist of offender characteristic, risk, and prison adjustment measures.

Failure Measure (Dependent Variable).

In this study the dependent variable is recidivism. Recidivism refers to an offender, who has previously been apprehended, convicted, and presumably rehabilitated by either probation or a prison sentence, has committed another offense (Maltz, 1984). Researchers studying the post-release behavior of prisoners employ a number of different recidivism measures, including arrests, technical violations and/or revocations, convictions, or imprisonment (Hepburn and Albonetti, 1994; Maltz, 1984; Schmidt and Witte, 1988). Research indicates that the best and most practical

definitions of recidivism are those based on rearrest (Maltz, 1984; Shinnar and Shinnar, 1975; Visher, Lattemore, and Linster, 1991). Therefore, recidivism is operationalized in the present study as rearrest. Re-arrest refers to any arrest for a felony or misdemeanor and is dichotomized as “rearrest” or “no-rearrest.” This information is gathered from the criminal history records (“rap” sheets) obtained from the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) which in most instances, contain both state and national data. The date and most serious offense incarcerated for the re-arrest is recorded along with other arrest data. Recidivism is measured by following the study participants from January 1991 to August 1997, a follow-up period of 80 months. ²

Religion Measures (Principle Variable of Interest).

Criminologists and other social sciences have not been able to agree on what religion is, much less operationalize the concept (Comstock, 1995; Cunningham et al., 1995; Glock, 1973; James, 1936; Stark, 1984). As a result, they have not been able to develop a construct to measure what it means to be religious. Therefore, no one knows with complete assurance how “religious” a person is. Religion is a complex construct that includes belief and behaviors that are often internal and often independent of a person’s external religious practices, such as church attendance and participation in various religious activities. Intrinsic feelings about religion may not be well-indicated by what a person verbally expresses. Although development of a religious construct may be poorly represented by self-reports, at this point, we have no other means to assess “religiosity” other than referencing what people themselves say.

In this study, religion is operationalized in two ways. First, following the lead of Clear et al. (1992), the degree of “religiousness” is represented by the variable group, which is the total score inmates

² Typically in recidivism studies researchers and practitioners expect to see time to failure models as the statistical method of data analysis. There are two reasons why time to failure models are not used in this study. First, the follow-up period for this study is six years and eight months, which considerably lessens the problem of right-censored status changes. Second, the data for the date of failure is not available for every case.

received on the “Prisoner Value Survey” (a multidimensional religious measurement instrument, which is a series of situations in the prison designed to test an inmates religious sincerity). This variable distinguishes the “religious” from the “non-religious” inmate; the “religious” inmates are the group of inmates who score in the top 20% of the instrument scale and meet the church attendance requirement discussed earlier.

Second, earlier research documents that the concept of religion has several different dimensions which could have a unique relationship to deviance (Clear et al., 1992; Cornwall, 1989). It has also been suggested that a single indicator may be a poor predictor of religion (Ellis, 1985; Johnson, 1985; Knudten and Knudten, 1971; Tittle and Welch, 1983). Moreover, “multiple dimensional measures of religiousness are generally considered preferable to unidimensional measures because they tap a variety of aspects of religiousness beyond mere participation” (Clear et al., 1992, pg. 10). Therefore, in addition to the overall religiousness measure, this study employed the seven dimensions of religion identified by Comstock (1995) to measure religion. These dimensions basically characterize the major world religions, as well as those religions that have been rejected by mainstream society. These measures were operationalized by multiple indicators which are taken from the “Prisoners Values Survey” measuring numerous aspects of the offender’s intrinsic and extrinsic religious beliefs and practices. The indicators from the “Prisoner Values Survey” were grouped into the analogous dimensions and factored to determine which indicators from the groupings are measuring the scope in question. The first religion measure is the self-reported religiousness measure and the other religion measures are the seven measures of religion developed from the factor analysis. Appendix A presents an overview of the indicators, which were factored to construct religion measures and a description of the religiousness measure.

Co-Variates.

The co-variates in this study were identified in the literature on (1) religion and (2) failure upon release from prison. The co-variate measures fall into three categories, risk measures, offender characteristics, and prison adjustment. The measures for the co-variates were taken from the self-report pre-release questionnaire and post-release follow-up interview. Appendix A presents an overview of the indicators which were factored to construct the co-variates for each category

DISCUSSION

This study has explored the relationship between an inmate's religiousness and their post-release community adjustment. The sample consisted of 321 male inmates who were serving time in twelve prisons scattered throughout the country. The discussion of the data analyses focus on the logistic regression results consisted of estimating a series of equations in which variables in the study were placed into logical groupings and each model was then estimated on the dependent variable of re-arrest.

The first model estimated the impact of religion measures on re-arrest. Here the religion measures of Belief, Society, Personal Identity, Morality, and History were not found to be statistically significant. In contrast, the religion measures of Transcend and Ritual were statistically significant, with Transcend being the most important determinant of recidivism. These results may be explained by findings from the Clear et al. (1992) study which reveals that many of the inmates spoke of being "born again" and consistently spoke of the presence of God in their lives, who they believed was now in control of their lives. This presence of God resulted in a more personal relationship with Him, which in turn increased their self-awareness and sense of personal power. According to these inmates, religion provided them with the opportunity to atone for their past misdeeds and seek forgiveness from

God, which gave their life a new meaning. This belief in God was strengthened and reinforced through ritual participation in various religious sacraments and activities. Moreover, participation in religious programs reinforced and strengthened the inmate's religious commitment and belief, which in turn, sanctified the established norms of conventional society. Hence, religious teaching delineated the moral prescriptions the inmates are expected to live by. The inmates began to accept responsibility for their past misbehavior, thereby, beginning the process of reconciliation with circumstances and events that lead to their criminal activity. It appears then that religion helps inmates to understand their shortcomings and provides them with a sense of purpose and direction to live a more fulfilling, productive, law abiding life.

The second model estimated the impact of the offender characteristic measures on re-arrest. In this model, the offender characteristics of race, marital status, and educational level were not found to be statistically significant, however, faith appears to be statistically significant. These results indicate that offenders who identified themselves as being Protestants were less likely to recidivate than offenders who were not Protestants. This finding may also be explained by the Clear et al. (1992) study which revealed that in the prison setting, the Pentecostal religion orientations tended to ameliorate the prison environment. In the prisons that were studied, the religious orientation of Christians appeared to be orthodox and doctrinaire. Thus, inmates attended church service, prayer meetings, evening Bible study, and musical performances, as prescribed by their religious doctrine. It may be possible that the strong moral and ethical tone of Christian fundamentalist which encourage literal interpretation of the Bible and strict adherence to legal and moral codes fostered movement away from criminal activity.

The third model estimated the impact of the risk measures on re-arrest. In this model, the risk measures for the most serious offense inmates were incarcerated and the length of time served on the

sample sentence were not statistically significant. Risk measures of the age of the offender at release from the sample sentence and the total number of prior arrests were statistically significant, which is consistent with findings from prior research and theory. Moreover, the reduction in arrest rates for released inmates are largely the result of maturation effects in which case as inmates get older, they burn out and are unable to maintain their previous lifestyles (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Irvin and Austin, 1997). Crime rates increase rapidly during early adolescence, peak in the teenage years, and gradually and steadily decline thereafter, a process described by as the aging-out phenomenon. Crime decreases with age, the researchers add, even among people who commit frequent offenses. They argue that all offenders commit fewer crimes, as they grow older because they have less strength, less mobility, and so on. These findings may also be explained by a lack of maturity on behalf of young offenders who may not have yet experienced the suffering and humiliation the more seasoned and experience offender has. Therefore, the young offenders have not fully internalized the harsh realities of prison life. Finally, these findings may be explained by the inexperience of the young offenders who are more apt to commit crimes such as purse snatching or drug offenses and commit more crimes in groups, which are more easily detectable.

The fourth model estimated the impact of the prison adjustment measures on re-arrest. In this model, the prison adjustment measures for, the number of disciplinary confinements, the prison adjustment construct, and participation in other prison programs, were not statistically significant. However, the prison adjustment measure of self-esteem was statistically significant. These findings may also be explained by the findings from the Clear et al. (1992) study. Moreover, these findings are perhaps a reflection of increased self-worth and awareness the inmate experienced, as a result of his spiritual development and involvement in religious activities. It may be that religion provided the inmate an with an opportunity to deal with core issues that lead his current situation, which in turn,

facilitated the development of a sense of inner peace and a greater sense of self-worth. These inmate characteristics differed significantly from those traits initially exhibited when they were first incarcerated.

The final logistic regression model consisted of the significant predictors from Models 1 - 4, Ritual, Transcend, AgeRP, Priors, Faith, and Esteem, along with the measure for religiousness, and re-arrest. Overall, the results indicate that the total number of prior arrests and age of the offender at release from the sample sentence are the most significant predictors of recidivism, with the age of the offender at release from the sample sentence being the most important determinant of recidivism. Another significant finding was that inmates with higher levels of self-esteem were more likely to be re-arrested than inmates with lower levels of self-esteem. The results also indicate that a significant relationship exists between belief in the supernatural and participation in religious programs and post-release community adjustment. Moreover, increasing participation in religious programs, as measured by a self-report questionnaire, was associated with lower levels of re-arrest rates, as measured by official FBI criminal history reports. Similarly, an inmate's belief in the supernatural (as measured by the same self-report questionnaire), is also significantly related to the number of times the inmate was re-arrested. Thus, higher levels of religious participation and belief in the supernatural are associated with fewer post-release arrests. However, the results indicated no difference in the recidivism rates of "religious" and "non-religious" inmates.

The research results provided by this study are consistent with the empirical studies assessed since 1985, which provide evidence of a relationship between religion and deviance. Like these other studies, the findings here indicate that religious participation (which is operationalized in this study as Ritual) and belief in God (which is operationalized in this study as Transcendence) are associated with

deviant/criminal behavior. Also, like the empirical studies assessed since 1985, these findings indicate that Ritual is the most significant determinant of re-arrest among the religion measures.

Although, these research findings indicate that Ritual and Transcendence are significant predictors of re-arrest, these measures are not the most important determinants of re-arrest. However, the findings provide evidence that this relationship between religion and deviance is not spurious or inconclusive as suggested by some criminologists. Moreover, even when controlling for the risk measures (AgeRP and Priors) and the offender characteristic measure of Esteem, the effects of the religion measures do not diminish. Not only do the effects of the measure remain in the multivariate analysis when controlling for other factors, but, contrary to what some criminologists have argued, the effects are not weak to moderate, at least for the measure of Ritual. Moreover, in the final equation, the p-value for Ritual is .01 which indicates that these results are not weak, and therefore, not inconclusive.

Conclusion

In the past several decades, increased attention has been paid to the possibility of religion reducing criminal behavior and recidivism rates among inmates (Clear et al., 1992; Johnson, 1984, 1987; Johnson et al., 1997; O'Connor, 1996). A growing body of research suggests that religion decreases the risk of deviant behavior (Ellis, 1985; Johnson, 1984; Sumter and Clear, 1998; Title and Welch, 1983). This relationship is of special concern to criminologists, correctional administrators, and public policy officials, who continue to search for ways to deal with the enormous problem of recidivism among former inmates. One response has been to find rehabilitation effects in the form of programs such as vocational training, job enhancement skills, educational enhancement, self-betterment programs, and recently, religion.

This study has examined the impact of prisoners' religiousness on their post-release community adjustment. In the multi-variate analyses, the following variables were found to be significantly related

to successful community adjustment: the total number of prior arrests, the age of the offender at release from the sample sentence, participation in religious programs, the level of self-esteem of the offender, and the belief in the supernatural. Variables that were not significantly related to successful community adjustment included the religious constructs of Belief, Morality, Society, History, and Personal Identity. Also, the educational status of the inmate, his race, and his marital status, were not statistically significant. In addition, the length of time served on the sample sentence or the most serious offense the inmate had been incarcerated, were not statistically significant. Finally, the prison adjustment construct, participation in other prison programs, or the number of disciplinary confinements, were not statistically significant.

Overall, the multi-variate analyses indicate that being a young offender, having a high level of self-esteem, and having an extensive prior arrest history, are significant predictors of recidivism. Also, a relationship appears to exist between participation in religious programs and belief in the supernatural and post-release community adjustment. Those inmates who report higher levels of religious participation and belief in the supernatural were less likely to be arrested after release from the sample sentence, whether classified "religious" or "non-religious." The analyses indicate very little difference in the overall reduction of recidivism for inmates based on the classification as "religious" or "non-religious." Moreover, there is a small, but greater chance for "non-religious" inmates to be arrested than "religious inmates," but this difference is not statistically significant. Based on these results, it is clear that the classification of religiousness of an offender does not influence recidivism. Considering these findings, it cannot be concluded that claiming to be or being classified as being religious influences the recidivism rate of the offenders in this study. This is perhaps because the religiousness measure is a self-reported measure and that it does not actually measure religion. This assumption is

supported by a visual inspection of the correlation matrix, which indicates that the religiousness measure is barely correlated with other religion measures and the variable, Faith.

Therefore, these findings indicate that religious programs may be important in the prison setting and should be considered as a potential rehabilitation tool for all inmates. However, administrative decisions such as early release, parole release, or work release or custody advancement, should not be made on the basis of an inmate claiming to be religious, since this classification does not appear to predict program success.

APPENDIX A

Religiousness and Religion Measures

Religiousness Measure

X₁ Group The religiousness measure which consist of an control and comparison group. This variable has two categories: 0 = religious group and 1 = non-religious group

Religion Measures

Belief Religious ideas that the offenders hold to be true. The indicators are: 1) I try to bring my religion into all that I do; and 2) My religious beliefs are what really lie behind everything I do. The index ranges from 1 to 10.

X₃ Transcend Religious belief in the “extra-worldly” as a dimension of the holy, the divine, the supernatural, the extra mundane, the world of gods and goddesses, etc. The indicators are: 1) I believe the word of God is revealed in the scriptures; 2) I believe God watches over me and is the one I must answer to; and 3) I believe God showed himself to man through the prophets. The index ranges from 1 to 15.

X₄ History Religious tradition (upbringing) of the offender. The indicators are: 1) Religion was talked about in the home while growing up; and 2) How often the offender attended religious service while growing up. The index ranges from 1 to 3.

X₅ Ritual Religious activities performed by the offender with formal or informal rules or customs which reinforces the offender’s religious beliefs and values. The indicators are: 1) During the past year, how often have you gone to services of your religious faith? 2) How often do you study books for other writings about your faith? 3) How often do you read the Scriptures of your faith? 4) How often do you make a contribution to your religious faith? And 5) How often do you take some active part in your religious service: reading, speaking, singing, praying, etc. The index ranges from 4 to 20.

X₆ Periden Religion provides the offender with a sense or purpose and meaning for his life experiences. The indicators are: 1) Religion is most important to me because it gives me a better sense of myself; and 2) Belonging to a religious group gives me a better sense of myself. The index ranges from 1 to 10.

X ₇	Morality	Religious doctrine prescribes prescriptions that the offender must do in order to obtain salvation. The indicators are: 1) You have been given the job in the commissary ...other inmate workers made inmate customers pay them to guarantee their orders. How likely would you do this? and 2) Job which gives you the chance to steal things that you can sell for cigarettes. How likely would you do this? The index ranges from 1 to 8.
X ₈	Society	Religion serves to reinforce the unity and stability of society by supporting social control, enhancing established values, and providing a means to overcome guilt and alienation. The indicators are: 1) I keep up with what my religious group is doing and have some influence on its decisions; and 2) Religious services gives me a lot of satisfaction. The index ranges from 1 to 10.

Co-variates

Offender Characteristics:

X ₉	Race	The race of the offender. This variable has two categories: 0 = white and 1 = non-white
X ₁₀	Marital	The marital status reported by the offender. This variable has two categories: 0 = non single and 1 = single
X ₁₁	Educate	Self-report educational level of the offender. This variable has two categories: 0 = some high school or less and 1 = completed high school or more
X ₁₂	Faith	The religious affiliation reported by the offender. This variable has two categories: 0 = Protestant and 1 = Non-Protestant

Risk Measures:

X ₁₃	Priors	The total number of prior arrests before the sample sentence. The numbers of arrests range from 0 to 24.
X ₁₄	Length	How much time served on the sample sentence rounded to the nearest month. The numbers of months range from 1 to 245.
X ₁₅	AgeRP	The age of the offender at release from prison on the sample sentence. The average age is 29.
X ₁₆	Offense	The most serious offense the offender was incarcerated for the sample sentence. This variable has three categories: 0 = drug offense, 1 = person offense, and 2 = property offense.

Prison Adjustment:

X ₁₇	Priadjust	Construct which indicates the offender's adjustment to prison. The indicators are: 1) how often do you feel comfortable around inmates here; and 2) how often do you feel uncomfortable around the staff. The index ranges from 2 to 10.
X ₁₈	Esteem	Construct which indicates the offender's level of self-esteem while in prison. The indicators are: 1) I take a positive attitude towards myself; and 2) I am satisfied with myself. The index ranges from 2 to 10.
X ₁₉	Otherpar	Participation in other prison programs by the offender. This variable has two categories: 0 = no and 1 = yes.
X ₂₀	Confine	How many times the offender reported he was placed in disciplinary confinement. This variable has three categories. 0 = none, 1 = 1-2 times, and 2 = 3 or more times.

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