

Literature review on the factors related to escape from correctional institutions (R-12, 1991)

Correctional institutions are intended to provide safe, secure and humane containment for convicted offenders who pose a potential threat to the community. For the protection of the community, the single most important responsibility of correctional institutions is to prevent escapes or other unauthorized "walkaways." Although it has been understood that not all convicted offenders pose an equal threat to society, and not all institutions are the same with respect to the security measures they provide, escapees are cause for serious concern both among correctional staff and the public in general.

This report provides an overview of identified factors related to escape behaviour and methods of analysis. One of the two commonly used approaches is the quasi-experimental design which typically focuses on archival data and compares a group of non-escapees to escapees. The other is a simple descriptive approach to analyzing the characteristics of inmates involved in escape incidents. The authors also recognize that much of this research is outdated and sometimes experimentally inadequate.

The report suggests the focus of research, which has examined factors related to escape from correctional institutions, generally falls into three categories: static factors, situational or dynamic factors, and psychological characteristics of inmates. The report also identifies another body of research that addresses institutional security, such as perimeter fences, walls, alarm/ patrol systems and towers.

For the purpose of this paper, the authors have reviewed the range of static and dynamic/ situational factors that research has examined in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of escapees.

The research suggests there was sufficient evidence to cite static factors (such as prior escapes, prior confinements and age) and dynamic/situational factors (such as family problems, alcohol abuse and institutional crisis situations) as related to escape. Understanding the precursors to escape is the first step in developing appropriate preventive measures.