

DISCUSSION

Marie Vida Ryan, California Department of Corrections

Jim McCafferty's paper has been very informative. My background is prison statistics, and, therefore, my comments should be evaluated with respect to my particular interest. We are immediately assured that those collecting and evaluating prisoner statistics are not likely to lack in subject matter, at least through 1980. Mr. McCafferty's prediction of almost 319,000 sentenced adult offenders in state and federal institutions reflects a 50 percent increase in the next 20 years and, therefore, the problems and suggestions he presents should be seriously considered.

Although in the past ten years there has been a noticeable development in the states toward better statistical systems, additional progress is mandatory if administrators are to meet the problems and needs of the confined prisoners.

It is extremely pleasing that the National Prisoner Statistics reports on court commitments with trends data since 1942 and on release data are to be published soon. As to the two new proposals for the "NPS" program, I would like to especially comment on the one for the collection of minimal data regarding prior commitment history beginning with the calendar year 1961. The proposed question was: "Has this court commitment ever served a sentence in an adult correctional institution?" - to be answered "yes" or "no". Although a statistical series on the recidivistic patterns of committed persons is needed badly, I have some concern as to the significance of a "yes" answer.

I. Consideration

A. The served sentence could be one day, or 20 years, or more.

1. A "yes" answer would include those who served sentences of one or 10 days for such offenses as drunkenness, disturbing the peace, vagrancy, and would also include those committed to a more severe sentence as 5-life for robbery, assault, or such.

It seems to me that the answer of "yes" is too inclusive for meaningful evaluation.

2. The words "adult correctional institutions" were in the question. What is an adult correctional institution? We think of a jail as an adult institution, but some juveniles or persons in the younger age groups are sentenced to them. In California we have a Youth Authority. Boys sentenced to the Youth Authority may be transferred to our prisons. Although they were sentenced to a Youth Authority commitment they are

being held and trained for an extended period of time in what is normally thought of as an adult correctional institution.

3. If this question is considered immediately at time of admission it is possible that the answer is not available except from the inmate, for there is a time lapse necessary to get prior criminal records, known as rap sheets, from state or federal identification bureaus. Perhaps the answer to this proposed recidivistic history question should be made at time of release from prison or at least some months after admission.

Those of us in California who use the "NPS" series are glad to see them embarking on new programs.

- B. I would like to re-emphasize a point that Mr. McCafferty mentioned which is easily overlooked when using criminal statistics; that is, the non-comparability of prison statistics from one state to another. A person must know the differences among states' laws, practices, and policies, if other than only naive interpretations are to be made. Adult institutions care for juvenile wards. Burglary in one state is called larceny in another. Differences in criminal procedures are such that what is a felony in one state is equivalent to a misdemeanor in another. A sentence for more than one year may mean confinement in a prison in one state but jail in another.

For some branches of government like the Social Security Act, where the individual states have their own laws -- such as, amount of unemployment insurance to be paid each week and the number of weeks to be covered -- briefs of the state laws have been done in a uniform outline style for each state. At a glance, say vertically, one can see the differences in amounts of payment each week in each state, or reading horizontally one has a brief of each state's law. Some such document in outline form would help us in the comparison of prison statistics from state to state.

I agree with Mr. McCafferty that "prisoner statistics are a useful tool if used with caution."

II. Consideration - Criminal Career Statistics Program

California has established a small criminal career recording system of men who have been in prison. But the system is extremely limited and is only applicable to parolees or dischargees who remain in California, as our record followup system is based principally upon the California Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation reports. At the present time we have no way of knowing what happens to the felons that do not appear on a California Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation report. The felon may not be involved in criminal activity or he may be involved out of California.

III. Consideration - Comprehensive Inventory of Law Enforcement-Judicial-Correctional Processes

The Attorney General's Survey of Released Procedures of 1939 and the Wickersham Reports were mentioned. These were two outstanding reports at that time. If similar studies are to be done, where should the leadership and planning be placed? In the federal government? In the Council of State governments? There seems to be a wealth of foundation funds or grant monies available today. Could we get the necessary studies this way? On whom does the leadership for inaugurating such studies rest?

IV. Consideration - Handbook on Criminal and Delinquency Statistics

If such a handbook establishing standards and collection patterns is made in this field, it seems that the task of preparing such a book rests upon the person or persons who are most qualified in leadership, planning, and experienced in the field today. From Mr. George Davis' paper on Court And Probation Statistics, which was just read, there is proof that an actual operation is being carried on and the results are evident.

V. Consideration - Human and Material Resources

Under this consideration it was stated that criminal statistics agencies must turn to colleges for personnel requirements. This is a goal we should work toward, but at the present time, actual experience is the reverse, as some colleges or universities are turning to the agencies for training. In some universities and colleges in California, the professors who have graduate students preparing papers on correctional administration which may require statistics, send the graduate students to us with such remarks as: "Model your report after the

style used in Departments of the Youth Authority, Justice, or Corrections, and ask their staffs how and why they used that particular series and arrived at their findings."

We encourage this work with the students. Perhaps persons in other agencies and in other states have had similar experiences with universities and colleges.

More and more administrators in the field of criminal justice are recognizing the need of statistics and research tools. Some states who started years ago in collection of prisoners statistical series have now started to branch into experimental research in the treatment of sentenced prisoners, while operational research is still growing by leaps and bounds. When operational research is applied to the majority of functions in the correctional field it will necessitate the use of electronic processing machines.

The Departments of the Youth Authority and of Corrections in California have asked the Department of Finance to make a feasibility study with respect to the use of electronic data processing equipment in these departments in the fields of:

- (1) research and statistics.
- (2) inmate records, reports and controls.
- (3) business management including accounting, personnel, and property records.
- (4) Correctional Industries' cost accounting, and production and sales order planning and control.

Although most of us are doing some applied research now, we realize that there is a wealth of information yet to be obtained from the data now available, and all of us are watching the progress in each locale, state, and federal government for ideas in the development in our own systems.

As expressed by Mr. McCafferty, I, too, believe that criminal statistics is becoming more and more scientific and not based upon hunches or subjective evaluations.

Thank you