

## Discussant Comments - "Does Parole Supervision work?"

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About a dozen years ago I visited the Director of Training for the Costa Rica penal system. He told me that his recidivism rate was about 15 percent and asked me what I thought of it. I told him that my first reaction was that it sounded pretty good, but upon reflection I realized (and told him) that the opposite was true -- it was not good. What it reflected was that they were incarcerating too many people who need not have been incarcerated. In other words, look carefully at these rates - don't assume that they are generated by similar populations of evildoers.

Hard to use administrative data for anything other than administrative issues.

In recounting the experience of California's Special Intensive Parole Unit (SIPU) program, Conrad (1981) noted, "In Oakland, for example, the SIPU agent was an irrepressible enthusiast who kept his office open until late hours at night to dispense advice to, and to conduct bull sessions with any parolee who cared to happen in, as most of his caseload seemed to enjoy doing. His violation rate was extremely low, and I never saw any reason to believe that there was a special ambiance in Oakland which favored parole success.

"Across the bay in San Francisco the SIPU agent was an enthusiast of another stripe. He liked to rise in the small hours of the morning so that he could descend on unemployed parolees and remind them that early birds get the available worms and slug-a-beds do not. How he managed to conduct these sunrise raids on his charges without dismemberment on his person I have never understood, but his parole violation rate was high, even after he was convinced of the unwisdom of the strenuous counseling technique he had adopted."

Conrad, John P. (1981). *Justice and Consequences*. Lexington Books, Lexington, Massachusetts.

Problems with Type 1 vs Type 2 errors. It may be easier to justify keeping individuals under lock & key longer than to let them go at a more appropriate time and get into a Willy Horton situation. Which means that you have to provide ammunition to policy makers to counter the inevitable bad publicity when a parolee commits a newsworthy crime.