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THE UTILITY OF CASE RECORDS IN PROBATION AND PAROLE

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The following article is based upon a portion of the research he undertook¹ while employed by the Wisconsin Division of Corrections as a Research Consultant during the summers of 1960-1964.—
EDITOR.

THE PROBLEM

Probation and parole officers compile and maintain extensive case records. These records presumably have the following uses: to provide assurance that statutory and administrative responsibilities have been met, to insure adequate service to clients, to assist in supervision, to function as a guide in case planning, and to provide research data.¹ These uses have been emphasized without factual documentation as to whether they are being met or not.

Inasmuch as the preparation and maintenance of case records are major activities of a probation and parole agency—from the point of view of the amount of professional staff time expended as well as clerical costs—they have recently come under scrutiny. For example, a recent time study of Wisconsin probation and parole officers showed that the largest amount of the officers' time is spent on "recording and related activities."² According to the study, male officers spend 30.9 percent of their time on recording and female officers spend 34.2 percent of their time on this activity. When added to the other "indirect" activities of officers—travel and office work—it was found that officers spent nearly six-tenths of their time on "indirect" activity. In other words, they spend only four-tenths of their time in "direct" services to individuals.

Time studies in other jurisdictions have also shown that a large amount of the officers' time is

devoted to recording. A time study of state parole officers in Pennsylvania showed that they devote 24 percent of their time to recording.³ A time study of county probation officers in Contra Costa County, California, showed that the officers spend 22.2 percent of their time on "office work", primarily recording.⁴

In addition to the time spent by probation and parole officers it is also obvious that a great deal of time of other staff members is devoted to the preparation, maintenance, and handling of case records. In Wisconsin there is one full-time stenographer for every two probation and parole officers. The majority of the stenographer's time is devoted to work on case records. In district offices and in the state office, file clerks are engaged in filing materials in case folders. Numerous administrators, such as District Administrators, Regional Administrators, Parole Board Members, and the Supervisor of Inter-State Placements, spend a great deal of their time reading case records as a basis for decision making.

It became clear in Wisconsin, therefore, that an examination in depth of the system of case recording of probation and parole officers was essential. For one thing, it was deemed necessary to secure factual information about the utilization of the records by the principal users. For another thing, if probation and parole officers were to devote more of their time to direct services with probationers and parolees they had to spend less time on indirect activities. When the indirect activities were analyzed it became apparent that most elements in this category—such as, travel time, for example

¹ HAMILTON, PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL CASE RECORDING 8-9 (1946).

² MILES, A TIME STUDY OF WISCONSIN PROBATION AND PAROLE AGENTS (1964). Probation and Parole Officers in Wisconsin, and in some other jurisdictions, are officially designated as "Agents." The term "Officer" will be used in this article.

³ JACKS, A TIME STUDY OF PAROLE AGENTS 4 (1961).

⁴ DAVIS, AN APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE BUDGETING FOR PROBATION SERVICES 21-22 (1958).

—could not be cut down. This meant that the only element that seemed to be subject to reduction was recording and related activities. Accordingly, an experimental study was designed to determine whether or not an abbreviated system of recording would accomplish this result.

One of the by-products of the study was a detailed analysis of the use of case records by the principal users. This article is based upon this analysis.

HISTORY OF CASE RECORDING

Case recording began as soon as social agencies were established. The early records were abbreviated chronicles of the practical activities of the agency. The records consisted largely of lists of amounts of relief given, or children placed in institutions. Early case records were almost totally devoid of individualized, psychologically-oriented materials.⁵ In probation and parole the early records were largely legal in nature—such as police and court records and orders for the revocation of parole. An occasional crisp comment would declare that “subject was taken by officer to the State Reformatory. Received receipt for same.”

The invention, and subsequent widespread use, of the typewriter made it possible to expand the scope of case records. Carbon copies of letters, as well as written accounts of home visits, made their appearance in case records. The greatest incentive for more detailed recording, however, was the development of interest in the social sciences, especially the psychological, aspects of the helping process. This was due to the advances of the social sciences, accepted by social work, especially in the immediate post-World War I period.

The interest of social workers in psychiatry resulted in more than an increase in the volume of case records; it brought about a virtual revolution in the quality of social work as well. Social workers ceased to be concerned primarily with a record of their stewardship and became concerned, as well, with the interrelationships of the agency and the worker with the client.

In the late 1920's and early 1930's sociologists became interested in the research potential of social case records. As a result, they gave advice to social workers which resulted in a greater volume of recording. The sociologists pleaded for more objectivity, inclusion of special material relating to

social problems, and, in some instances, verbatim recording so the details of the relationship between the social worker and the client could be studied.⁶

The administrative requirements of specialized social agencies also became more pronounced. Child welfare agencies placing children for adoption required proof of the suitability of the physical aspects of the home and the psychological adjustment of prospective adoptive parents. Agencies administering mother's aid and old-age assistance needed legal proof of eligibility. Probation and parole agencies wanted the records to reflect the extent of surveillance. Parole boards demanded social evidence of the proposed plans for the release of inmates. In short, as new public agencies with specific statutory responsibilities developed they had to have extensive documentation of proof of the fulfillment of their obligations.

As previously noted, professional social work, especially as seen in the work of private agencies, was adopting a psychiatric, or more precisely a psychoanalytic, interpretation of human behavior.⁷ This too resulted in much more detailed case histories. The early history and development of the client, especially in relationship to his mother and father, became important in diagnosing the case and formulating a plan for treatment.

The development of a more intensive and detailed process of supervision also added to the length of case records. The first “General Secretaries” and “District Secretaries” of the Charity Organization Societies were probably the original casework supervisors. They inducted, trained, and oversaw the work of the “charity visitors.” Supervision was the art of teaching new social workers on the job. As the process was institutionalized, the supervisory conference became more significant. In many offices the agency policies required that all dictation had to be recorded and typed before the conference could be held. The supervisors, relying more and more (so they claimed) upon the record for insight regarding the psychological interaction between worker and client, demanded more and more “process” in recording.

The requirements of teachers of social casework have likewise served to inflate case records. The

⁶ Reddick, *The Relation of Sociology to Social Work*, 8 FAMILY 357 (1928); Burgess, *What Social Records Should Contain to be Useful for Sociological Interpretation*, 6 SOCIAL FORCES 532-534 (1928); Young, *Should Case Records be Written in the First Person?*, 11 FAMILY 153-154 (1928).

⁷ ROBINSON, *A CHANGING PSYCHOLOGY IN SOCIAL CASE WORK* (1930).

⁵ SHEFFIELD, *THE SOCIAL CASE HISTORY* 5-18 (1920).

student in field work was expected to prepare careful and detailed notes in long-hand. He was also taught to record, in "process", all that went on between himself, the client, and the community. Records chosen by teachers of social casework for teaching in schools of social work were also expected to show the details of client interaction. Inasmuch as it was considered an honor to have an agency record chosen for teaching, the agency catered to the demands of the teachers.

All of these factors had their influence in probation and parole services. The administrative and statutory responsibilities of probation and parole are self-evident. Although the "psychiatric deluge" was not so pronounced in probation and parole as in other agencies, it was by no means absent. The supervisory process was accepted and expanded in probation and parole agencies. Probation and parole has been less intense in its association with schools of social work, but, especially in recent years, this has been an additional factor. All in all, the same forces were at work for the expansion of the case records in probation and parole as in other agencies.

Within the past ten years, however, there have been numerous questions about the validity of extensive case records in social agencies. In 1954 two Chicago agencies—the Family Service Bureau of the United Charities and the Jewish Family and Community Service—started an analysis of their case records. The following year (1955) they carried on an experimental study with a summarized system of recording. Among other things, the study concluded that the supervisory process is based mainly upon verbal communication. The supervisors, they found, spent only 8 percent of their time reading records. The study also concluded that caseworkers preferred a system of recording that is organized, specific, and explicit.⁸

Brevity in recording had also been recommended for family service agencies by Wilda J. Daily and Virginia P. Hogan in 1958.⁹ A similar recommendation was made for child welfare agencies in 1963.¹⁰

THE WISCONSIN STUDY

The Wisconsin study of experimental recording

⁸ FRINGS, KRATOVIL, & POLEMIS, *AN ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL CASE RECORDING: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY IN TWO FAMILY AGENCIES* 76-77 (1958).

⁹ Daily & Hogan, *Brief Systems of Recording*, 39 *SOCIAL CASEWORK* 278-282 (1958).

¹⁰ Panof & Peterson, *Current Trends in Case Recording*, 42 *Child Welfare* 230-234 (1963).

was undertaken in three districts from October 1, 1963 to October 1, 1964.

In Wisconsin the Division of Corrections of the State Department of Public Welfare has responsibility for the administration of state-wide parole for juveniles and adults and state-wide probation for adults. This is true, except in Milwaukee County. There the state has responsibility only for adult and juvenile parole. The administration of juvenile and adult probation is a responsibility of local courts in Milwaukee County.

The state employs approximately 150 probation and parole officers to carry out this responsibility. Administratively, the state is divided into 14 districts—four of these are in Milwaukee, two in Madison, and the remainder in the rest of the state. Each district is headed by a District Administrator, with probation and parole officers assigned to areas where they usually maintain their own offices (except in the large cities where they are located in the district office). Three districts, presumably representative of various types of districts were chosen for the study. One of the districts was in Milwaukee, chosen because it is an all urban district. Another was one of the Madison districts, chosen because it was an urban-rural district. The third was the Eau Claire District, chosen because it was more rural in nature.

Each probation and parole area has a number, which indicates the district, sex of the officer, and a number for the area. These numbers served as the basis for the selection of one-half of the officers, by sex, for the control group, and one-half for the experimental group. Sixteen or 12.3 percent of the total number of officers were contained in the experimental group. The same number was contained in the control group. The two groups were chosen by the use of random numbers.¹¹ Officers in the experimental groups recorded according to an abbreviated system, designed for the study. Officers in the control groups continued to record, as did all other officers in the state except those in the experimental groups, in the usual manner.

A new "face sheet" was designed for use in the study. This "face sheet" was four pages in length and was used for probation social studies, presentence investigations, institutional admission investigations, and sex crimes studies. It also contained basic identifying information (such as name, date of birth, height, weight, race, social security

¹¹ Based upon tables in WALLIS & ROBERTS, *STATISTICS: A NEW APPROACH* (1956).

number, etc.), offense and court data, the offender's version and the victim's statement of the offense, plea, and sentence. In addition, the "sheet" included social information—marital history, parents, siblings, religious affiliation, education, employment, etc. Finally, it also contained the officer's evaluation and plan for the case.

This "face sheet" included the data of the old "face sheet" and also incorporated data for various types of social studies. It was no longer necessary for officers in the experimental group to fill out a "face sheet" and prepare a special probation social or pre-sentence investigation. The relative brevity of the reports plus the ease in finding pertinent data proved to be popular with judges.

Monthly and semi-annual reports were substituted for all "running records." These reports were one page in length and contained space for financial data, types of contacts the officer had with the offender, and a short space for the officer's comments. This meant that contacts with offenders were not reported in the running record each time they occurred, but only in the summaries.

A special "Violation Report" was designed for the study. On this report the officer reported the type of violation: conviction of another offense, revocation to be requested, charged with another offense, arrested but not charged, rule violation, and violation of an officer's directive. A "Statement of the Violation and Substantiating Details" and a statement of the officer's "Disposition of the Violation" were also required on the form.

A "Case Closing Summary" was also included. This form filled out on all cases closed, required the officer to check the type of case, marital status at the termination of supervision, employment during supervision, use of institutional training, disruptive use of alcohol, school adjustment, cooperation with officer, persons associated with the offender during supervision, dependency obligations, feeling toward others, success of plan, and prognosis when discharged.

These forms took the place of the "running records" that were continued by all officers except those in the experimental study group. Under the system of "running records" only a few special forms—such as a "face sheet" which did not incorporate data for social studies—were used. Every time something happened on the case—a home visit, an office visit, a rule violation, etc.—a chronological entry describing the event was typed into the record with carbon copies sent to district administrators, regional administrators, parole

board members, etc. All these lengthy chronological entries were eliminated for those officers in the experimental study group. The information was abbreviated and summarized on the various forms noted above.

Various tests were used to assess the utility of the experimental records. One was a time study of the experimental and control agents. This was to discover whether or not less time was spent in recording by officers in the experimental groups. Interviews, in depth, were conducted by the research staff in an effort to discover the effectiveness of the records to the principal users. Still another test was one designed to discover the utility of the records to users in the state office.

A complete set of records is maintained in the state office where they are available to various administrative officers. A system was set up whereby the users of experimental records were required to indicate their use. A luminescent tag stating "Experimental File—See Instructions" was placed on the tag of each experimental record. The tag was not only luminescent, but was also very brightly colored (orange). Hence, these records could hardly be missed by users. Securely stapled on the inside of the jacket was an explanatory account of the study, with space for the users to make certain notes. The user was required to give the date of use, his name and title, the purpose for the use of the record, and a "comment on adequacy and utility of record." Under this last heading the user was asked to check whether he found the record to be "very good, good, average, fair, poor, or very poor." Administrative regulations were issued clearly indicating the responsibility of employees to record their usage of the experimental records. Attempts were made to follow up on these instructions. It is the analysis of the use of the experimental records that is the principal basis of this article.

ADMINISTRATIVE USE OF CASE RECORDS IN PROBATION AND PAROLE

It is usually contended that probation and parole agencies have administrative and statutory responsibilities that give unique obligations to probation and parole officers and place special requirements upon probation and parole case records.

An offender who is released from an institution on parole is still serving his sentence. The fact that he is doing so outside the institution does not mean

that he is free from controls. Indeed, the parole officer has a special responsibility to see that the offender does not disobey the rules of parole. The parole officer's supervision of the parolee requires documentation. His admonitions to the parolee in regard to drinking, frequenting with bad companions, and keeping late hours needs to be recorded. Continuous disregard of the rules or of an officer's specific directives may be the basis for the subsequent revocation of parole.

A probation and parole officer has certain statutory responsibilities in regard to those whom he is supervising. Wisconsin law, for example, requires that a monthly report must be submitted to the officer by the parolee. There are also definite restrictions placed upon parolees: they may not marry, travel, or change jobs without approval from their probation and parole officers.

Courts often require probationers to pay restitution to a victim as a basis of his probation. In such cases the officer must collect and disburse the restitution payments. This obviously requires recording. The same is true when the court orders the payment of support money by a man who has been found guilty of non-support of his family. Not only does the probation and parole officer require a record, but repeated failures to pay support money or make restitution payments could be a basis for subsequent revocation.

Hence, the probation and parole officer has a basis of reality for his contention that he has unusual statutory and administrative responsibilities whose fulfillment should be recorded in the case record.

Administrative officers who use the records often do so because of their legal responsibilities. For example, members of the Parole Board use records as a basis for determining eligibility for parole. They need to have details about the offense, the inmate's adjustment, and the proposed plan for release. The Supervisor of Inter-State Placements uses the record to determine if a specific case is a suitable risk for supervision in another state. Regional administrators use records to determine whether or not revocation should be requested. Other departments of state government, especially the Governor's Office and the Office of the Attorney General, use records.

The potential administrative uses of records by other administrative offices is very great. Probation and parole officers, who compile the records, know this and often attempt to have information recorded.

USE OF RECORDS IN SUPERVISION

Traditionally, casework supervisors have contended that case records have been one of the principal bases for the supervision of workers. The record shows that the worker is carrying out his responsibilities and it is also a basis for understanding the worker's job performance.

In analyzing the supervisory process in the Wisconsin system of probation and parole we found that the supervisors did not rely primarily upon the records as a basis of supervision. They often said they did, but upon more detailed examination it was found that they did not. The chief means of carrying out the supervisory process was through personal discussion between the supervisors (District Administrators) and the officers. The supervisors used the records primarily to alert themselves to problems and as a record of fulfillment of administrative and statutory responsibilities. For the details of the casework process the supervisors depended, almost entirely, upon personal discussion with the workers.

There are some who might contend that the supervisory process may be unique in probation and parole. In this respect, however, the Wisconsin probation and parole service is similar to the Family Service Bureau of the United Charities and the Jewish Family and Community Service (the Chicago agencies involved in a recording study). They too found that supervisors carried on the process of supervision mainly by personal discussion with workers.¹²

It would appear, therefore, that the belief that supervisors are dependent primarily upon the written record for the supervisory process may be one of the unfounded bits of folklore in casework agencies.

USE OF RECORDS BY PROBATION AND PAROLE OFFICERS

One of the principal users of case records in probation and parole are the officers themselves. There are a variety of ways in which probation and parole officers use the records.

First of all, the record serves as a guide to the probation and parole officer as to the facts of case activity. From the record he knows the details of the offense, the social history of the offender, the date of the last home visit, the amount of restitution paid, the work record of the offender, etc.

¹² FRINGS, KRATOVIL, and POLEMIS, *op. cit. supra* note 8.

The officer also secures simple, but nonetheless important, identifying information from the record: address of the offender, directions for finding the home (particularly important in a rural area), and address of the place of employment. These are the kinds of information that cannot be stored in the officer's head; they have to be maintained in the record.

Secondly, the record makes it possible to have a fairly smooth transition from one officer to another on a specific case. Unfortunately, there is often a fairly heavy turnover of officers on a specific case. This is due, in part, to the turnover of employees in probation and parole agencies. It is also due to the increases in population with concomitant increases in the numbers of offenders. It is also due to the increased emphasis upon professional quality in corrections. This results in an increase in the number of officers and a decrease in the size of caseloads. All of these factors mean that there is a constant turnover of probation and parole officers. The new officers must have records to inform them about the facts of their cases as developed by their predecessors.

Thirdly, the officer uses the record to organize his thinking about the case and to plan future courses of action. Through reading the record and recording his contacts with the case in the record the officer organizes his thinking and prepares his plans for the case.

Finally, the officer uses the record in the supervision of the offender. For example, an offender has been ordered to pay support money. He fails to make payments for several months. When accosted by the officer he contends that he made a payment during the last month. The officer consults the record and then, once again, informs the offender that the record shows that no support payments have been made for two months.

In our study we found that case records are widely used by the officers themselves. Some of the uses of case records—for supervision of officers, for teaching, and for research—have been over-emphasized. The uses of records by officers themselves, however, have been under-emphasized.

USE OF RECORDS BY OTHER AGENCIES

Formerly caseworkers used to go to other social agencies that had known the client and read the case record. This rarely happens today. It is not because clients are not known to numerous agencies. In fact, there are many "multiple problem" families. Families who have members who are

offenders against the law also have members in mental hospitals, members who receive public aid, and members who are patients in psychiatric clinics. Modern social agencies, however, provide specialized services and usually do not duplicate the work of other agencies. Despite the fact that a large volume of services is given to the "hard core" cases, social agencies are not among the principal users of agency records.

Probationers and parolees are invariably experienced in dealing with social workers. They have been known to social workers in schools, juvenile courts, psychiatric clinics, and public assistance agencies. These agencies, as already noted, have special responsibilities and are interested in securing specific information from the probation and parole agency.

In our study we found very little evidence of use of records by representatives of other agencies. This was never mentioned by the probation and parole officers and, therefore, seems to be of negligible significance in the total usage of records.

USE OF RECORDS FOR RESEARCH

Social case records were once assumed to contain much significant research data. In the days of heavy foreign immigration many sociologists used social agency records as a source of information on the assimilation of immigrants. One of the sociological classics of this period—*The Polish Peasant*¹³—utilized social agency records as a major source of data. In the late 1920's and early 1930's sociologists advised social workers regarding the form and content of case records. Professor Thomas D. Eliot, for example, suggested that case records contain both subjective and objective data. Both types of materials, however, should be clearly identified as an aid to the sociological researcher.¹⁴ Elon H. Moore pleaded for maximum accuracy in case records, also for the benefit of sociological researchers.¹⁵ Pauline Young declared that verbatim recording was desirable in case records, both as aid to the social workers in diagnosis and the sociologist in research.¹⁶

At the present time, however, the research value of case records is recognized to be less significant than formerly. Case records are still used as a basis

¹³ THOMAS & ZNANIECKI, *THE POLISH PEASANT IN EUROPE AND AMERICA* (1927).

¹⁴ Eliot, *Objectivity and Subjectivity in the Case Record*, 6 *SOCIAL FORCES* 539-544 (1928).

¹⁵ Moore, *How Accurate Are Case Records?*, 12 *SOCIAL FORCES* 498-507 (1934).

¹⁶ Young, *op. cit. supra* note 6.

for research, but it is now recognized that the research value of the records is quite limited. Generally speaking, the research data in case records is factual information that is not contained in the so-called "running record." In probation and parole cases such information as the offense, age and sex of offender, sentence, etc. are the kinds of data that have research value. Lengthy, verbose recording does not add to the research value of the case records.

This we found to be the case in the Wisconsin probation and parole system. The records are used extensively for research by graduate students from the University of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In the main these students are looking for basic factual data in the records and are not searching for details of the "dynamics" of the psychological inter-action between probation and parole officers and offenders.

USE OF RECORDS IN TEACHING

Traditionally, case records have been the chief source of teaching the principles of casework. Case records from social agencies are edited to insure anonymity and are then reproduced for discussion purposes for casework classes in schools of social work. Teachers want a maximum of "process" so that students will have opportunities for detailed discussions of the relationships between the caseworker and the client.

Agencies have also used the case record as a basis for the induction of inexperienced workers to the agency. Beginning workers often record in great detail—sometimes first submitting materials in longhand—so that the supervisor will be able to carry on this educational activity.¹⁷

The Wisconsin probation and parole system is no exception. Field work units for students from the Schools of Social Work of the University of Wisconsin and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee are maintained in Madison and Milwaukee. Beginning workers are also expected to record in somewhat greater detail.

The development of tape recording and its extensive use in education has brought some of the assumed educational values of case records into question. No matter how extensive the recording of "process" the case record does not have the details of a tape recording. Furthermore, the record is probably not as valuable to the learning of the

¹⁷ Bristol, Handbook on Social Case Recording (1936).

beginning worker as his first-hand observation of an experienced worker.

We found this to be true in our study. Thus there is increased recognition of the limitations of case records as a basis for teaching casework and for the induction of new workers. This is not to imply that case records have no educational values. Rather, the implication is that these are not major factors and should be so considered in the determination of the content and format of case records.

EXTENT AND ADEQUACY OF RECORDS AS JUDGED BY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS

As previously noted, all experimental folders were tagged with special identification. Between October 1, 1963 and July 1, 1964 all users of the records were required to indicate their use on a special form. On July 1, 1964 an analysis was made of the extent of the use of these records.

On July 1, 1964 there were 928 experimental records. Of these, 856 had no record of use during the period October 1, 1963 to July 1, 1964. Due to errors, 18 of the records had had no "Evaluation Forms" placed in them. The remaining 64 records had been used one or more times. This means that only 6.9 percent of the records had been used according to the listings on the "Evaluation Forms."

The actual usage of records was probably somewhat larger than this. Despite the administrative orders and attempts to supervise the system it is obvious that some who used the records did not record the fact. Some of them may have forgotten the requirement. Others who use records secure large groups of records at one time. Such is the case of persons who use records to secure information regarding potential transfers of inmates from one institution to another. Using a large group of records at one time they may not have time to record their usage. For whatever reason it is obvious that not all of the users recorded their usage.

The central office files are "open." That is, there is easy access to them by all employees and any employee can secure records merely by going to the files and taking them. A "closed" filing system where only one employee could check out records and thereby keep track of individual employee usage could have eliminated this problem.

The actual usage of records is also greater than indicated because of the duplicate copies of records, the usage of which went unrecorded. Members of the Parole Board have their own copies of records.

Presumably they read the record of every case they hear and take the records with them to hearings.

We have no way of knowing the extent to which usage was not recorded. As already indicated, however, we know that it occurred in some instances. We know that the total use of records is restricted to a relatively small number of employees. It is doubtful if the total number of users, including Parole Board Members, is double the amount recorded. Even if one arbitrarily declares that 15 percent of the records were actually used, there were still 85 percent of the records that were unused for a period of nine months.

The records, as already noted, were used by a comparatively small number of employees. The Supervisor of Interstate Placements, the two Regional Administrators, the Supervisor of Institutional Classification, and the Supervisor of Education were the principal users.

The users of records in the central office have definite purposes in mind when they read case records. They seldom read a record in its entirety. Rather, they are searching, as rapidly as possible, for answers to specific questions. For example, the Supervisor of Classification had a request for the transfer of an inmate from one institution to another. From the record he attempted to secure information about the institutional adjustment of the inmate, the nature of the offense, the inmate's possible release date, and other facts that would assist him in making the decision. The Executive Secretary of the Special Review Board (sex crimes parole board) sought data about the prior adjustment of the inmate when he had been on probation. To give still another example: the Supervisor of Interstate Placements read a record to secure information about an offender who wished to be released under supervision to a neighboring state.

Although the central office staff uses a limited number of records there are several points that should be kept in mind. The first is that the use of the records is crucial in making decisions by certain strategic administrative officers. Regional Administrators make decisions regarding the revocation of parole. In doing so they rely primarily upon the records in the central office. In many cases they also call the probation and parole officer on the telephone to secure the most recent information on the case. Nevertheless, the record is often the sole basis for making a decision. Another point is that although a limited number of cases out of the total number are used for decision-making in

the central office no one can tell what cases may be used. As noted above, only about 15 percent of the cases are read by administrative officers. All records, however, have to be prepared on the assumption that they may be included in this 15 percent.

Administrative officers who used the cases in the central office did not demand extensive recording. Actually, they want specific facts and they want them in a hurry. Abbreviated recording is at least as satisfactory to them as chronological recording. Only 10.4 percent of the administrative officers who used the abbreviated records in the experimental group found them to be unsatisfactory. In fact, 21.8 percent of them reported the experimental records to be "very good" and an additional 32.1 percent reported them to be "good." Many of the administrative officers were especially pleased with the abbreviated recording because it enabled them to find specific information faster than they could have found it in the regular records.

It is also interesting to note that administrative officers who used records to aid in decision-making appeared to put a somewhat greater emphasis upon the records when discussing this with members of the research staff than actually was the case in practice. Direct telephone conversations with the officers, as already indicated, appeared to be of greater significance to them in decision-making than one might believe by discussing the problem with them. Despite this fact, it is still true that one of the principal uses of records is for decision-making by administrative officers in the central office.

CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions regarding the utility of case records in probation and parole can be drawn from our study in Wisconsin:

1. Case records in probation and parole agencies, if the Wisconsin agency is typical, have limited usage by a relatively small number of persons. The Wisconsin study showed that only 6.9 percent of the experimental records were read by anyone in the central office during a nine-month period. Even if as many as 15 percent of the records were actually used during this period it means that 85 percent of the records were not used.

The records were used by a small number of key administrative officers who were searching for specific factual information. Regional Adminis-

trators, the Supervisor of Interstate Placements, the Supervisor of Classification, and the Supervisor of Education were the principal users.

2. The small percentage of records used for administrative purposes are very strategic in this decision-making. The records are often the principal basis for the revocation of parole, the transfer of an inmate from one institution to another, and the granting of permission for a parolee to be supervised in another state. Because of the significance of these decisions the records should contain, in readily accessible form, the factual information essential for action.

3. Probation and parole officers themselves are principal users of case records. They use the records to know what action was taken by their predecessors, for basic identifying facts about cases, and as a plan for treatment. The process of recording is significant to probation and parole officers because it is through this process they are able to organize their thinking about a case.

4. The case record is not the chief basis for the supervision of probation and parole officers. Supervisors use the record to call their attention to

specific facts about a case. The basic tool in supervision, however, is personal discussion between the supervisor and the officer.

5. The value of case records as tools in teaching has been over-emphasized. Despite the fact that case records have been widely used in schools of social work and in in-service training programs it is apparent that other devices—such as tape recording and direct observation of an experienced worker by an inexperienced worker—have more value.

6. Case records have limited value in research. Factual information—such as offense committed, age and sex of offender, sentence, etc.—can be secured from case records. The research potential of records for studies of the psychological and sociological aspects of offenders, however, is limited.

The limited use of case records plus the tremendous amount of staff time devoted to the preparation and maintenance of records indicates that revisions of the recording system are needed. Probation and parole agencies could benefit from detailed analyses of case recording. Such analyses should lead to a streamlining of the records.