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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to describe the distribution of a selected set of socio-demographic variables among a random sample of inmates of a relatively large southern state penitentiary, and (2) to correlate their drinking careers to patterns of deviant acts. The ensuing analysis emphasizes the racial composition of the sample and the relationship between the subculture of the two major racial groups and drinking styles leading to offensive behavior. Results of correlations between drinking behavior and crime are presented throughout the paper. They reveal that a very large majority of inmates tend to be "regular" drinkers, that a substantial portion of the inmates had previously experienced personal social complications as a result of drinking, and that these experiences created the "ideal" circumstances conducive to the commitment of the criminal act. The results show strong evidence to support the relationship between drinking behavior and rate of recidivism. Study limitations were twofold: (1) its design sought only to explore connections between deviant acts and drinking; and (2) several important variables pertaining to the inmates' first experiences with alcohol were not examined. (Author/PC)

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ALCOHOL AND CRIME: PREVIOUS DRINKING
CAREERS OF CONVICTED OFFENDERS

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ALCOHOL AND CRIME: PREVIOUS DRINKING CAREERS OF CONVICTED OFFENDERS

Although there is general acknowledgement of alcohol as a factor in anti-social behavior, the nature and magnitude of this relationship remains obscure. Consequently, disagreement and speculation exist regarding the contribution of drinking to deviant acts (McCarthy, 1964:167-172). This situation is especially the case in rural areas since previous research, in the main, has focused on the association between alcohol and crime in urban centers. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine the role of beverage alcohol in the life styles of a random sample of predominantly rural males incarcerated in the Mississippi State Penitentiary. Two forms of data are examined. The first provides a profile of the social and demographic characteristics of the total male prison sample. The second includes an analysis of the factors related to the previous drinking behavior of the inmates.

Research Procedures

The Mississippi State Penitentiary System, known in penal circles as Parchman, is composed of 21,690 acres of which the bulk is located in the rich Mississippi Delta. Inmates are housed in seventeen dormitory-like camps or units that are strategically spread in accord with the system's

sizeable farm operation.

The sample included 242 inmates randomly chosen from a universe of 1,459 male prisoners. The respondents were interviewed from a pre-tested questionnaire in groups within their respective housing units. A research assistant explained the schedule to the assembled groups and interpreted each item when clarification was requested. The inmates, however, were asked not to discuss the questions among themselves nor to compare answers. Furthermore, the names of the inmates were not solicited; complete anonymity was assured.¹

Findings

Description of Sample Population

The Parchman population included a smaller representation of whites and a greater representation of blacks than that for the state as a whole. For example, black males made up 36 percent of the total male population of Mississippi but 67 percent of the Parchman population. This finding reflects, in part, a racial differential regarding law enforcement.

The mean age for the convicted offender was approximately 33 years, for both black and white males. Furthermore, the age range of Mississippi inmates were similar to the range recorded elsewhere (Grisby, 1963:298-306).

The highest proportion of inmates were between the ages of 20 to 49 years which is the most productive period in the

¹A complete description of research procedures and tables can be obtained from the authors.

male's life. Nearly 80 percent of the Parchman sample was in this age bracket as compared to slightly over 40 percent of the total male population of the state.

In general, the prison sample was more educationally impoverished than the state male population. Nearly 8 percent of those incarcerated had received no formal schooling. This figure compares to approximately 4 percent of Mississippi's total male population. The difference, however, is attributed primarily to the black sample. The white offender had actually received more formal education than his state counterpart. For example, 45 percent of the white inmates as compared to 35 percent of the total white male population had graduated from or had obtained some training beyond high school. Thus the data suggest that the white prison sample, in comparison to the state population, is not as educationally disadvantaged as one might think.

The prisoners were likely to have held unskilled or semi-skilled occupations. Those occupations requiring formal educational training were, as expected, underrepresented. Several differences were noted by racial affiliation. Among blacks, there was little difference between the state and prison populations in terms of unskilled and semi-skilled occupations. Almost 7 in 10 in each case were employed in these type jobs. For whites, however, nearly 3 in 5 of the inmates as compared to 1 in 2 of the white male population were unskilled or semi-skilled workers. In both racial groups ,

there was an underrepresentation of professionals or managers. Yet, 1 in 4 of the white inmates as compared to none of the black inmates had been employed in these types of occupations.

The majority of the offenders, 76 percent, were born within the state. Blacks, however, were more representative of the native-born than whites, 81 percent as compared to 66 percent. These figures compare with 95 percent and 81 percent, respectively, of the total black and white population of Mississippi who are native born.

Eight in 10 of the inmates claimed Mississippi as their state of legal residence. Here again, blacks more so than whites, three-fourths as compared to two-thirds, made this claim. In addition, the data revealed that the Mississippi inmate (64 percent) had been born and had spent most of his childhood in rural communities of 2,500 or less population. Fourteen percent had been born and raised in communities of between 2,500 and 10,000 population while 22 percent had been born and reared in urban centers of 10,000 or more. Similar percentages were found for both white and black inmates and for the state as a whole. Data pertaining to the size of community claimed as legal residence immediately preceding incarceration revealed that almost one-half of the inmates lived in areas of 2,500 population or less while another 20 percent resided in small towns ranging in size from 2,500 to 10,000 inhabitants. In sum, therefore, the Mississippi inmate is likely to be a rural and native Mississippian.

Over one-half of all Parchman inmates were in prison for committing a crime designed to yield an economic gain. However, there was a significant difference between the two racial groups in this respect. The black inmate was more likely to have engaged in crimes of passion while economic crimes prevailed among whites. Approximately, 4 in 5 of the inmates had been arrested one or more times while 1 in 3 had been previously arrested five or more times. Recidivism, however, was somewhat higher among whites than blacks which reflects, in some measure, confinement policies.

Drinking Behavior

Drinking behavior was operationalized by the item "How frequently have you used alcohol (beer, wine, or spirits) during the year immediately preceding the survey?" Those inmates who did not drink in any form were labeled as abstainers while those who drank less than three times per week were labeled as occasional drinkers. Inmates who drank according to a set pattern that consisted of using alcohol more than three times a week were categorized as regular drinkers.

The data revealed that 82 percent of the sample were users of beverage alcohol. There is no norm with which to compare this finding since various studies do not report measures of drinking styles which allow for specific comparisons. However, a recent nationwide survey showed that 77 percent of the males questioned were alcohol users. This same investigation found that the lowest percentage of drinkers were located in the less

urbanized East South Central states (35 percent) (Cahalon and Cisin, 1968:133-151). Research in two Mississippi communities indicates that 54 percent of the males are users. In addition, the inmates, when compared to the sample within the communities, were more likely to be frequent drinkers. For instance, less than 1 in 10 of the community sample of male adult users drank more than three times a week while over 1 in 3 of the inmates imbibed this of ten. The data, therefore, suggest the conclusion that the incidence and frequency of alcohol use are relatively high among inmates when compared to the adult male population (Globetti, 1971) (1967:124-234).

There was evidence of an abusive drinking style among the inmates. For example, nearly 2 in 5 said that they had experienced three or more personal and social complications as a result of drinking. There was a high incidence of excessive drinking in that 6 in 10 of those who imbibed said they usually consumed four to six beers at one sitting while 7 in 10 replied that they consumed four to five shots of straight liquor. The experience of the effects of excessive alcohol use such as becoming tight, drunk, sick or passed out was almost universal among the users. The drinkers tended to associate alcohol with their incarceration and deviant acts. Nearly 60 percent said they were drinking at the time of the crime for which they were convicted, while one-half indicated that alcohol was a major reason for their imprisonment. Finally, there was a positive relationship between alcohol use and recidivism. It might be inferred from this that the frustrations which accompany each

arrest produced a subsequent increase of alcohol intake for utilitarian purposes.

Despite differences in styles of use, variations in the drinking behavior of the inmates by age, education, occupation, and place and size of residence resembled findings for male adults reported from other sections of the country and from Mississippi. There was a positive correlation between educational level and the inmates' frequency of drinking. Although not statistically significant, the proportion of offenders who used alcohol in a regular manner increased as occupational status changed from unskilled to semi and skilled jobs. Data on the employment record of the inmates showed that the frequency of drinking increased with the factor of being sporadically employed. This would indirectly suggest that regular users were experiencing problems on the job because of their drinking habits.

The consumption of alcohol and its frequency of use varied inversely with the inmates' age and positively with the size of his residence prior to arrest. It is interesting to note, however, that over one-half of the regular users came from rural communities as compared to 60 percent of the non-users.

Racial differences in alcohol use resembled those found in Mississippi and elsewhere (Globetti, 1970:). That is, contrary to popular expectation, blacks were less likely to drink than whites. It is commonly felt, at least in the popular mind, that the black subculture of the South displays a

greater tolerance for impulsively oriented behavior which leads to the belief that blacks who are not heavily cautioned against drinking, are given more opportunity to abuse alcohol. The data refute this stereotype. Nearly three times more blacks, 23 percent as compared to 8 percent, were abstainers. Furthermore, whites were more likely to be regular users while blacks, if they drank, were more apt to be occasional drinkers. The higher incidence of occasional alcohol intake among blacks may be partially explained in terms of the life style within this group which defines drinking to be primarily a Saturday night entertainment.

Finally, there was a significant difference between the various users of alcohol and the major type of offense committed. Regular drinkers were more likely to have engaged in crimes for economic gain while non-users and occasional users were apt to commit passion offenses. This latter finding probably reflects a racial difference in types of crimes committed. As shown earlier, blacks tended to engage in crimes of passion and also were likely to be non-users or occasional users of alcohol.

Conclusion

This study was concerned with the distinguishing social characteristics and previous drinking patterns of 242 males inmates incarcerated in the Mississippi State Penitentiary. The prisoners were primarily black, rural and native Mississippians, between the ages of 20-49 years, from low occupational and educational levels. They were poor marriage risks, had a

high incidence of recidivism, and were arrested in the main for economic crimes.

Several variations emerged between the white and black offenders. In general, the black inmates were more educationally and occupationally disadvantaged reflecting the larger social structure. They were more likely than whites to have been born in rural areas in the state and to have lived in small communities prior to conviction. Crimes of economic gain were more frequent among whites. Recidivism rates were high for both groups but especially so for white inmates.

There was a high correlation between the factors of drinking and criminal behavior. Only 18 percent of the inmates, all of them black, were non-users. Relatively, frequent and heavy drinking was the rule in that 1 in 3 of the users replied that they consumed alcohol three or more times a week. These figures compare to 54 percent of the adult males of two Mississippi communities who use alcohol and only 7 percent who imbibe three or more times a week. Furthermore, the drinking styles disclosed several dimensions frequently associated with alcohol abuse.

These findings point to the need for programs of intervention within the prison setting. Alcohol, although not the cause of deviant behavior, was a weighty and complicating factor in the lives of the inmates. Many of the inmates attribute, rightly or wrongly, much of their misconduct to alcohol. Moreover, 1 in 4 of the users replied that they would like help with their drinking problem while in prison. Only 1 in 10 had ever

sought assistance previously in the form of counseling or Alcoholics Anonymous.

In concluding this paper a few general observations and cautions should be made. The larger study, from which these data were taken, was designed to investigate the factors associated with criminal behavior in rural areas and not specifically with the part of alcohol in the committing of crime. As a result, this effort is limited in an attempt to explain the connection between deviant acts and drinking; rather it is directed toward what the drinker does and not why he does it. Secondly, because of the original intent of the larger study, several important and crucial variables pertaining to the inmates' first experience with alcohol, his early socialization regarding its use, his drinking situation and so on were not covered.

Table 1. Comparison of the Percentage Distribution of Parchman
 Sample with Total Male Population, Mississippi (1960)
 by Selected Social Factors, Age, Education, Occupation.

Factor	Total		White		Black	
	State	Parchman	White	Parchman	White	Parchman
Age						
10-19	28	7	25	5	34	8
20-29	15	41	16	44	14	40
30-39	14	21	16	22	11	20
40-49	14	18	15	18	13	18
50-59	13	9	13	8	12	3
60-69	9	3	8	3	9	3
70-79	7	1	7	0	7	2
$x^2 = 2.508$ d.f. = 6 .90 > P > .80						
Education						
None	4	8	1	0	7	11
0-8 years	49	41	38	24	65	50
Some High						
School	20	27	26	31	12	25
High School						
Graduate or More	27	24	35	45	16	14
$x^2 = 35.215$ d.f. = 3 .001 > P						

Table 1. (cont.)

Factor	Total		White		Black	
	State	Parchman	White	Parchman	White	Parchman
Occupation						
Unskilled	22	24	8	2	44	33
Skilled	34	40	39	57	26	33
Service	4	26	3	8	7	33
Sales or Clerical	9	3	13	8	1	1
Professional & Managerial	31	7	37	25	22	0
$\chi^2 = 62.369$ d. f. = 4 .001 > P						

Table 2. Comparison of the Percentage Distribution of
Parchman Sample by Selected Factors

Factor	Total	White	Black
Criminal Offense			
Economic	53	62	48
Passion	29	17	35
Sex	7	4	9
Multiple Serious Offenses	11	17	8
$\chi^2 = 11.498$ d. f. = 3 .01 > P > .001			
Size of Childhood Community			
On Farm in Country	38	31	42
In Country not on Farm	10	18	6
In Small Town (under 2,500 pop.)	16	17	16
In Large Town (2,500-10,000 pop.)	14	14	14
In City (10,000 or more pop.)	22	20	22
$\chi^2 = 9.707$ d. f. = 4 .05 > P > .02			
Size of Residence Prior to Imprisonment			
On Farm in Country	19	21	15
In Country not on Farm	9	6	16
In Small Town (under 2,500 pop.)	21	25	13
In Large Town (2,500-10,000 pop.)	19	18	22
In City (10,000 or more pop.)	32	30	34
$\chi^2 = 10.009$ d. f. = 4 .05 > P > .02			

Table 2. (cont.)

Factor	Total	White	Black
Number of Prior Arrests			
None	19	16	20
1-2	25	16	28
3-4	20	21	19
5-6	14	12	15
7-10	9	10	9
11 or more	13	25	9
$\chi^2 = 11.605$ d. f. = 5 $.05 > P > .02$			

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Parchman Sample by Drinking Behavior and Social Factors

Factor	White and Black Percent Frequency of Drinking Within Groupings			White and Black Percent Frequency of Drinking Within Total		
	Abstainers	Occasional	Regular	Abstainers	Occasional	Regular
Race						
White	8	37	55	14	30	44
Black	23	43	34	86	70	56
$\chi^2 = 12.382$ d. f. = 2 .01 > P > .001						
Age						
10-19	19	25	56	8	4	11
20-29	18	37	45	43	37	46
30-39	10	40	50	12	20	25
40-49	15	54	31	15	23	14
50-59	19	62	19	10	13	4
60 and over	56	33	11	12	3	10
$\chi^2 = 22.209$ d. f. = 10 .02 > P > .01						
Formal Education						
None	12	59	29	5	10	5
0-8 years	21	46	33	50	45	34
Attended High						
School	21	43	36	34	28	24
High School Graduate						
or more	7	30	63	11	17	37
$\chi^2 = 16.464$ d. f. = 6 .02 > P > .01						

Table 3. (cont.)

Factor	White and Black Percent Frequency of Drinking Within Groupings			White and Black Percent Frequency of Drinking Within Total		
	Abstainers	Occasional	Regular	Abstainers	Occasional	Regular
In Country, not On Farm	5	60	35	3	13	8
Small Town (under 2,500)	26	50	24	31	23	13
In Large Town (2,500- 10,000)	12	38	50	13	17	24
In City (10,000 or more)	15	33	52	25	24	41
$\chi^2 = 18.365$ d. f. = 8 .02 > P > .01						
Type of Offense						
Economic	18	32	50	49	41	67
Passion	21	58	21	32	41	15
Sex	25	25	50	10	5	9
Multiple						
Offenses	17	50	33	9	13	9
$\chi^2 = 56.301$ d. f. = 6 P > .001						

Table 3. (cont.)

Factor	White and Black Percent Frequency of Drinking Within Groupings			White and Black Percent Frequency of Drinking Within Total		
	Abstainers	Occasional	Regular	Abstainers	Occasional	Regular
Occupation						
Unskilled	25	53	22	36	28	15
Skilled	16	41	43	36	36	46
Service	19	47	34	28	26	25
Sales & Clerks	0	40	60	0	7	9
Professional Manager	0	50	50	0	7	9
$\chi^2 = 9.571$ d. f. = 8 .30 > P > .20						
Size of Community During Childhood						
On Farm	15	52	33	34	47	31
In Country, not On Farm	24	29	47	14	7	11
Small Town (under 2,500 pop.)	11	60	29	12	23	11
In Large Town (2,500-10,000 pop.)	19	32	49	17	10	16
In City (10,000 or more)	17	25	58	23	13	31
$\chi^2 = 17.494$ d. f. = 8 .05 > P > .02						
Size of Community Prior to Conviction						
On Farm	26	45	29	28	21	14

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