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RELIABILITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PROGNOSIS IN THE WESTERN PENITENTIARY OF PENNSYLVANIA

A. C. CARTER AND G. I. GIARDINI¹

The purpose of this study is to check on the reliability of the prognoses made by the Psychology Department of the Western Penitentiary, at Pittsburgh, Pa., relative to the possibility or probability of prisoners making a readjustment upon release.

The predictions of the psychologist were based on fairly complete case histories comprising psychometric tests, a psycho-neurotic inventory, a history of previous crimes, and a social and economic history checked by investigation. The predictions were compared with the reports of the State Parole Bureau,² relative to the actual conduct of the subjects of the study while on parole.

The study includes those cases that were released on parole from November 1, 1930, to November 1, 1931. The State Bureau of Parole was established in the Fall of 1930. Cases released after November 1, 1931, were not included in order not to shorten unduly the period during which any one case had been on parole. The study was begun in February of 1933. Therefore, all the subjects of the study had been out on parole, or had the opportunity of being out, for at least 15 months by the time this study was initiated.

Only those cases were included that had been checked by outside investigation before release. From November 1, 1930 to November 1, 1931, there were 422 men released on parole. Many of these had come to prison before 1925, when outside investigations were begun. Hence, only 149 of them had been investigated. There were no other known selective factors for investigation. It is likely, therefore, that this small sample is fairly representative. Of the 149 cases, however, 24 had to be discarded because of incomplete investigation and five because of incomplete parole data. This left 120 cases for inclusion in our study.

¹Mrs. Armenter Cheatham Carter undertook the study as a term paper in a course in Criminal Psychology, given by G. I. Giardini at the University of Pittsburgh. Mrs. Carter compiled the data while Mr. Giardini supervised the work and revised the paper for publication. Mr. Giardini is psychologist at the Western Penitentiary.

²The parole data were obtained with the cooperation of Mr. W. T. Broecker, Senior Field Agent, District No. 2, State Bureau of Parole.

The first step after the selection of the cases was to study the psychological prognoses generally and to attempt to classify them. The following schedule was derived empirically:

Categories of Psychological Prognoses

A. *Safe.* Those individuals who will be able to adjust themselves upon release and assume their ordinary duties without supervision.

B. *Fair.* Those individuals who will adjust themselves upon release and assume their ordinary duties with a minimum amount of supervision.

C. *Rigid Supervision.* Those who will need careful supervision enforced rather rigidly, but with this supervision will adjust themselves to outside environment.

D. *Doubtful.* Those individuals who in spite of supervision may retain their old habits and frequent old habitats and who are not likely to readjust after their release.

E. *Hopeless.* Cases where no readjustment can be expected due to habituation to crime, feeble-mindedness, etc. Among these are those prisoners who should be institutionalized.

A study was then made of the parole reports without reference to any particular case, but merely with the thought of arriving at a classification of parole status comparable with the classification of psychological prognoses. The following schedule was finally adopted:

Schedule of Parole Status

I. *Safe.* Those individuals who would adjust without supervision. Also, those reporting regularly and giving no trouble.

II. *Fair.* Those individuals who need only the routine supervision. Those reporting regularly and troublesome only occasionally and for minor reasons.

III. *Rigid Supervision.* Those individuals who without rigid supervision may become very troublesome, but who adjust with the rigid supervision.

IV. *Doubtful.* Those who because of circumstances may be serious parole violators once but may adjust adequately upon second release or if given another chance.

V. *Hopeless.* Violators, whether captured or uncaptured and those who because of habituation to crime, feeble-mindedness, drink habit, etc., should be institutionalized. Also, those who never report after release.

The cases were then classified first under one, then under the other of these two schedules to see the frequency and the degree in which the predictions made in the psychological prognoses were corroborated by reports on the actual conduct of the men while on parole.

Results

The results are briefly presented in the following table:

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF CASES AS PER PSYCHOLOGICAL PROGNOSIS AND PAROLE STATUS

Psychological Prognosis A. Safe.	
Number of cases.....	10
Distribution on Parole Schedule—	
I. Safe	9
II. Fair	1
III. Rigid	0
IV. Doubtful	0
V. Hopeless	0
Psychological Prognosis B. Fair.	
Number of cases.....	25
Distribution on Parole Schedule—	
I. Safe	9
II. Fair	12
III. Rigid	2
IV. Doubtful	0
V. Hopeless	2
Psychological Prognosis C. Rigid.	
Number of cases.....	31
Distribution on Parole Schedule—	
I. Safe	2
II. Fair	14
III. Rigid	10
IV. Doubtful	0
V. Hopeless	5
Psychological Prognosis D. Doubtful.	
Number of cases.....	33
Distribution on Parole Schedule—	
I. Safe	1
II. Fair	9
III. Rigid	6
IV. Doubtful	3
V. Hopeless	14
Psychological Prognosis E. Hopeless.	
Number of cases.....	21
Distribution on Parole Schedule—	
I. Safe	0
II. Fair	3

III. Rigid	6
IV. Doubtful	1
V. Hopeless	11

The above data show that in 45 cases out of 120, or in 37.5 per cent, the predictions of the psychologist were corroborated by the parole reports. Forty-seven other cases, or 39.2 per cent of them, fall in the parole class adjacent to the one predicted by the psychologists. In other words, 76.7 per cent of the cases in the parole schedule are not more than one class removed from that predicted in the psychological prognoses. Twenty-eight cases, or 23.3 per cent, deviate widely from the predictions of the psychology department.

To reach a more definite measure of the reliability of the psychological prognoses, the data were submitted to a correlation technique.³ Pearson's corrective formula for broad grouping was used. The results are shown in Table II.

TABLE II
SCATTER DIAGRAM OF PAROLE STATUS AGAINST PROGNOSIS CATEGORIES

Prognosis	Parole Status					Total
	V	IV	III	II	I	
A	1	9	10
B	2	..	2	12	9	25
C	5	..	10	14	2	31
D	14	3	6	9	1	33
E	11	1	6	3	..	21
Total	32	4	24	39	21	120

Correlation ratio: .713.
Standard error: .045.
Probable error: .030.

The relatively uneven distribution of total cases under *Parole Status* is not easily explained away. Undoubtedly, the much larger number of "hopeless" cases as compared with "doubtful" cases, is partly due to the fact that a sizeable proportion of the men do not report to the parole officer at all upon release, and are, therefore, immediately called failures. But it is not likely that this accounts for the discrepancy altogether. It may be that parole status IV was not defined adequately; or it may be that after the men have been out on parole for 15 months the "doubtful" cases tend to disappear, gravitating toward more definite classes. Even under most favorable

³The correlation was worked out by Mr. W. R. Grove, assistant psychologist at the Western Penitentiary.

circumstances, in the comparison of variates of the nature involved in this study, we cannot regard the corresponding classes as equivalent, point for point.

Summary

No definite conclusion can be drawn from this preliminary study of the reliability of psychological prognoses, first, because of the small number of subjects used, and secondly, because the men had been out on parole, at the most, twenty-seven months. However, the data suggest that there is probably a high degree of reliability in the prognoses made by the Psychology Department of the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania relative to the probable conduct of prisoners upon release on parole.