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Furloughs and Recidivism

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While the number of inmates incarcerated in the Federal Prison System has continued its steady climb in recent years, the number of furloughs granted has been decreasing. During 1990, 3,657 inmates out of a yearend population of 60,734 received a social furlough. In 1989, 4,143 inmates out of a yearend population of 54,644 received such a furlough and, in 1988, 4,610 inmates out of 46,642 were furloughed. Despite this decrease, furloughs remain—for the few inmates who qualify and who pose no risk to the community—a valuable means of easing reintegration back into society just prior to release from prison.

Analysis of the behavior of Federal inmates who were granted a furlough prior to release indicates that

these individuals were more likely to remain arrest-free after release than inmates who were not furloughed. The question of why this is so remains. Are inmates who are furloughed better able to maintain community and family ties and thereby offset the effects of imprisonment? Are offenders who receive furloughs those offenders who are least likely to recidivate anyway? Or, perhaps it is a combination of these explanations.

This article describes the relationship between furloughs and recidivism based on an analysis of recidivism data collected for a sample of offenders released in 1982.

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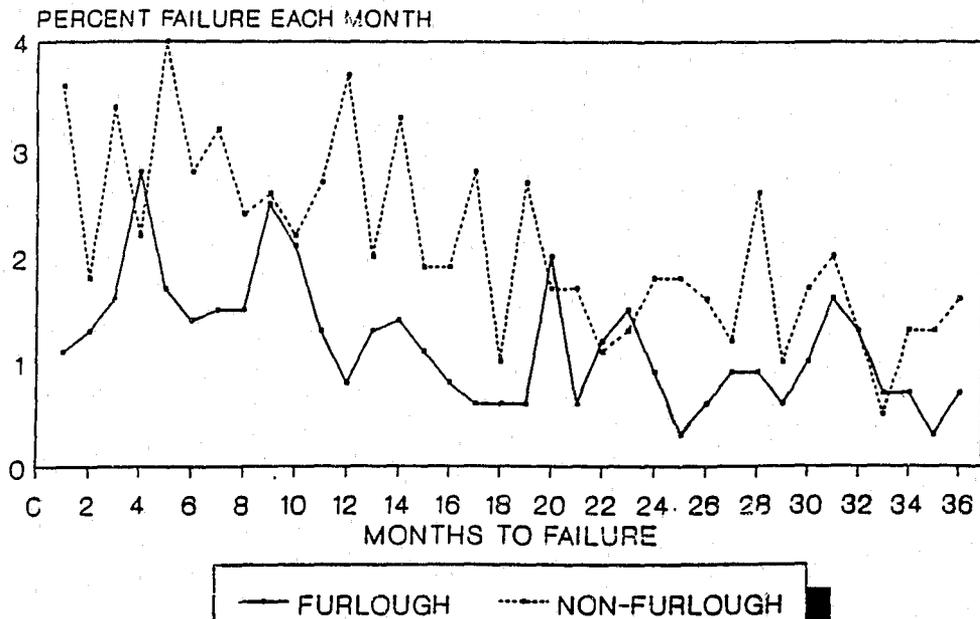
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Figure 1.

HAZARD RATE BY MONTH FOR 1982 RELEASE SAMPLE



An analysis of the relationship between furloughs and recidivism among BOP inmates revealed that inmates receiving social furloughs had significantly lower recidivism rates than inmates who had not been furloughed. Even when the effects of other variables such as Salient Factor Score (a measure of recidivism risk used by the U.S. Parole Commission), age, race, time served, gender, and type of offense were considered, the furloughed group experienced greater post-release success. For the releasees studied, of those granted social furloughs, 32.6 percent recidivated in the 3-year follow-up period, compared to 52.9 percent of the releasees who had no furlough. That is, 20.3 percent fewer fur-

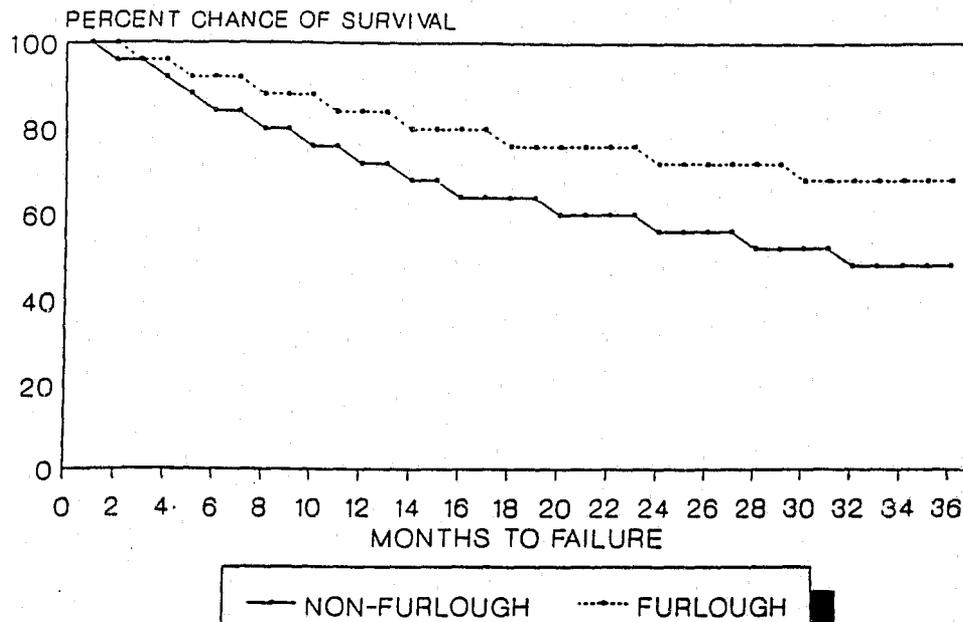
loughed inmates recidivated than those who had no furlough.

This analysis was conducted using recidivism data collected for a sample of offenders released in 1982, all of whom were serving sentences of longer than 1 year. For purposes of the study, an offender was considered a recidivist if he or she was rearrested within 3 years after release from a BOP institution. Only social furloughs were analyzed for this study (i.e., transfer, medical, and legal furloughs were excluded).

Figure 1 shows the hazard rate,¹ or percent of inmates still in the free community at the beginning of the month who recidivated

Figure 2.

SURVIVAL FUNCTION FOR 1982 RELEASE SAMPLE



each month over the 3-year follow-up period, for both the furlough and non-furlough groups. The graph shows that inmates who were granted a furlough prior to release from a Federal facility were less likely to recidivate in each month after release than were those inmates who had no furlough. For example, in the sixth month after release, 2.8 percent of the non-furlough group was rearrested whereas 1.4 percent of the furlough group was rearrested.

Figure 2 shows what is called the survival function,² or probability that an offender will not recidivate each month within 3 years after release. Again it is evident that offenders who were furloughed prior

to release from prison were likely to go longer without recidivating than offenders who were not granted a furlough. For example, at 2 years after release, offenders who were not granted a social furlough prior to release stood a 56 percent chance of not recidivating. On the other hand, offenders who were furloughed stood a 72 percent chance of not being rearrested within 2 years.

Furloughs and Salient Factor Score

Perhaps the reason we are finding the low recidivism rate for furloughed offenders is because the Bureau furloughed only those inmates with a small chance (low risk) of recidivating. To test this

**Percent of Offenders Who Recidivated Within 3 Years,
Controlling for Release on Furlough and
Salient Factor Score**

| | <i>Salient Factor Score</i> | | | | <i>All Offenders</i> |
|---------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| | High Risk | Medium Risk | Medium Low Risk | Low Risk | |
| Furlough | 17.1% | 19.4% | 10.7% | 9.6% | 32.6% |
| No Furlough | 56.6% | 38.7% | 32.4% | 11.9% | 52.9% |
| All Offenders | 73.6% | 58.1% | 43.1% | 21.5% | 44.7% |

theory, we analyzed the risk of recidivism for the furlough and non-furlough groups using the Parole Commission's Salient Factor Score (SFS). SFS is a measure of recidivism risk based on characteristics of the offender. For ease of interpretation, SFS was recoded into four risk categories, which appear in the table on page 4. We found that offenders from all risk categories had been furloughed. Furthermore, the table shows that, within each risk category, offenders who were granted furloughs had better recidivism rates than offenders who were not furloughed. For example, only 17.2 percent of the offenders in the high-risk category who received furloughs recidivated within 3 years, whereas 56.5 percent of the offenders in this category who did not get furloughs were rearrested within 3 years. These findings are consistent across all risk categories. The results are less striking in the low risk category because the recidivism rates are very low for these offenders in the first place.

Summary

In summary, sophisticated statistical analysis shows that offenders who were granted a furlough prior to release are more likely to remain arrest-free after release than are those inmates who do not receive furloughs. Also, the probability that an offender will recidivate in any given month in a 3-year follow-up period is lower for offenders who were released on a social furlough. Furthermore, controlling for SFS reveals that within each risk category, offenders who were granted furloughs are less likely to recidivate than offenders who were not released on furlough.

Conclusion

Based on these findings one is led to the question: *Why do furloughed offenders experience greater post-release success?* One explanation is that release on furlough allows the inmate to maintain family

ties and other ties to his or her community, offsetting the effects of prisonization. An alternative explanation is that the BOP's case managers are making sound decisions about who receives a social furlough and that those who receive furloughs are also those least likely to recidivate. The third, and most likely explanation, is that the post-release success of furloughed inmates may be attributed to both explanations. In any case,

the findings do not imply that the BOP should necessarily relax the criteria for selecting inmates for social furloughs; the findings do indicate that the BOP is to be commended on the social furlough policy in place in 1982.

For further information on furloughs and recidivism, contact Chris Eichenlaub in the BOP's Office of Research and Evaluation at 202/724-3121.

¹ The hazard rate is the number of offenders who are rearrested in a given time period (day or month) divided by the number of offenders who were still at risk (had not been rearrested) at the beginning of the time period.

² The survival function is generated by a logistic regression equation.

Key Indicators Gets a Facelift

The Key Indicators/Strategic Support System looks a bit different these days due to a revised user interface based on suggestions received from the Key Indicators Wardens Advisory Group. The new interface — or menu screens with which the user interacts — makes the system easier to use by providing the user with a scrolling, “point and shoot” table of contents, no longer requiring him/her to proceed through a series of changing panels. The new interface also allows the user to browse through the list of displays for a specific word or phrase.

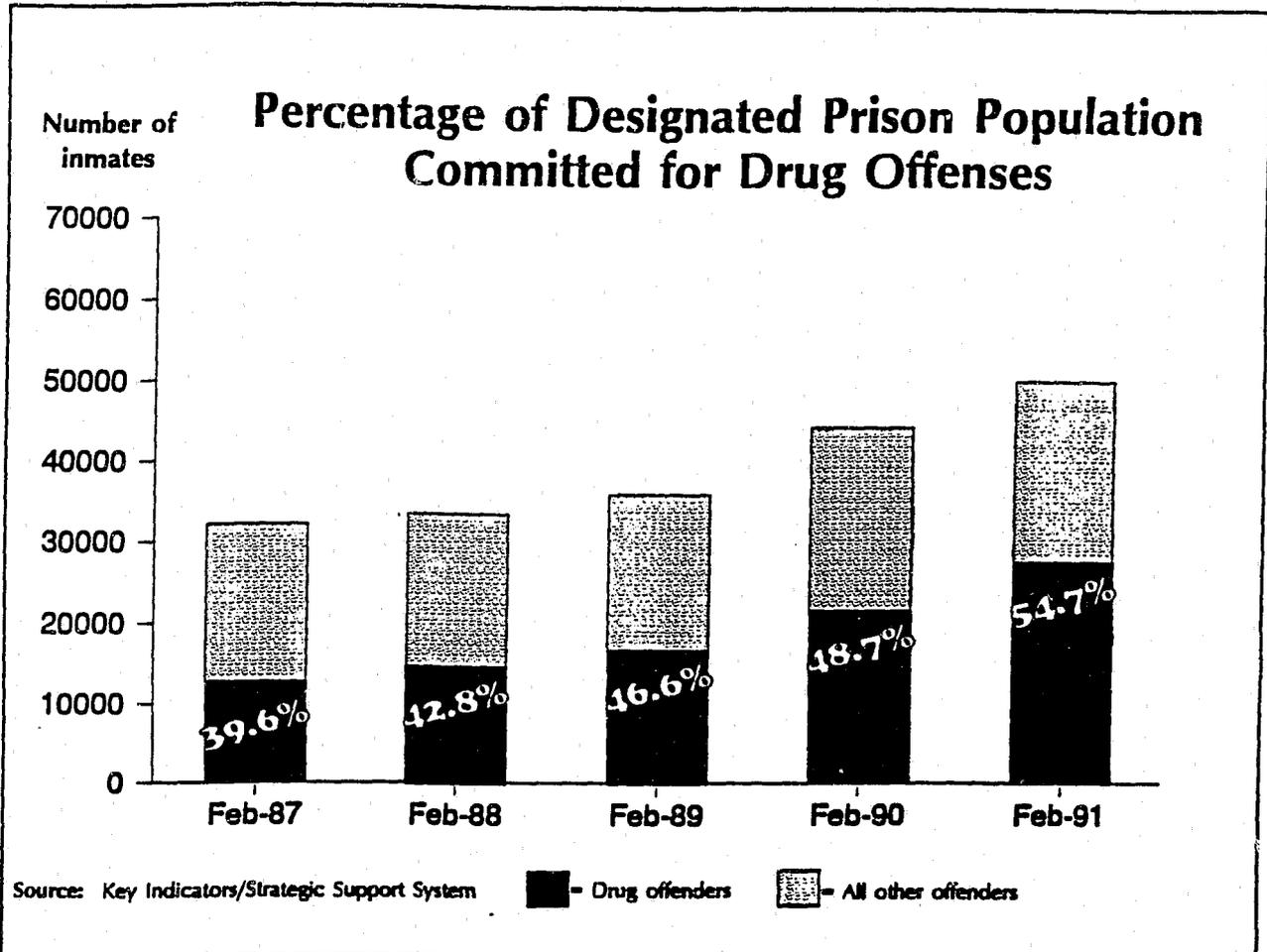
In addition to its new appearance, Key Indicators now contains some previously unavailable information. First of all, data from the 1990 administration of the Prison Social Climate Survey is available at the institution and aggregate (region, security level, and BOP) levels. Disaggregated data by the 24 socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (e.g., gender, supervisory experience, years employed by BOP) will be included in a future update.

Other content changes to Key Indicators are:

- *The inmate SENTRY-based fact sheets now contain a breakdown of Colombian, Cuban, and Mexican citizens.*
- *The fact sheets displaying furlough rates have been modified to reflect the number of furloughs granted as a proportion of the number of inmates eligible for furloughs. Previously, the rate had been calculated as a proportion of the entire inmate population. Thus the new figures will be substantially larger than before.*
- *The financial databases reflecting overtime and outside medical expenditures have been revised. They now include categories showing obligations for the current month, fiscal year cumulative obligations, and projected obligations through the end of the fiscal year.*
- *A prototype fact sheet on staff use of force is now available.*

If you have any questions concerning Key Indicators, please contact the Office of Research at 202/724-3121, FTS 724-3121.

Federal Drug Offender Population at All-Time High



Over the past 4 years, the percentage of Federal offenders serving sentences for drug-related offenses increased steadily and somewhat dramatically. The above figure, based on data from the Key Indicators/Strategic Support System concerning sentenced and designated inmates for whom sentencing information was available, illustrates this growth.

The graphic shows that during the 4-year period from February 1987 to February 1991, the percentage of inmates serving sentences for drug-related offenses (represented by the solid portion of the vertical bars) increased by more than 15 percent to the current all-time high of 54.7 percent of the entire Federal inmate population (represented by both the solid and shaded portions of the bars).

Note - The total prison population in February 1991 was 62,533. The graph does not include unsentenced and undesignated prisoners.

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