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**Exploring the Link Between Visits and Parole Success:
A Survey of Prison Visitors**

by

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Abstract

An exploratory survey of visitors to two men's prisons finds that the visitors differ in some significant ways from prisoners' families previously described in the literature. The results raise some questions about the correlation that has been established between visits and post-release success and provoke suggestions for in-depth research into visitor/prisoner relationships.

Exploring the Link Between Visits and Parole Success: A Survey of Prison Visitors

The link between parole success and the maintenance of family ties during incarceration has long been accepted. All available empirical evidence supports this relationship. Ohlin (1954) and Glaser (1964) both found that prisoners with supportive families were far more likely to successfully complete parole than were prisoners without families. Holt and Miller characterized this relationship as “strong and consistent” in their California study (1972: 5). While both Glaser and Ohlin included letters and telephone calls as measures of “active” family interest, the California study used only visits and found the strongest relationship between active families and parole success. Others have found that visits had a positive effect on the prisoners’ institutional behavior (Scudder, 1954; Borgman, 1985).

This body of literature has formed the basis for recommendations for change in visiting policies and for a growing perception among prison officials that family visits are an essential component of the rehabilitative process. The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals urged correctional authorities to “encourage visitors rather than merely tolerating them” (1973: 68). Some years later the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections (1981) deemed contact visits essential for accreditation and called for no limits on either visit length or number of visits except where schedule, personnel or space restraints require them.

Many corrections officials have responded to these recommendations by maximizing visiting opportunities through larger visiting rooms, longer visits and generous visiting schedules (Schafer, 1991).

The Advisory Commission, in concert with many others, also recommended that services be provided to visitors in order to encourage them to visit and to assist in adjusting to the incarceration of the family member. A number of such services have

been described in the literature, including: subsidization of the visit (National Advisory Commission, 1973; Weintraub, 1976; Fenlon, 1972; Homer, 1979; Burton, 1988); marriage or family counseling (Fenton, 1959; Neussendorfer, 1969; Stollery, 1970; Weintraub, 1976; Fishman & Alissi, 1979; et al.); and parenting programs for prisoners and their spouses (Bourdouris, 1985; Giveans, 1988; Lowenstein, 1986; Harris, 1988; Herrmann-Keeling, 1988). All of these services are intended to strengthen the family unit and, from the perspective of the corrections officials who support them, to assist in the rehabilitation of the prisoners under their care.

However, neither the research which establishes the link between visiting and parole success nor the recommendations designed to exploit the link provide an explanation for the correlation between visits and parole success. Studies of prisoners' families might provide an answer, but most of these focus on the marital relationship or on the impact of the husband's incarceration on his wife and children. The emphasis has been on the social and economic strains resulting from the incarceration of the breadwinner (e.g., Schneller, 1975; Hinds, 1981; et al.). Few focus on the visit or its importance to the visitor or the prisoner. When visiting was mentioned, the inability of the wife to visit her husband was stressed. Morris (1965) found that the primary reason that wives of prisoners in England did not visit was the expense involved. Homer (1979) estimated that transportation costs for a trip from New York City to the state prison in Attica would be "176.25% of the [welfare] wife's total weekly income" (p. 50). In a special issue of *Nurturing Today*, the visit is addressed in terms of inmate parents' rights to visitation with their children (Terrizzi, 1988) or on visiting programs which enhance the incarcerated parent's relationship with her child (e.g., Bloom, 1988; Brown, 1988; et al.).

Fishman and Alissi used the phrase 'natural support systems' in the title of their article on prisoner/family relationships (1979). Common sense suggests that the existence of a natural support system will provide the newly released prisoner with

the resources needed while he or she adjusts to life “outside,” and this support increases the parolee’s chances of successfully completing the parole period. The contribution of visits to this process is not entirely clear. There are several possibilities. The visit may serve as a reminder of the world outside the prison and as an antidote to institutionalization. The writings of prisoners suggest that this may be an important consideration. Conscientious objector Alfred Hassler wrote:

I had a measure of how quickly a man becomes engrossed with the life in prison when Dot visited me. . . . Today, after a month of not having seen her or anyone else from the outside world, she brought [a reminder] that an outside world does exist—and I needed it as much. (1954: 62)

The visit permits role continuance and role practice and thus may smooth the adjustment of both family and prisoner to his release. It may be that a demonstration of support during incarceration reflects a promise of continued support after release. It may mean only that the family that has the resources to visit regularly has the resources to provide assistance to the prisoner during the transition from prison to community. It may also reflect a degree of family loyalty and cohesion which predated the period of incarceration and will outlast it.

An explanation of the relationship between visits and parole success is not to be found by analyzing families who cannot or do not visit. Nor can it be found in descriptions of pilot programs designed to increase parent/child contacts. However, information about people who do visit prisoners can provide some insight. This paper is a preliminary effort to explore prisoner/visitor relationships and to provide a basis for more intensive research into the link between visits and parole success.

Prison visiting is not pleasant. Many prisons have crowded visiting areas, and many have limited visiting hours and restricted the length of the visit (Schafer, 1978, 1991). The processing of visitors is not always efficient, and sometimes visitors are denied visits because of inadequate identification, inappropriate clothing or their behavior during processing (Schafer, 1989). The distance traveled for a visit may

require expenditure of considerable time, money and effort. Nonetheless, in spite of the hardships involved, many prisoners' families visit frequently and regularly. This paper presents profiles of these visitors as part of a preliminary effort to provide a basis for examining the dynamics of the prisoner/visitor relationship and the importance of that relationship to release success. Only adult visitors are profiled because they have the freedom to choose to continue or to terminate their relationship with the prisoner beyond the period of his incarceration and because they have control over the expenditure of time and resources for both visits and for post-release support. Although the information was collected some time ago, it is still instructive.

Research Method

A survey of visitors was conducted on consecutive summer weekends in 1976 in two state prisons for adult male felons. One is a very old maximum-security, "end-of-line" prison which is located in a medium-sized city in the central part of the state and is easily accessible. It is within walking distance of train and bus depots and is on a city bus line. The other, a new medium-security prison, is in a less populous region, houses less serious offenders, is several miles from any city of size, is surrounded by farm land, and is on a two-lane state highway. Though an inter-city bus does stop on the highway, the line serves only one large city. For most families the prison is accessible only by automobile.

Visiting policies at the two prisons differed. The centrally located (urban) prison had limited visiting facilities and permitted contact visits on weekends only. Each visitor could stay for two hours. The less accessible (rural) prison permitted contact visits seven days a week for six hours per day and limited visit length only when the number of visitors was so high that all could not be accommodated. Summer

weekends were peak visiting periods at both institutions and were therefore chosen for distribution of the survey questionnaires.

A total of 378 survey questionnaires (184 at the urban prison, 194 at the rural one) were returned. The numbers do not reflect the total visitor volume since some refused to accept the questionnaires and others failed to return them. The questionnaire was simple and could be completed quickly. Though a few questions asked for written answers, most required only checkmarks. Pencils were distributed with the forms. Since the survey was exploratory, it sought very general information about visiting and about the visitors themselves.

Survey Results

Fourteen of the 378 questionnaires were eliminated from the survey results because they were completed by one-time visitors (members of the clergy, volunteers and one lawyer) leaving an N of 364. The total visitor profile is presented in Table 1. As might be assumed at institutions which confine only men, women were the largest number of visitors, with “female friends” constituting the largest category of women. Although they are not tied by blood or legal bonds to the prisoner, this group includes some who are potential sources of release support, and hence the group is included in the discussion.

Table 1. Prison Visitors by Facility

N = 364

Relationship to prisoner	Urban prison		Rural prison		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Wife	31	17.2	30	16.3	61	16.8
Parents (total)	(34)	(18.9)	(48)	(26.1)	(82)	(22.5)
Mother	26	14.4	29	15.8	55	15.1
Father	8	4.4	19	10.3	27	7.4
Siblings (total)	(21)	(11.7)	(29)	(15.8)	(50)	(13.7)
Sister	11	6.1	15	8.1	26	7.1
Brother	10	5.5	14	7.6	24	6.6
Child (unaccompanied)	3	1.7	1	0.5	4	1.1
Other relative	12	6.7	10	5.4	22	6.0
Female friend	72	40.0	58	31.5	130	35.7
Male friend	7	3.9	8	4.3	15	4.1
TOTAL	180		184		364	

Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding

The parents of prisoners constituted the second largest category of visitors, but there were more wives in the sample than mothers and nearly twice as many mothers as fathers. Siblings often accompanied parents and represented the next largest group of visitors.

“Other” relatives included grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and a fair representation of in-laws. This group also tended to accompany the prisoner’s nearer relatives. This category was so heterogeneous that it could not be meaningfully profiled, and no single group within it was large enough for separate consideration. The same was true of prisoners’ children. While many young children were present at visits, not all were the children of the prisoners. There were only four adult children in the sample, too few to be included in the analysis.

Four categories of visitors are profiled: wives, parents, siblings and “female friends,” an N of 323. The last is included because they have the potential to be important sources of parole support. (According to Schwartz and Zeisel (1976), who criticized both the attitudes of parole officers toward common-law relationships and those parole rules which prohibit cohabitation, some common-law relationships are stronger than many marriages.)

Since the opportunity to practice familial roles is important to the maintenance of family relationships, frequency of contact is a key to the strength of family unity. The frequency of visit by relationship is presented separately in Table 2 so that comparisons can be made. It should be noted that the information is self-reported and may reflect the respondents’ intentions to visit rather than the actual number of visits made, or perceptions of frequency rather than a precise count.

Wives and female friends were the most regular visitors: 77 percent of the wives and 66.2 percent of the female friends visited at least once a week; and 88.5 percent of the wives and 83.9 percent of female friends reported visiting at least every other week. Parents visited frequently: approximately one-third of the fathers (33.3%) and

Table 2. Visiting Frequency by Relationship

N = 323

Frequency	Wives		Mothers		Fathers		Siblings		Female friends		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
At least once a week	47	77.0	18	32.7	9	33.3	13	26.0	86	66.2	173	53.6
Every two weeks	7	11.5	20	36.4	8	29.6	9	18.0	23	17.7	67	20.7
Every month	4	6.6	11	20.0	6	22.2	13	26.0	8	6.2	42	13.0
Every two months	1	1.6	2	3.6	–	–	5	10.0	4	3.1	12	3.7
Four times a year	–	–	2	3.6	2	7.4	4	8.0	1	0.8	9	2.8
Two times a year	–	–	1	1.8	1	3.7	2	4.0	–	–	4	1.2
Once a year	1	1.6	1	1.8	1	3.7	–	–	3	2.3	6	1.9
No response	1	1.6	–	–	–	–	4	8.0	5	3.8	10	3.1
TOTAL	61		55		27		50		130		323	

Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

mothers (32.7%) visited at least once a week. Prisoners' siblings visited less frequently: only 34.6 percent of the sisters and 16.6 percent of the brothers visited this often. Since the prisoners' siblings may accompany his parents on a visit, it may be that they were more likely to alternate visits with other brothers and sisters.

Many factors influence the frequency with which families can visit: distance, time, access to transportation, and such personal characteristics as age, economic status, and number of children. The prison's accessibility and its visiting policies also have an impact on frequency of visit. The vast majority of all respondents visited at least once a month: 95.1 percent of wives, 89.1 percent of the mothers, 85.2 percent of fathers, 70.0 percent of the brothers and sisters, and 90.0 percent of the female friends. When the obstacles to visiting are considered, the visitors in the sample appear to constitute a promising group for a preliminary examination of prisoner/family relationships.

Prisoners' Wives

Because the wives of the prisoners have been the subjects of most of the reported studies of prisoners' families and are the relatives most likely to be included in family counseling programs, their responses are of special interest. They are profiled in Table 3.

Table 3. Profile of Visitors: Wives of Prisoners

N = 61

Age	N	%	Mode of transportation to prison	N	%
Less than 21	3	4.9	Walk	2	3.3
21-25	26	42.6	Private car	43	70.5
26-30	16	26.2	Bus	6	9.8
31-40	14	23.0	Train	8	13.1
41-50	1	1.6	Airplane	1	1.6
51-60	1	1.6	Cab	1	1.6
Over 60	-	-			

Employment status	N	%	Number of children	N	%
Employed	28	45.9	None	14	22.9
Unemployed	6	9.8	One	12	19.7
Public assistance	23	37.7	Two	17	27.9
No response	4	6.6	Three	7	11.5
			Four	3	4.9
			Five	2	3.3
			Six	2	3.3
			No response	4	6.6

Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Employment status and children	Number of children								Total
Employment status	None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	No response	Total
Employed	9	7	7	3	2	-	-	-	28
Unemployed	4	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	6
Public assistance	1	4	9	4	1	2	2	-	23
No response	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4
TOTAL	14	12	17	7	3	2	2	4	61

Prisoner's wives have been characterized in the literature as living in urban areas with their minor children and supported in large measure by public assistance. The wives in this sample were not atypical. They were young, as might be expected, since the average age of prisoners was 26 in one prison, 28 in the other. Nearly three-quarters (73.8%) were thirty or younger and only two (3.3%) were over forty. Forty-three of the wives (70.5%) had children, most of whom were dependent minors. Of these 43, 22 (51.2%) were on public assistance, while 19 (44.2%) were employed. Since more than a third of the wives with children were employed, more of the prisoners' wives in the total sample had jobs than were on public assistance: 28 (45.9%) were employed; 23 (37.7%) received welfare payments; and six (9.8%) indicated that they were unemployed but did not check the welfare payments box. The number of children seemed to be a factor in the source of income: employed wives had an average of 1.4 children while wives on public assistance had an average of 2.6 children.

In this, the visiting wives did not fit the typical characterization, but if Homer (1979) is correct in assessing the difficulties of visiting for wives on welfare, these women should constitute a smaller percentage of the actual visitors.

The visiting wives were typically living with their minor children in largely urban areas, but they tended not to be on welfare and were not as precluded from frequent and regular visits by stringent budgets. Their jobs were usually low-paying “pink collar” ones.

Parents and Siblings

Parents are a very likely source of release support for their convicted sons and constituted a large number of the visitors to prisoners (22.5% of the total). They are profiled in Table 4. Since there were twice as many mothers as fathers in the sample, it was hypothesized that marital status might explain the difference; i.e., fathers might accompany their wives on visits but divorced fathers often lose touch with their children. Divorced mothers, on the other hand, are the most likely parent to have raised the children and to continue the relationship into adulthood. Certainly, the large proportion of visiting fathers who were married (88.8%) suggests that this may be the case, but 74.5 percent of the mothers were married and only 7.3 percent were divorced. The numbers are too small to be conclusive, but an intact family may be a factor in the unity of the prisoner’s family. Six mothers and one father did not respond to this questionnaire item.

Few of the parents were limited by age or infirmity from frequent visits. Half of the parents were fifty or younger; 70 percent were sixty or younger. The frequency of the visit appeared to depend more on distance than on age. Most of the parents (87.8%) visited at least once a month. Of those who visited less frequently (N = 10), five lived outside the state; one married couple traveled more than 1000 miles four

Table 4. Profile of Visitors: Parents of Prisoners

N = 82
(55 mothers; 27 fathers)

Marital status	Mothers		Fathers		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Single	–	–	–	–	–	–
Married	41	74.5	24	88.9	65	79.3
Divorced	4	7.3	–	–	4	4.9
Widowed	4	7.3	2	7.4	6	7.3
No response	6	10.9	1	3.7	7	8.5
Age						
31–40	3	5.5	–	–	3	3.7
41–50	26	47.3	15	55.6	41	50.0
51–60	17	30.9	9	33.3	26	31.7
Over 60	5	9.1	3	11.1	8	9.8
No response	4	7.3	–	–	4	4.9
Employment status						
Employed	22	40.0	20	74.1	42	51.2
Unemployed	18	32.7	4	14.8	22	26.8
Public assistance	6	10.9	–	–	6	7.3
No response	9	16.4	3	11.1	12	14.6
Number of children						
One	3	5.5	5	18.5	8	9.8
Two	10	18.2	4	14.8	14	17.1
Three	4	7.3	4	14.8	8	9.8
Four	6	10.9	3	11.1	9	11.0
Five	1	1.8	1	3.7	2	2.4
Six	4	7.3	1	3.7	5	6.1
Seven	2	3.6	–	–	2	2.4
Eight	1	1.8	–	–	1	1.2
Nine	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ten	2	3.6	1	3.7	3	3.7
No response	22	40.0	8	29.6	30	36.6
TOTAL	55		27		82	

Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

times yearly for a visit; one mother traveled 500 miles to visit this often; and one couple visited twice a year from their home over 350 miles from the institution.

As a group, the visiting parents lived as traditional families. Over half of the parents were employed (40% of the mothers and 74.1% of the fathers). Most of the unemployed mothers were married (88.9%) and many of them wrote “housewife” by the employment item. A very small percentage of the mothers indicated that they received public assistance (10.9%).

The visiting siblings of the prisoners also reflected traditional values. This is not surprising, since many accompanied their parents on visits to their brothers. The siblings are profiled in Table 5. Older siblings tended to be employed, younger ones

in school. A good portion of the adult siblings who visited were married (42%), but more (48%) were single. Since, as a group, the visiting sisters and brothers were quite young (66% were 25 or younger), this is not surprising. The profile suggests that this group was not only young, but also energetic: 60 percent were employed, and none of the visiting siblings checked the welfare box. Although young, this group of siblings could provide an important source of release support for their imprisoned brother who may serve several years before being paroled. Regular contact increases the likelihood of this support.

Table 5. Profile of Visitors: Siblings of Prisoners

N = 50
(26 sisters; 24 brothers)

Marital status	Sisters		Brothers		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Single	11	42.3	13	54.2	24	48.0
Married	14	53.8	7	29.2	21	42.0
Divorced	1	3.8	2	8.3	3	6.0
Widowed	–	–	1	4.2	1	2.0
No response	–	–	1	4.2	1	2.0
Age						
Less than 21	8	30.8	4	16.7	12	24.0
21–25	9	34.6	12	50.0	21	42.0
26–30	5	19.2	4	16.7	9	18.0
31–40	1	3.8	3	12.5	4	8.0
41–50	1	3.8	–	–	1	2.0
51–60	–	–	–	–	–	–
Over 60	2	7.7	1	4.2	3	6.0
Employment status						
Employed	15	57.7	15	62.5	30	60.0
Unemployed	9	34.6	7	29.2	16	32.0
No response	2	7.7	2	8.3	4	8.0
TOTAL	26		24		50	

Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Female Friends

The degree to which one can consider the next category of visitors as a potential source of release support is open to question. Women visitors to men’s prisons are of several types. Some are common-law partners of long standing who hope to continue their relationship after the prisoner’s release. They may be promising sources of

emotional and financial support during the parole period. They are among the most loyal visitors, traveling frequently and regularly to the prison. Another type of female friend is the woman who occasionally accompanies a relative on visits to the prison. She is not likely to be a part of a future support network.

Between these two groups are others who may or may not continue the relationship with the prisoner they visit. Some of the women in the sample are volunteer prison visitors who have formed friendships with prisoners through religious or civic groups. They visit regularly, but not frequently, and may provide continued friendship and support after the prisoner's release. Another portion of this group falls into a category which might be termed "prison-attracted women." These women seldom have relationships with men in the free community and seem to prefer relationships with incarcerated men. Some meet one prisoner through visits with another and some form liaisons with prisoner after prisoner. Those who were identified as members of this group during the research period arrived in a holiday mood. Two women who came together changed to party dresses in the visitors' restrooms and seemed to view the visit as a pleasant social affair.

Since the survey instrument was not designed to differentiate among these visitor types, all female friends are profiled in Table 6. This is by far the largest category of visitor, but because of the different kinds of relationships represented the profile is not very revealing. They were nevertheless an interesting group. They were young; more than half were 25 years old or younger. Not surprisingly they were also unmarried: 84.6 percent were either single (58.5%), divorced (24.6%) or widowed (1.5%). Fewer had children than was supposed (38.5%), although a large number of respondents skipped this item. Some may have done so because they had no children, but the number of no responses is too large to permit conclusions to be drawn. Most of these young women were employed (60.8%); 23 were unemployed (17.7%) and 20 (15.4%) checked the welfare box. In general, the female friends who visited appeared

Discussion

The results of this preliminary survey of prison visitors suggest that family unity as exemplified by visits may vary by relationship and may depend for continuance on a variety of factors beyond the control of the prisoner or his visitor, some of which may preexist the period of incarceration. Such factors as type of crime, length of sentence, criminal history, family history and even economic background must be studied in order to thoroughly assess the relationship between visits and parole success, and each of these factors should also be analyzed by type of relationship.

Of all the family relationships studied here, the prisoner's relationship with his wife is the most precarious. Some wives remain unflinchingly loyal, but many are unable or unwilling to continue the relationship. A felony conviction is grounds for divorce in most states and many prisoners receive divorce papers while they are incarcerated. Many prisoners' wives are living under difficult circumstances: they have been left in near poverty to raise their children alone. The personal hardships caused by the criminal activities of their husbands may result in growing bitterness and resentment and lead them to dissolve the marriage. In addition, the enforced loss of sexual intimacy can have a detrimental effect for both marriage partners.

Although the wives in this sample reported that they visited regularly and frequently, we may question whether this pattern continued for the entire period of their husband's incarceration. Even when the marriage survives until parole, the problems of readjusting to the marital situation may place strains on the relationship, thus also jeopardizing parole success.

The strength of a prisoner's marriage may be directly related to the length of his sentence. The willingness of young women whose husbands are imprisoned to bear the burden of poverty and the loss of both companionship and sexual intimacy may depend on the duration of the hardship. Further research in this area is needed and

prisons should be encouraged to maintain records on the marital status of prisoners and on the divorce rate during incarceration. Unless we can control for the many factors which may intervene in the marital relationship, even wives who visit may not constitute a reliable sample for the study of prisoner-family relationships.

The parent-child relationship is not subject to as many of these constraints. Certainly the imprisonment of a son can place such a severe strain on the parents that a breakdown in their relationship with their son results. The social stigma of having a convicted criminal in the family could be sufficient cause to terminate the relationship. Some parents may reach a crisis in tolerance following a son's history of problem behavior. We may assume, however, that the parents in the sample are seeking to maintain their relationship with the prisoner, that the relationship predated the imprisonment, and that it will continue after release.

While the parents in the visitor sample reported visiting less frequently than the wives, their circumstances seemed such that budgetary problems were not likely to change the pattern of regularity. The majority of the parents were employed; many of the mothers who were not employed were living in a household with an employed breadwinner. They seemed able to afford regular visits and to afford to subsidize the visits of the prisoner's sisters and brothers. They are likely to provide emotional support and encouragement both during and after incarceration, and they could be the visitors most able to provide food and housing, job contacts, temporary financial assistance, etc.

The marital status of the parents in the sample and the indication that the prisoner's siblings follow the visiting patterns set by their parents suggest that prisoner-family unity is a preexisting phenomenon which will prevail in spite of the problems raised by the incarceration of one family member. The visit may be a manifestation of family unity rather than a means of achieving or maintaining it.

Such a change in our view of the link between visits and parole success would not obviate the need for maximizing visiting opportunities, for improving the visiting environment or for providing services to visitors. Frequent pleasant contacts during incarceration will ease release adjustment for both the prisoner and the family.

This possibility and the evident traditional working or middle-class backgrounds of the visiting parents raise questions about research linking visits with parole success. More research may find a link between parole success and family economic status.

Conclusion

The research of Holt and Miller (1972), Glaser (1964) and others finds a strong link between visits as measures of family support and the post-release success of the prisoner. Because of this link, other authors have recommended that prisons encourage family visits by increasing visiting opportunities, improving visiting facilities, providing services for visitors, and even subsidizing the cost of visits for indigent families (National Advisory Commission, 1973; Schwartz & Weintraub, 1974; and others).

Since prisoners' wives are apparently the least able of the visitors to afford the cost of visits, programs which provide subsidized visits and child care services could contribute to the frequency of the visit and add to the strength of the marriage. Counseling services could also have a positive effect on the marital relationship. Counseling can prepare both partners for release adjustment problems and can increase each partner's understanding of the problems faced by the other.

Since the prisoner's common-law relationships are subject to the same strains, services provided for wives could be extended to these women. The visits of other "female friends" should not be discouraged. Their contact with the prisoner can offset the problems associated with the "loss of heterosexual relationships" discussed by

Sykes (1958). These include problems with self-image caused by immersion into a unisex environment and problems related to readjusting to a heterosexual one after release. Role practice may be important in a variety of relationships, not just familial ones.

Such services might also contribute to the prisoner's relationships with parents, siblings, and other relatives. Though family unity may be strong enough to result in regular visits by families with traditional working-class backgrounds, some prisoners have supportive parents who cannot afford the cost of regular visits. Visit subsidies could strengthen the unity of these families and of families whose relationships with the prisoner are marginal. Since family members are likely to be called upon for both emotional and financial assistance upon the prisoner's release, counseling services which help prepare both family and prisoner for post-release adjustment problems can be beneficial regardless of the degree of family unity prior to incarceration.

Prisoners who do not have families are in a difficult position. If ties with the "outside" are important to parole success, programs which match volunteer visitors with prisoners might be strengthened and expanded. Further studies of prisoner-family unity might illuminate the importance of such ties to both rehabilitation efforts inside the prison and successful reintegration into society. Though lay visitors were among the friends, both male and female, in the study they could not be treated as a separate category of visitor, and their roles in the rehabilitation of the prisoner should also be studied.

This study was an exploratory one intended to identify some of the factors which may be related to prisoner-family unity and to suggest suitable areas for further research into the link between visits and parole success. A major impediment to such research has been the failure of institutions to gather information on visiting, visitors, or even the family relationships of the prisoners. One study noted that 51

percent of the 168 prisons responding to a visiting survey could not supply information on the number of their residents who had received no visits, and 38 percent did not maintain records on the marital status of prisoners (Schafer, 1977). Researchers must encourage correctional institutions to routinely include such information in statistical profiles of prisoners and to compile visiting information annually.

Since all the available evidence indicates that successful completion of parole is related in a significant way to the maintenance of family ties during incarceration, research into the dynamics of this relationship could play an important role in the development of correctional policies and programs and contribute to our understanding of interpersonal relationships.

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