

WINLATON YOUTH TRAINING CENTRE

A METHOD FOR REDUCING ADOLESCENT AGGRESSION IN AN
INSTITUTIONAL POPULATION

by

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SUMMARY OF REPORT (same title and authorship)

A three-part administrative method is detailed and evaluated as to its effectiveness in reducing adolescent aggression in an institution for adjudicated young women.

The administrative method has three closely inter-related parts:

1) Daily (five days per week) compulsory group meetings of eight to twelve inmates* led by one or two staff members. These triad meetings feature a prominent role played by former inmates and advanced inmates who clearly display positive, mature, anti-criminal, caring and responsible norms and values. The Triad group contains three kinds of people: a) those with the problem now (inmates, trainees, adjudicated delinquents); b) those who never had the problem or who had it so long ago that it doesn't matter (staff, professionals, volunteers from the community); and c) those who used to have the problem, but now do not (ex-delinquents, former inmates who volunteer to help, advanced trainees chosen because they personify the desired values and behaviour). The "ex" role (c) is considered key in establishing positive norms in the group.

2) Formalised procedures (Grievance Hearings, group work feedback sheets, Serious Incident Reports, Mini Triad check sheets, remission procedures, guidelines for handling absconders, etc.) as a means for dealing with violence and other transgressions when they do occur, as well as with responsible behaviour.

3) Weekly, up and down the line staff and section (cottage) meetings to review incident reports, reformulate procedures and guidelines, offer in-service group work training and keep the positive objective salient. The three-part method is described in greater detail in the report.

The three-part method was applied at Winlaton Youth Training Centre by Dr Eileen N Slack whilst she was employed as Deputy Superintendent.

EVALUATION

Four sources of evidence have been used to evaluate the application of the management method:

- 1) Anecdotes gathered from staff.
- 2) Recorded inmate assaults on staff.
- 3) Fire Brigade records of "seriously damaging" fires (arsons).
- 4) Analysis of abscondings.

NOTE: *inmate: one of a family, community or other group occupying a single dwelling, home, or other place of residence; especially a person confined or kept in an institution.

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SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The results indicate that there has been a lowering of the basal level of aggression at the institution. The reduction is evident from an examination of anecdotal statements by staff, a count of inmate assaults on staff, a count of seriously damaging fires and an examination of abscondings.

No statistical test of significance can be applied to the inmate-assault data or the fire data because there are no cases in support of any hypothesis other than a decrease in these counts.

Absconding data was examined three ways:

- 1) Counting the total number of abscondings in a month, including repeats by the same absconder. No test significance was applied to these data because the events were not independent. It was noted, however, that there was a reduction in the direction predicted by the hypothesis that aggression had decreased.
- 2) Counting the total number of absconders in a month, including in the count repeater absconders from previous months. This count showed a significant decrease during and/or after implementation of the administrative method. When this count is expressed as a percentage of the average populations, the decrease is even more significant. The correlation between population and absconders is positive, but not significant.
- 3) Counting the number of first time ever absconders in a month, including in the count only those who had never previously absconded from the institution. This count showed a slightly significant decrease during and/or after implementation of the administrative method.

EXPLANATION OF RESULTS

The most obvious explanation for the anecdotal testimonies, reduction in counts of assaults on staff, elimination of seriously damaging fires, and improvement in the absconding rate, is that the administrative method, as outlined, has been effective in reducing the basal level of aggression in the institution.

The following alternative explanations are discussed:

- 1) The "true believer" explanation.
- 2) Special "charisma".
- 3) "Soft-hearted" theories.
- 4) Suppression theory.
- 5) Punishment theories.

Alternative explanations are found inadequate to account for the results.

CONCLUSION

The report concludes as follows:

The reduction of aggression in an institution is neither a trivial nor a miraculous event. Rather, it is the result of consistent application of administrative and communicative methods. Great effort is often required in addition to goodwill. The implementor must persist, at times despite powerful opposition from above and below. Once a state of lowered aggression is achieved, however, opportunities readily present themselves whereby the institution can open up to the outside world, without repercussions. Inmates can begin to interact with the community, secure in the knowledge that norms and values will be *RESPECTED*.