

A Profile of Murderer Escapees

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Abstract

To construct a profile of murderer escapees, 35 murderers who had escaped from the legal custody of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections between the period 1990 to 1995 were compared with 100 murderers who did not escape during the same period. Considering their last single escape, the escapee group was not significantly different from the non-escapee group. However, if the prior multiple escapes were considered, the repeated escapes did correlate with some variables.

This study was undertaken to construct a profile of murderers who escaped from the custody of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, as differentiated from similar murderers who did not escape (the control group). The intention was to distinguish the variables that were associated with escape/non-escape and then to use these variables in the classification procedures for screening out the likely escapees.

THE METHOD

The Information Gathering

The number of murderers who escaped from January 1, 1990, to December 31, 1995, was 35 (all males). Pertinent information on 35 murderer escapees (test group) and 100 murderer non-escapees (control group) was obtained from the following sources:

1. The research and evaluation unit of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections (ODOC) provided offense related information such as murder type, sentence, date of reception, age at escape, escape type, escape code, escape date, facility which reported escape, current facility, current count unit; and also socio-demographic data such as gender, race, marital status, and education (16 items). The test group of 100 randomly chosen murderers was reduced to 88, after elimination of female murderers and the murderers on death row.
2. The Oklahoma Pardon and Parole Board also opened their thick folders allowing the researcher to glean whatever information was needed for the escape study. A good part of the information which was collected by the parole investigators for the parole decision was also good for screening the lifer prisoners for outside work. After laborious examination of the inmate files, the researcher assembled a schedule of 38 items (see Schedule A). Information on these 38 variables was only partially available in many cases, but it was useful for comparison if it was available both for the escapees and non-escapees. Incidentally, the test group was reduced from 35 to 31, as one escapee was shot dead by the police, two died with some illness, and one was discharged. So for in-depth analysis, 31 escapees were compared with 31 non-escapees in all the 38 variables.

3. In addition to 16 computerized items (see #1 above) and 38 items assembled from the pardon and parole board, (see Schedule A), another questionnaire of eight items was addressed to the office of the inspector general (ODOC). These questions sought information on the site of escape, the length of time the escapee worked at the site, any outside help in escape, if he escaped alone or with another inmate, if the escape was planned, if an event triggered the escape, the number of prior escapes, if the escapee was recaptured, and for how long the escapee remained at large.

The Instruments

Most studies of prisoners' behavior seek answers in prior criminal records including juvenile behavior, history of alcohol and drug abuse, previous crime patterns, social history including family background and marital relationships; behavior in prison, participation in prison programs, evaluation by staff; and parole outcome. So, based on that experience with prison studies and the availability of information in the inmates' files, Schedule A was prepared and used to seek out information (if available) on each of the 31 escapees and 31 non-escapees.

SCHEDULE A			
Information Assembled from the Folders of Both the Escapees and Non-escapees			
COL #	VARIABLE	SYMBOL	CODE DESCRIPTION
1-2	ID (Serial number)		
3	Escapee	ESCPEE	
I. PRIOR CRIMINAL AND DRUG ABUSE DATA			
4	Murder type	MURTYP	Murder I, 1; Murder II, 2
5	Sentence	SENT	Death modified to life; Life without parole 1; Life sentence or the number of years, 2
6-7	Age at reception	AGERCPN	Yes 1; No 2
8	Detainer(s)	DETAINER	Number of years
9	Consecutive sentence	CNSYRS	Number
10	Prior convictions	PRCONVIC	Number
11	Prior prob & parole	PRPNPL	Number
12	Prior incarcerations	PINCARC	Violent 1, Property 2, Drugs 3, All 4
13	Prior crime type	PRCRTYPE	Yes 1, No 2
14	Juvenile record	JURECRD	Serious 1, Moderate 2, None 3
15	Alcohol abuse	ALCABUSE	Serious 1, Moderate 2, None 3
16	Drug abuse	DRGABUSE	Once 1, Twice or more 2, None 0

17	P&P revocations	PPREVOK	Number
18-19	Risk score	RISKSCOR	None 0, One 1, Two 2, Three 3
20	Crime companions	CRCOMP	
II. SOCIAL HISTORY			
21	Family history	FAMHIST	Stable 1, Neglectful 2, Abusive 3, Criminal family 4
22	Marital status	MARITAL	Single 1, Married 2, Divorced 3, Prison-wed wife 4
23	Dependents	DEPENDNT	Number
24	Education	EDUCATN	College 1, High School 2, GED 3, Less than H.S. 4
25	Military duty (kind of discharge)	MILYDIS	Honorable 1, Dishonorable 2, Court martialled 3
26	Family/community support	FCSUP	Lots 1, Some 2, None 3
III. PRISON CONDUCT			
27	Participation in prison programs	PARPROG	Above average 1, Average 2, Below average 3
28	Evaluation of program participation	PROGEVAL	Excellent, Outstanding 1; Poor to Outstanding 2;
29	Institutional transfers	INSTLTRS	Good, Average 3; Below average, Poor 4
30	Misconducts	MISCOND	Number
31	Misconduct type	MISCDTYP	Number
32	Psychological evaluation	PSYEVAL	Threatening, fighting 1; Drug-related 2; All kinds 3, Psychosis, Paranoid 1; Suicide attempts 2; Unstable, alcoholic 3; Psychopath, sociopath 4
33	Staff support for parole	SUPPORTS	Lots 1, Some 2, None 3
IV. PAROLE OUTCOME			
34	Parole denials	PDENIALS	Number
V. ESCAPE INFORMATION			
35	Time difference between parole denial and escape	TBPDESC	Number of months
36	Escape code	ESCCODE	Escape from outside 1, Escape from activity 2, Escape during transfer 3, Escape from inside 4

37	Escape type	ESCTYPE	Abscond 1, AWOL 2, Escape 3
38-40	Time on escape (Time at large)	TESCAPE	Number of days
41	Years between reception and escape	YRSRCES	Number of years
42	Race	RACE	White 1, Non-white 2
43	Number of times escaped	TIMESESC	Number

The above schedule was used to extract the available information from the Pardon and Parole Board files of 31 murderer escapees and 31 murderer non-escapees.

Next, the researcher approached the ODOC Inspector General's office with the following questionnaire.

QUESTIONNAIRE B

Concerning Escapee _____

1. What was his site of escape?
2. If he worked outside, how long had he worked outside?
3. Did he get some outside help to escape?
4. Did he escape alone or in company of another prisoner?
5. Did this escape occur on the spur of the moment, or had he prepared it well for quite some time?
6. Was there any triggering event preceding his escape?
7. Did he show some escape tendency?
8. Has he been captured?
9. Any other information pertinent to this research?

Information gathered from three different sources was carefully coded and transferred to the computer. Applying SAS, frequency tables, Chi-squares, means, correlations, T-tests were calculated to compare the escapees with non-escapees.

DATA ANALYSES

On comparing the 35 escapees with 88 non-escapees (randomly selected by the ODOC), the analysis revealed that significantly more whites than non-whites (Afro-Americans, Indians, and others) escaped from the custody of the ODOC.

Chi-square: 3.236, DF 1, probability = 0.072

Fisher's Exact Test
(Left) probability = 0.979

(Right) 5.39E-02,
 (2-Tail) 9.96E-02

TABLE 1 Race By Escape			
RACE 1 Frequency Expected Percent Row Pct Col Pct	ESC Escapees 1	Non-Escapees 2	Total
1 White	26 21.626 21.14 34.21 74.29	50 54.374 40.65 65.79 56.82	76 61.79
2 Non-White	9 13.374 7.32 19.15 25.71	38 33.626 30.89 80.85 43.18	47 38.21
Total	35 28.46	88 71.54	123 100.00

Next, on comparing the 31 escapee murderers with 31 non-escapee murderers on 38 items, it was found that the two groups tended to be more similar than dissimilar. As Table 2 shows, the escapees and non-escapees had small differences in both directions, but those differences were too small to be significant. The only significant differences were in the areas of alcohol abuse and drug abuse, where the non-escapee group had a higher incidence of serious abuse as compared to the escapee group. These results came out opposite to the expected direction. The non-escapees emerged worse off in serious alcohol and drug abuse. The only other significant difference was in the area of prison staff support which was higher for the non-escapees, and lesser for the escapees. In all other areas of prior criminal record, family background, and prison record, the two groups were indistinguishable from each other.

TABLE 2

Characteristics of 31 Escapee Murderers Versus 31 Non-Escapee Murderers

Variable	Escapee Murderers		Non-Escapee Murderer		Chi-Square Vale/DF	Prob
	#	%	#	%		
Murder Degree						
I	20	32.26	22	35.48	0.295/1	0.587
II	11	17.74	9	14.52		
Sentence						
Death modified to life, Life w/o parole	9	14.52	5	8.06		
Life, or # of years	22	35.48	26	41.94	1.476/1	0.224
Prior Crime Type						
Violent	7	20.59	5	16.71		
Non-violent	2	5.88	3	8.82		
All types	9	26.47	8	23.53	0.476/2	0.788
Juvenile Record						
Yes	15	24.19	14	22.58		
No	16	25.81	17	27.42	0.065/1	0.799
Alcohol Abuser*						
Serious	18	29.03	30	48.39		
Moderate	13	20.97	1	1.61	13.286/1	0.000*
Drug Abuser*						
Serious	20	32.26	22	46.77		
Moderate	11	17.74	2	3.23	7.884/1	0.005*
Education						
Below High School or GED	8	22.86	9	25.71		
High school or above	5	14.29	13	37.16	1.392/1	0.238
Military Discharge						
Honorable	2	13.33	3	20.00		
Dishonorable	4	26.67	6	40.00	0.000/1	1.000
Family & Community						
Support	7	11.29	11	17.74		
No support	24	38.71	20	32.26	1.253/1	0.263

Institutional Staff						
Support	2	3.45	10	17.24		
No Support	25	43.10	21	36.21	5.431/1	0.020*
Nature of Prison Misconducts						
Threatening, fighting	6	17.65	10	29.41		
Drug abusing	4	11.76	1	2.94		
All kinds	7	20.59	6	17.65	2.877/2	0.237
Family Background						
Stable	6	14.29	6	14.29		
Neglected, Abusive & Criminal	13	30.95	17	40.48	0.154/1	0.695
Marital Status						
Single	5	10.87	13	28.26		
Married	6	13.04	2	4.35		
Divorced	6	13.04	13	28.26		
Prison-wed wife	0	0.00	1	2.17	6.442/3	0.092
Participation in Prison Program						
Above average	5	11.90	14	33.33		
Average	8	19.05	8	19.05		
Below average	4	9.52	3	7.14	2.991/2	0.224
Staff Evaluation of Inmates' Participation in Prison Programs						
Excellent, Good	11	26.1	19	45.24		
Poor & below average	6	14.29	6	14.29	0.632/1	0.426

*Statistically Significant

While the non-parametric statistics did not distinguish the escapees from the non-escapees that well, the researcher next looked at correlations. Correlational analyses provided a large number of significant relationships among several variables (prior criminal record including juvenile record; alcohol and drug abuse; support provided to the inmate by the family, community, and also by the prison staff) but only a few were directly related to the escape/escapee.

Alcohol and drug abuse showed a significant relationship with the total number of times a prisoner escaped. Those who had a more serious and chronic problem with substance abuse tended to repeat escapes, i.e., multiple escapees. Also, the larger the number of times a prisoner escaped, the larger the number of probation and parole revocations (there is a similarity between revocation and escape). Again, the higher the RISK SCORE, as developed by the pardon and parole board, the higher the number of escapes from the

correctional system. Also, the higher the number of escapes, the greater the chance of another escape. In other words, a prior escape breeds another escape; and it tends to establish a pattern. The following table (#3) shows the Pearson Correlation Coefficient/Probability/Number of Observations.

The second segment of Table 3 suggests that unstable, abusive, and criminal family background was associated with absconding and walking away from the outside sites of work.

TABLE 3

Correlations Between Repeat Escapes and Other Variables

Number of Times Escaped			
Variables	Number	Probability	Pearson Correlation Coefficient
Alcohol Abuse	19	.0454	0.46398
Drug Abuse	19	.0454	0.46398
Revocations	25	.0126	0.49121
Risk Score	50	.1203	0.18026
Current Escape	62	.0001	-0.84596
Family Background			
Escape Code (Escape from outside, outside activity, inside)	19	.0086	-0.58415
Escape Type (Absconded, AWOL, escape)	19	.0357	-0.48418

Staff Support

Those who had high support from their own family and community also elicited more support from the prison staff members. That was in evidence from the letters of recommendations sent to the pardon and parole board both by the friends in the community and also the prison staff. Two important correlations were that as the number of prison misconducts rose, the staff support decreased, and as the staff support decreased, the chances of escape increased (Table 4).

TABLE 4**Correlations Between Staff Support and Other Variables**

Staff Support			
Variables	Number	Probability	Pearson Correlation Coefficient
Family & Community Support	58	.0001	0.67036
Inmates' Work Evaluation	40	.0099	0.40319
Misconducts Number	41	.0036	0.44416
Escape/Not escaped	58	.0195	-0.30601

Other correlations (tables not shown) showed that as the family instability (neglect, abusiveness, criminality) increased, family and community support decreased, and the prison misconducts increased (and escape is a serious prison misconduct itself). So the vast array of correlations does establish the usual associational link(s) between early family problems → substance abuse/juvenile delinquency problems → adult crime → prison misconducts → low support systems → escape → repeated escapes. The Parole Board's RISK SCORE (now abandoned) showed a positive correlation with escape, because the RISK SCORE was made up of the aforesaid variables of family, delinquency, substance abuse, prior criminal record and previous failures under the community supervision.

Descriptive Analyses of 35 Murderer Escapees

Conviction. Of the 35 murderer escapees, more than half, that was, 19 (54%) were convicted of murder in the first degree, and 16 (46%) were convicted for murder in the second degree.

Sentence. As regards the sentence, four of them (11%) were sentenced to death, which sentence was later modified to life, 18 were sentenced to life, one was sentenced to life without parole, and 12 were sentenced to a term ranging from 10 years to 55 years.

Race. The murderer escapees were disproportionately Caucasians--26 (74%), African Americans--6 (17%), and Native Americans--3 (9%). On comparing the escapee group with a randomly chosen control group of 100 non-escapee murderers, it was found that

the test group of 35 escapee murderers had a significantly higher proportion of white inmates.

Age at Reception. The murderer escapees' age at reception ranged from 15 to 59 years. Four of them were in their teen years, 12 in their 20s, nine in their 30s, seven in their 40s, and one was 59 years old. The mean age of escapees at reception was 29.52 years, and they were about two years older than the non-escapee group.

Age at Escape. Of the 35 escapees, the youngest escapee was 17 years old at the time of escape and the oldest was 68 years old. Between these two extreme ages, two escaped during their teen years, 14 during their 30s, ten during their 40s, four in their 50s, and one in his 60s.

The mean time difference between a murderer's reception in the prison and his escape was 8.06 years with a minimum period of less than a year, and a maximum of nine years. Out of these, one-fifth (20%) escaped the very first year of their reception, and one-third escaped between the sixth and the ninth year of reception. It must be remembered, of course, that out of 35, as many as 29 murderers escaped from outside, and only three escaped from inside the prison, two from another legal agency, and one escaped while he was in transit from one prison to another.

Opportunity to Escape. The fact that 29 of the murderers escaped from minimum or nominal security sites indicated a factor of opportunity to escape which must be considered along with other factors. They had been trusted to work outside, and they violated that trust. One escaped inmate stated that he "could not adjust to outside freedom of the trustee unit." How long had they worked outside before they escaped? That information was not available, and in a few cases where it was available, the usual time period of outside work was four months to two years.

Outside Help. There was evidence of outside help to escape in at least six cases: three escapees used some cutters to cut the fence or the bars; in two cases, the inmate's wife conveniently drove him off at the time of a visit, and in one case, the inmate kidnapped a staff member and forced him to drive them away from the institution.

Companionship in Escapes. In 40% of the cases, the murderer escapee had at least one other companion with him at the time of escape. Companionship seemed to have been an important factor not only in the commission of original crime, but also in the violation of prison rules. In this group of escapees, there were two sets of brothers who did crimes together right from their teen years to adulthood, were sentenced together, did time together, escaped together, and were captured together.

Planning in Escapes. In 40% of the cases, there was definite evidence of some planning, such as digging a tunnel from inside the prison, or doing some planning to ride away with a visiting wife or girlfriend.

Triggering Event. In seven (20%) of the cases, some kind of event was known to have triggered the escape, such as: an impending transfer from yard work at the warden's house, which he liked, to a high security institution; news of wife's illness; some problems with his girlfriend; having some sexual problems with another inmate; difficulty in adjusting to the freedom of a trustee unit.

Prior Escapes. Out of the 35 escapees, five inmates had one prior escape, and two had two prior escapes. So at least 20% of them had a definite escape tendency and a pattern of escape behavior. This should be a warning sign when inmates are classified for outside work.

Their Victims During Escape. One murderer escapee committed another murder on the West Coast during his escape. Another escapee murdered his girlfriend the very first evening of his escape. Incidentally, this girlfriend had helped him to escape. Another escapee kidnapped the deputy warden's wife (whereabouts still unknown at this writing) and one threatened his former victim's family with violent consequences, but he was captured before he could harm them.

Time at Large. Three of the escapees were captured within an hour of the escape, nine were captured in one day, four were captured within the first week, two in two weeks, six were captured between 16 to 60 days, two in 61 to 120 days, five between 5 months to 40 months, and two of them were still at large. One was killed by the local police and one died. Ironically, those who dug tunnels to escape from inside or cut the fences and iron bars were all arrested the same day or within a few hours. Their freedom was short lived and their labors were not rewarded.

Distinguishing Variables. To complete the profile of the murderer escapees, added below are the characteristics that distinguish the escapees from non-escapees (as summarized from an earlier section on data analysis in this paper).

Multiple escapees tended to have significantly more of the following problems in their background than the non-escapees:

1. having been raised in neglectful, abusive, and criminal families;
2. having had a longer juvenile record;
3. having had a chronic substance abuse problem;
4. having had a longer criminal record--more convictions, more incarcerations, more revocations, more failure in community supervision;
5. having had a higher RISK SCORE;
6. having had more prison misconducts;
7. having had low prison evaluations;
8. having had low support from family and community; and
9. having had low support from the prison staff.

The above factors tended to distinguish repeat escapees better than the one-time escapees. The number of repeat escapees was rather small, so the findings have to be carefully interpreted.

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