
Study conducted in a medium security California prison, in a 500 bed unit for men identified as having some psychiatric or behavior problems while incarcerated. Data are infraction reports revised for a one year period (June 1987 – May 1988).

A total of 911 infraction reports were identified for the one year period. Variables on each infraction included whether the day was 85 degrees or higher, type of residence (observation, disciplinary/restricted movement, chronic, or outpatient psychiatric; whether location was job/school/appointment site, dorm, corridor/hall, shower, dining or recreation area, and cell; shift; whether report written by CO on wing, CO assigned elsewhere, medical or other staff; whether other inmates were involved; target of violence (staff, another inmate, self, or property).

Of the violent incidents (which were more than 50% of all), the largest category of targets was property, followed by another inmate.

Violence toward another inmate was least likely in school or at job sites. Only a small (but statistically significant) trend toward more violence when temperatures were 85 or above. Inmate aggression toward other inmates was less likely to occur when inmates were housed on disciplinary floors.

(p. 128) “The point of the present study is to underscore the fact that there are non-random patterns to the type of behaviors people exhibit in varying situations”

In conclusion (p. 129): “Ideally, what is needed is an ecological approach to understanding prison violence, one that focuses on the relationship between the person and the environment.”
Using Situational Factors to Predict Types of Prison Violence

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ABSTRACT This study tested situational factors as predictors of types of individual aggressive incidents in a male prison population. The majority of past research on predicting individual incidents of prison violence has seriously downplayed situational factors. The situational variables used covered three general questions: Where? When? and Who Else?. Incidents of violence were categorized by whether the occurrence of an infraction involved aggressive behavior directed at staff, another inmate, self, or property. This study found that situational variables did serve as predictors of these categories of violence. These results support the position that background or personality factors, when used without situational factors, may not provide a complete understanding of prison violence.

Past research predicting disruptive or violent behavior in prison has largely conceived of these behaviors as indicative of the coping level of the inmate. The focus is necessarily on the inmate and the question centers around which types of inmates engage in these behaviors. The underlying or explicit presumption is that if an inmate does engage in these behaviors that inmate is "maladjusted" and if an inmate does not engage in these behaviors that inmate is "well adjusted." This line of thinking is infused with a
bias in favor of the individual at the expense of the situation within which the incident occurred, suggesting that there may be a correspondent inference bias (Jones & Davis, 1965) in prison researchers. Prison researchers assume that there must be some dispositional characteristic of the individual that accounts for this behavior and so research continues in this direction while situational factors are ignored.

**RELATED STUDIES**

The current prison research environment presents a classic case of the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977), the tendency to attribute the cause of a behavior to an individual's character or personality even in the face of very strong situational determinants.

The specific variables used in predicting prison adjustment [Note 1] or incidents of violence have been heavily weighed in the direction of background variables such as race, age, and commitment offense (Brown & Spaveccek, 1971; Cac, 1961; Flanagan, 1980; Flanagan, 1983) or personality factors such as MMPI scores (Jones, Beidleman, & Fowler, 1981; Panton, 1979). The usefulness of this type of prediction study has been questioned on a number of grounds (Henderson, 1986; Megargee & Carbonell, 1985; Shawver, Clanon, Kordys & Friedman, 1985). The personality inventories that are most often used, contain little situational or contextual information (Furnham & Henderson, 1982) which hampers their ability to aid in predicting violence that necessarily includes not only a person but also a situation.

This bias may have arisen because of the necessity of classification of inmates. Classification of inmates for housing and program purposes has, for good reason, focused on use of variables centered in the individual. Classification for purposes of programing and prison management, while it includes the goal of violence reduction, is not, however, equivalent to violence prediction for purposes of violence prevention. Because classification serves to fit a group of individuals with a housing area, it necessarily includes the use of situational factors in carrying out its objective. Classification uses information about the person and the situations available in the given prison in making a determination. While it is often assumed that these two functions (classification and adjustment prediction) will involve the same variables (e.g., Louscher, Hosford & Moss, 1983; Wright, 1988) this assumption may not be founded.

**Situational Studies**

Studies on situational factors contributing to incidents of violence in maximum security psychiatric or forensic settings have found differences in physically aggressive behavior depending on location, housing unit, and time of day of assaults (Dictz & Rada, 1983; Harris & Varney, 1986). Harris and Varney found that much of the variability in assaultive behavior was due to environmental factors even when patients were initially noted to be characteristically violent. They concluded that assaultiveness was "due to the interaction of environmental and internal factors" (p. 188).

There have been a few studies conducted on the relationship between situational factors and individual incidents of violence in prison populations. Henderson (1986) researched incidents both within and outside of prison, as described by the perpetrator, and found eight different clusters, in part based on situational factors, which roughly corresponded to eight different types of violence as previously described in other research. Kratcoski (1988) examined situational factors of inmate violence toward guards and found that location of assault, time of day of assault, and work experience of the correctional officer assaulted, all varied systematically as a function of the assaultive behavior. Other situational studies have focused on issues of crowding or density (e.g., Cox, Paulus & McCain, 1988; Megargee, 1976). High levels of density have been shown to be related to disruptive behavior in several different types of prisons (Cox, Paulus & McCain; Jan, 1980).

The current project examined disciplinary infractions through the use of the situational information provided by the institution
rather than individual characteristics of inmates. The perspective taken here emphasizes the fact that the incidents arise out of the combination of features both as part of the inmate and as part of the situation. As Flanagan (1983) notes, "the processes that lead to charging an inmate with a disciplinary infraction are situational in nature-involving a complex interplay between inmate, officer, and the setting in which the interaction occurs" (p. 37). In addition, given that some infraction occurs, it is not necessarily the case that an act of violence will be included as part of that infraction. It was predicted that the likelihood that the infraction involved violence would be, in part, determined by the situation.

The purpose of the present study was to test the prediction that, given the occurrence of an infraction, situational variables could be identified as predictors of whether this infraction included an individual act of violence. If so, specific situational variables should be identifiable for each of the different types of individual violence that occurred in the given prison population. The types of individual violence found on the unit under investigation were distinguished by the target of the violent behavior. This study examined violence toward staff, another inmate, self, and property. Individual violence is usually defined as acts of violence against others, but, as Toch (1976) points out, violence may also include acts of self-inflicted violence. No study to date has looked at each of these types of violence separately given a set of situational predictors.

The situational variables used in this study have been implicated by previous research and, for the most part, are noted on infraction reports. The predictor variables used were location of incident, housing wing of inmate, temperature, shift, job assignment of reporting officer, and the involvement of other inmates. The only variable not taken from infraction reports was ambient temperature. Due to an absence of air conditioning on inmate housing units, hot temperatures could be related to aggressive incidents. Studies done outside the prison environment have indicated a possible linear relationship between heat and assaultive behavior (Cotton, 1986; Harries & Stadler, 1983, 1988) though some evidence suggests that if there is a relationship, it may be curvilinear (Bell & Fusco, 1989).

In a study done in a Federal prison, Megargee (1976) found no relationship between heat and assaultive behavior. Location of incident, time of day of incident, and housing unit of inmate have been indicated as possible predictors of assaultive behavior in psychiatric hospitals (Harris & Varney, 1986; Dietz & Rada, 1983); location, time of day, and characteristics of the reporting officer have been found to be related to staff assaults in prison (Kratcoski, 1988); and location, time of day, and the presence of others have been found to be helpful in distinguishing types of violence occurring in and outside of prison (Henderson, 1986).

**METHOD**

The prison in which the present investigation was conducted is a medium security, state prison in California and the unit studied housed 500 men who were identified as having some psychiatric or behavior problems while incarcerated. All data were obtained from infraction reports (CDC-115s) for a one year period (June 87 to May 88). Cases were identified by reports rather than by inmates or subjects. Of the total 911 infraction reports identified 809 had some penalty assessed so were retained for the current study. All variables were dummy coded for nominal scale. Because of the categorical nature of the dependent variables, logistic regression was used (Aldrich & Nelson, 1984). Logistic regression or logit analysis works on a non-linear probability model in the case of dichotomous dependent variables. As in linear regression, logit coefficients are interpretable as the independent contribution of each regressor in predicting the outcome. Logistic regression or logit analysis was chosen over discriminant analysis as a means of analyzing the data because of its fewer limitations and better suitability to this type of predictive analysis (Darlington, 1990).

All predictor variables except temperature were taken from the incident report. Maximum daily ambient temperatures were obtained from the National Weather Service and the highest maximum temperatures were coded. "Hot" was defined as 85 degrees
or more. The situational variables used covered three general questions: Where? When? and Who Else?.

"Where?" represented both the site in the prison at which the incident occurred and the type of residence [wing] in which the inmate was housed. Locations coded were job, school, or appointment site; dorm; corridor or hall (including grill gates and sally ports); shower, dining, or recreation area; and cell. The "cell" category was used as the base category in dummy coding because of its lack of public situational features. Type of housing wings coded were observation, disciplinary or restricted movement, chronic or outpatient psychiatric. The psychiatric wings were used as the base category because of the unique environmental features of the inpatient wing (i.e. mental health staff, air conditioning).

"When?" represented both whether the incident occurred in days with extreme heat as defined above and the shift on which the incident occurred. The base category for temperature was all days which had a maximum temperature that was less than 85 degrees. Shift categories were day shift (7:00-14:59), afternoon shift (15:00 to 22:59), night shift (23:00-06:59). Night shift was used as the base category in dummy coding.

"Who else?" represented both who wrote up the report and whether any other inmates were actively involved in the incident. Categories for who wrote up the report were correctional officer assigned to the wing on which the inmate was housed, correctional officer assigned other than where the inmate was housed, medical technical assistant or other staff. The last category was used as a base category. The active involvement of other inmates was coded using the "no other inmates" category as the base category. The variable representing other inmates was not used in the models for violence toward another inmate or self because the active involvement of other inmates is part of the definition of the first and the involvement of other inmates is incompatible with the second.

The four types of violence representing the criterion variables were coded from the description of the offense. The operational definition of violence here was one used by Wilds (1973) as "hostility translated into physical action that has intent to cause harm to people or destruction to property" (p. 429). Using this definition the terms "violence" or "aggression" can be used interchangeably. Categories of aggression used as criterion variables were violence toward (1) staff; (2) another inmate; (3) self; and (4) property. Each category was predicted from the population of all infractions occurring within the one year period for the unit studied. A separate logit analysis was done for each type of violence.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Violent incidents comprised just over 50% of all infractions. Of the total 809 infractions, 82 involved aggressive behavior toward staff, 128 involved aggressive behavior toward another inmate, 53 involved aggressive behavior toward self, and 153 involved aggressive behavior toward property. Overall goodness of fit of the model was calculated for each equation. The measure used was one suggested by Aldrich and Nelson (1984) where pseudo R-squared = c/(N + c), with c being the chi-square statistic for overall fit and N being the total sample size. This measure ranges from 0 to 1. Using this measure the overall goodness of fit for violence toward staff was .08, toward another inmate was .21, toward self was .06, and toward property was .23.

Logit analyses also revealed that there were significant predictors for each type of aggression. The results of the analyses are given in Table 1 by the coefficient estimates of each situational variable with corresponding t values. Significance levels are given for those variables that, relative to the base category, correspond with a significant increase or decrease in the likelihood of each type of aggression occurring. The Job/School/Apartment category was taken out of the equations for self and property; the Shower/Dining/Recreation area category was taken out of the equation for self because these were zero-entry categories, retention of which would create problems in the statistical analyses. This reduced the N for these two equations as is noted in Table 1.

Violence toward staff was more likely to occur in areas where inmates were active but not in a highly structured manner (i.e. corridors and dining, recreation, and shower areas) rather than in
Violence toward property occurred less when in the same area and was less likely to occur during the day.

Violence toward self was less likely to occur when in the same area. This is probably related to the physical movement and motion of people in the area. The area of the residence was less likely to occur than the area of the study. The area of the residence was more likely to occur when in the same area.

Violence toward others was more likely to occur when in the study area. The area of the residence was less likely to occur than the area of the study. The area of the residence was more likely to occur when in the same area.

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Table 1: Coefficient Estimates of Each Situational Variable for Likelihood of Each Type of Violence
was significantly more likely to be reported by a correctional officer than by other staff.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The use of information on situational factors need not lead to the claim that purely situational factors could ever completely explain violent behavior. As Bandura (1981) states, a search for purely situational causal determinants of behavior is "an unproductive pursuit of the psychological Grail" (p. 30). Rather, the point of the present study is to underscore the fact that there are non-random patterns to the type of behaviors people exhibit in varying situations. As the results here indicate, violent behavior in a male prison population is no exception. There is a need, therefore, to increase our understanding of the situational factors that will help us to predict the likelihood of violent behaviors occurring in prison, in effort to prevent their occurrence.

While personality and background variables should not be ignored, they should be supplemented. Exclusive use of background variables produces what some psychologists have termed "destiny studies" (Shawver, et al., 1985) because they "tell us how things are likely to turn out but they do not give us a clue as to what we can do to influence things to turn out better" (p. 2). One cannot hope to change an inmate's age, sex or prior convictions during incarceration. The exclusive use of MMPI scales presents similar problems. Because of their tendency to categorize people based on criteria that is difficult to alter, they too act as destiny variables. Changing a person's MMPI score is neither a very realistic goal nor a necessarily helpful goal.

Prediction based solely on personality or background factors also has had its share of empirical problems. These factors when used alone have yielded a high number of false positives (Megargee & Carbonell, 1985) and have accounted for less than 30% of the variance in prison adjustment studies (Carbonell, Megargee & Moorhead, 1985). In a review of the literature on the previous use of eight MMPI scales in predicting adjustment to prison by use of criteria indicating the occurrence of disruptive behavior (e.g., segregation, disciplinary infractions), Megargee and Carbonell reported that many of the studies gave contradictory results or found no relationship.

The use of classification variables for violence or adjustment prediction is inherently problematic because only one aspect of the incident is being measured. In a study of the usefulness of different classification systems in predicting adjustment to prison, Wright (1988) found that whether the system focused on psychological (Megargee's MMPI Typology), situational (Toch's Prison Preference Inventory) or background (Risk Assessment) variables none were superior to the others. Each predicted some outcomes and not others and each explained no more that 20% of the variance. This suggests that there is a need to re-think how violence prediction is best done and what the variables for future study should be.

Ideally, what is needed is an ecological approach to understanding prison violence, one that focuses on the relationship between the person and the environment (Flynn, 1976). Only when researchers find ways to capture the necessarily interacting variables of the person and the situation can they begin to tell the whole story of prison violence (Jones, Beidleman & Fowler, 1981; Monahan, 1981). As Monahan states, "It can be argued that the inclusion of situational variables is the most pressing current need in the field of violence prediction" (p. 130). It is clear that the study presented here does not tell the whole story but only a small part of the story. Its importance lies in the fact that it tells the part that needs to be heard most at this time.

Research Note

1. The term "adjustment" will be used in describing other studies, but because the present investigation is a situational study, disruptive or violent behavior is herein conceptualized quite differently.
References


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Releasee Characteristics and Parole Success

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ABSTRACT This study compared adult releasees who had vocational, or vocational and academic training, to a control group of releasees who chose not to enroll in vocational or academic training. A fourth group, those releasees who received only academic coursework while incarcerated, was also studied. A total of 760 releasees was studied for 12 months. Violation/nonviolation was the independent variable. It was cross tabulated with fourteen independent variables, focusing especially on education and/or vocational program involvement while incarcerated. Violation was defined as "returned to prison because of parole violation," "committing a new crime" (also resulting in parole violation), or "being absent without permission" (also a parole violation). Chi-square analysis indicated that seeking and obtaining a job was essential to remaining on parole. Parolees who had no prior documented history of abusing alcohol or drugs were more successful on parole. Other important background characteristics related to parole success are being married, participating in...