

Tracking Security Incidents in Institutions

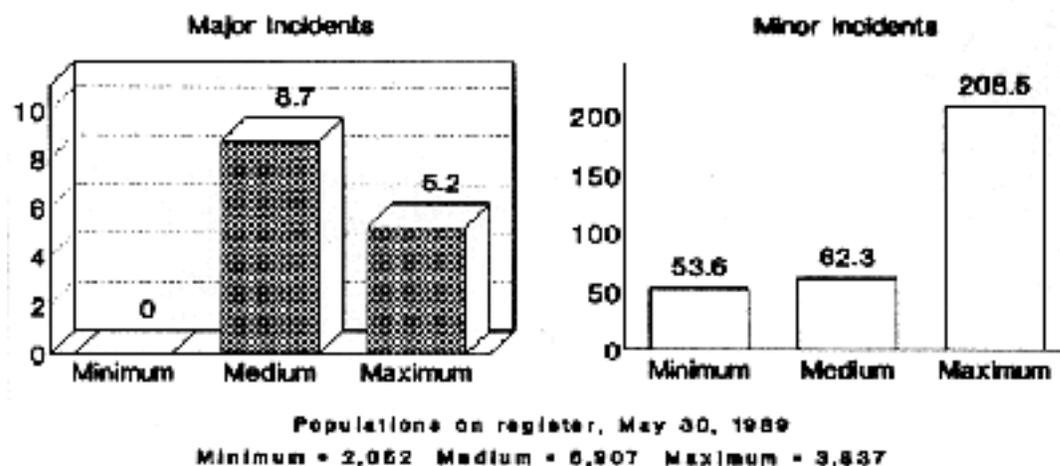
How do the rates of security occurrences vary across different institutional security levels? Have security incidents increased or decreased so far this year? Has the use of force during security incidents changed in recent years?

These were some of the questions examined in a recently completed study by the Research Branch. The study explored methods for improving the monthly reporting of security incident statistics by the Custody and Control Division. Security incidents for the month of May 1989 were the main focus of the research. However, the study also examined trends in security incidents over time.

One interesting finding from the May 1989 figures was that maximum institutions reported a lower rate of major security incidents than medium institutions. Murders, suicides, hostage takings, assaults/fights/disturbances causing injury, and escapes from maximum and medium institutions were classified as major incidents. No major incidents occurred in minimum institutions. The rates for both major and minor incidents are displayed in Figure 1 for the three institutional security levels.

Figure 1

Figure 1
Security Incidents, May 1989:
Rates Per 10,000 Inmates by Security Level



The opposite trend was in evidence for minor security incidents (assaults/fights/disturbances without injuries, attempted suicide, self-inflicted injuries, suspected arson, attempted escapes, and escaped from minimum). The rate of occurrence of minor incidents in maximum security institutions was more than three times the rates reported by minimum and medium institutions. Since the figures were based only on security information for the month of May 1989, the extent to which this pattern remains stable over time needs to be investigated further.

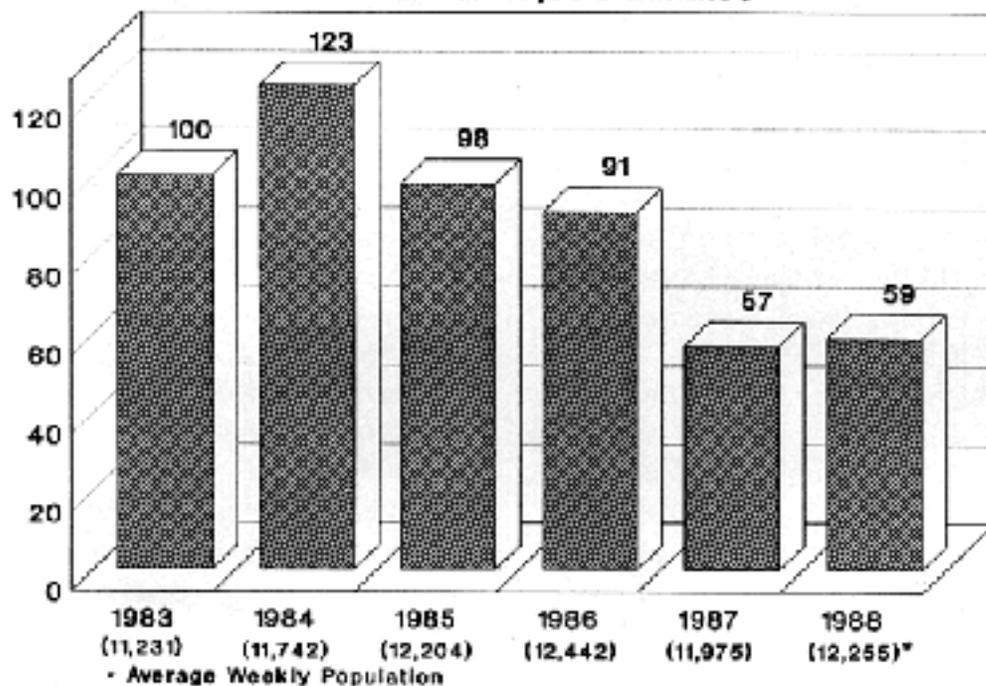
The report also compared rates of occurrence of major and minor incidents for the same five-month periods (January to May) in 1988 and 1989. The rates show a slight increase in the number of major and minor incidents for the first five months in 1989. The rate of major incidents was 24.4 per 10,000

inmates for the period January to May 1988, while the rate for 1989 was 29.1. However, it is too early in the year to determine whether or not there will be an over-all increase in the rate of security incidents during 1989.

One very encouraging finding was that the occurrence of major security incidents appears to have declined over the six-year period of 1983 to 1988. As Figure 2 shows, in 1988 there were 59 major security incidents recorded per 10,000 inmates. The rate of 123 incidents recorded for 1984 was more than double the 1988 rate.

Figure 2

Figure 2
Major Security Incidents, 1983-1988:
Rates Per 10,000 Inmates



While this decline in major incidents was occurring, it appears that staff increased their use of force in responding to security incidents. Although this trend was not as evident for the use of firearms, there were increases in the use of gas and physical force between 1988 and 1989. It remains to be determined whether the way that staff respond to incidents has any bearing on the likelihood or severity of future incidents.

The study has demonstrated that we can learn a great deal from more systematic analysis of the security information that is collected. A number of questions can be posed in future research. For example, how do the rates of particular types of incidents (e.g., suicide attempts, inmate fights) vary by institutional security levels? What types of security incidents are most frequently associated with the use of force? Have rates for particular types of security incidents (e.g. arson, inmate assaults) changed over time?