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Gene Kassebaum, David A. Ward, and Daniel M. Wilner, Prison Treatment and Parole Survival

Craig Eldon Pinkus

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BOOK REVIEW

PRISON TREATMENT AND PAROLE SURVIVAL: AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT. By Gene Kassebaum, David A. Ward and Daniel M. Wilner. New York: John Wiley and Sons. 1971. Pp. 380. \$9.95.

Prison Treatment and Parole Survival is a report on one of the most extensive and meticulous sociological studies of a correctional program yet undertaken. In the calmest and most rational language, the authors provide data and conclusions that all but seal the tomb containing the corpse know among penologists as "treatment." They candidly acknowledge that the thrust of most other treatment evaluation surveys has been that no decisive effect in reducing recidivism has been demonstrated by the many programs studied. Yet, the methods and magnitude of their research make this one of the most persuasive documentations of the failure of the "treatment philosophy."

The institutional target of the study was California Men's Colony—East (CMCE) at San Louis Obispo, midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. CMCE opened in 1961, and the authors were on the site working on the terms of their study with corrections officials as the facility was under construction. They very carefully spell out the details of the study which extended until August of 1969. Major phases of the study included the random assignment of inmates into treatment or control group sections, correctional staff training, observation of counseling groups, interviews of inmates, inmate opinion sampling by questionnaires, preparation of abstracts of prison records, administration of psychological tests, data collection from parolees and parole agents, follow-up data collection on arrests, dispositions and parole revocations and, finally, analysis of the mass of information collected. Although much of the methodological description could easily have lapsed into jargon, it is clear and should be easily followed by lawyers as well as by corrections officials.

The major technique now being used to achieve the "treatment" objective is the "group counseling" procedure to which the California Corrections Program has been heavily committed. The authors set three hypotheses to be tested by the data: 1) "Participation in treatment results in lessened endorsement of the inmate code" (an informal set of values of inmates which emphasizes resistance to the official norms and manipulation of custodial officers and other inmates); 2) "Inmates

who participated in the group counseling program will receive fewer disciplinary reports;" and 3) "Parolees who participated in the prison group counseling program will have lower recidivism rates than controls" (*i.e.*, persons not participating in the counseling).¹ The results were simply that the three hypotheses could not be supported by the study.

The authors express thanks and praise throughout the book to the California Corrections Department. They emphasize something that should be emphasized here as well: California has perhaps the best State Department of Corrections in the nation. That department has been a leader in progressive innovations, and it has been the largest state source of evaluative data. To that must be added that CMCE was one of the newest correctional institutions, one in which the daily lives of the inmates were materially more comfortable than in most state penal institutions. The staff was above average. Yet, the "treatment" program failed about the same as efforts in less enlightened environments. The authors cite the conclusions of a review and summary of their work by the Research Division of the California Legislature. Every person interested or involved in corrections should read these conclusions:

- I. There is no evidence to support claims that one correctional program has more rehabilitative effectiveness than another.
- II. Statistics on recidivism exaggerate the extent to which convicted offenders return to serious crime.
- III. The likelihood of a citizen being subjected to personal injury or property loss can be only infinitesimally lessened by the field of Corrections.
- IV. The increase in public protection gained by the imprisonment of large numbers of offenders, of whom few are dangerous, is outweighed by the public costs involved.

The above conclusions form the basis of the single recommendation: that no more funds be provided for the construction of state prison facilities.²

The authors conclude their substantial work on a note which is pessimistic, and their pessimism seems well-founded:

Precisely because the concept and connotations of psycho-

1. G. KASSEBAUM, D. WARD & D. WILNER, PRISON TREATMENT AND PAROLE SURVIVAL: AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT 71 (1971).

2. *Id.* at 323.

logical treatment provide a suitable imagery with which to depict imprisonment, it is unlikely that studies which fail to confirm such treatment's effects will lead to the abandonment of the treatment ideology.³

They leave us with the example of "civil commitment" of drug users under the aegis of the Department of Corrections which amounts to long-term custody and parole situations. It is, in other words, the same old thing clothed in the vague rhetoric of treatment. More than likely, as the authors seem to sense, this book will not do any good. States that have not achieved the diversity of facilities and progressive ideals of California will probably try to do so. Indiana, for example, has a state constitutional provision which requires that "[t]he penal code shall be founded on the principles of reformation, and not of vindictive justice."⁴ Future legislatures will continue to be asked to bankroll treatment programs that will continue to fail to achieve their goals. And, there is every chance that they will pay the bills without being apprised of the substantial literature showing that what they are buying just will not do the job. It would be a minor miracle if, through a book such as *Prison Treatment and Parole Survival*, we could bid farewell to the "treatment" ideology and save a great deal of money that would be wasted pursuing it.

CRAIG ELDON PINKUS*

3. *Id.*

4. IND. CONST. art. 1, § 18.

* Staff Attorney, Legal Services Organization of Indianapolis.