



Research Bulletin

Reasons for Escape: Interviews with Recaptured Escapees

Barbara Thompson
Research Statistician

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SUMMARY

In an attempt to learn more about the reasons for escapes, an ongoing research study was commenced in N.S.W. in March 1986, involving interviewing recaptured escapees. This report provides an analysis of the self-reported reasons for escape given by 458 of 650 escapees recaptured from late 1985 to April 1992. While the reasons and circumstances of each escape could be very individual, in order to look for overall patterns the reasons were grouped into broad categories. The analysis showed the following:

* 31% of respondents said they had escaped for reasons in the category "chronic family problems", while 21% of respondents said they had escaped for reasons in the category "bad news from outside". That is, about half the respondents said they had escaped because of family (or similar) problems outside;

* 19% of respondents said they had escaped for reasons in the category "threats from other inmates", while 2% said they had escaped for reasons in the category "pressure to use/carry drugs". That is, about a fifth of the respondents said they had escaped because of pressure from other inmates;

* 20% of respondents said they had escaped for reasons in the categories "could not cope with imprisonment", "conflict with staff", "parole uncertain or refused", "extradition threat", or "did not

want to be transferred" (categories referring to dislike of imprisonment without specific threats from other inmates);

* 10% of respondents said they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of escape, and/or had escaped to obtain alcohol or drugs (9% of full-time inmate and 70% of periodic detainee respondents).

* 4% of respondents appeared to be strongly influenced to escape by a companion.

Other findings were:

* 64% of respondents reported that they had been planning the escape for less than a day, while 84% had been planning it for less than a week;

* 87% of respondents said that they had not thought of escaping previously.

Points from the findings which indicated possible additional strategies for minimising the number of escapees were noted.

The study recommended that a committee be convened to make recommendations regarding strategies for reducing the number of escapees in the light of these and other research findings.

INTRODUCTION

Although a relatively rare event, escapes from correctional centres are an issue of concern for both correctional administrators and members of the community alike.

The escape rate from NSW correctional centres has been falling over the last 9 years. In 1982/83, 1983/84 and 1984/85 there were 5.3, 5.1 and 5.1 escapes per 100 inmate years respectively. In 1985/86, 1986/87 and 1987/88 the rate fell to 3.0, 2.6 and 3.4, and in 1988/89, 1989/90 and 1990/91 there was another fall to 1.8, 1.9 and 1.8 (see Table A1 in the Appendix). However this still represents 100 full-time inmates and 11 periodic detainees who escaped in 1990/91 and there is a general concern to reduce the escape rate as far as possible.

Since the end of 1988, additional strategies designed to decrease the number of escapes have been introduced. These include the building of more fences and the increased supervision of inmates in minimum security camps. In addition, legislation has been passed (Regulation 9A, Prisons (General) Regulation 1989) regarding the classification of recaptured escapees. Those inmates who escaped between 31st October, 1988 and 18th May, 1990 cannot go below a "B" classification for the remainder of their sentence. (This

requires them to be confined at all times by a secure physical barrier.) In addition, inmates who escaped after 18th May, 1990 must be classified as "E1" or "E2" and hence confined in certain maximum or medium security correctional centres for the remainder of their current sentence as well as any future sentence. This change follows amendments to the Prison (General) Regulations, 1989.

To assist in understanding escapes and in devising strategies to minimise them, information is available from three main sources: departmental administrative records, reports of departmental staff who knew the inmate at the time of escape, and thirdly, the results of interviews with recaptured escapees. These three sources provide different perspectives on inmates who escape, the circumstances of the escapes and the reasons why inmates escape.

Gorta and Sillavan (1989) used administrative records to derive a profile of escapees. They reported, among other findings, that escapees tended to be younger and were more likely to be serving sentences for property offences than inmates in general. They also reported that the majority of escapes were from minimum security correctional centres (68%) with another 12% of escapes being inmates who failed to return from an unescorted temporary absence from the correctional centre

(such as attendance at technical college or day/weekend leave). Despite these findings they concluded that the characteristics of escapees determined in their study strongly suggested that reasons exist for escaping other than the presentation of the opportunity. Furthermore they found that over a third of escapees escaped with one or more other inmates.

They also reported that 74% of the escapees in their study were not convicted of committing any offences whilst at large. This is consistent with more recent data where of the 318 subsequent court actions for inmates being charged with 'escape lawful custody' notified between 1st July, 1988 and 17th May, 1992, 231 (72.6%) were not convicted of any offences whilst at large.

A study on the extent of the knowledge of institutional officers of reasons for escape (Nguyen Da Huong, Gorta & Thompson, 1989) reported that reasons for escape were put forward by institutional officers (superintendent, psychologist, welfare officer, wing officer/overseer, parole officer or education officer) for only 26% of the 294 escape reports analysed in that study. The most frequent reasons for escape given by staff were classed as "chronic family problems", or "drug- or alcohol-related".

In March 1986 an ongoing study was commenced where recaptured escapees were interviewed by a correctional centre staff member about their reasons for escape (Porritt, 1987). Analysing the responses in 1988, Gorta and Nguyen Da Huong grouped the stated reasons for escape into broad categories and found that 44% mentioned "bad news from outside" and 24% mentioned "chronic family problems" as a reason for escape. The majority of respondents stated their escape had been a 'spur of the moment' decision (74%) and most said they had never been tempted to escape previously (86%).

This report represents a continuation of this study and contains an analysis of the 458 interview forms received for escapees recaptured from late 1985 up until 15th April, 1992. It is intended that this information be examined both to provide a better understanding of why inmates escape and to develop strategies for reducing the escape rate.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Following the notification of a recapture, staff of the Research and Statistics Division forwarded a copy of a structured interview schedule to the relevant correctional centre. Prior to February 1987 the forms were forwarded to the correctional centre welfare officer who was to conduct the interview. After this time the form was forwarded to the superintendent of the correctional centre who was requested to arrange for a suitable member of staff to conduct the interview. That is, the interviews were conducted by a range of correctional centre staff using the same interview schedule. Confidentiality was stressed.

The inmate was asked the following questions:

1. How were you getting along with other prisoners the last few weeks before you left? (If any signs of tension, probe for fear of assault, problems over gambling, drugs or other debts, sexual harassment, etc.)
2. How were you getting along with the officers the last few weeks before you left?
3. Had you heard anything about changes in your program or bonuses? or a transfer? or any

other rumours that bothered you?

4. How were things with your family and friends outside - had any problems come up? (deaths, illnesses, trouble with law, school, spouse withdrawing, drop in visits, arguments, family debts).
5. When you actually left, what went through your mind?
6. How long had you been thinking about going?
7. Had you ever been tempted before to leave? What stopped you? What went through your mind?

There was then a space for the interviewer's assessment of the inmate's motives for this escape.

In February 1990, at the suggestion of a recaptured escapee, a further question was added:

"Is there anything the department could have done to help prevent you from escaping? If yes, what?"

Of the 650 escapees recaptured during the period November 1985 to April 1992, 35 (5%) had been released before they could be interviewed, 39 (6%) were not willing to be interviewed, and for

*Reasons for Escape:
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118 (18%) the forms were not available for analysis (in most cases were not returned by the correctional centre). The response rate was lowest during the second half of 1986 due to shortages in the availability of welfare officers to conduct the interviews, but improved when the procedure was changed to allow the superintendent to nominate a suitable interviewer. The number of forms sent out for each financial year is given in Table A2 in the Appendix.

For the 458 (70%) escapees who gave reasons for escape, the reasons were classified into the following broad categories:

- Bad news from outside
- Chronic family problems
- Threats from other inmates
- Pressure to use/carry drugs
- Could not cope with imprisonment
- Conflict with staff
- Parole uncertain/refused
- Extradition threat
- Did not want to be transferred
- To obtain drugs/alcohol
- Under the influence drugs/alcohol
- Persuaded by companion
- Other

In some cases more than one reason was given.

In order to look for any major differences in the reasons given for

escape in the three years with the lowest escape rates compared to other years, the results were divided into escapes before and after 30th June 1988.

All quotations but two (from 1989) in the Findings section are from inmates who escaped after 1st January, 1990. As will be apparent from the quotations, some interview schedules were completed in the first person and some in the third person. For clarity, all material quoted from the interviewer's assessment of motives for escape has been labelled as "interviewer's comment".

FINDINGS

1. Stated reason for escape

The reason for each escape was often very individual, but to assist in determining any patterns the reasons were grouped into several broad categories. The total number of escapees giving a certain category of reason for each period is shown in Table 1. This is also expressed as two percentages: first as a percentage of the number of responses received, and secondly as a percentage of the total number of recaptured escapees.

The first percentage (of the number of responses received) can be used as an estimate of the percentage of escapees with that category of reason for escape. However this assumes that the escapees either not recaptured, not interviewed, or refusing to respond would have given the same reasons for escape as the recaptured escapees who did respond, which is not very likely. The second percentage (of the number of recaptured escapees) gives a minimum percentage of all recaptured escapees who escaped for that reason.

1a. Outside problems

About half the respondents said that they had escaped because of family (or similar) problems outside.

For those responding, 21% of the escapes were attributed to the inmate reacting to some bad news recently received from outside (see Table 1).

Examples of reasons in this grouping include:

"My mother suffered a heart attack. I thought whether my mother would die or not.";

"... Phoned father who informed me my mother and son had been in a car accident and were hospitalised ... I was concerned they might die and wanted to be with them ... I received the message during the day and escaped that night.";

"My daughter was interfered with by a relative whilst being minded at her friend's house ... I wanted to hurt this person and then bring him before the police."

In some cases it was obvious that the escape had come directly after a piece of bad news from outside. In other cases the inmate had apparently mulled over a family problem until finally motivated to escape by an additional piece of information. For example:

"Death of my father. I told my fiancée to put some flowers on my father's grave, and the next time I spoke to her she told me he wasn't buried but was still in the chapel at the crematorium. I was very close to my father as he reared me on his own from the age of 8 years." Interviewer's comment: "The prisoner seems to have been overcome by grief by the fact that his father had not had a plot at the crematorium but was still in the chapel."

Table 1: Total number of escapes for each category of reason

	Number			Percentage [*] of Responses	Percentage of Recaptures [*]		
	Before ^{**}	After ^{**}	Total		Before ^{**}	After ^{**}	Total
Bad news from outside	58	37	95	21	16	12	15
Chronic family problems	66	78	144	31	19	26	22
Threats from other inmates	38	48	86	19	11	16	13
Pressure use/carry drugs	6	5	11	2	2	2	2
Could not cope with imprisonment	20	19	39	9	6	6	6
Conflict with staff	3	12	15	3	1	4	2
Parole uncertain/refused	4	6	10	2	1	2	2
Extradition threat	6	0	6	1	2	0	1
Did not want to be transferred	9	15	24	5	3	5	4
To obtain drugs/alcohol	8	11	19	4	2	4	3
Under the influence	15	16	31	7	4	5	5
Persuaded by companion	9	9	18	4	3	3	3
Other	16	26	42	9	5	9	6
Total responses	224	234	458	100	64	79	70
No form	85	33	118	-	24	11	18
Released	26	9	35	-	7	3	5
Not willing	17	22	39	-	5	7	6
TOTAL RECAPTURES	352	298	650	-	100	100	100

* Percentage of responses (calculated out of 458) estimates the percentage of escapees giving each reason assuming unreaptured escapees and those not responding would have given the same reasons for escape as the responding recaptured escapees.

Percentage of recaptures (calculated out of 650) gives the minimum percentage of recaptured escapees with that reason.

** Before = Escaped before 30/6/88, After = Escaped after 30/6/88.

For another 31% of respondents the escape seemed related to chronic family problems. Some of these differed from the "bad news from outside" escapes only in that there was no mention of a final trigger. For example:

"My daughter is on heroin and was working in a massage parlour in Melbourne. I was very concerned about her.";

"Girlfriend nearly died from drug O.D. Small son in danger because of this. I had fear for my son's safety ... I had tried to solve problems from inside gaol, but faced frustration. I felt the only thing to do was solve the problem myself.";

"I had trouble with my de facto who had been thrown out of her residence with 3 kids. I wanted to help her find a place to stay.";

Interviewer's comment: "The prisoner had no support with the death of his brother. He was also worried about no one being there to look after their home. He needs counselling."

Some other problems in the category were more long term. For example:

"I just wanted to see my dad" (after parents' marriage breakdown. Father

lives in Lightning Ridge);

Interviewer's comment: "Break up with wife, plus parents were overseas during this time and could not be contacted. All these factors played a major role in the escape. Only child who has not been denied anything.";

Interviewer's comment: "He wanted to see his wife and kid and being placed in a minimum security gave him the opportunity to abscond".

While some of the reasons given may seem inadequate for risking an increased sentence, there is no way of assessing, from the data in this study, how much a given situation would affect an individual inmate.

Of those escaping because of bad news from outside, 11% had thought about the escape for a week or more, and 1% for a month or more (Table A5). This is in contrast to those escaping due to chronic family problems where 12% had thought about the escape for a month or more. Also only 2% (2 people) of those who eventually escaped because of bad news from outside said that they had thought about escaping on a previous occasion (Table A6), again in contrast to those escaping due to chronic family problems where 17% reported thinking about escaping previously.

1b. Pressure by other inmates

The categories "threats to other inmates" and "pressure to use/carry drugs" were grouped together in this section because they both concern pressure exerted by other inmates.

Of the 86 inmates (19% of respondents) giving reasons grouped in the category "threats from other inmates", 26 (30% of those in this category) mentioned sexual threats. Examples of their responses include:

"Heard a rumour that he was going to be bashed and sexually assaulted. This is the main reason he escaped.";

"Six black fellows wanted to rape me, then they wanted to knife me in the shower room."

Other physical threats were mentioned in 51 cases (59% of those in this category), for example:

Interviewer's comment: "Motives for escape were due to threats on his life by other inmates." ("Threats from other inmates with knife for not supporting their stand-over tactics on other inmates.");

Interviewer's comment: "Very frightened of being bashed again.

Sustained several head injuries in a previous gaol. When associates of the prisoner who bashed him at the previous gaol turned up and threatened him he just took off.";

Interviewer's comment: "I would consider he was in fear of his life if he did not escape."

Other threats (threats to inmate's family or by setting the inmate up with illegal possessions) or general harassment made up the remaining 10% of cases. Some of the threats were related to non-payment of drug debts, for example:

Interviewer's comment: "There seems to be a drug ring operating at the gaol with drugs being sold by inmates who are paid by money or goods left by the purchaser's visitors. This prisoner's visitor did not visit the week of his escape and he could not pay for the drug received in advance."

For 2% of the respondents the reason given for escape was pressure to use or carry drugs, for example:

"Stood over by five or so inmates to get girlfriend to bring in drugs." Interviewer's comment: "Appears he didn't want to bring in drugs but was scared of consequences if he didn't."

1c. Other dislike of imprisonment

The categories "could not cope with imprisonment", "conflict with staff", "parole uncertain/refused", "extradition threat", and "did not want to be transferred" were grouped together as they all refer to escapes due to dislike of imprisonment but without specific threats from other inmates.

The 9% of respondents who were put in the "could not cope with imprisonment" category seemed to have no obvious reason for escaping except a general dislike of imprisonment:

"Just wanted to get away for a while on his own.";

Interviewer's comment: "Just fed up with the place and decided to escape on the spur of the moment."

While 3% of respondents mentioned conflict with staff as the reason for escape, the complaint may or may not have been justified. For example:

"I was sick of being threatened by the inmates and the officers." (Two officers in particular.) Interviewer's comment: "Low I.Q., immaturity, irresponsibility, inability to accept discipline, unwillingness to work.";

"One officer in particular, if he would've let up I may not have went, he was being smart." Interviewer's comment: "It appears the condition of owing money and the officer in question pushed the prisoner to the extent that he decided to escape on the spur of the moment. The inmate commenced work at 4.00am and finished at 4.00pm, being a twelve hour shift, and I believe that working 12 hourly shifts will add to tension over a period of time."

Another 2% of respondents escaped because their parole was in doubt.

Interviewer's comment: "Motive for escape was that Parole Board altered the date for his release on parole."

One per cent escaped because they feared extradition to another state for a long sentence. None of the escapes for this stated reason occurred within the last three years.

Of the 24 (5%) respondents who said they escaped because they did not want to be transferred, or who had had a request for transfer denied, 10 wanted to be nearer to their family, 5 disliked their new camp or minimum security correctional centre, 4 missed their old correctional centre, 3 had been threatened with return to a maximum

security correctional centre, 1 feared drugs at the new camp, and 1 did not want to leave the opportunity for study. For example:

"Problems with wife due to decline in visits." (Is there anything the Department could have done?) "I should have stayed at previous gaol."

In some cases the inmate had previously warned that he would escape if transferred. For example:

"Just to see fiancee again ... I told the previous gaol I would do the bolt if they sent me to this gaol and asked if I could stay where I was." Interviewer's comment: "I believe where there was no temptation (at the previous gaol) he didn't consider escape. It was only when he saw so much open space".

1d. Drug/alcohol use

The categories "to obtain drugs/alcohol" and "under the influence of drugs/alcohol" were grouped together here as both refer to the use of drugs of alcohol in a correctional centre.

While 19 (4%) respondents apparently escaped to obtain drugs and/or alcohol, 13 indicated they had intended to return to the correctional centre (11 with

alcohol and 2 with heroin).

Interviewer's comment: "I believe this prisoner was going to get drunk, not trying to escape."

Four had escaped to get a "shot" and one to get methadone (not available at that Periodic Detention Centre).

Thirty-one (7%) respondents claimed that they had been too drunk or drugged to know what they were doing, for example:

"Was drinking and wasn't really thinking about anything.";

"I was not of sound mind at the time due to the effects of mushroom juice.";

Interviewer's comment: "Stated he had been sniffing petrol and was not aware of what he was doing or even where he was.";

Interviewer's comment: "It seems the prisoner was heavily medicated when he left and was unaware of what he was doing."

In 20 cases alcohol was involved, either home brew or commercially produced. The other cases involved legal medication (4), petrol (2), hallucinogens (mushroom juice) (2), serepax (1), beer

on top of medication (1) and "pills" (1).

1e. Persuaded by companion

For 18 (4%) responses, the presence of a companion seemed to play a major part in the decision to escape, although only 6 out of the 18 did not have another reason as well:

Interviewer's comment: "I consider the inmate was a confused lonely youth, depressed by being away from his family and a victim of peer pressure.";

Interviewer's comment: "This prisoner escaped because his brother did, who was the ringleader.";

(How long had you been thinking about going?) "Just that night as soon as I saw the gate cut by the other bloke who went with me."

1f. Other

Into this category were put the 42 (9%) respondents who gave reasons for escape not fitting into previous categories. Nine of these said that they had not set out to escape. Six of these nine had been unintentionally late after leave or work release and panicked. For example:

The interviewer's comment indicated that most days the inmate was asked

to go for a drink by co-workers who didn't know the inmate was on Work Release. After a week and a half the inmate gave in but after a few drinks realised they had stayed too late.

Two had been caught outside boundaries but claimed they were not escaping, for example:

"I wished to collect mushrooms for tea, stepped over fence and walked into S.I.U. stakeout for a drug drop I had no intentions of escaping, only supplementing the tea menu."
Interviewer's comment: "I have no reason to disbelieve the prisoner."

One had left the camp to see his wife nearby but had not decided to escape until he realised he could not return without detection.

Another ten apparently escaped because of instability caused by drink/drug problems (4), general mental instability (4) or panic after being told they were HIV+ (2), for example:

Interviewer's comment: "I believe drug addiction was main motive. Prisoner not stable on methadone.";

Interviewer's comment: "Interviewer's assessment is that the prisoner is mentally irrational and needs

psychiatric assessment."

Another 10 gave reasons connected with dislike of correctional centre life not covered in previous sections. This included 3 related to their job and 3 who feared an increased sentence from additional charges, for example:

"I wanted to stay doing the concreting and the officer wanted me to do the labouring for the bricklayers."

In 3 cases the inmate denied escaping at all at the interview, in 2 cases the reason given was to prove innocence of the original crime, and 1 inmate claimed he thought he had been discharged. In 1 case the inmate claimed to have escaped to obtain medical treatment in a hospital.

2. Potential preventative action by Department

Acting on a suggestion by a recaptured escapee, the questions "Is there anything the Department could have done to help prevent you from escaping? If yes, what?" were added to the questionnaire. This question was asked of 158 respondents and 83 (53%) replied that the Department could have done something to prevent the escape. Of these, 34 nominated action to do with a transfer, 12 extra counselling, 14 the granting of extra leave, 14 improved

living conditions, and 2 tighter restrictions on inmates. The other 7 specified being issued with methadone, put in a psychiatric hospital, given more medical attention, allowed a computer to prepare case, allowed to do desired job, not to have to work outside correctional centre, or not have hopes of parole built up. Examples include:

"Death of an uncle. Became tormented if granted permission to attend funeral I should not have escaped.";

"Girlfriend was ill and having problems with the kids Asked for an extended phone call, made enquiries about getting leave for the day, both these requests refused.";

"Availability of welfare officer or outside service that could have acted on my behalf or perhaps a psychologist to talk to." (Girlfriend nearly died from drug overdose and small son in danger.);

"De facto had been thrown out of her residence with 3 kids." Interviewer's comment: "The prisoner was concerned for his de facto and possibly would have been helped if he had known he could have confided in someone."

It is evident that not all the suggestions were practical. Also it is interesting that only 61% of those escaping because of bad news from outside and 65% of those escaping because of chronic family problems (where one might have expected the inmate needed practical help or counselling) thought that the Department could have done something to prevent the escape (see Table A7):

"Not at that time. I was too upset to think rationally.";

"No, as I believe they wouldn't have escorted me to Townsville, Queensland." (Mother and son in hospital after car accident.).

3. Escapes from maximum security correctional centres

Since escapes from maximum security correctional centres are much more difficult than escapes from medium or minimum security correctional centres, replies from the 11 recaptured escapees from maximum security correctional centres were examined separately. It was noted that 2 were outside the correctional centre under escort at the time. For the other 9 respondents, 6 gave no reason for escaping, 1 said that he had a family problem, 1 said he was trying to avoid a lengthy imprisonment sentence in another state and 1 said he was shocked at unexpectedly learning of

an increased sentence.

4. Escapes from periodic detention centres

Periodic detainees are held in custody only two nights a week, usually at weekends. Therefore an escape from a periodic detention centre (PDC) differs from an escape from a correctional centre in that the detainee has had five days to solve family problems and can look forward to getting back home in a few days. Of the 20 escapees who were sent forms, responses were received from only 10, mostly because the recaptured detainee was not at a correctional centre where they could easily be interviewed. Of these 10, one detainee claimed to have been drunk, one to have been on "pills", and one to have been drinking on top of medication. One was on methadone which was not available at the PDC and one had a drinking problem and left to find alcohol, and another left to support a drug problem. Another left to avoid being transferred after drinking alcohol and another left to bring back drugs.

The ninth detainee left to go to visit his sick mother:

"I went in and asked if I could go home at about 5.30pm, they said no." Interviewer's comments: "The detainee's only reason for escape was

his sick mother but I think there were other reasons that he would not say actually behind the escape."

The tenth detainee left because he said he was not happy with the job he had been assigned at the detention centre.

5. Length of planning

Overall 64% of the respondents said that they had been thinking of escaping for less than a day (including "on the spur of the moment"), 20% for a day or more but less than a week, 9% for a week or more but under a month, and 8% for a month or more (see Table A5). Thus the majority of escapes did not seem to be planned in advance.

One of the questions asked was "when you actually left, what went through your mind?" Often the responses described the reason for leaving or stated the inmate was under the influence of drugs or alcohol. However, some of the responses indicated immediate doubt as to whether the inmate was doing the right thing, for example:

"Straight away he thought it was stupid and knew it wouldn't be easy. Scared, yet happy that he was out - worried about what would happen."

For the 34 respondents (7%) who

claimed to have been considering escape for a month or more, 10 had been planning to escape since arrest or entry to gaol, 9 since a certain event, and 6 since before the transfer to a low security correctional centre, while the other 9 could not be classified in this manner.

Thus it appears that at least 25 (5%) respondents had merely been awaiting an opportunity in order to escape for some time, in contrast to the 293 (64%) who said that they escaped with less than a day's consideration.

6. Prior thought of escape

Overall only 58 (13%) of the respondents said they had previously thought of escaping (see Table A6). Asked the reason why they did not escape at that time 27 said they had decided that it "was not worth it" or to "just hang on", 11 had decided the security was too good, 6 hoped the situation making them want to escape would change, 4 were talked out of it by friends, 2 waited for another opportunity to avoid risking other people getting hurt, and 8 had actually escaped.

For the 31 who said they had decided it was not worth it or were talked out of it, 11 eventually escaped allegedly because of family problems, 8 because

they could not cope with gaol, 6 when they were intoxicated, 5 because of threats from other inmates, and one because his sentence was increased.

7. Credibility of responses

As self-reported reasons for an illegal act, the responses described in this paper might not be entirely accurate, especially since the escape may have been several months prior to the interview. In addition, the reasons for escaping may not have been clearly formulated in the inmate's mind, even at the time of escape. The questionnaire asks that the interviews be conducted by a staff member "chosen (to) have the credibility and sensitivity to win the inmate's co-operation" and confidentiality is stressed. In some cases the interviewer commented that he/she thought that the inmate was hiding the real reason:

"The prisoner has indicated that his escape was due to family problems (death of a father). Other comments would indicate that he has a mental disorder and I cannot fully assess his attitude.";

"Communication breakdown and no support, in addition personal problems, feeling of isolation is what I believe tempted this escape. However I feel this prisoner is very manipulative, and

things are not quite as she has stated."

However, in 97% of cases, the interviewer seemed to accept the inmate's reasons as being true:

"Prisoner appears genuine about his reason for escape as stated." (To go to brother's funeral);

"Prisoner appeared to become distraught about news of daughter's illness. Prisoner appeared genuine in concerns and stated he felt this was the only way he could see his child."

8. Multiple reasons for escape

In 83% of the 458 responses only one reason for escape was indicated, in 16% two reasons for escape were indicated, and for 1% of the responses there appeared to be three reasons, for example:

"Was totally shattered at being knocked back for his parole. ... When he saw the other inmate escaping he followed suit. ... Thought I could see my son ... keeps asking when I'm getting out."

Those escaping because of bad news from outside, could not cope with imprisonment or to get drugs or alcohol had additional reasons in 16% of cases

only. Thus an escape for one of these stated reasons tended to be for that reason alone. This is in contrast to those escaping because of parole refusal, with a companion, or because of staff conflict where there were additional reasons in 64% of cases. That is, these reasons usually were given as part of a more complex motive for escape.

9. Trends over time

In order to show any major differences in the pattern of reasons for escape with increased measures to prevent escapes, the data were divided into escapes before and after 30th June, 1988. Unfortunately the high proportion (30%) of missing data (inmate not recaptured, no form, inmate released before interview, or inmate unwilling to be interviewed) meant that no overall conclusions could be drawn. However there was no statistically significant difference (at the 5% level) between the two time periods for the percentage of respondents who gave bad news from outside (overall 21% of respondents), chronic-- family problems (overall 31% of respondents), threats from other inmates (overall 19% of respondents), or under the influence and/or to obtain drugs or alcohol (overall 10% of respondents).

Thus there is no evidence that the pattern of reasons given for escape was

different for the years with the lower escape rates. Even so, the results are still shown for the two periods separately in Tables 1 and A3 in order to emphasise that inmates are still escaping for the same alleged reasons as before.

10. Comparisons between correctional centres

The numbers in each category are given separately for each correctional centre in Table A3. It is difficult to make deductions about relative conditions at institutions from this breakdown as the number of escapes at an institution must depend a lot on the ease of escape and the type of inmate held there. However it is interesting that so many institutions have had escapes attributed to drug or alcohol problems in the institution, (11 correctional centres and 5 periodic detention centres). Also that so many institutions have had escapes attributed to threats by other inmates (15 correctional centres).

DISCUSSION

While escapes are always of concern to correctional administrators, they are rare events in correctional centres and the reasons are sometimes very individual. However this analysis of responses from recaptured escapees shows some general patterns: "bad news from outside" and "chronic family problems" were the most frequently given categories of reasons for escape, followed by "threats from other inmates". A further small proportion of escapes were claimed to be related to drug or alcohol use (e.g., escaping while under the influence or to obtain alcohol or drugs). In addition, the majority (84% in this study) of escapees had said they had been thinking about the escape for less than a week. These results are also consistent with findings from previous studies (Porritt, 1987; Gorta and Nguyen Da Huong, 1988).

That is, while this study indicated some escapees who claimed to have been planning to escape since their arrival at a correctional centre and others who seemed to have escaped without thought or had not intended to escape at all, the majority of those who responded to the questionnaire (over 47% of those recaptured) claimed to have escaped as an attempt to deal with a problem either inside or outside the institution. It also appeared that often these problems were

of great enough importance to the inmate to override thoughts of the consequences of escaping.

In the last few years, strategies to minimise escapes have concentrated on increasing correctional centre security and increasing the penalty for escape. The findings in this report are based on the self-reports of recaptured escapees who may be cautious in revealing information which may be incriminating or embarrassing and which may be distorted because of poor memory or lack of understanding of their own motives. However the results indicate that additional strategies might be concerned with ways of assisting inmates to solve their problems without resorting to escape. It should be noted that many inmates must have had the same type of problems but did not escape, either because they found other ways of solving these problems, or were deterred by the existing procedures. It should also be noted that only 52% of those asked the question replied that the Department could have done something to prevent their escape, and that many of these suggestions were impractical.

Devising management strategies is outside the scope of this study. However, the findings do indicate some points relating to management practices which may be worth consideration, such

as these described below.

1. Reception of bad news

Letters, telephone calls or visitors may bring bad news motivating an escape.

2. Opportunities for outside contact

Maintaining outside social contacts is acknowledged to be an important factor in rehabilitation. However other constraints often make it impossible to place an inmate within easy reach of his or her family. At present there is limited financial assistance for visiting under some circumstances. The Civil Rehabilitation Committee also run a very limited bus service to Windsor, Lithgow, Kirkconnell, Bathurst, Cessnock, Berrima and Goulburn. But in general, lack of public transport and the distances involved can make visiting a correctional centre very difficult.

A revised policy on temporary leave, designed partly to alleviate problems associated with lack of family and community contact, became effective on 1st March, 1992. Under this policy opportunities for day and weekend leave are increased, especially for inmates at isolated camps.

3. Counselling facilities

Since there are not full-time welfare officers and/or psychologists in all correctional centres, counselling in time of emergency must often have to come from custodial staff or other inmates. That 43 (45%) of those stating they had escaped because of bad news from outside claimed they had considered escape for more than one day indicates that in some cases there is time for intervention. However it was evident that improved counselling would not have prevented all those who escaped because of family problems, since some stated they had left with no thought of discussing the problem with anyone, and others had had counselling but had decided they needed to escape anyway.

In some cases the inmate reportedly escaped to deal with a practical family crisis (such as helping to find accommodation for his de facto and small children in an emergency), the kind of problem which could perhaps be dealt with by someone on the inmate's behalf.

4. Threats and harassment

At present an inmate at a minimum security institution who is threatened by other inmates can only report this and request a transfer. At least one of the

escapees stated that he feared his transfer would come too late.

Formulating the details of such strategies to minimise escapes would require input from throughout the Department. However this list does show that there could be strategies for reducing escapes other than solely focussing on increasing correctional centre security and the escape penalty. But it is also acknowledged that no strategies will entirely prevent escapes, and the costs of preventative strategies need to be weighed against the expected reduction in escapes as well as any other expected benefits.

RECOMMENDATION

That a committee be convened to make recommendations regarding strategies for reducing the number of escapees, in the light of these and other recent research findings. The committee should comprise, as a minimum, representatives from Prison Operations (including a member of the Classification Branch and a psychologist), and the Research and Statistics Division.

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APPENDIX

Table A1: Number of escapes per year

Financial Year	Number Escapes	Daily Average*	Escapes/100 Inmate Years
1981/82	146	3612	4.0
1982/83	190	3577	5.3
1983/84	183	3589	5.1
1984/85	181	3550	5.1
1985/86	120	3941	3.0
1986/87	106	4063	2.6
1987/88	143	4238	3.4
1988/89	79	4504	1.8
1989/90	98	5198	1.9
1990/91	111	6008	1.8

* Including 2/7ths of the number in Periodic Detention, as detainees are in custody two days per week.

Table A2: Number of interview forms sent out

Year of Escape	No Form Returned	Already Released	Not Willing	Responded	TOTAL FORMS
Prior to 85/86	8	1	1	15	25
85/86	40	12	5	32	89
86/87	37	0	3	63	103
87/88	0	13	8	114	135
Period 1 Sub-total	85 (24%)	26 (7%)	17 (5%)	224 (64%)	352
88/89	1	2	10	53	66
89/90	3	3	4	75	85
90/91	27	3	4	64	98
91/92	2	1	4	42	49
Period 2 Sub-total	33 (11%)	9 (3%)	22 (7%)	234 (79%)	298
TOTAL	118 (18%)	35 (5%)	39 (6%)	458 (70%)	650

Table A3: Number of escapes for each category of stated reason from individual correctional centres

Correctional Centre**	Bad news from outside			Chronic Family Problems			Threats from other Inmates			Pressure Use/Carry Drugs		
	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL
REM				1		1						
MUL					1	1						
TRC	3	4	7	4	6	10	2	3	5			
PMT	1		1	1	1	2						
BTH		1	1	2	1	3	2		2			
GRA-C		2	2		1	1						
GRA								1	1			
COO							2		2			
BRO				1	1	2						
EMU	19	12	31	19	18	37	18	12	30		2	2
GNS	3	3	6	4	7	11		7	7			
OBE	5		5	3	3	6	1	3	4			
MAN	4		4	4	3	7	3	3	6			
KIR	2	2	4	1	3	4	2	7	9		1	1
NEW					2	2						
SIL	15	7	22	20	10	30	3	3	6	4	1	5
CES	2		2	3	3	6	1		1	1		1
BTH-X		1	1		5	5		3	3			
GLB-X	4	2	6	1	5	6	3	3	6			
NOR		2	2	2	3	5	1		1	1	1	2
MBK		1	1		3	3		3	3			
PMT-PDC					1	1						
MER-PDC					1	1						
TOTAL	58	37	95	66	78	144	38	48	86	6	5	11

* More than one reason may be given for each escape.

** See Table A4 for abbreviations.

Before = Escaped before 30/6/88, After = Escaped after 30/6/88

Table A3: Number of escapes for each category of stated reason from individual correctional centres, continued

Correctional Centres**	Could not Cope with Imprisonment			Conflict with staff			Parole Uncertain/Refused			Extradition Threat			Did not want to be Transferred		
	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL
SCU	1		1												
GLB										1		1			
MUL	1		1												
TRC		1	1										1		1
BTH	1		1				1	1	2						
GRA-C														1	1
GRA	1	1	2												
COO	1		1				2		2	1		1			
BRO		1	1												
EMU	4	2	6	1	4	5		1	1	1		1	1	2	3
GNS		2	2				1		1	1		1		2	2
OBE										1		1			
MAN	1		1											2	2
KIR	1	5	6		1	1				1		1	2	3	5
NEW		1	1												
SIL	5	1	6	2	2	4		3	3				2	2	4
CES	1		1												
BTH-X	1		1		1	1								1	1
GLB-X		2	2					1	1					1	1
NOR	2		2		4	4							3	1	4
MBK		3	3												
TOTAL	20	19	39	3	12	15	4	6	10	6	0	6	9	15	24

More than one reason may be given for each escape.

** See Table A4 for abbreviations. Before = Escaped before 30/6/88, After = Escaped after 30/6/88.

Table A3: Number of escapes for each category of stated reason from individual correctional centres, continued

Correctional Centre	Obtain Drugs/Alcohol			Under Influence			Persuaded by Companion			Other		
	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL	Before	After	TOTAL
ASP											1	1
TRC				2		2				5	2	7
PMT	1		1									
BTH							1		1		1	1
GRA								1	1			
COO							2		2			
BRO					2	2		1	1	1	1	2
EMU	1	3	4	2	2	4	4	2	6	2	3	5
GNS		1	1	2	2	4	1		1		1	1
OBE							1		1		1	1
MAN	3	4	7	7	2	9		1	1	1		1
KIR				1	2	3					1	1
SIL	2		2		1	1				6	7	13
CES				1	1	2					3	3
BTH-X								1	1			
GLB-X										1	1	2
NOR					1	1		2	2		2	2
MBK								1	1		1	1
LB-PDC	1	2	3									
TOM-PDC		1	1									
EMU-PDC					1	1						
MER-PDC					1	1						
WIN-PDC					1	1					1	1
TOTAL	8	11	19	15	16	31	9	9	18	16	26	42

Table A4: Correctional centre abbreviations used in Table A3

Correctional Centre	Abbreviation	Correctional Centre	Abbreviation
Special Care Unit	SCU	Kirkconnell	KIR
Assessment Prison	ASP	YOCC- Newnes	NEW
Remand Centre	REM	Silverwater	SIL
Goulburn - Main	GLB	Cessnock	CES
Mulawa	MUL	Bathurst X-Wing	BTH - X
Training Centre	TRC	Goulburn X-Wing	GLB - X
Parramatta Centre	PMT	Norma Parker	NOR
Bathurst - Main	BTH	Parklea	PKA
Berrima	BER	Miroma	MIR
Grafton - C Wing	GRA-C	St Heliers	MBK
Grafton - Main	GRA	Long Bay PDC	LB - PDC
Cooma	COO	Parramatta PDC	PMT - PDC
Broken Hill	BRO	Tomago PDC	TOM - PDC
Emu Plains	EMU	Emu Plains PDC	EMU - PDC
Glen Innes	GNS	Merinda PDC	MER - PDC
Oberon	OBE	Windsor PDC	WIN - PDC
Mannus	MAN		

Table A5: How long had inmate been thinking about going?

Category of reason for escape	Percentage of Respondents				Total Number
	Day*	Week	Month	>Month	
Bad news from outside	56	34	10	1	95
Chronic family problems	62	15	11	12	143**
Threats from other inmates	67	21	8	4	86
Pressure use/carry drugs	64	18	18	0	11
Could not cope with imprisonment	50	18	16	16	38**
Conflict with staff	80	0	13	7	15
Parole uncertain/refused	30	30	20	20	10
Extradition threat	33	17	17	33	6
Did not want to be transferred	57	35	9	0	23**
To obtain drugs/alcohol	84	11	0	5	19
Under the influence	97	3	0	0	31
Persuaded by companion	72	22	6	0	18
Other	62	24	5	10	42
TOTAL	64	20	9	8	455

* Day = less than a full day; Week = a day or more but less than a week;

Month = a week or more but less than a month; >Month = a month or more.

** Question unanswered by one respondent.

Table A6: Had the inmate ever been tempted before to leave?

Category of reason for escape	Percentage of Respondents		Number of Respondents
	No	Yes	
Bad news from outside	98	2	95
Chronic family problems	83	17	144
Threats from other inmates	87	13	86
Pressure use/carry drugs	82	18	11
Could not cope with imprisonment	72	28	39
Conflict with staff	93	7	15
Parole uncertain/refused	70	30	10
Extradition threat	83	17	6
Did not want to be transferred	87	13	23*
To obtain drugs/alcohol	95	5	19
Under the influence	84	16	31
Persuaded by companion	83	17	18
Other	93	7	42
TOTAL	87	13	457

* Question unanswered by one respondent

Table A7: Is there anything the Department could have done to help prevent escape?

Category of reason for escape	Percentage of Respondents		Number of Respondents
	No	Yes	
Bad news from outside	39	61	31
Chronic family problems	35	65	48
Threats from other prisoners	49	51	33
Pressure use/carry drugs	100	0	2
Could not cope with imprisonment	64	36	14
Conflict with staff	50	50	6
Parole uncertain/refused	50	50	2
Extradition threat	-	-	0
Did not want to be transferred	18	82	11
To obtain drugs/alcohol	60	40	5
Under the influence	60	40	10
Persuaded by companion	80	20	5
Other	44	56	18
TOTAL	48	52	158