U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Corrections

# JAIL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

**REVISED EDITION**

**MARCH 1992**

*THE NIC JAILS DIVISION*
*PRESENTS:*

# JAIL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

***Revised Edition***

***March 1992***

## PREFACE TO THE 1992 EDITION

***This update of Jail Classification System Development: A Review*** of ***the Literature was*** prepared by LIS, Inc., as a component of its contract to operate the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Information Center. In addition to providing both new sections and expanded information on topics covered in the previous, 1989 edition, this update also retains portions of the original text. LIS, Inc., does not assume responsibility for opinions, textual information, or writing that have remained unaltered from the previous edition.

This document reviews information published by government agencies, private groups, and individual researchers. Citations refer to the sources of new documentation on objective jail classification and do not serve as an endorsement of a particular point of view or classification methodology. With a focus on the diverse issues in jail classification, this document outlines available research and emphasizes its practical application in the jail setting.

### Content Updating

The 1992 edition of the literature review includes new sections on:

- Objective classification system components;
- The use of criminal history data in making classification decisions; and
- Computer applications in objective classification.

With the increasing use of objective classification systems in jails, more sophisticated systems have been designed in order to maximize the availability and quality of inmate data. This edition reviews automated systems specifically designed for jail classification purposes.

Continuing research examines the predictability of violent behavior, the impact of jail architecture and related conditions of confinement on inmate behavior, and varied models for determining risk criteria for classification instruments.

While weighing the advantages and disadvantages of several approaches to jail inmate classication, this review also provides an example of an objective jail classification system that includes both the decision-tree and point scale approaches.

A discussion of special needs assessment for jail inmates includes new material on:

- Medical screening guidelines, including AIDS-related classification issues;
- Mental health screening, including suicide risk assessment; and
- The prevalence of substance abuse among jail inmates.

Statistical references have been updated using recently published documentation provided by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the

National Juvenile Court Archive, the National Institute of Justice, the American Jail Association, and other organizations.

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- Robert Hall of Grand Traverse County (Michigan) Sheriff's Department.
- Melissa Sickmund of the National Center for Juvenile Justice, National Juvenile Court Archive.
- Gary Simmons of Multnomah County Jails (Oregon).
- Dave Wells of the Northpointe Institute for Public Management.

Jim T. Barbee of the NIC Jails Division monitored progress of the update.

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The following exhibits were included by permission from the persons listed below:

- Exhibits 1 and 2. *Texas Jail Standards: Inmate Safety and Classification Plan*. Jack E. Crump, Texas Commission on Jail Standards.
- Exhibit 3. *Wayne County Correctional Facility Classification Notice and Primary* Security Level Assignment. David Wells, Northpointe Institute of Public Management.
- Exhibits 6 through 8c. *Multnomah County Corrections Population Management System*. Gary Simmons, Multnomah County (Oregon) Sheriff's Department

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## JAIL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT: SERIES TITLES

In addition to the literature review, several reports have been produced as part of the NIC Jails Division project on jail classification system development. Interested readers should refer to the following documents for in-depth discussion of issues related to the development, implementation, and evaluation of an objective jail classification system:

- ***Evaluating Jail Classification Systems: A Practical Approach.***
- ***Jail Classification System Development: Executive Summary.***
- ***Jail Classification System Development: Final Report.***
- ***Guidelines for Developing, Implementing and Revising an Objective Jail Classification System.***
- ***Objective Jail Classification System User's Manual.***
- ***Survey*** of ***Jail Classification Systems.***
- ***Training Manual.***
- ***Implementing Objective Classification in Jails: Some Problem Areas.***

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Many other individuals also contributed to the successful completion of the literature review. Invaluable assistance was afforded by personnel at the three jail sites that implemented the NIC objective classification system for a period of eight months. They provided project staff with not only information important to evaluating the system, but also insights into ways to improve it and modify it for use by other jails. While many personnel at these sites were involved in the implementation effort, the following individuals played key roles:

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Deputy Linda C. Shuttlesworth, Classification Officer

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## INTRODUCTION

Between July 1, 1987 and June 30, 1988, there were over 9.6 million admissions into the nation's jails (U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1990). According to 1990 BJS estimates, if each of these admissions represented a single person, it would mean that approximately 4 percent of the nation's population were admitted to jail each year. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, more people experience jail than any other form of correctional supervision (see Table 1). Given these data, jail classification takes on added importance for enhancing the management of inmates and agency resources. Yet, because of their unique populations and operational requirements, jails often fall behind other correctional agencies in developing and implementing effective classification systems. Information pertaining to jail classification has only recently become available.

This review of the literature summarizes the following currently available information:

- The history of inmate classification;
- The specific classification peculiarities characteristic of jail settings including the distinctive nature of jail operations, an overview of the jail classification process, and the advantages of effective jail classification; and
- Issues in the implementation of objective jail classification systems, including recent approaches to jail classification, the determination of valid criteria included in calculating custody requirements, assessment of inmate program needs, and the relationship between jail architecture and inmate behavior.

The review does not address pretrial release risk assessment since this study focuses on the in-custody management of inmates who have failed to secure immediate pretrial release. However, the two classification decision-making schemes are similar in structure and content, often relying on the same information especially in regard to initial classification criteria. The major difference lies in intent. Whereas pretrial release instruments seek to evaluate a defendant's suitability for release from pretrial detention, jail classification systems focus on the inmate's appropriate housing or custody designation within the jail's various housing facilities. Pretrial release instruments assess the likelihood of failure to appear and pretrial criminal activity, while jail classification is concerned with inmate misconduct, e.g., violence against inmates and staff, and escape. Therefore, some but not all information used for pretrial release decisions is relevant to jail classification.

originally a product of the National Institute of Corrections' Jail Classification Project (GN-1). this report was updated in 1992 by LIS, Inc., under contract 89KO6-DP-5. The broadest goal of this project is to encourage the implementation of objective custody classification schemes in the nation's jails. The overall objective is the implementation of more effective, humane, and cost-effective classification systems throughout the nation's 3,448 jails (BJS, 1990).

**Table 1. Persons Under Correctional Supervision [1]**

| | Annual Admissions | Annual Population |
|---|---|---|
| **Adults** | | |
| Jail | 10,005,138 [1] | 403,019 [1] |
| Prison | 379,742 [3] | 603,732 [4] |
| Probation | 1,465,388 [2] | 2,356,483 [2] |
| Parole | 263,798 [3] | 407,977 [3] |
| **Total adults supervised** | 12,114,066 | 3,771,211 |
| **Juveniles** | | |
| Public institutions | 619,181 [5] | 56,123 [5] |
| Private institutions | 141,463 [6] | 37,822 [6] |
| Probation | N/A | N/A |
| Parole | N/A | N/A |

Sources

1 U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Census of Local Jails, 1988.* (Provides figures from the period July 1987-June 1988.)

2 BJS, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics-1989.*

3 BJS, *Correctional Populations in the U.S., 1988.* (Figure represents those admitted during 1988.)

4 BJS, *Correctional Populations in the U.S., 1989.* (Figure presents the prison population as of December 31.1988.)

5 U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Children in Custody,* 1989.

6 OJJDP, *Juveniles Taken into Custody, FY9O Report.*

(1) Statistics provided in Table 1 represent most recent jail census data as published by the Bureau of Justice statistics in 1991. Annual estimates are available from BJS.

## I. HISTORY OF INMATE CLASSIFICATION

The history of inmate classification in the United States closely parallels the evolution of the nation's correctional philosophy. Prior to 1870, when corrections focused on retribution and punishment, classification was based primarily on type of offense. Inmates were classified for the purpose of determining the "appropriate" form of punishment. There was no need to extend the process further since all inmates were housed in comparable settings and occupied their time in a similar manner.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, corrections changed direction, introducing reform and rehabilitation as important goals. As these goals gained prominence and acceptance, classification began to ground itself in clinical diagnostic and treatment categories that stressed the "personal pathologies" of offenders.

Inmates, by virtue of their arrest and conviction, were assumed to be deficient in personal growth and survival skills. The task of classification was to identify such deficiencies so that they could be corrected. Use of this medical model of classification proliferated during the twentieth century as the psychological and sociological causes of crime were explored and methods for assessing offenders grew more sophisticated. This trend continued into the early 1970s. It started to lose favor due to public frustration with rising crime rates, gratuitous violence, and perceived failure of treatment-oriented programs.

### The Move Toward Objective Classification Systems

Today, correctional philosophy in many jurisdictions is increasingly based upon a retributive (punishment) or "just desserts" view of handling offenders. Previous assumptions regarding the efficacy of rehabilitation have been increasingly challenged. There has also been an increase in litigation regarding inappropriate use of criteria for determining how inmates are housed and when and whether they are permitted to participate in correctional programs. Both developments, along with the well-publicized national prison and jail crowding crisis, have affected traditional classification strategies governing the management of inmates.

Specifically, correctional classification systems have moved away from so called "subjective" models to "objective" systems. Subjective models tend to rely upon informal criteria which often lead to inconsistency and error in staff decision-making. Conversely, objective systems depend upon a narrow set of well-defined legal (e.g., severity of current offense, prior arrests, etc.) and personal characteristics (e.g., age, marital status, etc.). These items are then weighted and assigned differential values (points) within a well-defined instrument that is then used to assess an inmate's level of risk or program needs. Objective systems place greater emphasis on fairness, consistency, and openness in the decision-making process.

### Existing Guidelines for Inmate Classification

As long ago as 1973, the National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals outlined standards pertaining to inmate classification. More recently, as a result of the increasing emphasis on classification as a management tool and the growing pressure to improve

classification, considerable attention has been focused on the process of classification Many individuals and organizations have provided guidance in structuring effective procedures. Among the most widely-accepted guidelines are the fourteen principles formulated by Solomon (1980) and subsequently adopted by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC):

1. Them must be a clear definition of goals and objectives of the total correctional system.
2. Them must be detailed written procedures and policies governing the classification process.
3. The classification process must provide for the collection of complete, high-quality, verified, standardized data.
4. Measurement and testing instruments used in the classification decision-making process must be valid, reliable, and objective.
5. There must be explicit policy statements structuring and checking the discretionary decision-making powers of classification team staff.
6. There must be provision for screening and further evaluating prisoners who are management problems and those who have special needs.
7. There must be provisions to match offenders with programs; these provisions must be consistent with custody classification.
8. There must be provisions to classify prisoners at the least restrictive custody level.
9. There must be provisions to involve prisoners in the classification process.
10. Them must be provisions for systematic, periodic reclassification hearings.
11. The classification process must be efficient and economically sound.
12. There must be provisions to continuously evaluate and improve the classification process,
13. Classification procedures must be consistent with constitutional requisites.
14. There must be opportunity to gain input from administration and line staff when undertaking development of a classification system.

## II. CLASSIFICATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A JAIL

In comparison to the extensive amount of research and practical material available on prison classification, jail inmate classification is a relatively new phenomenon. In 1987, the NIC Jails Division initiated a study to determine jail classification practices (NIC, 1990). Also in 1987, Brennan noted "a widespread trend among jails to adopt objective classification systems." In a random sample of 10 percent of the nation's jails with average daily populations less than 250, Guynes et al. (1985) noted that over 65 percent of respondents identified classification as part of their intake procedures. Familiarity with new classification objectives and procedures has led to increasing staff acceptance of objective jail classification systems (NIC, 1984).

### Proliferation of State-Wide Jail Standards

By 1989, the NIC Jails Division found that twenty-nine states had instituted jail standards, with twenty-eight of these providing technical assistance. Twenty-six states now require mandatory compliance with explicit jail standards (Rosazza and Martin, 1991; NIC Jails Division, 1989). According to a 1991 survey conducted by Rosazza and Martin, three of the eight states reporting voluntary jails standards have legislated programs that include substantial technical assistance.

In general, these standards are concerned with the separation of the inmate population into discrete groups. For example, males are to be housed apart from females, minors are to be isolated from adults, and pretrial offenders are to be kept separate from sentenced offenders. However, as will be discussed later in this review, such separation requirements often complicate the use of classification for inmate management and may not constitute appropriate classifying criteria.

As recently as 1990, the State of Texas Commission on Jail Standards adopted specific requirements for inmate classification and segregation. Guidelines for ensuring inmate safety incorporate supervisory procedures and objective classification criteria that are included in a point-scale instrument (See Exhibit 1). The Texas guidelines also outline provisions for inclusion in a classification plan (See Exhibit 2).

Other organizations, like the American Correctional Association and the National Sheriffs' Association, have also promulgated standards for jail classification. Their standards typically go beyond categorizing inmates and address decision-making policies and procedures.

## CLASSIFICATION AND SEPARATION OF INMATES 217.12

**.001 Inmate safety.** A person arrested shall be confined or separated in a facility in the following manner:

(a) prior to and during processing into a facility, arrested persons shall be under direct staff supervision:

(b) following processing, housing separation shall be provided to assure the health and safety of each detained:

(c) a person confined to a detoxification cell shall be moved to a general housing area as soon as he can properly care for himself; and

(d) a custody level shall be assessed each individual consistent with public safety and available information when other than high risk housing is utilized.

(1) A custody assessment system shall be developed, when appropriate by each sheriff using the following information and format or a similar system subject to approval of the classification plan:

| | |
|---|---|
| (i) Charge/Conviction | (1 to 10 points) |
| (ii) Offense History | (1 to 10 points) |
| (iii) Escape History | (1 to 10 points) |
| (iv) History of Violence | (1 to 10 points) |
| (v) Length of Incarceration | (1 to 10 points) |
| (vi) other Factors | (1 to 10 points) |

(2) The lowest figure is a positive indicator while the highest figure is a negative indicator. Known stability factors may affect the assessment by reducing the number indicator for each scored area.

(3) This assessment shall determine low risk or high risk custody status. Inmates with a custody assessment of 24-60 shall be considered high risk inmates. Inmates with a custody assessment, of O-23 may be considered low risk inmates. A similar assessment system may be used: however, scoring guidelines shall be comparable with this subparagraph.

Adopted 7/25/90

(4) After custody level assessment has been resolved, high risk inmates shall be classified according to section .002 of this title relating to Classification Plan. Low risk inmates do not require further classification except the separation of male and female inmates. Inmates transferred directly to a low risk facility shall be assessed by the Sheriff or his designee upon arrival. Those not qualifying as low risk inmates shall be immediately transferred to a high risk facility.

**Exhibit 2.** **.002 Classification plan.** Each Sheriff shall develop and implement a written classification plan, approved by the Commission, which shall provide for the protection of inmates, staff and the community. The plan shall contain the following provisions:

(a) A classification and a risk assessment made prior to assignment to housing other than maximum security level.

(b) Separation and assignment of inmates to living areas. and activities shall be based upon the following factors:

(1) Gender. Male inmates shall be separated from the sight and sound of female inmates, except that, when under direct, visual and proximate supervision, males and females may simultaneously dine together and attend together church services, education programs, counseling programs, recreation and exercise programs and work programs.

(2) Age. If juveniles are detained, they shall be separated by sight and sound from adult inmates. Age shall be a consideration when any inmate is assigned to inmate housing.

(3) Witnesses. Witnesses not charged with a crime shall be separated from all other inmates.

(4) Health. Inmates with communicable disease shall be separated from all other inmates unless recommended otherwise **by** the local health official. All inmates possessing mental health concerns to include homicidal or suicidal tendencies, shall be housed to provide for more frequent observation.

(5) Severity of charges/conviction. Violent or assaultive crimes, crimes against persons and crimes involving use of a weapon or deadly force shall be considered.

(6) First offenders awaiting trial shall be separated from all inmates who have been convicted of crimes. The Texas Commission on Jail Standards may grant a variance to this requirement when individuals are congregated under constant and direct supervision.

(7) Known institutional behavior. All available incident reports shall be considered.

(8) Criminal Sophistication.

(9) Assaultive or passive tendencies.

(10) The separation of trusties, inmates sentenced to work release, weekend detention or alternative programs which could lead to breach in security or introduction of contraband.

(11) All other available information.

(c) An appeals process of one's classification and/or assessment to the sheriff.

(d) The maintenance of records of inmates' classificaitions, appeals, reviews and disposition.

.003 Cell assignment. The number and capacity of cells or rooms in a facility shall be designed and constructed so that the mandatory separation provisions and the facilities inmate classification plan can be complied with.

.004 Responsibility, records. The sheriff or his designee should be responsible for the Ceil assigmnent of inmates following classification and cell assignment shall be kept in the inmate's records.

## Distinctive Nature of Jail Operations

The &lay in implementing classification in jails is primarily a result of their unique functions and associated constraints. Unlike prisons, which confine only sentenced offenders, jails are responsible for detaining a diverse population: suspects under investigation and awaiting charge, persons charged with an offense and awaiting trial, persons convicted of a crime and awaiting sentence, persons sentenced to jail terms less than one year and a day, offenders believed to have violated their probation or parole, individuals with detainers in another jurisdiction but no charges in the holding county or city, sentenced offenders awaiting transfer to overcrowded state prisons, and juveniles awaiting transfer to juvenile correctional facilities.

Classification of such a varied population is further complicated by the short length of stay for many persons. Frequently, inmates are released within seventy-two hours of their arrival, making it difficult, if not impossible, for staff to obtain the information necessary to determine the appropriate custody level and housing assignment. In jails without immediate access to criminal history records, staff must make decisions based on minimal data: inmates' charges, bond amounts, and self-reported medical histories. The lack of adequate verifiable information in such instances precludes staff from separating offenders into categories that would enhance inmate management.

Larger jail systems, moreover, must contend with a high volume of admissions. High annual admission rates tax existing resources, create work overloads for staff, and decrease the time available to assess individual inmates. Rapid turnover in the population also necessitates quick decision-making, a condition that impedes jail classification.

In addition, jail classification is hampered by the physical design of the facilities themselves. Most jails have been designed with maximum security cells, rendering futile the categorization of inmates by varying custody requirements. Older facilities in particular lack sufficient capacity and/or capability to physically separate inmates who have been classified differently.

Inadequate staff resources also play a role in the &lay in implementing objective classification systems in jails. The lack of staff to accomplish classification functions stems from a variety of factors, including:

- Overall shortages of jail personnel.
- Lack of appreciation for role and benefits of detention operation to larger department.
- Insufficient numbers of staff trained to perform classification activities.
- Staff apathy in regard to classification assignments.
- General constraints associated with budgetary allocations.

Daily operating factors have also slowed the evolution of jail classification. In addition, issues such as overcrowding of existing facilities, the need for improved resource allocation, and intervention by the courts, have generated countervailing pressures directed toward enhancing the jail classification process. Among jail administrators, there is a growing awareness of-and support for-the benefits that can be derived from valid and reliable classification systems.

## Overview of the Jail Booking and Classification Process

The process of jail classification varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, depending on such factors as the characteristics of the inmate population and the philosophy and style of agency management. Nevertheless, an overview of the classification process is useful in understanding why various decisions are made, points when problems may arise, and procedures that could be enhanced.

### Intake and Booking

Typically, jail classification begins at the intake stage, which occurs following the arrest. New arrivals are placed in a holding area, ranging in size from single or multiple cells to a "tank," when they may spend anywhere from a few hours to a few days awaiting pretrial release and arraignment, (In larger jail systems where separate holding facilities are available, formal classification is initiated after arraignment) While in this holding area, offenders are searched, relieved of personal property, photographed, and fingerprinted. During this time, intake staff, who usually axe uniformed staff (occasionally classification personnel), often run a check of available records to obtain information pertaining to the arrestee's criminal history and presence of outstanding warrants or detainers. In addition, specially trained personnel may conduct psychological and/or medical screenings to detect serious problems that require immediate attention.

### Initial custody classification

Initial classification begins, in almost all cases, after it is decided to hold the charged person for arraignment. Custody classification is not carried out on persons who are quickly released through the bail process, on their own recognizance, pending further investigation, or without being charged. Most of these events occur within four to eight hours after booking, making it impractical and unnecessary to conduct a formal custody assessment. Once it becomes evident that the inmate will be detained for a substantial period of time, staff begin to classify inmates using information obtained from the screening assessments and record checks. Frequently, classification activities are conducted by intake staff. However, in recent years, many jail systems, particularly large ones, have established classification units that perform these functions. Due to the diversity of the population, inmates are generally separated into broad categories. Most jurisdictions, for example, distinguish between pretrial and sentenced inmates, adults and juveniles, and men and women.

According to a 1987 national survey conducted for the American Correctional Association Task Force on the Female Offender, over one quarter of the jails surveyed had classification officers assigned exclusively for women - (Research Advisory Services, 1988). An average of over 25 percent of jails responding had classification systems specifically designed for women offenders, and an additional 15.7 percent planned to implement such a system.

Many jails also categorize inmates by the amount of their bond, if it is set by statute. Numerous jails attempt to separate the violent from the nonviolent or those charged with Monies from those charged with misdemeanors. In addition some jurisdictions try to identify special management inmates (protective custody, suicide risk, etc.).

In making such separation decisions, staff may rely heavily upon inmate interviews. Usually these interviews are conducted to obtain basic data about the offender. They are often necessary

to acquire information that is not available through a records search. Without automated record retrieval systems in place, several days may be required to verify self-report information, and by this time the inmate may have been released. In many cases such information cannot be verified at all. This dependence on self-report data lessens the effectiveness of classification decision-making because the data obtained may not be accurate.

Based on the separation categories, inmates are then given a housing assignment. Jurisdictions attempt to house "incompatible" groups (e.g., adults and juveniles, pretrial and sentenced) separately. Within these broad groupings, many larger systems also try to maintain a proportional distribution of inmates by such characteristics as age and race. Larger jail systems can easily accommodate such distinctions, particularly if they consist of several facilities. In contrast, the structural design of smaller jails often prevents any but the most fundamental separations. Housing assignment is generally under the purview of the classification and intake staff, while cell assignment is the responsibility of the housing supervisor, who is more likely to know where appropriate bed space is available.

Decisions concerning program assignments may also be made during initial classification or intake. These, too, are based on information obtained from record checks, medical and psychological screening, and inmate interviews. However, in many jurisdictions, program assignments are postponed until it is known whether the inmate will be released prior to trial. Due to rapid population turnover, some jails reserve programming primarily for sentenced inmates.

Typically, the entire intake/classification process takes from two to six hours. Larger jail systems generally conduct intake and classification on a round-the-clock basis, seven days a week. Smaller jails may restrict these activities to eight to twelve hours a day, Monday through Friday or Saturday, and keep inmates in holding areas during other times.

### Custody Reclassification

Reclassification is a vital component of the classification process. Unlike initial classification, which attempts to use items describing the inmates' demographics, offense, and criminal history to determine custody level, reclassification criteria are dominated by measures of in-custody behavior. The premise of reclassification is that "errors" may be made at the initial classification stage and should be corrected based on the inmate's later behavior. Reclassification is especially important for sentenced inmates who face lengthy incarceration terms and for defendants likely to spend several months awaiting a court disposition.

In practice reclassification of jail inmates appears to be a function of four factors:

1. Change in inmate status from pretrial to sentenced
2. The prisoner's conduct while incarcerated.
3. Length of confinement.
4. Filing of additional charges.

Change in inmate status automatically initiates a reclassification action. Satisfactory conduct may lead to reclassification so that an inmate can qualify for a trusty position, work release, or other job placement. Misconduct may result in reclassification, a disciplinary hearing, or both. Reclassification may be requested by a variety of individuals, including classification staff, shift commanders, or inmates.

Some agencies also have policies requiring reclassification for sentenced inmates at set intervals. Thus, inmates who remain in jail for a lengthy period may be reclassified several times before they are released. Many sentenced inmates, however, may never be reclassified at all since their sentences may consist only of a few weeks or weekends in the jail setting.

### The Assumed Advantages of Effective Jail Classification

Whatever its size and complexity, the primary responsibility of the jail is to safely and securely detain all individuals remanded to its custody. Classification is an essential management tool for performing this function. As Solomon and Baird (1982) have state&

> **Corrections must recognize that classification is first and foremost a management tool. It should, in fact, be perceived as the veritable cornerstone of correctional administration. As a means of setting priorities, its purposes are to promote rational, consistent, and equitable methods of assessing the relative needs and risk of each individual and then to assign agency resources accordingly.**

**While such a statement may seem merely a laudable goal, it is rapidly becoming a practical** reality as the courts become increasingly involved in reviewing jail operations. Much of this involvement relates to inmate classification.

Cases pertaining to aspects of jail operations indicate substantial justification for the implementation of an effective classification system. In examining published decisions of federal and state courts, Malouff (1984) found thirteen damage awards against jails for classification-related mistakes or failures. In those cases decided since 1968, the average award was $93,000. The most common basis for an award was negligent failure to separate prisoners likely to be assaultive from those likely to be assaulted. Other common bases were negligent failure to keep inmates from intentionally or accidentally injuring or killing themselves, and negligent failure to place prisoners where they would receive needed medical attention

In addition to the thirteen cases involving a monetary award, Malouff cites twenty-six cases in which a court held that a damage claim should proceed to trial. These figures, however, should

be considered very conservative estimates since they do not include unpublished out-of-court settlements and trial-court awards.

The advantages of classification exceed the benefits of reduced litigation and findings of civil liability. An effective classification plan also provides:

- Data that are useful in facility planning;
- Improved security and control of inmates by identifying and providing surveillance for the appropriate group;
- Assistance in the effective utilization of personnel based on an understanding of -inmates" differential programming and security needs;
- Generation of information for use in monitoring and evaluating program goals;
- Provision of a consistent and equitable process for decision-making; and
- Assistance in population management by identifying those inmate groups who may be eligible for various release programs (Jeffers, 1980).

In addition to providing a consistent and documented rationale for assignment decisions, Glaser (1987) noted the economic advantages of classifying inmates efficiently. Although appropriate inmate classification can lead to more cost-effective jail operations, it does not necessarily reduce the level of staffing needed in jail facilities. Accurate classification allows the redistribution of personnel according to the custody requirements of inmates and permits better daily administration and crisis management. By reducing false positive predictions, accurate classification systems should save money through the removal of inmates inappropriately placed in costly, high-security jails and locating them in less secure, less expensive settings.

More recently, Brennan (1987b) noted the use of objective classification as a tool for forecasting budgetary, staff, program and facility needs. Effective classification schemes based on objective criteria can reduce significant errors with respect to the planning of new construction. Additionally, an efficient classification system aids in determining inmate eligibility for needed services, thus reducing the likelihood of violence, escape, failure to rehabilitate, or lawsuits. Brennan further identified administrative benefits stemming from objective classification goals as follows:

> Classification aims to reduce disorder and uncertainty by eliminating arbitrariness vagueness, unclear criteria, bias subjectivity, and prejudice from most inmate processing and movement decisions.

An additional benefit of an effective classification system, according to Glaser (1987), is that objective classification should allow decision makers to make judgments "that are guided by statistical evidence of their probable contribution to behavior change."

In a study of classification in one urban jail, Malouff et al. (1983) suggest that classification followed by appropriate placement significantly reduced the rate of violent acts, which, in turn, lowered security and maintenance expenditures.

In spite of a 66 percent increase in prisoner population Glaser (1987) likewise noted a 36 percent reduction in escape rate per year per thousand average daily population by 1984, four years after the California Department of Corrections point system was implemented. A decline in inmate deaths by violence was also noted for the same period, with most serious inmate disorder confined to maximum security facilities (Holt and Glaser, 1985).

## III. ISSUES IN IMPLEMENTING OBJECTIVE JAIL CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS

As Austin and Litsky (1982) point out, every jail has a classification system of some type:

> Each day decisions are made by staff about where to transfer inmates, what programs they will be allowed to participate in, how inmates will be punished for disciplinary infractions, who will receive medical attention, and so on. The process may be extremely formal or may be carried out by inmates and staff making informal, intuitive, or "gut" reactions. Decisions may involve the simple choice of placing an inmate in one of two available cells that look pretty much alike, or it may require a much more complex choice from a diverse range of housing, security, and program options.

As mentioned earlier, classification systems can usually be grouped into two basic categories: subjective and *objective.* The classification systems currently used in most jails can be characterized as subjective; that is, they require independent assessments on the part of the person(s) making the classification decision. Consequently, these systems emphasize subjective expertise and clinical judgment as the basis for determining the custody and programming needs of each inmate.

Under the subjective approach, decision-making is governed principally by broadly defined criteria related to the agency's correctional philosophy, the jail's physical design, and the inmate's own characteristics (Clements, 1981). An overriding premise in such systems is that experienced staff know the inmates and will make the most appropriate decisions. The problem is that not all staff are experienced, nor do they all possess equal ability to make classification decisions in a consistent or valid manner. Moreover, in large jails it is also unlikely that staff will become familiar enough with every inmate to allow them to form a complete picture of the offender's history and permit accurate subjective classification.

Objective systems, on the other hand, take a more formalized approach to the classification process, emphasizing equity and explicitness in decision-making. These systems are dependent upon staff use of a standardized form (such as a checklist or scoring sheet) to assess an inmate's custody and/or program needs. Completion of the form leads to recommendations pertaining to a custody designation and appropriate programming. The role of staff expertise and judgment is confined to agreement or disagreement with these recommendations.

Objective classification systems are characterized by the following elements:

- Using test and classification instruments that have been validated for inmate populations;
- Using the same components and scoring/classification approach with all inmates;
- Fostering similar decisions among classification staff on comparable cases;
- Assigning inmates to security and custody levels consistent with their background; and
- Structuring classification decision-making authority while minimizing overrides.

Imbedded in the above statements are the two essential properties of objective classification systems: reliability and validity. **Validity** refers to whether the items being used have some reasonable expectation of predicting a certain outcome. In other words, the items selected for inclusion in the classification system have been found to have some statistical relationship with the outcome being addressed; e.g., for jail classification the question becomes, "Do the items have any relationship to inmate misconduct or escapes?" If not, then there must be other grounds for their inclusion in the systems, or they should be removed

Reliability, which is the other essential ingredient of an objective system, has to do with the degree of consistency or equity in the classification approach, The procedures used to arrive at a classification disposition must be explicitly stated and consistently used in the classification of all inmates. Objective classification systems purposely seek to limit discretionary decision-making to ensure uniformity in agency operations and minimize the potential for unfavorable litigation.

It should be emphasized that a reliable system is not necessarily a valid one. Nor is it imperative that the assessment of the quality of an objective classification system be narrowly limited to these two measures.

Certain information needs to be considered when making a classification decision regardless of its predictive ability. For instance, the seriousness of the current offense and sentence length are frequently weighted heavily in most objective systems despite limited evidence that there is an inverse relationship between these items and inmate misconduct (NCCD, 1985). Nonetheless, it may be proper to include these items due to public attitudes and sentiment. The escape of a single murder suspect or convicted murderer would have a disastrous effect on the public's confidence in corrections. Although research may indicate that murderers are less likely to be assaultive while incarcerated, nevertheless for reasons of retribution, they should be held more securely (initially) than a person who commits a less heinous crime.

The goal of structuring decision-making through objective classification systems raises the issue of overrides. Technically, overrides reflect decisions by classification staff to depart from the inmates scored custody level. Overrides are an essential part of objective classification; they allow for the proper handling of exceptional cases. If a system had a low override level (e.g., less then 5 percent) it would be rigid, not allowing for staff expertise. By the same token, a system showing excessive overrides (e.g., over 20 percent) would no longer be objective because it would have lost its consistency.

### Recent Approaches to Objective Jail Classification

Objective inmate classification systems first surfaced in the nation's prison systems during the late 1970s (NCCD, 1985). The Federal Bureau of Prisons implemented the first objective system on a system-wide basis in 1977. The California Department of Corrections followed suit in 198O with its own unique approach. Since then NIC has urged states to adopt such systems and developed its own prisoner classification system in 1980, which many states have adopted. (Buchanan and Whitlow, 1986). While objective classification in local jurisdictions has in the past been confined primarily to pretrial screening, some jurisdictions have recently developed additive scoring instruments to determine, or assist in determining, an inmate's security and/or

custody level. For instance, the Oxford County Jail in Augusta, Maine has devised a printed scoring form used to assign security levels and program needs. During initial classification, the inmate participates in a structured nondirective interview. The data gathered are used to assign points. The inmate's form is scored a second time following verification of information elicited during the interview.

The Oxford County Jail classification instrument separates all inmates (pre-arraignment, pretrial, pre-sentence, and sentenced) into three classification categories (minimum, medium, and maximum) depending on prior legal and demographic information. The scale allows for both verified and nonverified scores. However, the different scores do not appear to produce different classification outcomes. The instrument also does not allow separation according to such criteria as gang affiliation or protective custody.

As of December 1991, twenty-six Michigan county jails had implemented a decision-tree system developed by Community Justice Alternatives (CJA). (See Exhibit 3.) According to CJA, a decision-tree system is superior to a point system because it is easy to use, classification can be accomplished quickly, little writing is involved, and the system does not require arithmetic. These characteristics facilitate training and use by correctional staff.

CJA's decision-tree system results in classification into one of eight security levels (two maximum, three medium, and three minimum) depending on an inmate's:

- Current type of conviction-felony or misdemeanor and assaultive behavior.
- Prior assaultive convictions.
- Escape history.
- Prior adjustment to institutional confinement.
- Prior criminal history within the last five years of street time.
- Pending security-risk warrants.
- Sentencing status-pre or post.
- Family ties.

This system permits overrides based on subjective or factual need. It also allows for attention flags to be set based on special conditions-such as physical or mental handicaps, diet restrictions, chemical abuse withdrawal, or high-risk cases (defined as inmates who ate suicidal or are deemed to be system risks). The flags may or may not result in decisions that deviate from the original decision-tree classification level designation.

In addition to assigning a primary security level for inmates, this decision-tree classification system incorporates initial screening and medical intake, suicide risk assessment, and a periodic security-level review. In-house program referral and recommendation for jail release programs also rely on inmate data obtained during the classification process.

Exhibit 3. County Correctional Facility Classification Notice & Primary Security Level Assignment

Name: _____
(last) (first) (middle)

**Jail No.** _____ **D.O.B.** ___/___/___ **Race** ____ **sex** ____ **SS#** _____

**Charge(s) 1)** _____ **2)** _____ **3)** _____

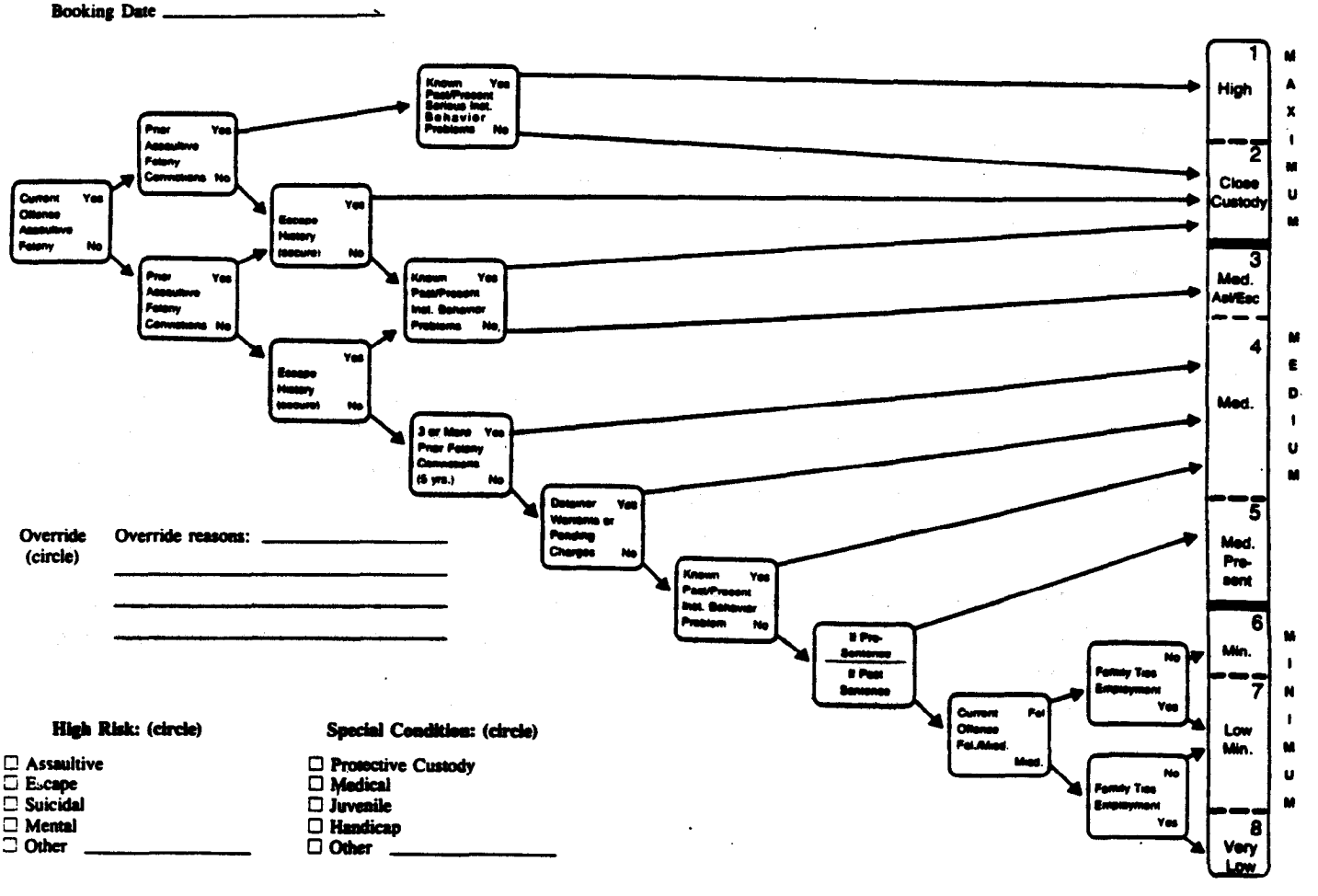
**You have been placed in the following classification: _____ by the Wayne County Jail Classification Department. This classification is determined by: current/past convictions; current/past institutional behavior; pending charges or holds in other jurisdictions (if any); sentenced or unsentenced; and/or any other information that may be deemed appropriate with regard to your personal security or the security of the facility. NOTE: Your classification can change when charges are altered or reduced; you are sentenced; due to administrative hearings; due to regular periodic review; and/or other reasons recommended by the jail staff.**

**Appeal Process: Any inmate who so desires may appeal his/her classification (in writing) in any of the three basic areas (security level, housing assignment or programs) within ten (10) days of the primary classification or reclassification by addressing the appeal to: CLASSIFICATION DEPARTMENT - APPEAL OF CLASSIFICATION:**

Classified by: _____ Date: __/__/__

Comments by staff: _____

## PRIMARY SECURITY LEVEL ASSIGNMENT



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Further applications of an objective classification system such as the decision-tree approach described above include:

- Screening unsentenced inmates for pretrial release;
- Determining inmate eligibility for community corrections programs; and
- Providing information to expedite court processing of unsentenced inmates (Northpointe, 1991).

One advantage of the decision-tree system is its ease of application and straightforward categorization process. However, overrides may be necessary in order to make appropriate classification decisions. For example; to be classified at the highest security level an inmate must meet all of the following criteria:

- Has been convicted of an assaultive felony;
- Has a prior assaultive conviction record; and
- Has a prior record of institutional adjustment problems.

A negative response to any one of the three criteria prevents a prisoner from being classified in the highest security range. A system override is required to appropriately place a high-risk inmate who does not meet one of these criteria. In automated applications of the decision-tree system, thirty-eight assaultive felony charges trigger override consideration (Northpointe, 1990).

Missing information may also hinder a classification system. If a response to one of the decision-tree steps is unknown, staff will have to make an assumption which may result in over- or under-classifying that individual.

The San Mateo County (Redwood City), California, jail has developed a classification system modeled after the NIC prison classification system (NIC 1984). The adapted instrument is applied to both sentenced and unsentenced inmates (Exhibits 4 and 5). Besides identifying housing and custody status needs, the system also scores inmates according to their medical needs, history of assaultive behavior, and escapes.

## Exhibit 4. Unsentenced Inmate Classification Score Sheet

INMATE:_____ COUNTY ID: _____

TOTAL BAIL:_____ CLASSIFICATION & HOUSING:_____/____

1. CHARGE, COURT INFORMATION & SEVERITY RATING

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Low | 0 | Score |
| Low Moderate | 1 | |
| Moderate _____/____/_____ | 2 | |
| High (charge) (court) (date) | 4 | |
| Highest | 6 | |

2. PRIOR ASSAULTIVE OFFENSE HISTORY (Convictions Only - Within the Past 5 Years)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Moderate | 2 | Score |
| High | 4 | |
| Highest | 6 | |

3. ESCAPE HISTORY (Rate Last 3 Years of Incarceration)

WALKAWAY:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Over 1 Year Ago | 1 | Score |
| Within the Last Year | 3 | |

ESCAPE FROM MEDIUM OR ABOVE CUSTODY, WITH ACTUAL OR THREATENED VIOLENCE:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Over 1 Year Ago | 5 | |
| Within the Last Year | 7 | |

4. ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Alcohol or Drug Offense | 1 | Score |
| Causing Occasional Legal & Social Problems | 2 | |

5. ADDITIONAL WARRANTS/CASES/DETAINERS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Immigration Hold | 0 | Score |
| Misdemeanor Case/Warrant/Detainer | 1 | |
| Felony Case/Warrant/Detainer/CYA or CDC Hold | 4 | |
| Extradition Initiated - Felony | 6 | |

6. PRIOR FELONY CONVICTIONS (Within the Past 5 Years)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| One | 2 | Score |
| Two or More | 4 | |

7. INMATE ACTION REPORTS & STAFF COMMENTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Minor | 1 | Score |
| Major | 2 | |

Comments: _____

8. STABILITY FACTORS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age 26 or Over | -2 | Score |
| High School/GED/Employed/Veteran | -1 | |

CLASSIFICATION DEPUTY: _____ TOTAL SCORE _____

CLASSIFICATION SCALE:

MED. 4 (D) . . . . . 7 POINTS OR MORE
MED. 3 (C) . . . . . 4 - 6 POINTS
MIN. 2 (B) . . . . . 1 - 3 POINTS
MIN. 1 (A) . . . . . MINUS - 0 POINTS

ATTACHED REPORTS:
SPCH: . . . Y N
RAP: . . . Y N

## Exhibit 4a. WCC Classification Score Sheet

Classification is based on three major sections: each section is important, but in the housing assignment of inmates, the third section is the critical one.

** First Section: RACE:

W for White
B for Black
M for Hispanic
O for Asian/Others

** Second Section: SIZE:

1 for Small - 5'4" and less
2 for Med. - 5'5" t0 5'8"
3 for Large - 5'9" and up

(Note: proportional weight and build for each category)

** Third Section: CLASSIFICATION:

3 - Unsentenced with State Historv
4 - Unsentenced without State History
5 - Sentenced with State History
6 - Sentenced without State History

State History: Any inmate who has done time at, or is sentenced to, CYA, CDC, or Federal Prison. Exception: 90 day observation

NOTE: There are also suffixes that go along with the three major sections, and they are:

1 - Assaultive/Escape (Officer Safety)
2 - P.C. or Medical
7 - Juvenile
8 - Civil Inmate
9 - SWP or WFF Roll up.

A fourth section is used in identifying the security level of each SENTENCED AND UNSENTENCED inmate.

| CLASSIFICATION | AUTHORIZED HOUSING | | SECURITY LEVEL CODE |
|---|---|---|---|
| MINIMUM ONE | SENTENCED | B DORM | A |
| | UNSENTENCED | D DORM | A |
| MINIMUM TWO | SENTENCED | B DORM | B |
| | UN-SENTENCED | D DORM | B |
| MEDIUM THREE | SENTENCED | C DORM | C |
| | UNSENTENCED | E DORM | C |
| MEDIUM FOUR | SENTENCED | C DORM/MAX | D |
| | UNSENTENCED | E DORM/MAX | D |

INFORMATIONAL CODES ONLY

| | |
|---|---|
| SENTENCED DETAINER FROM OTHER AGENCY | P |
| WEEKENDER (48 HOURS OR LESS) | W |

## Exhibit 5. Sentenced Inmate Classification Score Sheet

RELEASE DATE:_____

INMATE:_____ COUNTY ID: _____

SENT.DATE & DAYS_____/____ CLASSIFICATION & HOUSING:_____/___

1. SEVERITY OF CURRENT SENTENCE
   - Low . . . . . 0 — Score
   - Low Moderate . . . . . 1
   - Moderate (charge:_____) . . . . . 2
   - High . . . . . 4
   - Highest . . . . . 6
2. PRIOR ASSAULTIVE OFFENSE HISTORY (Convictions Only - Within the Past 5 Years)
   - Moderate . . . . . 2 — Score
   - High . . . . . 4
   - Highest . . . . . 6
3. ESCAPE HISTORY (Rate Last 3 Years of Incarceration)
   WALKAWAY:
   - Over 1 Year Ago . . . . . 1 — Score
   - Within the Last Year . . . . . 3

   ESCAPE FROM MEDIUM OR ABOVE CUSTODY, WITH ACTUAL OR THREATENED VIOLENCE:
   - Over 1 Year Ago . . . . . 5
   - Within the Last Year . . . . . 7
4. ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSE
   - Alcohol or Drug Offense . . . . . 1 — Score
   - Causing Occasional Legal & Social Problems . . . . . 2
5. CURRENT DETAILER
   - Immigration Hold . . . . . 0 — Score
   - Misdemeanor Hold . . . . . 1
   - Felony Case/Warrant/CYA or CDC Hold . . . . . 4
   - Extradition Initiated - Felony . . . . . 6
6. PRIOR FELONY CONVICTIONS (Within the Past 5 Years)
   - One . . . . . 2 — Score
   - Two or More . . . . . 4
7. STABILITY FACTORS
   - Age 26 or Over . . . . . -2 — Score
   - Diploma/GED/Military History/Employed/ . . . . . -1/-2
8. IN-CUSTODY PERFORMANCE

   Rules Infraction: (includes roll-ups) — Score
   - Minor Violation . . . . . +1
   - Major Violation . . . . . +2

   Current Good Behavior (Max. of -4 points)
   - First 30 Days . . . . . -1
   - Completion of 60 days . . . . . -1
   - Completion of 90 days . . . . . -1
   - Working Inmate During a Rating Period . . . . . -1

CLASSIFICATION DEPUTY: _____ . . . . . TOTAL SCORE

CLASSIFICATION SCALE:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| MED. 4 (D) . . . . . | 7 POINTS OR MORE | SWP: | DENIES APPROVED |
| MED. 3 (C) . . . . . | 4 - 6 POINTS | RAP . . . . | Y N |
| MIN. 2 (B) . . . . . | 1 - 3 POINTS | SPQH . . . | Y N |
| MIN. 1 (A) . . . . . | MINUS - 0 POINTS | P.O. . . . | Y N |
| | | PSYCH TEST: | _____ |

**Exhibit 5a. Severity Scales for Sentenced Inmate Score Sheet**

HIGHEST: 6 POINTS
- ARMED ROBBERY (Multiple, Threat)
- ASSAULT AND BATTERY WITH DANGEROUS WEAPON (Serious Injury, Risk of Death or Disfigurement)
- ESCAPE (Closed Institutions)
- EXPLOSIVES (Detonation - Potential Risk of Injury)
- KIDNAPPING
- MURDER
- RAPE
- SEX CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN / FORCE OR VIOLENCE

HIGH: 4 POINTS
- ARMED ROBBERY, OTHER (e.g., Demand Note)
- EXPLOSIVES (Possession, Transportation)
- EXTORTION
- MANSLAUGHTER
- SEX CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN

MODERATE: 2 POINTS
- BREAKING AND ENTERING
- BRIBING OF PUBLIC OFFICIAL
- CONTEMPT OF COURT
- COUNTERFEITING (Over $20,000 - Manufacturing, Passing, Possession)
- DRUGS (Sales/Felony)
- ESCAPE (Open Institution or Program - Included Bail Jumping)
- PROPERTY OFFENSES (Burglary, Embezzlement, Forgery, Fraud, Larceny, Grand Theft)
- SEX CRIMES/MISDEMEANORS (314PC & similar charges)
- AUTOMOBILE THEFT
- WEAPONS (Possession)

LOW MODERATE: 1 POINT
- ALCOHOL LAW VIOLATION
- ASSAULT AND BATTERY (No Injury)
- COUNTERFEITING ($1,000 - $20,000)
- DRUG OFFENSES (Misdemeanors)
- PROPERTY OFFENSES (Misdemeanors)
- SOLICITATION FOR SEXUAL ACTIVITY

LOW: NO POINTS
- COUNTERFEITING (Under $1,000)
- TRAFFIC OFFENSES (Other Than Alcohol/Drugs Related)

The San Mateo classification instrument uses seven measures of legal behavior and one measure of non-legal behavior. These include:

- Severity of current charge;
- Prior assaultive offense history;
- Escapehistory;
- Chemical dependency involvement resulting in legal action;
- warrants or detainers;
- Prior felony convictions;
- Recoded inmate behavior; and
- A stability factor comprised of age, employment history, and educational attainment.

Using the appropriate score sheet, inmates arc classified into housing units according to point calculations derived from the above criteria. Additional factors are also used:

- Race;
- Physical stature;
- Legal attributes (sentencing information and prior state criminal records); and
- Status group affiliation (such as protective custody, juvenile, civil case, and assaultive and escape history).

The San Mateo jail's system has developed an objective classification instrument using justice-based and status group affiliation information. It has the additional advantage of maintaining racial and physical size balances within its jail.

Grays Harbor County Jail (Washington) has incorporated both the decision-tree and point scale approaches into a classification system based upon objective, verified inmate information. During an initial pre-classification, the classification officer completes a medical screening form, records observations of the inmate, and uses a pre-classification decision-tree to determine an initial security assignment. Typically within twenty-four and forty-eight hours of admission, a classification screening questionnaire is completed via an inmate interview. A point tabulation of verified inmate data determines formal classification for the inmate, and the classification officer then recommends assignment to one of four security levels: maximum, medium, minimum, or a special needs category.

Any change in inmate status or behavior are reviewed by a Classification Board comprised of classification officers and chaired by either the Jail Superintendent or a Jail Sergeant, The Classification Board reviews classification decisions weekly, considers appeals made by inmates within seventy-two hours of their formal classification, and considers any overriding factors.

In place since 1984, the Grays Harbor classification system incorporates the advantages of both the decision-tree and point scale approaches, while providing an ongoing review process to

ensure appropriate security level assignment. Policy directives further specify custody and security considerations for inmates falling within the special needs category.

### Objectlve Classlficatlon System Components

In describing components of objective classification systems, Brennan (1987b) identified a trend toward ***consensus-based*** models for determining risk criteria. This approach relies on professional judgment in the logical selection of risk factors. Another popular approach, ***equity-based*** models use behavioral and legal variables with the goal of maximizing consistency, rather than emphasizing predictive accuracy. Brennan referred to the marginal success of ***predictive models,*** which include disciplinary infractions, escape, and suicide as risk variables. Such models incorporate legal, social, and psychological data as well as past criminal record information. Although Brennan (1987b) listed examples of ***psychological models*** that use psychometric instruments to determine risk factors for security and custody classification, he indicated inconsistent correlations between psychological risk factors and inmate misconduct.

There are several possible methods of combining these risk factors to make classification decisions. Brennan (1987b) discussed point scale, decision-tree, matrix, and combined approaches for determining inmate custody or security levels. In practice, these systems may be either consensus-based or statistically developed. The use of a discretionary override with objective criteria is often implemented as a means of combining subjective and objective classification.

Brennan (1987b) found no clear advantage between additive point scales and decision trees. Although he speculated that "statistically developed decision trees might eventually prove to be a superior predictive classification method," he also noted the high vulnerability of decision tree classification systems to incorrect data, "where one incorrect variable can introduce a chain of incorrect decisions" (Brennan, 1987b).

### Movement Toward Objective Jail Classification Systems

Several factors led to the implementation of objective systems for classifying inmates. As noted earlier, the courts have frequently mandated a process that is uniformly applied to all inmates. In addition, overcrowding has created pressure to implement more efficient and cost-effective policies and procedures for classifying inmates. With objective systems, most decisions can be made relatively quickly by line staff who have been trained to complete the assessment form and who have sufficient experience to identify those few cases requiring special handling. Moreover, use of a valid, equitable classification system can reduce overclassification, thereby decreasing costs associated with unnecessary incarceration or excessive security requirements (Bohnstedt and Geiser, 1979; Clements, 1982; Buchanan et al., 1986). Finally, the desire to receive accreditation has led many correctional administrators to adopt objective classification systems.

While complete objectivity in classifying inmates is not possible, supporters of objective systems contend that this approach:

- Controls discretion by permitting overrides of the classification process, but only within explicitly stated parameters;
- Assures everyone is aware of decision-making methods by including rules that are highly visible;
- Improves information-gathering by promoting the accurate, consistent, and comprehensive accumulation of information;
- Enforces consistency in decision-making by requiring decision-makers to use Standardized criteria and apply them in the same manner each time; and
- Provides for easier evaluatation/monitoring by using standardized criteria and procedures that facilitate review and assessment (Library Information Specialists, 1983).

## Deciding Which Criteria to Use

Although guidelines exist far regulating jail classification, they tend to be relatively general in nature. The specific process of assessing inmates' security and supervision requirements is usually left up to individual jurisdictions. This process, in turn, is generally dependent on an agency's correctional philosophy. Glaser (1982) noted the impact of institutional variability, e.g., architecture, size, resources, organizational structure, and management philosophy, as contributing; toward the diversity of classification systems. Brennan (1987b) also listed the nature of the local inmate population as an additional influence as jails adapt existing classification systems to their specific needs.

As noted previously, many jails have traditionally used a treatment or medical-model philosophy as the basis for classification. Thus, it is not surprising that a 1978 survey of jails conducted by the American Justice Institute found considerable reliance on psychometric instruments and clinical diagnosis in assessing inmates' potential for escape, violent behavior, and suicide. Austin and Litsky (1982) subsequently concluded that the treatment philosophy was the driving force behind the classification systems used in four jails of differing size and security rating. often, as in one metropolitan detention center, the overriding goal of classification was simply to have inmatcs "get along together" while incarcerated.

### Review of Research Literature on Criterion Variables

Brennan (19878) identified escape, recidivism, violence, and suicide as among the many behaviors for which predictive classifications are employed. As predictive models gain increased use in classification, Don Gottfredson (1987) noted their application in program evaluation the comparative study of classification methods, the development of new variables, the measurement of risks to the community as well as inmate risks, and improved validities to reduce classification errors.

Gottfredson (1987) listed several issues concerning prediction and classification research. Three major areas for improving the validity of predictive models are:

- Improvement of data quality, which determines the reliability and validity of classifications;
- Improved scaling of variables, e.g., prior record; and
- Improved outcome criteria, which may include the-behavior and efficiency of criminal justice officers (Gottfredson, 1987).

As the means by which relevant predictor variables are chosen, the criterion "constitutes the basis for determining the validity of the prediction method and thereby determines whether the method will be useful for any practical applications" (Gottfredson, 1987).

Glaser (1987) noted several problems in using statistical tables to make inmate risk assessments, including: stability of predictors over time, accuracy, and predictability for criteria. In discussing complications that arise from the interaction of prediction factors, Glaser (1987) gives as example five factors-number of prior felony convictions, number of prior incarcerations, age at first arrest, drug addiction, and longest job ever held in the community-"that differentiate offenders into categories with contrasting recidivism rates? The decision-tree approach provides one means for taking intercorrelating risk factors into account by allowing the decision maker to consider the validity of information for each category that contributes to the risk assessment, i.e., at each level of the decision-tree.

**Custody vs. Security Classification Risk Factors.** In a summary of research concerning classification risk factors, Brennan (1987b) distinguishes between classification custody factors and security factors. Custody ***classification*** inmate risk factors include the following: age, race, marital status, job stability, drug or alcohol use, residential mobility, criminal history, past violent offenses, sentence length/time served, and psychological assessments.

Although used in most jail custody classification schemes, past violence has weak or inconsistent correlations with institutional misconduct (Brennan, 1987b). Brennan further notes that due to the inconsistencies resulting from a single violence risk factor, each type of violence must be measured separately against misconduct rates.

The focus of *security classification* shifts from the institutional risks associated with inmates to public risk and street behavior. For security classification purposes, risk factors include criteria that involve escape, dangerous recidivism, and habitual criminality (Brennan, 1987b). Security-based classification systems, such as the CJA/Northpointe decision-tree, emphasize legal variables, criminal history, seriousness of the current offense, and past escape attempts. Five factors for security classification have been correlated with serious crimes: prior criminal behavior, age, race, socioeconomic status and unemployment, and substance abuse (Brennan, 1987b).

**Predicting Violent Behavior.** In classification systems that have placed a greater emphasis on prediction, there is an assumption that decision makers will be able to identify those prisoners likely to cause problems as well as those likely to benefit from rehabilitative treatment. Commonly, items pertaining to an inmate's life history, successes and failures, psychological test scores, or family situation are used as predictors of violent behavior and future crime. However,

studies show these systems do not always agree on which items constitute valid and reliable indicators of future conduct, particularly violent behavior.

For instance, Monahan (1981), who reviewed research on factors most consistently related to violence, stated: "If there is one finding that overshadows all others in the area of prediction, it is that the probability of future crime increases with each prior criminal act." Buchanan et al. (1986) found that objective initial classification factors related to criminal behavior in the classification systems used by three state agencies (e.g., current offense, prior convictions, and escape history) demonstrated relatively weak correlations with prison misconduct. Similarly, Wenk et al. (1972) concluded that a history of violence by itself has proved a poor predictor in parole survival. Brennan (1987b) also noted that "different elements of criminal history have different correlations with overall disciplinary problems." Further, it remains uncertain whether habitual criminals pose higher custodial risks. Brennan (1987b) also states that current research does not indicate any strong correlations between prior incarcerations and institutional misconduct.

Monahan (1981) reported that current research points to a strong relationship between age and crimes of violence. Young offenders are, proportionately, more likely to engage in recidivist violence, And not only current age but also age upon first contact with the police appears to relate strongly to recidivist criminal behavior. In determining security classification, however, age factors are often excluded due to the lack of reliable data, such as age at first arrest (Brennan, 1987b).

In a study of initial assessment factors used by three objective prison classification systems, Buchanan et al. (1986) found age to be the only factor consistently associated with serious institutional misconduct, although the correlation was moderate.

Sex and race have also been correlated with violent crime. (See, e.g., Webster, 1978; Kelley, 1977; Silberman, 1978; and Hindclang, 1978.) However, while such information about inmates may be considered general knowledge among jail staff, constitutional and civil rights considerations preclude its use for classification purposes other than housing assignment In summarizing research findings, Brennan (1987b) noted that correlations between race and inmate misconduct are weak or inconsistent, with much geographical variation. In a study of offenders convicted of felonies in California, Petersilia and Turner (1987) argued that racially correlated factors included in decision guidelines increased predictive accuracy an additional 5 to 12 percent.

In a review of predictors of criminal recidivism, Pritchard (1977) reported that in eight of nine studies with relevant data, an offender's pre-prison income was related to parole performance. Further, Seventy-two of seventy-six studies on pre-prison employment stability found a lack of stability to indicate greater likelihood of parole failure. However, such information may be of limited use in jail classification because it is almost always obtained from inmate self-report and is time-consuming for staff to verify.

Another factor sometimes correlated positively with criminal recidivism is substance abuse (Pritchard, 1977; Monahan, 1981). Tittle et al. (1978) found that 33 percent of a sample of inmates in California state prisons cited money for drugs and alcohol as the reason for their continuing criminal behavior. Age may play a role in such findings, however. Evidence of a

three-way relationship between drug/alcohol abuse, age, and prison misconduct has been found (Flanagan, 1980, 1983).

According to a study of the impact of drug offenders on county houses of correction in Massachusetts, more than three-fourths of male inmates admitted during 1987 and sentenced to thirty or more days had a prior history of substance abuse (Holmes and Reibel, 1989). (Samples included fifty substance abuse offenders and fifty other offenders from each county.) Correlating factors include:

- Age, with one-half of the sample younger than twenty-five and one-quarter younger than twenty-one;
- Marital status, with approximately 70 percent of inmates having never married,
- Education, with 57 percent having no high school diploma or GED; and
- Occupation, with over 40 percent indicating laborer positions (Holmes and Reibel, 1989).

Of the class of substance abusers who primarily use heroin (Class A), most had been convicted of larceny/receiving and burglary crimes. Holmes and Reibel (l989) found that only 15.4 percent of Class A users were serving time for drug offenses. Of inmates surveyed, over half had one or more formal discipline reports. More than 20 percent had three or more discipline reports.

Similarly, Farrington (1987) found a correlation between high individual crime rates and a poor employment record and drug use. Other interrelated factors included: an early age at onset of offending, a serious first offense, and a high past crime rate. Early antisocial behavior, convicted family members, low family income, and school failure are among the social factors correlated with high individual crime rates (Farrington, 1987).

Less powerful relationships have been found between violent behavior and factors such as estimated IQ, marital status, and residential mobility (Monahan, 1981). However, Flanagan (1980) contends that the relationship between marital status and violent behavior is **lessened** when age and IQ are taken into account and that residential mobility data are frequently obtained from sources of questionable reliability.

Although few of these factors have consistently been found to be valid and reliable predictors of violent behavior, most jails continue to employ them, subjectively or objectively, in classification. Factors related to risk prediction are especially likely to be used in making decisions concerning security and/or custody classification (Brennan, 1985).

**Applicability of Prediction Variables.** An additional problem for classification, as well as jail management, applies even when most valid predictors are used. As both Monahan (1981) and Austin and Litsky (1982) point out, the predictive relationships established for classification criteria apply to groups of offenders rather ***than individual*** inmates. Consequently, these factors have only limited ability to predict the behavior of any given person. For instance, an individual may belong to a group, 55 percent of which will engage in violent behavior. However, it is not possible to determine if that individual will fall into the 55 percent subgroup. Moreover, the capability of any given factor to predict behavior is highly dependent on the statistical prevalence

of the behavior within the population in question. The lower the frequency of the behavior, the less accurate the prediction will be. Violent incidents are relatively rare occurrences even in the most populous jails. Therefore, reliable prediction models of imnate violence will not easily be developed.

Stephen Gottfredson (1987) discussed problems in using the same prediction variables for populations that differ according to race or age ranges. Citing a modest ability for prediction within the criminal justice system, Gottfredson (1987) noted that incomplete or unreliable data is often a problem in making predictions of offender behavior.

Then are also serious concerns regarding the use of implicit predictions (which is widespread in the criminal justice system) versus using explicit predictions based on consistent and verifiable information (see Morris and Miller, 1985). The use of predictions of dangerousness has been criticized on the grounds that they arc inaccurate. It is unfair to predict individual behavior based on group behavior. The inconsistent and nonconclusive nature of research findings in prediction studies supports the contention that the use of prediction should be limited until reliable and valid predictions can be identified.

### Policy Consequences

These limitations on the use of predictors to classify inmates have two notable consequences. First, prediction results in a substantial amount of misclassification, especially when a-subjective approach is used. Ennis and Emery (1976), for illstance, suggest that predictions of dangerous behavior are wrong about 95 percent of the time. Inappropriate classification, usually to a higher than appropriate security and/or custody level, misuses valuable and limited resources. Second, as Monahan (1981) notes, the use of predictors raises questions about the violation of an individual's civil liberties because it provides the impetus for preventive or therapeutic intervention based upon a prediction of future behavior rather than an assessment of past conduct.

Consequently, objective systems need not be wholly predicted upon their capacity to predict with great accuracy. But at a minimum, they should consist of a reasonable set of objective criteria that ensures a more equitable and workable alternative to subjective classification systems. This mixture between prediction and objectivity is referred to as "justice-based." (See Goldkamp, 1987, for a review of the guidelines concept in criminal decision making.)

Table 2 displays the key attributes of subjective, prediction-based, and justice-based systems. Note that both forms of objective classification improve consistency in decision-making and are amenable to on-going research and evaluation.

**Table 2. Method of Classification**

| Characteristics of Jail Classification Systems | Types of Jail Classification Systems | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Subjective | Objective/ Prediction | Objective/ Justice-Based |
| Structure | Informal | Formalized | Formalized |
| Criteria used | Broadly defined | Measured behavioral attributes | Measured behavioral attributes |
| Criteria defined by | Independent assessment | Relevant predictor variables | Relevant legalistic predictor variables |
| Use of scales | No | Yes | Yes |
| Level of discretion | High | LOW | LOW |
| Evaluation of system | Not possible | Essential/prediction | Necessary/process |

Even among proponents of justice-based classification, however, there is some disagreement about the assessment criteria to be used As has already been demonstrated in this review, current models of objective classification differ greatly in the number, type, and scaling of classification criteria. Much needs to be learned about what constitute the most appropriate items for use in jail classification.

Brennan (1987a) gives four factors important to the creation and validation of classifications:

- Interacting stages for choosing a content domain,
- Constructing the classification;
- Checking internal validity; and
- Establishing external validity.

### Screening for Special and Program Needs

Thus far, this discussion has emphasized the use of point system instruments to determine custody designation. However, jail classification systems must also identify inmates with special housing or program needs who may not be captured by point systems. Rather, they require a process in which trained intake and classification staff use standardized screening and diagnostic processes to ensure that inmates with special needs are handled appropriately. These "special' need areas should include, but not be limited to, medical, mental health, suicide, and special security issues (e.g., active membership in violent gangs, witnesses, protection, etc.).

Little research has been conducted regarding inmate needs assessment in jails. That which has been completed, however, suggests that such evaluations are often both limited and inadequate. For example, surveys of jails show many facilities to be lacking in proper procedures for identifying and treating health care problems (Goldfarb, 1975, and National Sheriffs' Association, 1982). The National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) survey found that nearly

49 percent of 1,098 jails performed no initial medical screening. In general, only the larger systems contained an infirmary. In its 1988 *Census of Local Jails*, BJS found that 2,218 of the 3,316 jails surveyed had no medical facilities. According to the NSA survey, the average hours per day worked by a licensed physician was 3.9 hours, with most small jails using an on-call doctor supplemented by county nurses.

For jails with inmate populations less than 250, Guynes et al. (1985) noted that only 22.7 percent of responding jails identified medical examinations as part of their intake procedures. Ayres (1988) emphasized the need for separate medical custody for inmates with illnesses, injuries, alcohol or drug withdrawal, prostheses, or pregnancy-related problems.

## Assessing Medical Needs

According to guidelines developed by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (1986). jail administrators must contact medical staff before assigning housing and programming, taking disciplinary measures, or transferring an inmate who has medical or psychiatric illnesses or developmental disabilities. The NCCHC guidelines outline a medical screening process that consists of:

- An interview regarding health conditions;
- Observation of inmate behavior, apparent physical deformities, and skin condition; and
- Disposition (e.g., whether immediate referral to health care service, placement in the general inmate population with subsequent referral, or placement in the general population).

Such screening is to be conducted by medical personnel or health-trained correctional staff members.

NCCHC guidelines provide a framework for identifying the medical and mental health needs of jail inmates. Procedural models specify routine evaluations of inmates segregated from the general population, as well as providing a discussion of several health-related concerns fop inmates with communicable disease, potential for alcohol/drug withdrawal, developmental disabilities, pregnancy, sexual assault victimization, and suicidal tendencies. Of these, suicide and substance withdrawal are cited as two of the most serious conditions among jail inmates (NCCHC, 1986).

**Some states have also developed guidelines for managing inmates with medical or mental health needs. The California Board of Corrections has issued two reports designed to assist jail managers in meeting health care service standards. Exemplary models incorporate medical and mental health needs that are frequently encountered by jail staff, such as AIDS, suicide prevention, and pregnancy (California Board of Corrections, 1987). More recent guidelines address the assessment and planning of health care services for California's local detention facilities (Norman and Cotton, 1989).**

**Inmate Classification and AIDS.** Although suicide remained the leading cause of inmate death in jails during 1988, illness accounted for 41 percent of remaining inmate mortality (BJS,

1990). of these, acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) accounted for 10 percent of inmate deaths during the year ending June 30, 1988. Inmates with clinical indications of need received HIV testing in 1,108 jails during the same year. Approximately half of jails surveyed had no HIV testing for inmates.

With the growing incidence of AIDS in both the inmate and general populations, classification officers must pay particular attention to observable symptoms when assessing the medical needs of jail detainees. Ayres (1988) gives examples of AIDS-related questions and observations to include on screening forms, e.g., skin discoloration, white patches on tongue, night sweats, chills, or fatigue. These and other inmate data are used to determine the need for more in-depth medical screening by a health care professional.

In the Los Angeles County system, inmates with a history of previous HIV disease who exhibit symptoms undergo medical evaluation at the Men's Central Jail/Sybil Brand Institute Hospital (Clark, 1991). Appropriate housing is then determined in consultation with the custody medical liaison. HIV-positive inmates without active symptoms are treated on an outpatient basis. According to Clark (1991):

> With the exception of end-stage HIV disease patients, there is no medical rationale for isolated/segregated housing of inmates with HIV disease.

Appropriate supervision is recommended for asymptomatic HIV inmates in order to restrict high risk behavior while in custody.

The need for medical staff continues to be a problem in may jails (Guynes, 1988). According to a nationwide survey of jail managers, more than 40 percent of respondents indicated training needs for emergency medical procedures and handling of inmates with AIDS. Overall, 69 percent of those surveyed reported a need for training in handling special problem inmates. Although the availability of medical services in jails has improved over the past several years, mom than 50 percent of jail managers identified a need for improved identification of suicide risks and mentally disordered inmates.

The NSA survey found a similar picture in regard to mental health care (National Sheriffs' Association, 1982). Just 34 percent of the respondents provided psychiatric services, although almost 50 percent offered some type of personal counseling. Clearly, even if jails had the time and resources to conduct thorough psychological needs assessments--which they do not-many would be unable to provide services adequate to meet identified needs.

### Mental Health Screening

In spite of the escalating numbers of mentally ill jail inmates, there is little research available to assist jail managers in coping with the problems presented by these inmates (Russell, 1987). Kalinich and Embert (1990) state:

> Many researchers believe that deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill has shifted much of the burden of managing mentally ill individuals onto the criminal justice system, especially local jails.

Russell (1987) also notes that with the decline of federal assistance for mental health care programs, local jails receive a disproportionate share of the mental health care burden. While some states, e.g., New York, have defined inmate screening standard (Russell, 1987). others face significant challenges in responding to the needs presented by mentally ill individuals within the criminal justice system. According to Kalinich and Embert (1990). "the levels and types of service required for mentally ill inmates has not been made clear by case law, legislation or public policy."

In a survey of services offered by jails with inmate populations less than 250, over 75 percent of jails with classification procedures separated mentally unstable offenders from other segregation categories (Guynes et al., 1985). While more than 80 percent of respondents offered counseling and 66 percent had drug treatment programs, only 34 percent had education programming. Russell (1987) mentions Colorado and Connecticut as among the states with legislated programs for assessing and establishing mental health care services in jails.

In 1986, Wisconsin's Advisory Committee on Mentally Ill Inmates developed suggestions for statutory revisions concerning jail officer training on inmate mental health needs, mandatory jail operations Standards, and the segregation of mentally ill jail inmates. Among the suggested alternatives, additional training requirements for jail officers would include more hours devoted to the care of emotionally distressed, mentally ill, suicidal or developmentally disabled inmates. The committee's discussion paper also addressed issues related to technical assistance and finding for jail mental health services (Henkel, 1986).

Guidelines developed by NCCHC (1986) further specify a mandatory mental health evaluation for all inmates within fourteen days of admission. The evaluation must include both a structured interview by mental health cam staff and intelligence testing to screen for mental deficiencies.

Assessment of an inmate's educational and vocational needs may be difficult to verify. The **NSA** survey found that only 29 percent of jail Respondents offered a GED program, 14.4 percent had an adult basic education (ABE) program, and just 8 percent provided any type of vocational training. Moreover, the short length of stay of many inmates diminishes program impact and substantially decreases the cost-effectiveness of their operations.

Inmate self-report, along with staff observation is the principal means for identifying special needs inmates. Again, such information may or may not be reliable; it usually is quite difficult to verify. Yet it provides the basis for most inmate treatment. Inmates who require protective custody, for example, and those who are admitted homosexuals are normally housed separately from other inmates. Inmates who acknowledge or exhibit suicidal tendencies are placed in special observation cells or are monitored more closely by staff.

### *Suicide Risk Assessment*

**Some jurisdictions have also begun using a special booking interview form that was developed by the NIC National Jail Suicide Task Force to assist in the identification of potentially suicidal inmates (Special Commission to Investigate Suicide in Municipal Detention Centers, 1984).**

States with designated studies of statewide suicides within local detention include New York, Ohio and Michigan (Russell, 1987). A Massachusetts study to review suicides led to new legislation and provided increased training for jail officers. In New York State, a jail suicide prevention program integrates statewide training, systematic screening and monitoring, consistent reporting and data collection (Russell, 1987). The New York Suicide Prevention Crisis Service Model includes a five-step screening process:

1. Examine all records for indication of possible past/current mental health problem.
2. Administer suicide prevention screening guidelines form (which includes personal, interview-based data and observations of inmate behavior and appearance). The screening form is used with other classification data to assign appropriate housing.
3. Assess physical handicap(s).
4. Review files for prior history of suicide attempt or psychiatric inpatient services during previous incarcerations.
5. Consider other information.

### Classifying Substance Abusers

Inmates suspected of drug and/or alcohol abuse are frequently housed initially in detoxification cells, where they can be periodically checked. Resources for subsequent counseling, however, are limited. Only 38 percent of the 1,015 jails responding to this portion of the NSA survey (1982) provide substance abuse counseling; most of these programs were found in large systems where they were staffed primarily by community volunteers.

According to a study conducted by Austin and Litsky (1982), in one large urban jail only 13.6 percent of the inmates with a history of alcohol abuse and none of the inmates with a history of drug abuse were engaged in substance abuse programming.

According to a drug treatment program survey conducted by the American Jail Association (1990), only 28 percent of jails had drug treatment beyond detoxification services. For respondents indicating an average daily population greater than 250, more than 60 percent offered drug treatment services other than detoxification. Fifteen percent of all jails surveyed offered group counseling, 8 percent offered transition planning, and 14 percent offered drug education. Overall, only 7 percent had a comprehensive program that included group counseling, drug education, transition planning and referral to outside treatment programs. Twenty-eight percent of jails with inmate populations greater than 250 indicated a comprehensive treatment program. Of jails surveyed, an additional 9 percent planned to implement a drug treatment program within the next six months.

While it may be possible for most jails to identify inmates with chronic health problems or severe mental deficiencies, again only the larger systems are equipped to provide these, inmates with the care they require (NSA, 1982). Smaller jurisdictions generally transfer these inmates to another agency or an institution with secure facilities.

On the whole, then, jail classification must also include proper screening of inmates with special medical and mental health problems. The nature of jail operations (i.e., their high volume, high turnover, and short terms of incarceration) and limited program budgets inhibit efforts to provide most inmates with meaningful participation in educational, vocational, and substance abuse treatment programs. Consequently, including a detailed program needs assessment as part of the classification process will benefit only those inmates with the longest jail terms.

### Use of Criminal History Data In Making Classification Decisions

According to a Criminal Justice Information Policy paper on criminal history record information statutes, thirty-one of fifty states have enacted legislation authorizing consideration of criminal history in correctional classification and supervision (Search Group, 1991). Even in states that have not enacted statutory authority, prior criminal records, typically accessible to correctional officers within state departments of correction, are used to determine inmate classification. Ayres (1988) lists information sources for risk and assessment criteria essential to objective classification:

- Booking reports
- Medical/psychological screening and exam;
- Probation department criminal record and pm-sentence reports;
- Institutional reports for prior incarcerations;
- State or local police/sheriff records;
- Data from the National Crime Information Center, and
- Information from inmate interviews,

In a survey of problems identified by jail managers, results indicated that more than one-third of respondents identified nine of thirteen information management issues as major needs (Guynes, 1988). Over 50 percent of jail managers listed substance abuse history and medical/mental health information among information needs. Almost half of the respondents also indicated insufficient Court information. Several jail managers responding to open-ended questions noted that computerized systems were being implemented to improve the jail's access to inmate data.

Classification officers verify inmate self-report data with inmate background information accessed through various databases. In jails with computerized systems, such access can be immediate, thus facilitating custody or security assignment by allowing quick verification of data on prior offenses, incarcerations, prior disciplinary infractions, medical or psychiatric problems, or program history.

### Computer Applications In Objective Classification

Many jails have implemented or are developing computerized inmate tracking systems to monitor all phases of an offender's contact with the criminal justice system. Systems which

incorporate criminal history and personal data provide immediate access to important objective criteria.

Increased availability of data facilitates the verification of inmate interview information, thus alleviating one of the most time consuming tasks of jail classification staff. Although staff have improved access to inmate information, they must keep in mind that data reliability and completeness reflect existing inmate records. The quality of inmate information gathered from various databases is expected to improve with the development of policies and procedures for computerized data records and with increasing coordination among various criminal justice agencies.

Computer-accessible inmate data useful to classification divisions include:

- A record of classification category;
- Security and supervision requirements;
- Special needs, including medical or psychological information;
- Specific housing assignments; and,
- A record of when the classification decision was made, and the name of the classification officer (Ayres, 1988).

Other relevant information on "keep separate" status, gang affiliations, or behavior alerts are also typically included as part of the computerized inmate record. Another advantage of on-line inmate records is that updates of inmate status, behavior reports, or reclassification decisions can be entered as soon as the information is received.

Automated jail classification systems are in use or being implemented in many jurisdictions in or&r to simplify classification procedures and to obtain more complete inmate records. The Multnomah County (Oregon) Corrections Branch has recently implemented a computer&d, decision-tree classification system to supplement an existing criminal justice database. During the initial classification phase, a classification officer enters behavior alerts and attitude severity along with objective criteria into a computerized inmate record. Jail staff have the responsibility for verifying and updating all classification data, including inmate interview information, criminal history, and behavior alerts (See Exhibit 6,6A).

The Multnomah system includes twenty-three codes for behavior alerts, nine special needs categories, and four attitude levels. Other relevant data, including a charge score and needs assessment factors, are entered into the computer, which then determines a security category via an objective, decision-tree classification scheme (See Exhibit 7). According to the Multnomah County Corrections Branch Classification Training Manual, overrides require input from the classification team and are to be made for less than 5 percent of classifications. Once an inmate's record has been established, jail staff have immediate access to a detailed classification history form, including any updates, as well as to all decision tree criteria and criminal record input.

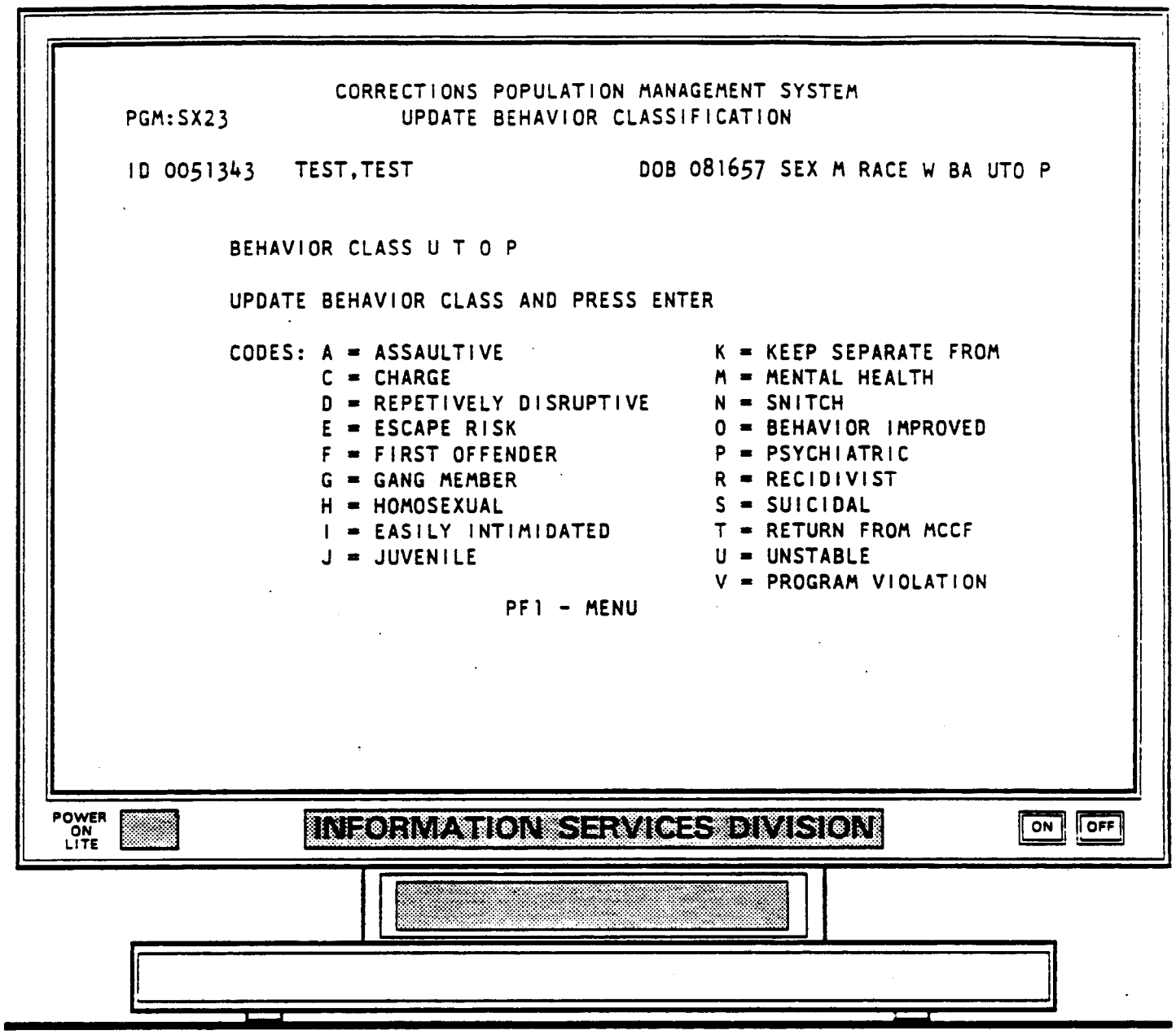
Computers can also generate statistical reports of the inmate population. This information is useful in planning for jail operation or programs and to direct treatment needs and services

(Ayres, 1988). At the Multnomah County Detention Center, which is a new generation, direct supervision facility, module custody-level decisions may be changed by changing post orders within the module. Management staff utilize information obtained from the classification process, readily available through the computer database, to make such decisions. in Multnomah County, computer generated profiles of jail's inmate population allow the intercorrelation of factors useful in risk assessment and inmate monitoring (See Exhibit 8,8A, 8B, 8C).

Brennan and Wells (1991b) discuss the use of criminal justice data in developing solutions to policy problems. Computerized inmate data systems provide a source for information on: inmate characteristics, security profiles of an inmate population, custody groupings, and inmate special needs. The improved availability of jail inmate and population information promotes data-driven, analysis-based decision making.

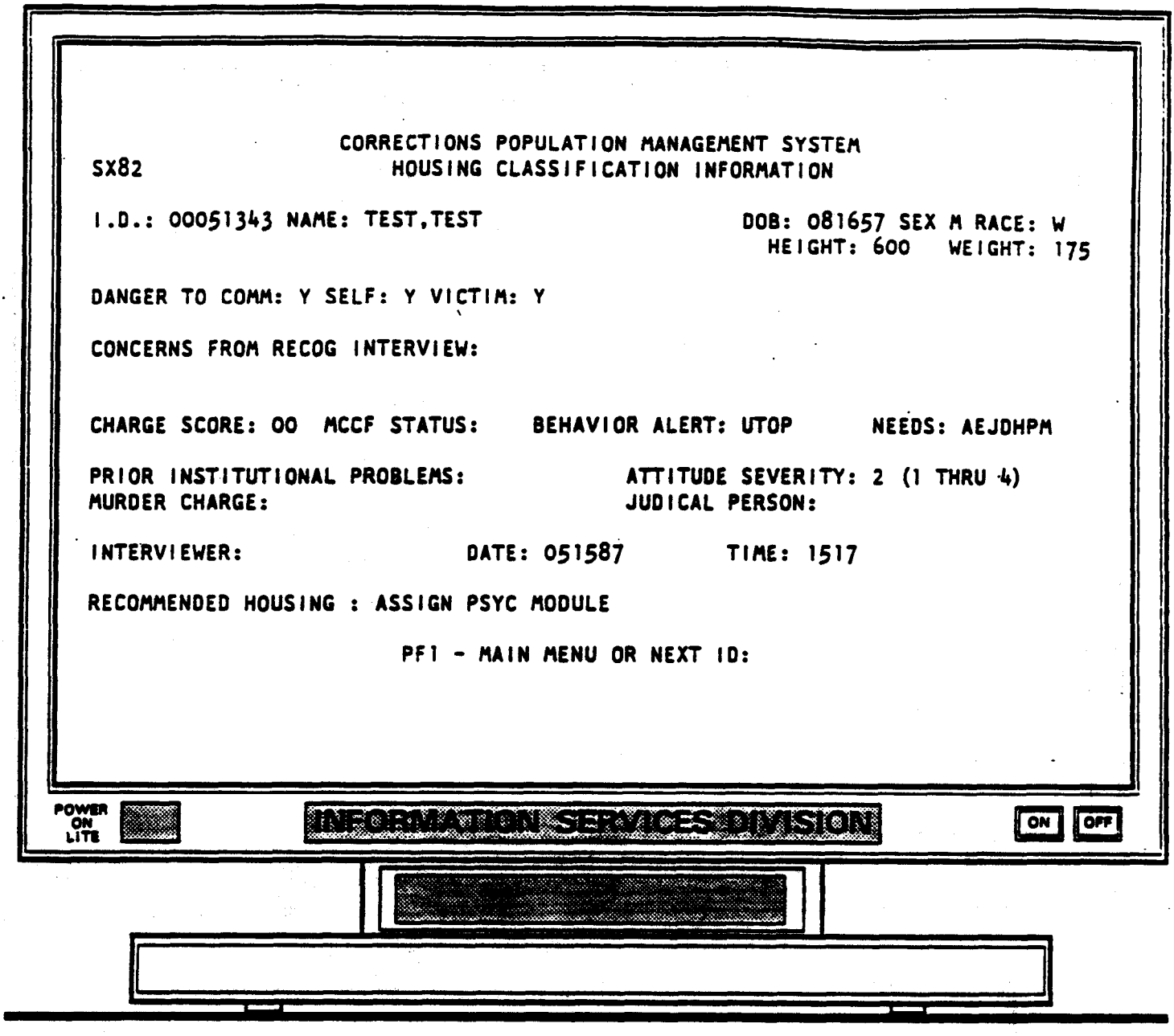
Another computerized decision-tree system is available at many jurisdictions in the State of Michigan, as well as at jails in other states (Northpointe, 1991). Through automated management software designed specifically for jails, staff have immediate access to inmate profiles that include classification and security information. Another benefit of such a system is the use of automated downloading of inmate and jail population data in state reporting. Like the Multnomah County system, additional features of this system include ongoing data collection and analysis. Among the data accessible at both inmate and population levels ate: demographic information, needs profiles, criminal history, offense and classification information, court status and sentence information, and summary data for alternative penalty planning (Brennan and Wells, 1991b).

**Exhibit 6. Multnomah County Corrections Population Management System Behavior Alert Update Screen**



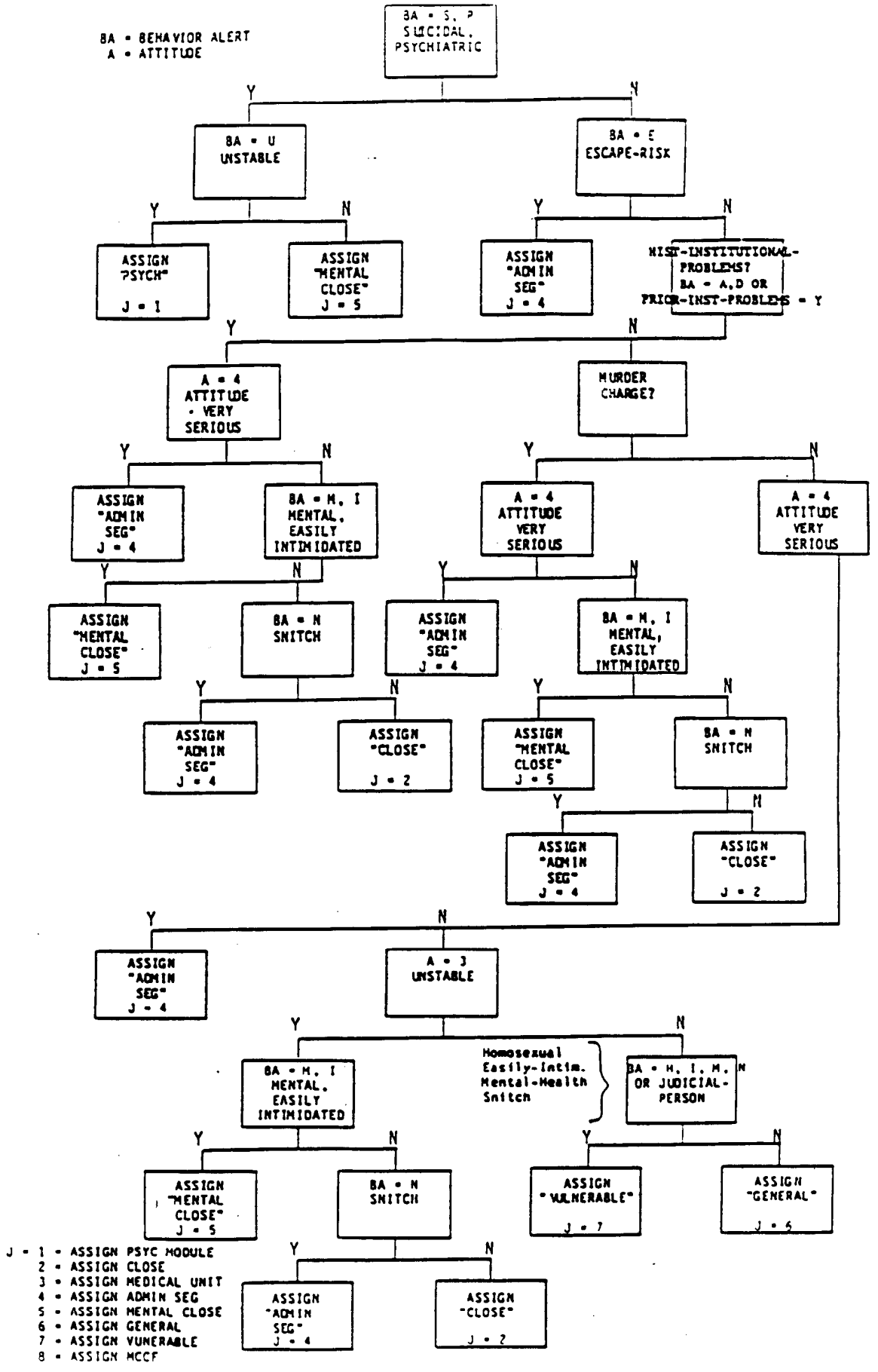

**THIS COMPUTER SCREEN IS USED TO UPDATE BEHAVIOR ALERTS AS INMATE STATUS CHANGES OR NEW INFORMATION IS RECEIVED BY CLASSIFICATION STAFF.**

**Exhibit 6a. Multnomah County Corrections Population Management System Houslng Classification Information Screen**




**THIS COMPUTER SCREEN IS USED TO INITIALLY CLASSIFY AN INMATE AND ENTER ALL INFORMATION GATHERED DURING THE INTERVIEW. THE INFORMATION PLACED ON THIS SCREEN SHOULD COINCIDE WITH THE INTERVIEW FORM.**

**Exhibit 7. Multnomah County Corrections Population Management System Decision-Tree Classification Scheme**



## Exhibit 8. Multnomah County Corrections Population Management System Demographlc Data

5X840I — MULTNOMAH COUNTY CORRECTIONS POPULATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

RUN DATE: 04/01/88 — PERSON DEMOGRAPHIC DATA — MONTH OF MARCH, 1988

| | INTAKE TOTAL | STATION HOUSE RELEASED | RECOG INTERVIEW & DENIED | RELEASE ON RECOG | RELEASE ON BAIL | COURT RELEASE ON RECOG | CLASSIFIED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TOTAL NUMBER | 2,182 | 0 | 943 | 694 | 119 | 87 | 1,028 |
| SEX: | | | | | | | |
| MALE | 1,805 | 0 | 786 | 549 | 108 | 69 | 836 |
| FEMALE | 377 | 0 | 157 | 145 | 14 | 19 | 192 |
| RACE: | | | | | | | |
| WHITE | 1,663 | 0 | 640 | 500 | 96 | 62 | 668 |
| MALE | 1,319 | 0 | 549 | 398 | 82 | 50 | 555 |
| FEMALE | 248 | 0 | 91 | 102 | 13 | 12 | 113 |
| BLACK | 549 | 0 | 287 | 171 | 20 | 23 | 327 |
| MALE | 431 | 0 | 208 | 130 | 19 | 16 | 296 |
| FEMALE | 118 | 0 | 99 | 41 | 1 | 7 | 71 |
| AISIAN | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| MALE | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| FEMALE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKAN | 39 | 0 | 20 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 22 |
| MALE | 28 | 0 | 13 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| FEMALE | 11 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| OTHER | 27 | 0 | 15 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| MALE | 27 | 0 | 15 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 10 |
| FEMALE | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MEAN AGE: | 30 | 00 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 31 | 30 |

## Exhibit 8a. Multnomah County Corrections Population Management system Preclassification Recognition Report

SX8402 — MULTNOMAH COUNTY CORRECTIONS POPULATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

RUN DATE: 04/01/88 — PRECLASSIFICATION RECOG REPORT — MONTH OF MARCH, 1988

| | |
|---|---|
| TOTAL BOOKED | 2,182 |
| STATION HOUSE RELEASES | 0 |
| BAIL RELEASES | 119 |
| NUMBER INTERVIEWED FOR RECOG | 1,608 |
| WITHIN RELEASE AUTHORITY | 1,100 |
| NBR. RECOGGED | 625 |
| NBR. NOT RECOGGED | 475 |
| OUTSIDE RELEASE AUTHORITY | 473 |
| NBR. RECOMMEND RECOG | 205 |
| NBR. RECOMMEND DENIAL | 268 |
| NBR. COURT RECOGGED | 34 |

BEHAVIOR ALERT ENTRIES:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ASSAULTIVE RISK | 15 | 0% | MILD MENTAL | 57 | 3% |
| ESCAPE RISK | 2 | 0% | CHRG. OF VIOLENCE | 75 | 4% |
| REP. DISRUPTIVE | 92 | 5% | RECIDIVIST | 247 | 15% |
| KEEP SEPERATED | 62 | 3% | FIRST OFFENDER | 96 | 5% |
| HOMOSEXUAL | 8 | 0% | JUVENILE | 2 | 0% |
| EASILY INTIMIDATED | 33 | 2% | UNSTABLE | 160 | 9% |
| INFORMENT | 8 | 0% | NO PROBLEMS | 576 | 35% |
| SUICIDE RISK | 9 | 0% | TRUSTEE | 61 | 3% |
| PSYCHIATRIC | 27 | 1% | | | |

--------- THIRD PARTY ---------

| | RECOG | | RECOMMENDATION | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| BURNSIDE | 14 | 0% | 40 | 2% |
| AUGUILA | 151 | 9% | 162 | 10% |
| CSS | 1 | 0% | 85 | 5% |
| FRIEND | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| RELATIVE | 6 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| OTHER | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| NONE | 174 | 10% | 99 | 6% |

NEED ENTRIES:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ALCOHOL | 241 | 14% | JOB | 898 | 55% |
| PSYCHIATRIC | 48 | 2% | MEDICAL | 166 | 10% |
| RETARDED | 2 | 0% | HOUSING | 235 | 14% |
| DRUG | 405 | 25% | EDUCATION | 481 | 29% |
| LANGUAGE | 18 | 1% | | | |

NON RECOG REASONS:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DAN TO COMMUNITY | 8 | 0% | NATURE OF CHARGE | 59 | 3% |
| DANGER TO SELF | 0 | 0% | LACK OF TIES | 145 | 9% |
| DANGER TO VICTIM | 164 | 10% | LACK OF STABILITY | 184 | 11% |
| PENDING CHARGE | 23 | 1% | ESCAPE RISK | 27 | 1% |
| REFUSED INTERVIEW | 47 | 2% | REC OF PROB OFF | 16 | 0% |
| FAIL TO APPEAR REC | 92 | 5% | NOT ELIGIBLE | 125 | 7% |
| ASSAULT RECORD | 8 | 0% | BAD ATTITUDE | 9 | 0% |

* NOTE: ALL PERCENTAGES ARE OF NUMBER INTERVIEWED FOR RECOG.

# Exhibit 8b. Multnomah County Corrections Population Management System Monthly Classification Report

SX8403 — MULTNOMAH COUNTY CORRECTIONS POPULATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

RUN DATE: 04/01/88 — MONTHLY CLASSIFICATION REPORT — MONTH OF MARCH, 1988

TOTAL CLASSIFIED THIS MONTH: 1,028

## HOUSING ASSIGNMENTS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PSYC MODULE: | 0 | 0% | MENTAL CLOSE: | 16 | 1% |
| CLOSE: | 182 | 18% | GENERAL: | 742 | 72% |
| MEDICAL UNIT: | 0 | 0% | VULNERABLE: | 93 | 9% |
| ADMIN SEG: | 14 | 1% | MCCF: | 0 | 0% |

## ATTITUDE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1: | 3 | 0% |
| 2: | 853 | 82% |
| 3: | 133 | 12% |
| 4: | 7 | 0% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| PRIOR INST PROBLEMS: | 45 | 4% |
| MURDER CHARGE: | 7 | 0% |
| JUDICIAL PERSON: | 0 | 0% |

## BEHAVIOR ALERT ENTRIES:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A: | 18 | 1% ASSAULTIVE RISK | M: | 73 | 7% MILD MENTAL |
| E: | 6 | 0% ESCAPE RISK | C: | 94 | 9% CHRG.OF VIOLANCE |
| D: | 113 | 10% REP. DISRUPTIVE | R: | 359 | 34% RECIDIVIST |
| K: | 81 | 7% KEEP SEPERATED | F: | 124 | 12% FIRST OFFENDER |
| H: | 10 | 0% HOMOSEXUAL | J: | 2 | 0% JUVENILE |
| I: | 44 | 4% EASILY INTIMIDATED | U: | 190 | 18% UNSTABLE |
| N: | 8 | 0% INFORMENT | O: | 785 | 76% NO PROBLEMS |
| S: | 9 | 0% SUICIDE RISK | T: | 79 | 7% TRUSTEE |
| P: | 24 | 2% PSYCHIATRIC | | | |

## NEEDS ENTRIES:

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A: | 234 | 22% ALCOHOL | J: | 741 | 72% JOB |
| P: | 34 | 3% PSYCHIATRIC | M: | 194 | 18% MEDICAL |
| R: | 1 | 0% RETARDED | H: | 212 | 20% HOUSING |
| D: | 398 | 38% DRUG | E: | 913 | 88% EDUCATION |
| L: | 13 | 1% LANGUAGE | | | |

* NOTE: ALL PERCENTAGES ARE OF TOTAL CLASSIFIED THIS MONTH

## CHARGE SCORE (AT CLASSIFICATION):

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1: | 6 | 0% | 11: | 0 | 0% | 21: | 8 | 0% | 31: | 0 | 0% |
| 2: | 17 | 1% | 12: | 6 | 0% | 22: | 122 | 11% | 32: | 0 | 0% |
| 3: | 1 | 0% | 13: | 9 | 0% | 23: | 15 | 1% | 33: | 0 | 0% |
| 4: | 0 | 0% | 14: | 8 | 0% | 24: | 23 | 2% | 34: | 0 | 0% |
| 5: | 0 | 0% | 15: | 1 | 0% | 25: | 4 | 0% | 35: | 0 | 0% |
| 6: | 0 | 0% | 16: | 23 | 2% | 26: | 37 | 3% | | | |
| 7: | 0 | 0% | 17: | 11 | 1% | 27: | 23 | 2% | | | |
| 8: | 6 | 0% | 18: | 4 | 0% | 28: | 44 | 4% | | | |
| 9: | 9 | 0% | 19: | 2 | 0% | 29: | 21 | 2% | | | |
| 10: | 1 | 0% | 20: | 0 | 0% | 30: | 97 | 9% | | | |

## Exhibit 8c. Multnomah County Corrections Population Management System Classification Needs by Charge Priority

MJDA906 04/01/88

CORRRECTIONS POPULATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
CLASSIFICATION NEEDS BY CHARGE PRIORITY
FOR THE SELECTED MONTH OF: MARCH



| | CHARGE PRIORITY | TOTAL | ALCOHOL | PHYCHIATRIC | DRUG | MEDICAL | HOUSING | EDUCATION | LANGUAGE | JOB | RETARDED | NO NEED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | A FELONY | 105 | 31 | 3 | 52 | 20 | 33 | 36 | 2 | 81 | . | 10 |
| 02 | B FELONY | 69 | 16 | 1 | 49 | 23 | 13 | 24 | 1 | 52 | . | 3 |
| 03 | C FELONY (NON RELEASABLE) | 145 | 31 | 5 | 74 | 30 | 35 | 53 | . | 111 | . | 11 |
| 04 | PAROLE VIOLATION | 19 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 6 | 5 | 2 | . | 15 | . | 2 |
| 05 | FUGITIVE | 20 | 4 | . | 4 | 5 | 6 | 4 | . | 14 | . | 4 |
| 06 | OSP ESCAPE | 12 | 2 | . | 6 | 3 | 1 | 4 | . | 10 | . | 1 |
| 07 | USM HOLD | 43 | 8 | . | 13 | 9 | 13 | 8 | . | 29 | . | 9 |
| 08 | CONTEMPT OF COURT | 1 | . | . | . | . | . | 1 | . | . | . | . |
| 09 | C FELONY (RELEASABLE) | 32 | 7 | . | 12 | 3 | 5 | 14 | . | 24 | . | 3 |
| 10 | MISDEMEANOR | 120 | 34 | 13 | 45 | 19 | 27 | 55 | . | 92 | . | 12 |
| 11 | TRAFFIC | 32 | 15 | . | 6 | 7 | 6 | 12 | 1 | 19 | . | 4 |
| 12 | VIOLATION | 2 | . | . | . | 1 | . | . | . | 1 | . | 1 |
| 13 | ORDINANCE | 3 | . | . | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | . | 1 | . | 1 |
| 14 | COUNTY HOLD | 9 | 1 | . | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 5 | . | 3 |
| 15 | FACILITY HOLD | 6 | . | . | 1 | 2 | . | . | . | 4 | . | 2 |
| 16 | USI HOLD | 3 | 2 | . | 2 | . | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | . | . |
| | TOTALS | 621 | 158 | 23 | 275 | 131 | 149 | 221 | 6 | 461 | 0 | 66 |
| | PERCENTAGES | | 25 | 3.7 | 44 | 21 | 24 | 36 | 1.0 | 74 | 0.0 | 11 |

Installed in 1985, the Jackson County (Missouri) Jail adopted a computerized inmate booking and record system to provide staff access to accurate, current information on inmates (Jameson and Megerman, 1991). Twenty-seven terminals located throughout the facility display current classification information for all inmates housed within the facility. Information from existing inmate records is incorporated into the current record when/ii the inmate is re-admitted to the facility. The Jackson County database also generates inmate population information.

If a classification system is to serve as an information clearinghouse for other programming or corrections needs (Ayres, 1988), then computerized systems such as those described above establish and maintain highly useful records for individual inmates and for the jail population as a whole.

### The Effect of Jail Architecture and Security Design on Inmate Behavior

Very little "solid" research has been conducted concerning the relationship between jail classification and inmate conduct. The research question to consider is: Does it make a difference if similarly situated inmates are housed in dissimilar housing or cell arrangements? Answers to this question are especially critical in today's era of increased jail and prison construction. In a study of the costs and benefits of various housing alternatives, Jay Farbstein (1983) suggests that inmate misconduct is suppressed by single cell housing. Farbstein argues that compared with multiple cells and dormitories, single cells are easier to monitor and require fewer security staff and less observation time.

However, research conducted to date does not always support these claims. In a review by Gaes (1985) of relevant research on the effects of single versus double bunking, there was no evidence that inmates in double-bunked cells had higher rates of victimization or associated health problems. Yet there is a growing body of literature (Gaes, 1985). which supports single cell versus dormitory configurations. These studies show that dormitory and double-bunked cells may raise tension levels, which can lead to increased levels of assaultive behavior. Other factors also influence whether assaultive behavior will occur in heavily double-bunked institutions: e.g., the level of crowding, the spatial constraints in cell or dormitory design, and the amount of out-of-cell activity allowed each inmate). Single-bunked cells also enhance opportunities for staff to differentiate among inmates and become more familiar with them. As a result, single cell housing lessens pressure on intake and classification staff to correctly assess or predict inmate behavior. In essence, it leaves staff with a little more margin for error when classifying inmates. The reverse is also true-if double bunking is used, then accurate classification becomes more essential to successful inmate management. Multiple-celling for medium security inmates has recently been adopted by the Standards Committee of the American Correctional Association (Milk, 1991; ACA, 1991).

Some correctional practitioners assert that the need for accurate assessment of inmate risks is also diminished in facilities using direct supervision. (See, e.g., Nelson, 1983.) Direct supervision-that is, continuous face-to-face contact with inmates-is said to require fewer security staff and to enhance staff-inmate relationships and to improve monitoring of inmates' in-custody behavior. It also is thought to facilitate an anticipatory approach to misconduct and, thus, decrease response time. Again, such improvements in jail security and custody are believed to alleviate pressure on intake and classification staff. It should be noted, however, that direct

supervision is most cost-effective in larger jails with housing pods containing at least fifty beds (Jay Farbstein, 1983).

Although Knapp and Wells (1988) found that the impact of objective classification was the same for traditional and direct supervision models, they noted a primary difference in the role classification plays for housing assignment, e.g., whether an inmate is housed in a group pod or a segregated area. According to these authors, the importance of objective classification for longer-term housing decisions decreases for direct supervision facilities that have a policy of mixing security levels-e.g., maximum, medium, and minimum-within the same area.

Architectural design is closely aligned with security and custody features of jails. In contrast to custody (supervision) requirements, security needs refer to the structural or architectural features needed to keep an inmate safely confined. The range of architectural design in jail settings is limited, however. Living arrangements vary most between jails, ranging from large holding tanks, with and without bunks, to single-bunked cells. The structural design of jail buildings usually does not include separate perimeter walls or fences mainly because inmate activity is permitted only in inside areas.

In facilities where outside activity takes place, perimeter walls or fences with security barbed-wire and guard towers or roving patrols are normally found Jail structures usually do not exhibit the range in security levels found in prison structures. Therefore, the classification instrument does not need to be concerned with security requirements as much as with custody issues.

Custody refers to the level of staff supervision required to safely house the inmate. High custody ratings indicate that the inmate is potentially a management problem, has a history of violent behavior, is a known drug dealer or heavy user, and/or has a history of escape or attempts. Prisoners with high custody ratings usually ate placed in locations with high visibility, are not allowed many programming options, and are given limited visiting privileges.

Architectural design can affect custody operations by giving careful attention to the layout of living tits. Housing which is easily monitored by correctional staff will increase custody coverage. Custody implies supervision; architectural design controls ease of supervision and increased ease of supervision enhances staffs custody performance.

Zupan (1991) discusses the impact of the high levels of physical confinement and social isolation that result from incarceration. Such jail confinement conditions can produce stress and anxiety, either of which may diminish an inmate’s internal control over behavior, thus resulting in violence or destructive behavior. Zupan (1991) notes the effects of architectural &sign and jail operating policies on the degree of social isolation experienced by inmates. Limited contact with the outside world and an absence of windows add to inmate isolation.

Research concerning the range of symptoms and interpersonal dynamics that result from confinement indicate high levels of stress and tension, and negative emotional symptomatology which produces behavioral responses that vary with competitiveness or dominance traits (Zupan, 1991). Responses include:

- Territorial behavior;
- Resentment toward others; and
- Interpersonal stress as a reaction to group isolation (as caused by au inability to escape from other inmates or an awareness of interdependency).

Research suggests that when interdependency is absent, aggression will be directly expressed (Haythorn, 1973; Zupan, 1991).

Also discussed by Zupan (1991) is the fact that the physical design of most traditional jails maximizes physical constraint. Many jails do not have adequate space for recreation, education or counseling areas, dining halls, or personal space for inmates. In addition, the intermittent nature of inmate supervision in traditional, linear jails creates a situation where "the probability is high that acts of vandalism and exploitation will not be detected ... by those in control." Zupan, 1991). Such behaviors stimulate further destruction and exploitation.

Deindividuation resulting from jail processes such as status degradation further reduces the mechanisms that normally hold antisocial behaviors in check (Zupan, 1991; see also Zimbardo, 1970). Feelings of anonymity, alienation, and &individuality that result in isolation hold the potential incite inmate violence.

Another factor important to inmate behavior is the role of negative expectations. Zupan (1991) identified the following sources of negativity encountered by a jail inmate:

- Architectural and interior design of the jail facility;
- Jailoperations; and
- Staff interaction with inmates,

Thus, direct supervision jails have the potential for alleviating inmate isolation by offering more opportunities for interpersonal communication, a non-linear housing design, and an increased awareness of the outside world. In addition, the podular/direct supervision architecture style eliminates many of the management and supervision techniques that produce negative behavior patterns in jails with the linear architecture style (Nelson, 1986). (See Nelson [1986] for a discussion of the relation between jail design and inmate management.)

## IV. IMPEDIMENTS TO JAIL CLASSIFICATION

Several factors keep many jail classification systems from operating as intended. Among the more severe constraints are:

- Lack of programming;
- Lack of diverse housing environments;
- Chronic overcrowding;
- Lack of or inadequate existing standards for jail classification;
- Poor management practices; and
- Inadequate classification data.

Classification aimed at identifying and managing inmates who present a threat to the secure, safe, and orderly operation of a jail is often rendered almost useless by the physical design of the facility itself. The physical plants of most facilities listed in the *National Jail and Adult Detention Directory* (American Correctional Association, 1986) have only one security designation, generally maximum. Thus, in these jails all inmates are subjected to the same security environment, whatever their individual security needs. However, actual supervision of inmates can vary since administrators may alter staffing assignments to correspond more closely with offenders' supervision requirements.

Another design problem in many jails, particularly older facilities, is the limited number of single cells. Sometimes this leads staff to disregard all but the most flagrant security and supervision needs; inmates are housed by their perceived ability to get along with other prisoners (Austin and Litsky, 1982). In one large system, physical design forced staff essentially to ignore security classification:

> Part of the classification policy . . . is to separate felons and misdemeanants. Misdemeanants are thought to be less aggressive than felons charged with more serious and sometimes more assaultive offenses. However, since felons so outnumber misdemeanants (2,348 felons versus 162 misdemeanants admitted), the less secure but more available tanks must be used. Consequently, felons a placed in the least restrictive setting (Austin and Litsky, 1982).

Effective classification is further distorted when jails become overcrowded. When intake and classification staff experience work overload, they tend to "streamline, simplify, and routinize" their work (Brennan, 1985). Routinized classification, in turn encourages subjective judgments while minimizing attention to individual cases; it often results in misclassification (Lipsky, 1980).

According to the 1988 Census of Local Jails, one in eight jail inmates was being held for other correctional authorities (BJS, 1990). The occupancy rate for the nation's jails in 1988 was 101 percent, far exceeding the 85 percent rate for 1983. During 1988, 8 percent of jail inmates were held because of crowding in other institutions.

Vanagunas and England (1988) discuss the impact of state prisoner backlogging on local detention. Problems posed to jails by long-term inmates and overcrowded conditions include overcapacitated physical amenities and staffing and difficulties in meeting standards for adequate space and care. Vanagunas and England (1988) also discuss the impact of decisions made by local police, prosecutors, judges and other criminal justice officials on local jail populations.

Lack of available bed-space frequently leads to "capacity-driven" classification decision-making. Housing and program assignments are determined not by formal policies and procedures or by inmate needs, but by available bed-space and program openings. In essence, classification is used to meet the facility's rather than the inmate's needs. And as Clements (1980) has pointed out:

> If services, programs, and facilities aren't available, there is strong pressure to not classify inmates as needing them. This approach results not only in poor programming for the individual but also in a costly failure to collect and analyze valuable information for purposes of long-range planning.

Thus, the stage is set fix continued operational problems as a "vicious cycle" develops. Overcrowding, and its resultant potential for violence, creates pressure to overclassify inmates in an attempt to increase security and custody throughout the jail. However, overclassification results in needles confinement and longer stays, exacerbating the crowding problem (Clements, 1980; and Brennan, 1985).

Ironically, standards pertaining to jail classification have also created problems. As noted previously, moat states, along with several professional organizations, have developed standards based on the traditional practice of separating the diverse jail population into groups defined by sex, age, and legal status. The majority of jails attempt to comply with these standards either because they are legally mandated to do so or because the standards have been adopted as agency policy. While such standards are intended to ensure safe and appropriate inmate housing, they have also proved to be a serious impediment to effective inmate management. After separating inmates in accord with such standards, jails all to frequently lack the capability to further group prisoners according to such management factors as security risk and program and service needs Some agencies even find it difficult just separating inmates into all the groups specified in the standards.

A classic example of both of these situations occurred in New York. In 1976, the state legislature devised a detailed set of standards that mandated twelve separate categories of inmate classification. Implementation of this law, however, was devastating to jail operations. As the New York State Commission of Correction (1985) concluded.

> **. . . [T]he mandate did not allow county facilities to utilize available jail space to the maximum degree possible. The law exacerbated the severe problems associated with jail overcrowding as partial tiers literally lay unused as a result of the mandated classification categories. . . . [The law] saddled facilities with a rigid classification scheme that hindered administrators from being able to deliver a battery of programs and services that are available for incarcerated persons.**

To comply with the mandated standards and alleviate crowded conditions, some agencies transferred inmates to other, oftentimes distant, facilities where the more appropriate bed-space was available. Thus, overcrowding, coupled with the law's twelve separation categories, "almost paralyzed correctional administrators from effectively and efficiently managing their facilities" (New York State Commission of Correction, 1985). The law has since been revised, with the twelve categories collapsed into four and provisions added for "gauging" an inmate's custody, psychological, physical, educational, and vocational needs.

The American Correctional Association also acknowledged drawbacks in traditional separation categories when it revised its *Standards for Adult Local Detention Facilities* (ACA, 1991). The new standards call for "separate management," as opposed to separation, of the following categories of inmates:

- Female and male inmates;
- Other classes of detainees (witnesses, civil prisoners);
- Community custody inmates (work releases, weekenders, trusties);
- Inmates with special problems (alcoholics, narcotics addicts, mentally disturbed persons, physically handicapped persons, persons with communicable diseases);
- Inmates requiring disciplinary detention;
- Inmates requiring administrative segregation; and
- Juveniles.

According to a 1988 survey of problems faced by jail managers, 74 percent of respondents indicated inadequate facility space for inmate separation in housing (Guynes, 1988).

Inadequate management practices present another serious obstacle to effective classification. Brennan (1985; 1987b) has examined this area of classification in considerable detail and notes several administrative weaknesses that promote misclassification. For instance, jail administrators are subject to a variety of external pressures (e.g., local politics and community attitudes) that influence agency policies. Typically, these pressures fall into two extreme, diametrically opposed positions: one stresses the rights of inmates and the principle of least restrictive custody, while the other emphasizes restrictive custody and incapacitation in order to ensure public safety and orderly facility operations. These conflicting forces further complicate the already difficult job of managing a jail. Failure to strike a balance between them, according to Brennan, can lead to serious misclassification problems. Inadequate commitment to classification, lack of understanding of goals, and lack of guiding initiatives and clear policy are factors that can lead to classification systems that are poorly integrated into institutional management policies (Brennan, 1987b).

Many administrators also have difficulty translating agency policy into operational procedures. As a result, classification manuals are "too voluminous, unwieldy, and contradictory" to be of much practical use. In other instances, policies and procedures may not be formally written down; leading line staff (who generally receive little training in classification) to implement their own informal policies, which are often tinged with person biases. This situation

is often exacerbated by inadequate supervision of line staff. Supervisory personnel typically lack management training, data, and performance measures for assessing classification de&ions made bylinestaff.

Moreover, amid policy and procedural ambiguities, line staff often succumb to pressure to classify inmates restrictively. Fearing that they will be held accountable for any serious incidents stemming from classification decision-making, line staff may attempt to protect themselves by assigning inmates a higher security and/or custody level than warranted or even by incarcerating offenders needlessly. The end result of such practices is over-classification and an expensive misuse of agency resources.

Finally, as noted earlier in the overview of the jail classification process, intake and classification staff routinely lack the timely, verified information necessary for effective decision-making. In contrast to their prison counterparts, jail staff do not have anything resembling a pretrial investigation report upon which they can base initial classification decisions. Instead, they must rely on record checks and inmate interviews, which yield information relatively quickly, but are not always complete and accurate. Some jurisdictions, however, wait several days before making permanent classification decisions. This practice allows additional time to collect and verify information, and, since most inmates are released within seventy-two hours of booking, it also reduces staff w&load. Still, the norm is the availability of minimal "hard" data and heavy dependence on subjectively based information.

Austin and Litsky (1982) found that all four of the jurisdictions in their study experienced high levels of missing data (often exceeding 50 percent), indicating that prior record information was not readily available or easily accessible for classification purposes. Sometimes, reliable information is not available at all. Gettinger (1982) noted that presentence investigation reports are the exception rather than the rule in most counties in Georgia severely limiting their use in classifying sentenced inmates.

Inadequate means for verifying data also causes problems in determining objective classification for jail inmates. Even in jurisdictions with computerized access to criminal justice data, inmate records may contain errors or lack updated information, e.g., inmate status or prior incarceration or treatment program outcome. Facilities like the Grays Harbor County Jail (Washington) have outlined policy and procedural guidelines that emphasize the necessity for inmate data verification.

## V. SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As criminological classification evolves, Brennan (1987a) notes "trends toward increased objectivity, increased precision, and increased information content." Objective jail classification schemes have greatly improved since their development, although many problems continue to undermine their effectiveness. Jail administrators face challenges in overcoming the obstacles presented by incomplete or inaccurate inmate data, pressures from overcrowding, the identification and management of inmates with special needs, the predictive validity of objective criteria, staff training, and the establishment of an evaluation process.

Brennan (1987b) also identifies the need to develop special purpose classifications that would have greater predictive success for offenders falling within categories such as drunk drivers, homicides, and vandals. The disparate nature of these offenders necessitates further refinement of classification rules in order to assign appropriate custody or security levels. Such classification schemes would improve predictive decision-making while providing a more offender-specific focus.

Among the classification issues requiring careful management are:

- Ensuring access to reliable, complete inmate data (including procedures for verification);
- Careful selection of objective criteria appropriate to characteristics of the local inmate population;
- Adequate training for classification staff; and
- Adequate facilities for separating classes of inmates according to guideline specifications.

While troublesome, these obstacles are not necessarily insurmountable. Effective management, as well as potential litigation, argues forcefully for improved jail classification. Requirements for successful implementation of an objective classification system include but are not limited to the following items:

- The development/adoption of an objective inmate classification system that includes a formal reclassification phase.
- Structural facility design allowing for the separation of inmates according to classification-identified needs.
- An initial and ongoing training program for classification staff.
- The development of a system-wide computerized data retrieval system facilitating the collection of legal and demographic information.
- A method for monitoring the implementation of the classification process.
- The development of an ongoing evaluation procedure.

Brennan and Wells (1991a) review factors that lead to failure in implementing an objective jail classification scheme in jails. They describe the following implementation phases to ensure the success of jail classification:

1. Creating a context for a new classification system;
2. Designing, testing, and refining the new classification;
3. Introducing the new classification system into routine use; and
4. Evaluating and monitoring system use through a post-implementation phase, and developing new classification applications.

With the identification of classification guidelines by the National Institute of Corrections, individual jurisdictions, and other criminal justice organizations, more jails are implementing jail classification systems. Standards developed by the American Correctional Association and many states now specify custody and security levels for specific classes of jail inmates. The benefits of an objective classification scheme tailored to the needs of a specific jail-better risk screening, more appropriate use of available bed space, and enhanced inmate management-are of vital importance to the future of jail operations. For many agencies these objectives will be achieved only through incremental adaptation rather than through overall system transformation.

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