statistical report 16

a thousand prisoners

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THE ORIGINS OF THE STUDY

An American authority has said:

> "If a business knew as little about the performance of its product and the explanation for its performance after it reached the market as corrections knows about the performance of its graduates and the reasons for their performance, the business would surely fail. Products that had to be taken in for repairs as often as correctional graduates are returned for more rehabilitation would soon be off the market".
>
> (Schnur, A.C., "The New Penology: Fact or Fiction? READINGS IN CRIMINOLOGY. D. Dressler ed. New York, Columbia University Press, 1964.)

This analogy between marketing and corrections may be considered too narrow by those who see 'treatment' as only one of several possible functions of the prison system. Nevertheless, the statement draws attention to the lack of factual information about inmates and the correctional processes both here and overseas. In coming months the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research will publish a series of reports dealing with different aspects of the treatment of offenders.

The Present Study

Good planning depends upon the availability of factual information. In particular, the prison administrator requires an increasingly detailed picture of the background and social functioning of inmates if health and welfare services are to be improved. Yet most studies of Australian prisons have been limited to the demographic features of inmate populations.

The present study is based on 1,000 male prisoners serving sentences of twelve months or more in New South Wales institutions. The project resulted from a request by the Corrective Services Advisory Council for information which could help in the planning of more effective mental health and social services. Among the matters considered in the survey were the circumstances in which the men had grown up, their employment situation just prior to imprisonment, the nature and extent of past psychiatric treatment and their ability to maintain contact with family and friends since coming to prison.

It was also considered necessary to assess the prisoners' interest in discussing personal and adjustment problems with qualified staff. In the light of overseas research, we were especially interested in identifying the type of prisoner who seriously contemplates suicide during his sentence.

The study was intended to provide information beyond the usual demographic details. Still, there is hardly an abundance of information about the social background of Australian prisoners and, for this reason alone, some detailing of our sample would be warranted. Equally important, however, is the necessity at the outset for presenting in broad outline a picture of the men who provided the information which it is hoped will be useful in future planning.

The Sample

At the time of the survey there were approximately 2500 men serving sentences of twelve months or more in New South Wales prisons. From this number, one thousand inmates (40 per cent) were chosen for the study. The random sample was drawn proportionately from all institutions containing 25 or more inmates serving

sentences of at least twelve months. The interviews were conducted during a two week period in November, 1973.

Age

Compared with the general population of males in New South Wales, our inmate sample contained a larger number of young men. For example, twice as many prisoners (41 per cent) as men in the general community (18.4 per cent) were between 18 and 24 years of age:

TABLE I - AGE OF PRISONERS COMPARED WITH COURT STATISTICS AND GENERAL POPULATION

	Prison sample (N=1,000)	Males, Higher Criminal Courts 1972 (N=4,183)	Males, N.S.W. population (1971 census)
	%	%	%
18 - 20 years	12.8	36.2	7.7
21 - 22 years	14.3	13.2	5.2
23 - 24 years	13.9	10.8	5.5
25 - 39 years	44.4	29.3	30.5
40 years+	14.0	10.5	51.1
Not established	0.6	-	-
	100.0	100.0	100.0

While the above table reflects a significant difference in the structure of the inmate group compared with the general population, this disparity is by no means as large as one might have expected from Higher Criminal Court statistics. In recent years, it has been the usual pattern for three fifths of those dealt with by the Higher Criminal Courts to be drawn from the 18 - 24 years age bracket (see above table). However, there is a tendency for the courts to try alternatives to imprisonment, especially in cases involving young offenders. For example, half of the cases dealt with in 1972 resulted in the imposition of a bond with or without probation.

This practice helps to explain why the prison population is comparatively 'youthful' but not as young as the pool of offenders from which it is drawn. Another reason is that some relatively long term inmates who entered prison as young men have grown older within the institutions. For example, offences against the person (including murder and manslaughter) obviously attract heavy penalties. Four times as many of the over forty group compared with 18 - 20 year olds were in prison for this type of offence (see the table on the next page). On the other hand, property offences were more concentrated in the under twenty-five year old group:

TABLE II – AGE OF OFFENDERS BY TYPE OF OFFENCE

	18–20 yrs. (N=128)	21–22 yrs. (N=143)	23–24 yrs. (N=139)	25–39 yrs. (N=444)	40 yrs.+ (N=140)
	%	%	%	%	%
Offences against person	6.3	9.1	10.1	19.6	24.3
Sexual offences	7.8	13.3	13.7	11.9	11.4
Robbery/extortion	28.1	21.7	16.5	18.2	10.7
Fraud	–	1.4	1.4	3.2	7.1
Property offences	53.1	45.4	51.1	39.9	37.9
Driving	–	0.7	–	0.2	0.7
Other	4.7	8.4	7.2	6.8	7.9
Not established	–	–	–	0.2	–
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Educational Background

The number of prisoners who had not progressed beyond a primary level of education was similar to the number in the general community. However, when we consider the number who had attained at least the Intermediate or School Certificate level, a difference between the prison and general population groups becomes apparent. Almost twice as many men (33.2 per cent) in the general population as prisoners (17.5 per cent) had reached the Intermediate /School Certificate level:

TABLE III – LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF INMATES

	Inmate sample (N=1,000)	N.S.W. Males 15 yrs.+ (1971 census)
	%	%
Graduate University/ College Advanced Education/ Higher School Certificate	4.0	21.3
Intermediate/School Certificate	13.5	11.9
Secondary	67.7	46.8
Primary	13.0	15.7
Never attended	0.8	0.4
Not established	1.0	3.9
	100.0	100.0

Area of Residence

The Bureau previously has compared crime rates in urban and rural areas of New South Wales.* The earlier study was based on the total offences recorded during a given year (1972).

* Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Statistical Report No. 6, "Crime in Our Cities – A Comparative Report".

The present research is based on a somewhat special group of offenders, namely those whose criminal careers have reached the point where they have been sentenced to at least twelve months imprisonment. Nevertheless, the two sets of findings closely resemble one another. The imprisonment rate for the urban areas of Newcastle and Wollongong stands midway between the rates for Sydney and the less populous country areas:

IMPRISONMENT RATES

	Males 15 yrs.+ (1971 census)	Rate per 1,000
Sydney statistical division	1,019,954	0.60
Newcastle/Wollongong statistical district	196,422	0.45
Rest of State	435,152	0.28

Occupation

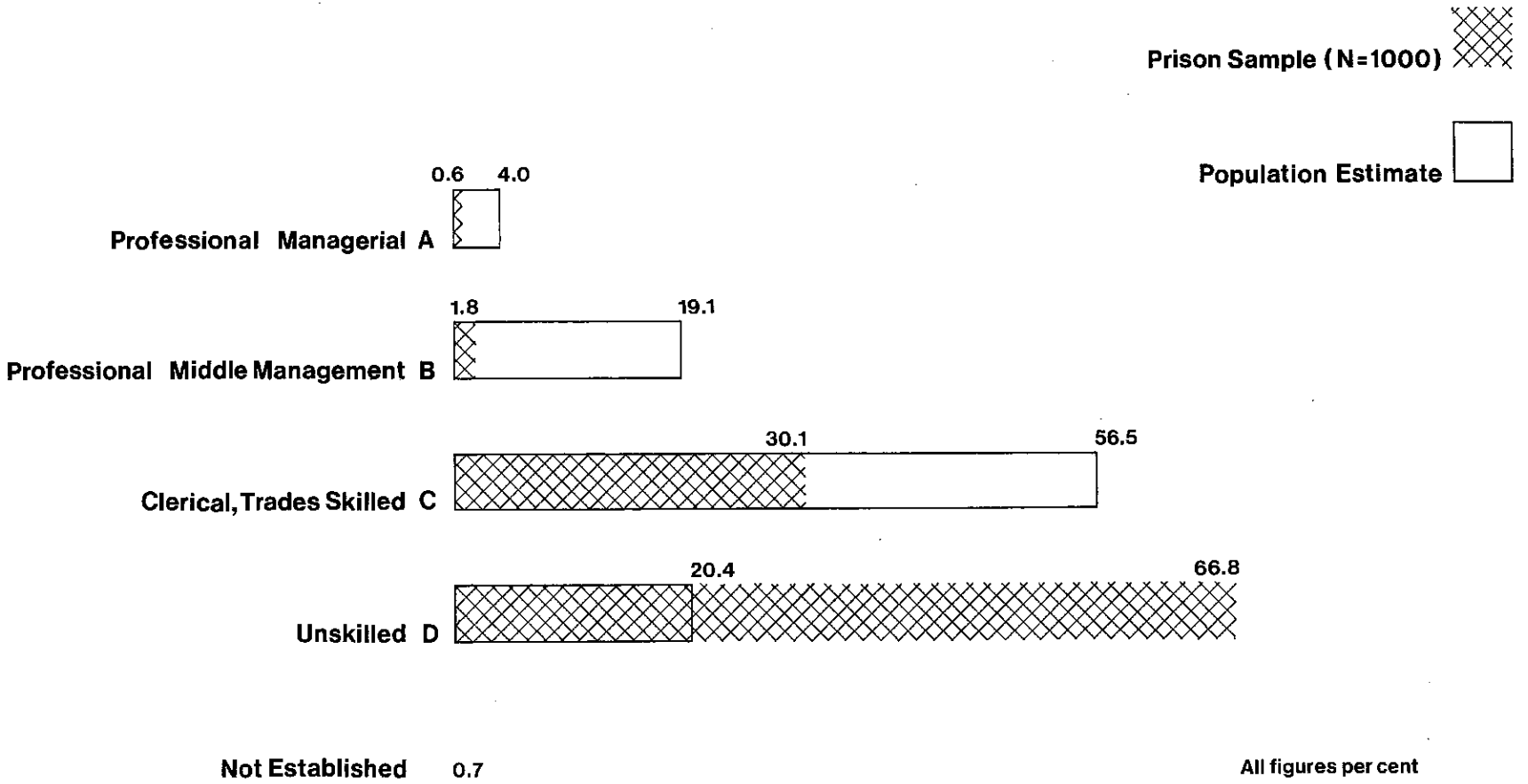
Many sociological studies have shown that occupational prestige - the relative social standing which the Australian public accords different occupations - is an effective indicator of variation in life style and opportunities associates with the concept of 'class'. The categories of occupation range from A (high) to D (low). Estimates are available of the proportion of the Sydney metropolitan population occurring in each of the four occupational strata (see the accompanying figure).

Details concerning his usual occupation were sought from each prisoner. In 0.7 per cent of cases, the occupation of the offender was not stated. In the remaining cases almost 97 per cent belonged to the two lowest social strata. The number of D ('unskilled') prisoners was more than three times the number of D status adults within the general urban (Sydney) population.

In times of comparatively full employment, an individual's work record is an indication of personal stability and capacity to satisfy basic material needs. A common objective of corrective institutions is the development of work habits, attitudes and skills which will enable the offender to be (lawfully) self-sufficient in the community.

In recent years a great deal has been learned about work rehabilitation, especially in the psychiatric field. That similar challenges face correctional workers is shown by the fact that one in six (15.5 per cent) of the 1,000 prisoners were unemployed for six of the twelve months before they were taken into custody. One in five (21.2 per cent) had been unemployed for three months or more. Furthermore, almost all (19.5 per cent) of those out of work for three months or more said their unemployment had not been forced on them by their inability to obtain work.

Occupational Prestige



Patients in a psychiatric hospital undergoing supervised industrial training to regain elementary work habits and adjust to the demands of normal work life.

On page 4 of this report, data is presented which indicates that, in addition to the vocational training which is already available, industrial rehabilitation may be needed by many prisoners.

Country of Birth

Australian born males accounted for 79.4 per cent of the sample of N.S.W. prisoners serving sentences of twelve months or more. The remaining 20.6 per cent were born outside Australia. These gross proportions match the known structure of the general male population in New South Wales (see the census figures in the accompanying table).

Certain differences in imprisonment rates become apparent when we take a more detailed look at specific national groups. Although representing a small percentage of the inmate and general populations, New Zealanders, Germans and Yugoslavs were over-represented in our sample. On the other hand, British, Greeks, Italians and the residual category (all other countries) were under-represented.

TABLE IV - COUNTRY OF BIRTH OF INMATES

Country of birth	Percentage of inmates	Percentage in N.S.W. (male) population (1971 census)
Australia	79.4	79.3
New Zealand	2.7	0.8
Great Britain	5.9	7.9
Germany	1.7	0.8
Netherlands	0.6	0.7
Greece	0.6	1.2
Italy	1.1	1.9
Malta	0.7	0.5
Poland	0.2	0.5
Yugoslavia	2.9	1.3
Hungary	0.4	0.3
U S S R	0.2	0.2
U S A	0.5	0.3
Other	2.4	4.3
Not established	0.7	-
	100.0	100.0

Offence and sentence

Before proceeding to an alalysis of the study findings, there are two other related background points which warrant brief mention. These are the types of offences for which the men had been imprisoned and the length of their sentences.

Property offences accounted for more than two out of five of the cases included in the study*. A little less than one in five involved robbery offences, one in six offences against the person and approximately one in nine sexual offences:

TABLE V - PRINCIPAL OFFENCES OF MEN INCLUDED IN SAMPLE

Offence category	Percentage (N=1000)
Offences against the person	15.9
Sexual Offences	11.7
Robbery/extortion	18.6
Fraud	2.8
Property offences	43.4
Driving offences	0.3
Other	6.9
Not established	0.4

* Based on principal offence - essentially the one which attracted the greater penalty.

Relatively few of the prisoners were serving less than two years. In fact, half had received sentences of five years or more with a further 8.4 per cent classified as either life or 'Governor's pleasure' prisoners:

TABLE VI - LENGTH OF SENTENCE (MINIMUM 12 MONTHS)

	Percentage (N=1000)
12 months less than 15 months	4.9
15 months less than 18 months	1.2
18 months less than 21 months	5.8
21 months less than 2 years	1.1
2 years less than $2\frac{1}{2}$ years	10.0
$2\frac{1}{2}$ years less than 3 years	5.2
3 years less than 4 years	13.8
4 years less than 5 years	10.8
5 years less than 10 years	26.7
10 years less than 20 years	12.1
life/Governor's pleasure	8.4
	100.0

FAMILY BACKGROUND

It is part of the popular conception of crime that offenders come from broken families. In Australia this view has been expressed so frequently, often by people with little more than moral conviction to back their argument, that it has tended to recede a little into the background of professional thinking.

The present study afforded an excellent opportunity for assessing the place of family breakdown in the social background of Australian offenders. Especially since we were dealing with men whose criminal careers had attained the relatively serious stage where they had been sentenced to at least twelve months imprisonment.

In three cases out of ten (31.2 per cent) the prisoners' parents had divorced or permanently separated. In the majority of these cases the divorce or separation took place before the offender was twelve years of age:

TABLE VII - AGE OF OFFENDER AT TIME OF PARENTS' DIVORCE/SEPARATION

	Number	Percentage
PARENTS NOT SEPARATED	688	68.8
PARENTS SEPARATED/DIVORCED	312	31.2
	%	
Offender 1 - 6 years of age	12.5	
Offender 7 - 12 years of age	10.4	
Offender 13 - 18 years of age	6.6	
Offender 19 - 24 years of age	1.3	
Offender 25 years +	0.4	
	1,000	100.0

These findings are similar to those obtained in overseas research. West (1972) has summarised a number of studies which indicate that approximately a third of borstal boys have experienced homes broken by parental death, desertion, separation, or divorce before reaching the age of fifteen*. Carr - Saunders, (1942), found the proportion of delinquent cases in which one or other natural parent was missing (28 per cent) approached double that of non-delinquents (16 per cent)**. The difference in incidence was mostly accounted for by the larger number of instances of parental divorce or separation in the delinquent group. In fact most surveys which have taken this factor into account suggest that breaks caused by parental desertion or separation are more closely associated with delinquency than breaks due to parental deaths.

Either as a consequence of their parents' separation or for other reasons, a substantial number of the prisoners had lived in an orphanage or some other form of children's home. More than six out of ten (61.2 per cent) of the prisoners whose parents had divorced said they had spent time in a children's home, compared with a third (33.9 per cent) of those whose parents had not separated.

In 54 cases (5.4 per cent of the total) it was claimed that the experience of institutionalization had occurred in the first five years of life. Half of this group claimed they had spent more than a year - 18 more than two years - in some form of 'home' in their first five years of life.

* West, D.J. The Young Offender (London: Pelican, 1972).
** Carr - Saunders, A.M. et al. Young Offenders (Cambridge: University Press, 1942).

More than a third (35.8 per cent) of the men said they had spent some time in an orphanage or children's home between six and eighteen years of age. In all but six of these 358 cases the prisoners described the institution as being State operated. That often it was a juvenile correctional institution is suggested by the fact in 72 per cent of these cases official records showed the prisoner had a history of juvenile offences. (This compared with a figure of 31 per cent among the 642 men who had not lived in a children's home).

The interviewers attempted to establish the amount of time each offender had spent in an institution between the ages of six and eighteen. For two out of three of the relevant individuals, the period involved was less than three years. However, fifty of the men in our sample said they had spent seven or more years in institutions. The majority of these cases were all too simply verified by a glance at the prisoner's juvenile record. In the words of a thirty year old prisoner who had spent as much time inside institutions as out of them:

> "Take a look at those papers in front of you and you'll see why I don't expect to be out for more than a few weeks when I finish this sentence".

TABLE VIII - PERIOD IN CHILDREN'S HOME, 6 - 18 YEARS OF AGE

Period in Institution		Number	Percentage
NON INSTITUTIONALISED		642	64.2
INSTITUTIONALISED		358	35.8
	%		
Less than a year	10.4		
1 year less than 2 years	7.7		
2 years less than 3 years	4.4		
3 years less than 4 years	3.5		
4 years less than 5 years	2.8		
5 years less than 7 years	2.0		
7 years less than 9 years	2.3		
9 years +	2.7		
		1,000	100.0

It may be, as West has pointed out, that the broken home, like so many other popular explanations, cannot be more than a contributory cause of delinquency. Nevertheless, it is a theme which recurred so frequently in the lives of our 1,000 prisoners as to demand recognition in the planning of prison treatment programmes.

These findings simply confirm those reported in a large compendium of family research.* Indeed, a review of the scores of propositions published there shows that individual delinquency is also associated with many experiences which disrupt the continuity of family life, (e.g. the mental illness of a parent). One can surely say now that there is good empirical evidence that any experience which threatens or actually interrupts the flow of family group life increases the members' chances of becoming delinquent and, while the family remains fragmented, of their remaining delinquent. Further research to establish these crude facts is really no longer necessary.

With two or three notable exceptions there is much less research into the effects of treatment or preventive programmes. A great deal of effort goes into achieving minimal success, a discouragement which probably acts as a deterrent.** However, the time has obviously come for more rigorous evaluation of the effects of carefully designed, relatively small field experiments in treatment. The key evidence shows that it would be logical to attempt various ways of re-constructing some of the primary, personally fulfilling group associations of the offender, either with family members or peers.

* Goode, William J., Elizabeth Hopkins and Helen M.McClure, Social Systems and Family Patterns; a propositional inventory, Bobbs-Merril, New York, 1971.

** Smith, Cyril S., M.R. Farrant and H.J. Marchant, The Wincroft Youth Project; A Social Work Programme in a Slum Area, Tavistock, London, 1972.

Evidence from several studies, showing the blunted capacity of many inmates for personal relationships, suggests that the cultivation of closer ties between prisoners may be a necessary first step in their 'resocialization'. Furthermore, knowledge gained from other fields where the use of mutual support groups is well established, indicates that there might be considerable advantage if these ties, established in prison, were to be extended beyond the prison walls.

SOCIAL CONTACTS

Whatever its justification on other grounds, imprisonment threatens the very social ties which it may be necessary to sustain in both the prisoner's and the community's best interests. It is important, therefore, to consider some of the more specific problems which arise in prisoners' relationships with key social contacts in the outside world. First, however, we must examine their social involvements prior to coming to prison.

Unlike certain groups of 'minor' offenders* the majority (84.9 per cent) of men serving twelve months or more had maintained 'close contact' with a person or group (other than their parents) prior to coming to prison. There was little difference in this respect between the different age-groups although there was a sharp increase beyond 24 years of age in the number of men who nominated their wife as their primary social contact before coming to prison. On the other hand, younger prisoners were far more likely to mention a friend or group of friends.

* Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Statistical Report No.5, DRUNKS WHO GO TO GAOL. August 1972.

Regardless of who was nominated, the 'closeness' of these relationships was brought out by the fact that in 95 per cent of cases, the person mentioned was seen 'daily' or 'weekly':

Close social contact before imprisonment	Wife	Friend/group friends	Relative	Organization	Not applicable
	%	%	%	%	%
Under 24 years (N=340)	11.2	63.9	11.4	1.2	12.3
24 years+ (N=654)	33.3	35.9	12.7	1.4	16.7

Having identified the 849 cases in which the prisoner had enjoyed a close social contact prior to coming to prison, it now was possible to ask what had happened to these relationships. Seven out of ten (70.7 per cent) of the relevant group (i.e. those with previously established contacts) were still writing to their wife, friend, or relative.

This meant there were 249 cases in which the prisoner was not corresponding with the nominated social contact. Six prisoners said they had made new friends and in 25 cases correspondence was not possible because the friends also had been imprisoned! A further 29 inmates declared that they had simply lost interest in their old friendships.

Taken at face value, this meant there were 189 cases - almost 1 in 5 of the total sample - where the prisoner apparently was interested in maintaining an important personal relationship, but was not writing to the person or group involved. It is the members of this group who warrant the attention of those interested in the rehabilitation of offenders.

Divorce or separation was the most common explanation for not maintaining correspondence. It might be argued that there is little any correctional system can do, or even should attempt to do, in these circumstances. Perhaps the divorce action was imminent or unrelated to the separation caused by imprisonment. In other cases the wife's action may reflect her contempt for her husband's criminal behaviour.

Without denying these possibilities, correctional social workers are also very much aware that a husband's imprisonment often places additional material and emotional strains on the marriage relationship. Since one of society's declared aims is the restoration of prisoners to a fully functional role in the community, the offer of competent professional help in the exploration of their marriage difficulties would appear to be a legitimate concern of the correctional system.

The wish to avoid causing others concern is another factor which at least warrants further exploration. In some cases, a little reflection might indicate that the key community contact is already well and truly 'concerned'*

* As later sections of this report will show, the judgement of many prisoners can easily be affected by the intense feelings which accompany their dislocation from one environment to another.

Without infringing the rights of the prisoner, it could well be in the interests of both parties to suggest that the relationship be re-established. Equally deserving of discussion is the attitude that 'they' are not interested in me while the special difficulties confronting the illiterate prisoner are self-apparent:

TABLE IX - REASON FOR NOT CORRESPONDING WITH 'OUTSIDE' SOCIAL CONTACT

	Number (N=189)	Percentage
Divorce/separation	62	32.8
'They' don't want to know you when you are in trouble	25	13.2
Don't want to worry 'them'	24	12.7
Not known where 'they' are	24	12.7
Can't write	8	4.3
Other	46	24.3
	189	100.0

Visits

Slightly more than two out of five (42.5 per cent) of the men interviewed had not had a visit from their main social contact. With one exception, the explanations offered by the members of this group closely resembled those advanced above to explain why they had not received mail.

One in six (15.8 per cent) of the total sample said their present location was too inconvenient or too far away to receive visits. It may well be that in some cases this type of 'explanation' clouds less palatable facts about the relationship in question. However, it is also true that many of the institutions are in remote places.

For some relatives and friends the problem may not entirely be solved by financial assistance or a rail warrant. Some deft organization may be required, perhaps involving local community agencies, if child care and other necessary arrangements are to be made.

PSYCHIATRIC TREATMENT

Whether or not a person receives a specific form of treatment or care depends on a number of factors over and above the particular problem he has. The various social care and/or control institutions in society are not unlike a series of railway sidings. The arrival of a person who is deviant, disturbed or simply unusual enough to attract social attention at this or that destination depends, to some extent, on the type of social agent (doctor, judge, social worker, psychiatrist etc.) manning the signal box at the particular time.

With these social determinants of treatment in mind, an attempt was made to find out the number of prisoners who had received 'psychiatric' help and the type of treatment they had received. The following question was put to our sample of 1,000 prisoners:

> "Have you ever had any treatment or help for a nervous, emotional or mental problem?"

One in three (33.6 per cent) of the inmates claimed that at some stage of their lives they had received such help. There was very little difference between the age groups in this respect:

RECEIVED TREATMENT

	%
18 - 24 years (N=410)	32.7
25 - 39 years (N=444)	36.0
40 years+ (N=140)	30.0

Nor were there any differences between prisoners normally resident in the major urban or non-urban areas of the State or prisoners of different educational or occupational backgrounds. Sex offenders (39.3 per cent) were somewhat more likely to have received treatment than other categories of offenders but again this difference was quite marginal.

The prisoners who recalled having received help for 'nervous, emotional, or mental problems' were asked to answer detailed questions about where they had received their treatment. Twenty three prisoners (6.8 per cent of the 'treatment' group) specified three sources of help, 85 (25.3 per cent) mentioned two, and 228 (67.9 per cent) indicated they had received help from just one treatment agency.

In the interests of brevity, it is necessary to condense the quite extensive information which was collected concerning the prisoners contacts with a variety of sources of personal help. Two out of five of the prisoners who had received treatment for emotional disorders - 13.7per cent of the total sample - had obtained help from psychiatric hospitals. A slightly smaller group (one in three of the treatment group) had received their help within the prison system.

Sometimes this prison treatment was a continuation of help received in the outside community. The papers of one man in his twenties showed he had been previously diagnosed 'paranoid schizophrenic'. In prison he continued to receive the same type of drug therapy prescribed by a private psychiatrist.

Often the prisoners said they had sought help because of difficulties in adjusting to life in prison. One long term prisoner said disturbances in the prison system were 'too much' for him and he had sought help in soothing his nerves. Another prisoner serving two years for a property offence had seen the prison medical officer twice following an attempted suicide.

As the table below shows, treatment received in the community was usually from an orthodox professional source. This was not always the case. One labourer in his forties said his nerves were 'shot' after a domestic tragedy. Later he received treatment from an hypnotist with no other professional qualifications.

One in six of the treatment group had been treated by a private psychiatrist and slightly more than one in ten by the outpatient staff of a general hospital. Other sources of help were numerically less significant:

TABLE X - SOURCES OF HELP FOR NERVOUS/EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

	Number	Percentage of treatment group* (N=336)
Psychiatric hospital	137	40.8
Prison treatment	125	37.2
Private psychiatrist	56	16.7
Outpatient-general hospital	39	11.6
Drug unit	17	5.1
Private hospital	8	2.4
Inebriates' hospital	7	2.1

* Adds to more than 100 because of multiple answers. (Each type of agency was counted just once for each individual).

It must be remembered that the above and subsequent data represent the prisoners' own subjective impressions of their experiences. This does not mean that, properly evaluated, the information is of less value than it would be if derived from other sources. Indeed, this element of 'subjectivity' is of special value when later, we consider their willingness to discuss personal problems with trained professional staff.

There is, however, some related information which needs to be interpreted cautiously because of the prisoners' lack of familiarity with psychiatric techniques. After questioning each prisoner about the source of his treatment or help, an attempt was made to document the types of treatment he had received. Clearly, two forms of treatment stood out in the memories of those who had received help for 'nervous, emotional or mental problems'. Almost 3 out of 5 (57.4 per cent) remembered having received some form of drug therapy. More than half (52.9 per cent) indicated that they had received one or another form of individual counselling. One in five (21.4 per cent) had participated in group counselling, and slightly fewer than one in ten (8.9 per cent) had received E.C.T. ('shock') treatment. Ten prisoners said they had experienced hypnosis and twelve claimed to have experienced 'aversion therapy'.

INTEREST IN PROFESSIONAL HELP

For effective health and welfare planning, we need to know more than just the number of men who have sought or obtained psychiatric help in the past. Amongst other things we need to know how many of the men sentenced to substantial terms of imprisonment might be interested in using counselling or psychiatric help while they are prisoners. They were, therefore, asked the following question:

> "Have you at any time since you came into prison felt you wanted to talk over a nervous, emotional, or mental problem with someone qualified to help with these matters?"

This question was intended to tap personal worries of varying degree of severity. Obviously, an expression of interest in using professional help would not necessarily imply some kind of 'psychiatric illness'. In practice, each stated problem would need to be investigated more thoroughly before deciding which branch, if any, of the helping professions should be brought into play.

Clearly, a substantial number of inmates are interested in testing the relevance and usefulness of professional help. More than two out of five of those interviewed said they wanted to 'talk over nervous, emotional or mental problems'.

Younger prisoners were more likely to indicate an interest in discussing their problems. Up to 39 years of age more than two out of five said they would like to discuss their difficulties. Prisoners over 40 were far less inclined to show interest in such discussions:

		%
18 - 24 years	(N=410)	42.9
25 - 39 years	(N=444)	45.9
40 years+	(N=140)	27.9

The types of problems which the prisoners wished to discuss were, of course, quite varied (see table XI). In some cases, the prisoners were concerned about emotional disturbances and impulses which had been a source of worry long before they came to prison. In other cases, the tension stemmed from difficulties in inter-personal relationships involving key social contacts in the community. For others it was an inability to adjust to prison which they wished to discuss.

All of these concerns represent appropriate starting points for exploration with professional staff. It is not altogether surprising that the majority of the men discussed their problems in terms of quite specific relationships or situations. People generally find it easier to think in a concrete rather than abstract way about themselves and their behaviour. The exceptions to this rule are usually people of higher education and those engaged in occupations which require them to think abstractly. Few prisoners were drawn from these groups.

Despite a general preference for discussing concrete problems, one in eight of those interviewed adopted a more analytical approach. They said they wished to gain better insight into their own nature or a better understanding of their anti-social behaviour. "I want to understand why I commit offences and keep coming to prison", said one twenty-three year old sex offender. "I need to understand myself better and find out why I commit crime", said another man serving life for murder:

TABLE XI - PROBLEMS WHICH PRISONERS WISH TO DISCUSS

		Number	Percentage
DO NOT WISH TO DISCUSS PROBLEM		576	57.6
WISH TO DISCUSS PROBLEM		419	41.9
	%		
Wish to understand self/anti-social behaviour	12.6		
Family problems	5.7		
Shock/tense reaction to prison environment	5.6		
Emotionally disturbed - nerves/ depressed	4.9		
Problems in relationship wife/ girl friend	3.5		
Problems in handling addiction (alcohol, drugs)	3.0		
Feeling of persecution by other prisoners/guards	1.0		
Loneliness	0.7		
Other	4.0		
Not stated	0.9		
DON'T KNOW		5	0.5
		1000	100.0

More than one in twenty of the prisoners were worried by family problems. In some cases it was the prisoner's inability to deal with an 'outside' problem that he wished to discuss. A twentyseven year old labourer serving four years for stealing commented: "It's about my missus. She's on the verge of a nervous breakdown and I'm worried sick about her. Nobody else cares". Another man in his fifties was worried about his step daughter who had become pregnant. "The boy will be sent to prison for carnal knowledge. I'd rather see him stay out of gaol and look after her - he's no help in gaol. They want to put my daughter in a home until she's eighteen and this will do more harm than good".

If for no other reason than reducing violent conflict, many of the fifty-six prisoners who reported a tense reaction to the prison environment were obvious candidates for professional help. "Prison is sending me mad", declared one twenty-one year old serving a fifteen months sentence for car stealing. "Things - my cell mate, food, no women, - build up and make me very tense" said a twenty year old. Another young man of the same age was somewhat more direct: "This place makes me very moody - it gives me the shits".

A twenty-seven year old serving four years for a sexual offence simply declared "I just can't cope with prison". An older 'lifer' said, "I can't stand the tension and strain in here - I want to unload some of this tension". A man in his thirties described his main worry as being 'just a number'. Finally, an illiterate middle aged prisoner serving a four and half year sentence said: "I feel very strange in here. I get bad nerves. I get stirred up too quickly in here".

SUICIDE

Not all the personal problems mentioned by our sample of prisoners could be described as 'severe'. Certainly, many of the difficulties mentioned are not unique to people in prison. There were, however, poignant reminders of the confusion, guilt and despair which characterised

the thinking of many of the inmates.

One indication of the depth of these feelings was the extent to which the inmates contemplated suicide. Our purpose in asking the prisoners about this subject was not, of course, to identify those who might actually take such drastic action. Our questioning was intended more as a measure of relative despair and depression:

> "People react to being in prison in different ways. Some people do their time without becoming too distressed – others find the experience very upsetting. We'd like to know how you've felt about it. For example, has there been any time in here when you've thought seriously about suicide?"

Unfortunately, we do not know how many people in the general community think seriously of suicide in the course of a year. We do know that one in five (20 per cent of our sample of prisoners) had 'thought seriously' about suicide during their sentence. Furthermore, we know that the likelihood of contemplating this action decreases sharply among prisoners who are over forty years of age.

CONTEMPLATED SUICIDE

	%
Under 25 years (N=410)	23.2
25 – 39 years (N=444)	20.3
40 years+ (N=140)	10.7

Men serving sentences for robbery/extortion offences (25.8 per cent) and offences against the person (23.3 per cent) were more likely to have contemplated suicide than sexual offenders (17.1 per cent) and property offenders (18.4 per cent). A more stringent test of the seriousness of the prisoner's depression was provided by a follow-up question concerning the thought of suicide:

> "Has this been a recurring thought or has it only happened once or twice?"

Of the 201 who originally contemplated suicide 81 (or 8.1 per cent of the total sample), indicated that the thought had been a recurring one. Again, prisoners under forty (8.7 per cent) were more likely than older inmates (4.3 per cent) to have thought 'seriously' about suicide. There were no differences between prisoners in the various offence or sentence categories.

Two out of five of the prisoners who had thought of suicide said the impulse had been brought on by feelings of depression. "I have this feeling of being nothing in life – its not worth living", said one Governor's Pleasure prisoner. "I feel powerless to do anything about my situation or to help my wife and child – they may have left me anyway", said a prisoner in his thirties serving three years for a larceny offence. Another prisoner in his early twenties said feelings of depression were brought on by "thinking about my life and how it is screwed up – it gets me down in the dumps".

A further 38 men – one in five of those for whom suicide had been a recurring thought – identified a more specific set of circumstances, namely, the initial shock of finding themselves faced with imprisonment. Needless to say, this group contained many men with lengthy sentences. Thirty-three of the thirty-eight men who reported being in a state of initial shock, were serving three years or more. Five were serving life sentences.

TABLE XII – STATED REASONS FOR CONTEMPLATING SUICIDE

	Number	Percentage (Where 'recurring' thought)
General depression	81	40.2
Initial shock	38	19.0
Feelings of persecution by prisoners/officers	18	8.9
Family worries	14	7.0
Desertion wife/girlfriend	10	5.0
Lonely	8	4.0
Bored	6	3.0
Other	21	10.4
Not established	5	2.5
	201	100.0

A NOTE ON SOME OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENTS

Grant (1973) has demonstrated that officers in correctional institutions and inmates can both be effective forces in developing programmes for managing conflict.* This approach is based on the general principle that the products of a social problem can be used in coping with that difficulty. Hence, prisoners who have attempted suicide in certain overseas institutions are working with prison officers and social scientists to achieve a better understanding of this problem.

Work proceeding within New York State prisons has shown that the forces supporting the myth that confinees can cope with any situation are overwhelming. Suicidal actions are passed of as 'manipulations'. "This frame of reference masks large numbers of actual incidents of self-inflicted violence. These could serve as a quality control index of an institution's mental health".

Grant acknowledges that suicidal behaviour among confined men does not necessarily differ from their behaviour when they are not confined. However, these suicidal incidents are markedly more prevalent when they are confined.

* Grant, J.D. "Management of Conflict in Correctional Institutions", in Ciba Foundation Symposium, MEDICAL CARE OF PRISONERS AND DETAINEES. (Amsterdam: Associated Scientific Publishers, 1973).