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AFTER CAREERS OF 424 PAROLED WISCONSIN CRIMINALS*

LUMAN W. SAMPSON¹

The factual material presented herewith results from a study made by the author while a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin in 1926 and 1927. It deals with 149 men from the Wisconsin state prison and 275 from the reformatory, whose after careers, following discharge from parole, averaged above five years in length at the time of the investigation.

While dissimilar in treatment of data the study corresponds in point of time and general method with those made by the Gluecks in Massachusetts, Vold in Minnesota and Burgess in Illinois. The group study of men from the two institutions made possible some interesting comparisons as to the relative success of ex-prisoners of varying ages and degrees of criminal experience. It marks another step toward an accurate evaluation of the work of our penal and correctional institutions.

When the data were assembled the problem as to the criteria of success and failure and their measurement presented itself. The records of the American Prison Association for the year 1923, page 136, make reference to this problem as follows:

"The question may well be raised as to what is success? Is it a distinctive, discernible thing which must be realized in fullness or not at all, or is it only a relative thing varying in the individual and recognizable only in connection with certain circumstances. It is of course relative. Take the great variety of criminals to be paroled and you will see that success is not a thing that can be stamped on all of them with mechanical precision and uniformity. The ideal success to be sure is the case in which the paroled man never again commits crime. All other successes are gratifying in the degree with which they approach the ideal."

Though this refers to the success or failure of men while on parole, it appears as forcefully applicable to post-parole careers.

Many factors enter into this relative success or failure of the men. Uppermost among these is the type of community into which they go. It has long been recognized that a successful man in one

*A study on a grant made by the Research Committee of the Graduate Faculty of the University of Wisconsin.

¹Fletcher College.

community might be an unsuccessful man in another community of different standards, folkways and customs. Very detailed information gained from personal contacts with all the individuals concerned would be necessary if fine discriminations are to be made, as for example the use and development of potential abilities, the wisest use of spare time, or the degree of happiness or of economic productivity attained.

A dual plan of classification was finally decided upon. First a rigid classification into but two groups—successes and failures—was followed. Here there was no half way ground, a man was either a success or a failure. Secondly a less rigid classification into three groups, successes, partial successes and failures was set up. The criteria used in placing the men in these several categories was as follows. For the two-fold grouping success implies:

1. No known arrests for serious offenses since discharge.
2. Living as a respected and respectable member of some established community.
3. Putting forth best efforts to care for any dependents.
4. Showing industry and putting forth efforts toward being steadily employed.
5. Having respectable companions and avoiding drunkenness, gambling and other dissipations.

Conversely failure implies:

1. Being again in prison or having been arrested for some major offense even though not convicted or being a fugitive from justice.
2. Idleness, wandering, vagrancy and general inability to hold a job.
3. Failure to support dependents.
4. Drunkenness, dissipation and bad companions.
5. Failure to meet financial obligations and a general reputation for being "no good" or a "sore spot" in the community.

In the three-fold grouping success implies the same rigid measurement set forth in the above criteria. Partial success, however, affords some leeway. To this grouping are brought over from the failure column those individuals so successful on many counts that it did not seem fair to list them as absolute failures, together with some six from the success column who though not quite deserving that classification were so rated in the dual grouping. Partial success then implies:

1. Irregular employment though showing willingness to work at times. (Consideration was given to normal and abnormal unemployment.)

2. Using liquor, sometimes to excess, often with consequent bad associations but so far as known not resulting in criminal conduct.
3. Giving but partial support to dependents though putting forth some efforts to do more.
4. Failing to meet financial obligations and at times not putting forth much effort to do so.
5. A reputation as a "ne'er do well" among the steadier elements of the community.

No man was rated a partial success who fell short on all these counts. The grouping simply represents an attempt to classify the men who have achieved a relative degree of success as other than complete failures. It gives to the men so classified the benefit of the doubt.

Throughout the analysis of the data the tables and discussion make clear the two series of classifications. The first table presents not only the gross numbers but also percentages which summarize in relative proportion the facts on each of the items discussed both for the prison and reformatory group. In view of the small numbers which this separation of the groups involves, in computing the percentages in many of the cells of the various categories they are combined in subsequent tables and in the interest of space the gross numbers are omitted, only the percentages being given.

TABLE I*

SHOWING DEGREE OF SUCCESS IN POST-PAROLE CAREERS OF 424 WISCONSIN REFORMATORY AND PRISON PAROLEES CLASSIFIED BY INSTITUTIONS

Numbers:

<i>Parolees</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Partial Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Total</i>
Reformatory	135	140	127	87	61	275
Prison	83	66	83	34	32	149
Total	218	206	210	121	93	424
Percentages:						
Reformatory	49.1	50.9	46.1	31.6	22.1	99.8
Prison	55.7	44.3	55.7	22.8	21.4	99.9
Total	51.4	48.5	49.5	28.5	21.9	99.9

*Each percentage is based on the total in the row in which it appears. For example, the first percentage is 135/275 (the number of reformatory cases) =49.1. Similar procedure is followed in all subsequent tables.

In terms of success or failure the prison group were 6.6% more successful than the men from the reformatory while combining the

degrees of success in the three-fold classification shows them to be but 0.8% more successful. It was to be expected that the younger and less stable men should show a higher percentage of partial success. Considered as a combined group the men were but slightly over 50% successful according to the dual rating while 78% show some degree of success under the triple rating.

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT MAKE FOR SUCCESS?

The data were divided into fourteen categories. The relation of these several categories to the success or failure of the men in after careers is indicated in the tables and discussion which follow.

1. *Family Status*

Probably 50% of the men were the product of broken homes. The incomplete data for the reformatory group alone shows 43.3% to be from such homes. Samples obtained from the prison group confirms the belief that in this respect they closely parallel the others.

The possible value of parental guidance and training lost to these men because of abnormal home conditions is open to question. In many cases departure from such homes may constitute the lesser of two evils. Fragmentary data as to the age of leaving home shows that Wisconsin criminals differ in this respect not at all from those studied by the Gluecks in Massachusetts where 80% left home prior to reformatory sentence and often at very early ages.² A similar conclusion is reached by the Bureau of the Census in the study of the Antecedents of Prisoners.³

2. *Rural or Urban Residence*

Classification as to rural or urban residence was made upon the basis of the United States Census which classifies as urban those residing in places of 2,500 inhabitants or more. Table II relates this category to post-parole outcomes.

²Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, 500 Criminal Careers, p. 300.

³Bureau of the Census, The Prisoner's Antecedents, p. 12.

TABLE II
SHOWING DEGREE OF SUCCESS IN POST-PAROLE CAREERS OF 424 WISCONSIN
REFORMATORY AND PRISON PAROLEES BY URBAN OR RURAL
RESIDENCE AT TIME OF COMMITMENT

Percentages only:

	<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Partial Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Total</i>
Rural	47.5	52.5	47.5	36.3	16.2	100.
Urban	53.3	46.7	50.8	24.5	24.7	100.
Total	51.4	48.5	49.5	28.5	21.9	99.9

Ground for bias may exist in these figures as it is true that an investigation of this nature draws more largely upon city police records and agencies than upon rural.

3. *Age at Time of Commitment*

Grouping the men by age at time of commitment gives a considerable scatter. None of the reformatory men were over thirty-one years of age. Fifty-three or slightly over 19% were over twenty-three; 125 or 45.5% were aged 20-23 years, while 97 or 35.2% were aged 16-19 years. Thus nearly half fell within the modal age grouping 20-23. One hundred eighteen or 79.2% of the prison group were over 23 years of age while 79 or 53% were over thirty-one years. Due to this scatter numbers in the individual cells of the tables were too small to warrant any conclusion save that the men of maturity at time of commitment, were slightly more successful in post-parole careers than the more youthful men. This holds true whether considered separately or as a combined group.

4. *Educational Status*

The significant fact revealed in this category is how little education the men possessed. Of the 424 only twelve had gone beyond high school while seven others had completed a high school education. Over 54% had less than an eighth grade education. Table III presents the percentage relationships between education and degree of success obtaining in after careers. The small numbers (10) in the illiterate grouping and (7) and (12) in the high school and above high school classifications, invalidates any dogmatic conclusions concerning those groups.

TABLE III

SHOWING DEGREE OF SUCCESS IN POST-PAROLE CAREERS OF 424 WISCONSIN
REFORMATORY AND PRISON PAROLEES BY DEGREE OF EDUCATION ATTAINED
AT THE TIME OF COMMITMENT TO THE INSTITUTION

Percentages only:

	<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Partial Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Total</i>
Illiterate	60.9	40.0	60.0	10.0	30.0	100.0
Grades 1-3	51.6	48.3	48.3	32.2	19.3	99.9
Grades 4-7	49.5	50.5	45.8	32.8	21.4	100.0
Grades 8-11	52.3	47.6	52.3	24.4	23.2	99.9
High School	14.2	85.7	14.2	42.8	42.8	99.8
Above H. S.	83.3	16.6	83.3	16.6		99.9
Total	51.4	48.5	49.5	28.5	22.0	100.0

5. *Occupational Status*

Taking as a basis for classification the principle that an unskilled laborer does any kind of rough work to which he can be sent without training, that the semi-skilled worker is a user of tools and processes requiring learning and that the skilled worker uses tools and processes which are usable only after a long period (six months or a year) devoted to the acquiring of skill, the men were listed as such. Though the men had followed some 69 different occupations the above principle of classification placed 51% in the unskilled grouping, 37% in the semi-skilled, and only 12% in the skilled grouping.

6. *Marital State*

Because of the disparity in ages between the reformatory and prison representatives there was a consequent disparity in marital condition. Eighty-two per cent of the reformatory men were single while only 31.5% of those from the prison were single. Table IV relates the degree of success in after careers according to marital state for the single, married and divorced members of the group (407 in all). The separated and widowed groups were too small to give valid percentages.

TABLE IV

SHOWING DEGREE OF SUCCESS IN POST-PAROLE CAREERS OF 424 WISCONSIN REFORMATORY AND PRISON PAROLEES BY MARITAL STATE

Percentages only:

	<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Partial Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Total</i>
Single	46.7	53.2	44.8	31.0	24.1	100.0
Married	62.2	37.7	61.4	21.0	17.5	100.0
Divorced	63.1	36.8	52.6	31.5	15.7	99.8

7. *Personal Habits*

Facts regarding the habits of the men as to the use of liquor were taken from their own declarations given to the authorities at the time of entering the institutions. These statements are not regarded as entirely accurate. It is, however, definitely known that liquor played an important part in the careers of many of these men both before and after the prison experience. The investigation frequently revealed the failures of the post-parole period to have been brought about in part by two factors that had been present in the beginning of the criminal careers, viz., bad companions and the use of liquor. Basing our statement then on the declarations of the men and confirmation of the same by investigation, we find 58% of those from the reformatory and 74.5% of those from the prison to be users of liquor.

8. *Nativity*

A considerable group of nationalities was represented in the parentage of the men composing the study. Among the foreign born parents are listed Polish, Italian, Bohemian, Austrian, German, Norwegian, Hollander, Greek and Finnish. The relationship of the nativity of the men to their post-parole success as revealed by the study is set forth in Table V below.

TABLE V

SHOWING DEGREE OF SUCCESS IN POST-PAROLE CAREERS OF 424 WISCONSIN PRISON AND REFORMATORY PAROLEES, ACCORDING TO NATIVITY

Percentages only:

	<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Partial Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Total</i>
Parents foreign, sons native	47.8	52.1	46.1	33.9	20.0	100.0
Parents and sons native	51.3	48.5	49.1	26.4	24.5	100.0
Parents and sons foreign	63.8	36.1	63.8	19.1	17.0	99.9
Total	51.4	48.6	49.5	28.5	21.9	99.9

The corresponding strength of these groups in the general population of the state in 1910 was as follows: The native sons of foreign parents composed 44.7% of the total population and 43.3% of the male population; native sons of native parents 33% of the total population and 32.07% of the male population, while the foreign born composed 22% of the total population and 24.03% of the male population.⁴

9-11. *Previous Criminality; Types of Offense for Which Committed*

A composite view of the criminality of these men was obtained first, by classification as first offenders or as more experienced criminals; secondly, as to whether the offense for which committed was major or minor in character and, thirdly, whether commitment was for offense against person, property or public justice. Consideration is given to these in the order named.

Though incomplete the records reveal the fact that 19.6% of the reformatory men had been previously arrested for various minor offenses. 8% had previously been inmates of the Wisconsin Industrial School. 12.6% of the prison group had previous records of offenses. Considered as a combined group 71% were listed as first offenders, 23% as second offenders and 4% as third offenders.

For purposes of this study the crimes committed by the reformatory men were classified as follows. All forms of burglary, robbery, including assault to rob, forgery, embezzlement, rape and assault to rape, larceny and grand larceny, obtaining money under false pretenses, arson and incest were listed as major offenses. Adultery, fornication, enticing female for immoral purposes, non-support and abandonment, assault, concealing stolen property and operating automobile without owner's consent, as minor offenses. This gives a list of fifteen major and eight minor offenses. A similar plan of classification for the crimes committed by the men of the prison group gave a list of twenty major and nine minor crimes. Here of course we have added to the list of major crimes the several degrees of murder and manslaughter.

Two hundred and fifty-one of the 275 young men from the reformatory or 91.2% were sentenced to the institution for major offenses. 74.5% of the men composing the prison group were sentenced for major offenses.

⁴Computation based on Abstract of the 13th Census of the United States, pp. 100-110.

Classification on the basis of crimes against the person, property or public justice reveals the following data. Of the reformatory group 17% were committed for crimes against the person and 83% for crimes against property. Of the prison group 39% were committed for crimes against the person, 57% for crimes against property and 4% for crimes against public justice. Doubtless this variance is in part to be attributed to the fact that the statutes are selective as between the prison and reformatory.

12. *Time Served.*

The average sentence for the men of the reformatory group was slightly under three years. That for the prison group, exclusive of those given life sentences, was slightly over three years. The data as to time actually spent in the institutions is as follows. For the combined groups 334 or 78% of the men served two years or less. One hundred seventeen or 27% served less than one year. The percentage relationship of time served to success in after careers is set forth in Table VI below.

TABLE VI

SHOWING DEGREE OF SUCCESS IN POST-PAROLE CAREERS OF 424 WISCONSIN PRISON AND REFORMATORY PAROLEES, ACCORDING TO LENGTH OF TIME SERVED
Percentages only:

<i>Time in Months</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Partial Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Total</i>
0-11	54.7	45.2	51.3	32.5	16.2	100.0
12-24	51.6	48.3	49.8	29.5	20.7	100.0
25-37	40.7	59.2	42.5	20.3	37.0	99.8
38-50	44.4	55.5	38.8	27.7	33.3	99.8
51-63	40.0	60.0	40.0	40.0	20.0	100.0
64-76	75.0	25.0	75.0		25.0	100.0
77-89	50.0	50.0	50.0	50.0		100.0
90-102	100.0		100.0			100.0
103-115						
116-128		100.0			100.0	100.0
220-232	100.0		100.0			100.0
Over 272	100.0		100.0			100.0
Total	51.4	48.6	49.5	28.5	21.9	99.9

13. *Institutional Conduct.*

Conduct records are kept at both institutions which reveal the attitude of the men toward the rules and regulations. These state

not only the nature of the infractions of the rules but also the disposition made in each case whether by way of reprimand or punishment of some sort.

The character of the offenses was varied. Talking, jostling when in line, refusal to work, wasting food, disobedience to guards, and attempts to escape are some of the charges. Each is dealt with according to the merits of the case. First offenses are frequently excused, others lead to more severity. Some are so serious as to lead to solitary confinement. In general misconduct is detrimental to the men from the standpoint of privileges withheld or lack of support for parole applications.

Eighty-five or 20% of the men had no infractions charged to their account. One hundred fifty-eight or 37% had from one to five charged against them while 181 or 42% had more than five.

14. *Time on Parole.*

Since August, 1907, Wisconsin has made use of parole in its efforts at rehabilitation of those committed to the state prison. The parole department is also an important part of the reformatory regime. The periods of time spent on parole by the men of our group differed considerably in length. This depended upon whether the parole was granted early in their institutional career or came close to the time set for expiration of sentence. Forty per cent of the men were on parole for less than six months. Table VII indicates the percentage relationship of time spent on parole to success in post-parole careers. Numbers leading to the percentages in the first three rows of the table were large enough to merit consideration, others were too small to warrant any conclusions. (Hence omitted.)

TABLE VII

SHOWING DEGREE OF SUCCESS IN POST-PAROLE CAREERS OF 424 WISCONSIN PRISON AND REFORMATORY PAROLEES, ACCORDING TO LENGTH OF TIME SPENT ON PAROLE

Percentages only:

<i>Time in Months</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Success</i>	<i>Partial Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>	<i>Total</i>
1-6	47.4	52.6	47.9	26.0	26.0	99.9
7-9	57.7	42.2	57.7	22.5	19.7	99.9
10-12	54.6	45.3	50.0	32.6	17.3	99.9

IN SUMMARY

As a result of this study the typical Wisconsin criminal stands revealed. In fifty per cent or more of the cases he is the product of an abnormal home from which he was separated in early life. In two out of three cases he is a city product. Generally when first apprehended by the law he is a mere youth, of very limited education and little or no training fitting him to make a living. In about two out of three cases he is single and footfree. He is usually addicted to the use of liquor, frequently in excessive amounts. In half of the cases he is a native son of native parents. Though recorded at the institutions as a first offender yet in many cases he has a long and comprehensive list of offenses against the rules of society charged to his account. In about ninety per cent of the cases he is a major offender.

The relationship of the various categories to success or failure in post-parole careers is revealed in the following data:

1. Family status is a contributing factor in the causation of delinquency and criminality. This factor carries over into the post-parole period but is extremely difficult to measure.

2. (Table II) Men of urban residence (assuming facts to have been equally well ascertained as to both groups) attain a greater degree of success in after careers than do those of rural origin when considered as absolute successes or failures. If success and partial success groupings be combined, the men of rural origin have the advantage of 8.5%. There is probably little real difference in the two groups.

3. The ages of the men made such a wide scatter in the tables that no valid conclusion could be reached concerning the relationship of age at time of commitment to after career success or failure save that those men who had reached maturity at commitment proved to be slightly more successful. This may have been attributable, however, to other factors.

4. (Table III.) Education is no doubt a contributory factor in success or failure. Those with at least an eighth grade education and those with above a high school education appear to be more successful but small numbers in some groupings of the table forbid dogmatic conclusions.

5. Semi-skilled and skilled workers were from six to nine per cent more successful in after careers than were the unskilled.

6. (Table IV.) Marriage constitutes a stabilizing influence. Married men show a considerably higher degree of success than do the single men.

7. Considered as success or failure, non-users of liquor from the reformatory group were 7.5% more successful than the users. The non-users from the prison group were 6.5% more successful than were the users. Combined in the more liberal grouping, the users make a better showing, but the non-users still lead.

8. (Table V.) In either the narrow or liberal rating the foreign born seem to have established the best records in post-parole careers. In the absolute success rating alone native sons of native parents are slightly more successful than are the native sons of foreign parents. If success and partial success ratings be combined, then the native sons of foreign parents surpass the native sons of native parents. It appears that native sons of native parents make up a larger percentage of the prison groups than their proportion in the general population warrants, while the native sons of foreign parents and foreign sons of foreign parents contribute less than their number in the general population warrants. This is not in conformity with the opinion of those who hold that the foreign born largely make up our prison population.

9. Fifty-six per cent of the first offenders succeeded. Of the second offenders 39% and of the third offenders 31% succeeded in after careers. The conclusion seems warranted that first offenders are more successful in after careers. Third and fourth offenders were so few in number that percentages concerning them are of little worth.

10. There is probably little if any difference in the degree of success of major and minor offenders, nor does the question of whether they were offenders against the person or property seem to play any material part.

11. (Table VI.) Considering simply the first four rows of figures in the table as the ones containing numbers great enough to warrant valid conclusions, it appears that those serving the shorter periods of time in the institutions were more successful in their after careers.

12. Whether considered as a combined group or by institutions, the evidence warrants the conclusion that men with more than the average number of infractions of institutional rules charged against them are less apt to be successful in after-careers. There are limiting factors here, such as excellent conduct by hardened criminals

in the knowledge that this will help to shorten time served and aid in securing release.

13. (Table VII.) Sixty-two per cent of the men rated as absolute successes were on parole for more than six months. Of those included in the success and partial success rating 74% were on parole for more than six months. The conclusion is that parole periods of six months or longer are necessary in order that the men may receive any benefits from the system.

IMPLICATIONS

Society must turn its attention in increasing degree to the social conditions that have to do with the determination of human conduct. We have far too little real data as to the hereditary and environmental factors which surround our criminal classes. We have enough, however, to reveal that they are positively lacking in education, training, and guidance by society which would tend to produce worth while citizenship. Social conditions are no doubt primary, but education or the lack of it is a factor in the competitive requirements of life. In so far as education is a factor, the increased use of educational facilities should reduce the amount of crime.

The influence of our penal and correctional institutions is largely negative in effect. They do not show in any marked degree the positive, corrective, and restorative influences they are popularly supposed to exert. Such positive results can come only from a much more extended classification and individualization of treatment. This necessitates the collection of vastly more information concerning our criminals prior to the acts which bring them into the institutions. It implies more accurate and complete examination and testing in order that their potentialities may be discovered. This will demand a considerable extension of the work of the psychologist, psychiatrist, sociologist, and educator. It will necessitate the renovation and remaking of the prison and reformatory regimes.

The parole period is in the main too short to afford any adequate supervision and guidance of the men during the trying period of re-adjustment to life in normal society. The parole forces are inadequate and society has set up no worth while supplemental agencies. Despite the expenditure of time, money, and effort on the part of society, in the apprehension, trial, conviction, incarceration, and supervised guidance of the criminal, these men in large numbers turn out to be total failures in after careers.

The courts need a much wider range of authority than they now possess. Absolutely indeterminate sentences should be applied. The courts too should have a much wider range of information concerning the antecedents and factors which produce the criminals with whom they have to deal. The why of criminal conduct should be more carefully determined. All such information should be passed along to the institutions to which the men are sent and should there be further supplemented by the work of the parole departments.

Crime is of multiple causation. There is danger of the "particularistic fallacy" in explaining crime causation. This study reveals the fact that many factors play a part not only in causing crime but also in determining the degree of success in after-careers. Wisconsin needs to make use of such prognostic devices as are now available and should supplement them by further and more comprehensive studies.

There is the concluding implication that the situation in the state of Wisconsin as to anti-social conduct is not radically different from that existing in other states. The facts revealed by the studies in Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Illinois harmonize rather closely with the facts revealed in this study. Whole-hearted attention by the people of all the states to this problem will give valuable results. It warrants careful consideration. It is the writer's belief that it will pay large dividends in human lives and character as well as in dollars and cents.