

9-1984

Client Success or Failure in a Halfway House

Patrick G. Donnelly

University of Dayton, pdonnelly1@udayton.edu

Brian E. Forschner

University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: http://ecommons.udayton.edu/soc_fac_pub

 Part of the [Civic and Community Engagement Commons](#), [Community-based Learning Commons](#), [Community-based Research Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), [Educational Sociology Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Other Sociology Commons](#), [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#), [Social Psychology and Interaction Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

eCommons Citation

Donnelly, Patrick G. and Forschner, Brian E., "Client Success or Failure in a Halfway House" (1984). *Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work Faculty Publications*. Paper 39.

http://ecommons.udayton.edu/soc_fac_pub/39

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

Client Success Or Failure In A Halfway House

BY PATRICK G. DONNELLY, PH.D. AND BRIAN FORSCHNER, PH.D.*

Halfway houses today are diverse entities. Seiter, et al. (1977) found that almost 60 percent of the houses in the United States are private nonprofit organizations. One-third were state operations with the remainder being federal, local or private profit organizations. The programs in the houses varied from those providing supervision and custody to those providing a full range of intensive in-house treatments for particular client needs. Some halfway houses handle only particular types of offenders (e.g., drug addicts) while others handle a wide range of offenders. Latessa and Allen (1982) suggest that the sociodemographic and criminal history backgrounds of clients differ depending upon the referral sources to the halfway house. Allen and Seiter (1981) developed three alternative models of halfway houses based on where they fit in the criminal justice system. In the first model, the inmate resides in the halfway house during the initial parole period. The second model covers those situations in which the inmate is transferred to a halfway house before parole is granted. In the third model, the inmates are granted parole and placed in the community on their own. The parolee is placed in the halfway house if problems begin to develop. Latessa and Allen (1982) call for further research on the types of clients in halfway houses and on client risk, their need levels and special problems. This research addresses these issues.

This article describes one halfway house, Cope House, in Dayton, Ohio. It is a diversified halfway house which does not fit any of the alternative models suggested by Allen and Seiter (1981). Cope House accepts adult male and female referrals from the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Department of Corrections of the State of Ohio, the Montgomery County Probation Department, and female referrals only from the City of Dayton Municipal Court. Cope House became co-correctional in January of 1981. Its clientele is a mixture of Federal pre-releases, state parolees, county probationers, and city misdemeanants doing workhouse time. This house

operates as both a halfway-in and a halfway-out program since it includes persons who were not required to "do time" in prison as well as persons who were sent to the house after serving a prison term. This article describes Cope's programs and examines the diversity of clients entering Cope House over a 3-year period. Following this we address the success or failure in the halfway house program of clients with different demographic characteristics, social backgrounds, and prior experience with criminal justice agencies.

Previous Research

A 1977 survey of evaluations for halfway houses in the United States by Seiter et al. (1977) classified the evaluations into four categories: those that looked at in-program success, post-program success (recidivism or community adjustment), efficiency or cost-effective analysis, and descriptive or subjective assessments of effectiveness or impact of halfway houses. The literature on the first two types of evaluations is most relevant for this study. Most of the studies analyzing the effectiveness of halfway houses utilize recidivism rates as the measure of success. Latessa and Allen (1982), after reviewing 44 studies examining the effect of halfway houses on recidivism, conclude that halfway houses are at least as effective as parole, especially since these clients are typically in a higher need, higher risk category. However, most of these studies are fraught with methodological problems. One of the stronger methodological studies on this issue analyzed the Massachusetts system. It found that participation in pre-release integration programs, including halfway houses, was related to reduced recidivism in both a 1-year and 5-year follow-up (Le Clair, 1983).

A study of the Connecticut system examined 1-year recidivism data for 182 male clients of contracted halfway houses and a comparison group of 137 males matched on age, education, marital status and previous criminal record characteristics (Meta Metrics, Inc., 1983). The halfway house group actually had a higher proportion of robbery and larceny offenders, characteristics that are generally related to higher recidivism rates. The overall

*Patrick G. Donnelly is an assistant professor at the University of Dayton, Ohio and Brian Forschner is executive director of the St. Leonard Center in Dayton.

recidivism rate was 37.2 percent for halfway house clients as compared to 48.5 percent for the comparison group.

More germane to this study, it appears that there is a relationship between successful program completion in a halfway house and recidivism. In the Connecticut study, the overall recidivism rate for halfway house clients who successfully completed the program was 26.6 percent, approximately half that of the comparison group. Beha's (1977) study of parolees in one halfway house found that those who successfully completed the program were significantly less likely to be reimprisoned for another offense in the 2 years following termination than were those who failed.

Since there is a relationship between in-program success and recidivism, it is important to identify the characteristics associated with success. While the in-program success rates in 24 studies surveyed by Seiter et al. (1977) varied from 26 percent to 93 percent, not all types of clients were equally successful. Beha (1977) identified a number of factors which were related to in-program success. Clients who did not have a record of drug use, who had held jobs for longer periods of time, who had done time in departmental segregation and who came from outside the city where the halfway house was located were more likely to successfully complete the program. In addition, the less extensive the parolee's prior involvement with the prison system, the more likely he was to remain with and complete the halfway house program. Also, clients with less involvement with petty crimes were more likely to successfully complete the program than were clients with more extensive involvement. While most clients had extensive prison experience, it seems that the length of imprisonment is not as important as the number of different times a person was imprisoned. Persons imprisoned for short periods on many occasions for less serious offenses were less likely to adjust to the halfway house environment than clients who had spent a few long prison terms. Halfway house administrators posited that this was because those who had been in and out of prison a number of times never really had to adjust to the structured environment of the prison. Persons who spent longer prison terms (which are not associated with petty offenses) adapted to the prison's structured environment and found it easier to adjust to the structured environment of the halfway house.

Other factors that are related to in-program success and failure are educational achievement, number of prior arrests, history of alcohol problems and referral source (Moczydlowski, 1980; Moran et

al., 1973). Each of these factors will be examined in this analysis to see whether they hold for Cope House residents.

This research differs from the work of writers mentioned above in a number of ways. First, this research examines a more heterogeneous resident population. Previous researchers analyzed either Federal parolees (Beha, 1977) or primarily Federal and state referrals (Moczydlowski, 1980). The residents of this halfway house include a high proportion of county and city referrals. Second, this research examines the record of 409 residents which is a considerably larger population than found in most previous work. Last, one of the shortcomings of previous research on halfway houses is the failure to discuss two key factors: program design and population, and program administration and organization (Sullivan et al., 1970). It is likely that these two factors play a major role in the effectiveness of a halfway house program. While an examination of only one halfway house will not allow claims concerning its relative effectiveness, these two factors need to be presented in order that the findings can be properly understood.

Description of Cope House

Cope House is a nonprofit, community-based correctional agency whose primary function is the rehabilitation and reintegration of adult offenders. Founded in 1975 under the aegis of Talbert House, Inc., of Cincinnati, Ohio, it became independently incorporated, with its own board of trustees, in 1976. Cope currently has a 22-bed capacity. Residents are selected on the basis of information sent from institutions, probation and parole departments, as well as other available social data. Prospective residents are interviewed when possible. Normally, prospective residents who are not accepted include chronic violent offenders, as well as rapists, severe drug or alcohol users, those clinically diagnosed as arsonists, psychotics or severely retarded. However, Cope accepts offenders with a broad range of social and psychological problems.

Programming revolves around a behavioral contract called a Mutual Agreement Plan, modeled after that used by the Massachusetts Halfway House Association. This contract addresses various needs of the client, typically employment, finances, future housing, and social service needs. Careful attention is paid to avoiding duplication of existing community services. This not only reduces costs but forces residents to reintegrate into the community and begin socializing with the non-offender population. For example, instead of offering an A.A. pro-

gram in-house, or mental health counseling, clients are encouraged to attend A.A. programs and clinics in the community. A primary emphasis is to enable residents to begin developing support groups in the community. In order to complete the program, they must be able to address the issues of employment, finances, and housing, but, more importantly, they must be able to answer the question, "Where do you belong?" Consequently, programming emphasizes the development of social and psychological "roots" in the community. It is a strong programming belief that these "roots" will inhibit recidivism as much as, or more than, employment.

The Data

All clients entering the halfway house were administered a standardized intake form. This form was developed by the International Halfway House Association and is precoded for data processing. It also meets the requirements of the Commissions on Accreditation for Corrections. Upon termination from Cope, another standard form was administered. Both intake and termination forms were administered and completed by trained staff. The forms, which rely on client self-disclosure, were then verified when necessary and possible through examination of the client file. The data were collected from all clients entering the program between January 1, 1980, and December 31, 1982. A total of 417 clients were admitted during that time. Complete intake and termination forms were available on the 409 of the clients that comprise the population for this study.

The intake form included information on demographic characteristics, social background, substance use and information on prior arrests, convictions and periods of incarceration. These are the independent variables in this study. The termination forms included information on the client's experience in the program and his or her success or failure in the program. This latter variable is the dependent variable. One problem with the majority of previous studies of in-program success was that they did not adequately define the criteria of success (Seiter et al., 1977). Failure in the program is defined in this article as removal from the house for violation of house rules and regulations or the commission of a new offense. This latter category included those who escaped from the house. Successful completion of the halfway house program was contingent on abiding by the house rules and regulations, not committing a criminal offense and making satisfactory efforts and progress towards finding employment, establishing a savings account, fin-

ding a post-release residence, and handling any existing emotional or substance abuse problems. Clients who accomplished these objectives are considered as successful as are those who were making progress towards achieving them at the time they were transferred or removed by the referral agency. This group is included in the successful category even though they did not complete the program because they were successfully accomplishing the tasks expected of them.

The Clientele

The first column of Table 1 describes the clientele of the halfway house over the 3-year period. Two-thirds of the clients were male and one-third were female. Fifty-two percent were white, while 46 percent were black. Younger persons comprised the majority of halfway house clients with 44 percent falling in the 18 to 25 age group. Overall, the median age of the clients was 26.6 years. Forty-six percent of the clients had never been married, while one-third were divorced or separated at the time of their entry into the program. Only 12 percent of the clients were married, while another 6 percent were in common-law marriages. Almost half of the clients did not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. Thirty-eight percent had completed 12 years of school, while only 14 percent had received education beyond the high school level. Eighty percent of the clients were city residents prior to their incarceration, while the remainder lived in suburban or rural areas.

Many clients were suffering from other problems in their lives both before and during their latest involvement with the criminal justice system. In the year preceding their incarceration, the average for the longest period of time a client had spent on a job was 7.8 months. Seventy-one percent of the clients had been employed or in school for less than one-half of the year before they were incarcerated. Twenty percent were active for the full year and 10 percent were active between one-half and the full year. Twenty-five percent of the clients reported using drugs currently more than once a week with 22 percent admitting that their drug use was a problem for them at the time of their admission. Twenty-one percent of all clients had received outpatient counseling at some point in their lives while 14 percent had received psychiatric hospitalization and 12 percent had attempted suicide.

In addition to these demographic and social background variables, another set of factors was examined. These may be considered legal factors in that they relate to the client's legal status and previous experiences with the criminal justice

system. The referral sources were evenly distributed, with almost 24 percent being Federal clients, 27 percent state parolees, 18 percent county probationers, and 27 percent city female misdemeanants. One-half of the clients had been arrested before they were 18 years old, while only 14 percent were arrested for the first time after they were 26. The median age of first arrest was 17.5 years. Almost two-thirds of the clients had at least one prior conviction, while 10 percent were apparently repeat offenders with 6 or more previous adult convictions. Eighty-five percent of the clients were incarcerated at least once as adults, while 15 percent had not. One-third of the clients had been incarcerated at least three times. Forty-five percent had been incarcerated for over 1 year, while one-quarter had spent between 3 months and a year incarcerated. The median number of months incarcerated was 11 and the median number of days spent in Cope House was 41.

Results

Overall, 65 percent of the clients in the halfway house program were successful and 35 percent were unsuccessful. This is slightly higher than the average success rate of 61 percent found by Seiter et al. in their survey of halfway houses. The relationships between the independent variables and success or failure in the halfway house program are shown in Table 1. A scan of column 2 reveals that no subgroup of the clientele was successful less than 48 percent of the time. Females were successful significantly more often than males. Over three-fourths of all females were successful compared to only three-fifths of the male clients. The relationship between age and outcome was not statistically significant but was in the direction that might be expected. Older clients tended to be successful more often than younger clients. While 70 percent of the clients over 36 were successful, only 60 percent of those under 25 were successful.

TABLE 1. Characteristics and Success or Failure of Clients in Halfway House

	% Clients	% Success	% Failure	N ¹
I. Social Characteristics				
*Gender: Female	32	76	24	129
Male	68	59	41	276
Age: Less than 25	44	60	40	179
26-35	39	67	33	157
36+	17	70	30	70

Table 1.—Continued

	% Clients	% Success	% Failure	N ¹
Race: Black	46	65	35	187
White	52	63	37	215
Other	2			
**Education: 0-11 years	48	59	41	194
12 years	38	65	35	154
13+	14	84	16	55
Marital Status:				
Never Married	46	59	41	189
Married	12	77	23	47
Common Law	6	56	44	25
Divorced/Separated	33	68	32	136
Widowed	2			
Last Living Arrangements:				
Parents/Spouse	43	62	38	174
Other Relative/Friend	29	60	40	117
Alone	23	72	28	93
Other	5			
Last Residence:				
City	80	64	36	321
Suburb/Rural	20	67	33	79
**Months on Longest Job:²				
Less than 8 months	67	60	40	249
8 months +	33	72	28	159
Percent of Weeks Full-Time Active:³				
Less than 50	71	63	37	281
51-99	10	69	31	39
100	20	71	29	77
Current Drug Use:				
Not a Problem	79	65	35	322
A Problem	21	61	38	86
Frequency of Current Drug Use:				
No Use	61	68	32	250
Once a Week or Less	13	69	31	54
More than Once a Week	26	55	45	105
Ever Arrested for Drinking?				
Yes	38	65	35	152
No	62	64	36	252
Ever Drink to Blackouts?				
Yes	19	69	31	77
No	81	63	37	319

Table 1.—Continued

	% Clients	% Success	% Failure	N ¹
<i>Ever Attempt Suicide?</i>				
Yes	12	59	41	49
No	88	65	35	356
<i>Ever Committed to Psychiatric Hospital?</i>				
Yes	14	55	46	56
No	86	66	34	347
<i>*Ever Have Outpatient Therapy?</i>				
Yes	21	49	51	84
No	79	68	32	319
II. <i>Legal Characteristics</i>				
<i>*Referral Source:</i>				
Federal	24	76	24	97
State	27	47	53	109
County	18	50	50	74
City-Town	27	81	19	111
Self	1			
Other	3			
<i>*Age at First Arrest:</i>				
8-17	50	57	43	188
18-25	36	66	35	148
26+	14	86	12	56
<i>**Number of Adult Convictions:</i>				
1	35	72	27	142
2-5	55	62	38	225
6+	10	48	53	40
<i>*Number of Adult Incarcerations:</i>				
0	15	80	20	61
1-2	53	69	32	216
3+	32	50	50	130
<i>*Months Incarcerated as Adult:</i>				
0	20	84	16	80
1-2	10	71	29	42
3-12	25	62	37	101
13+	45	56	44	183
<i>*Number of Days in Program:</i>				
Less than 41	59	56	44	241
41+	41	78	22	166

¹The total sample size is 409. The figures in this column may not add to 409 because of missing data for some cases for some variables. These figures represent the numbers on which Chi Square Significance Tests were run.

²In last 2 years in the community.

³In last year in the community.

*Significant at .001 level.

**Significant at .01 level.

Educational attainment was significantly related to a client's success or failure. Of those clients who did not have a high school diploma, only 59 percent were successful. Clients with a high school diploma or its equivalent but no further education were successful 65 percent of the time. Those with the highest educational levels, beyond a high school diploma were successful in 84 percent of the cases. With regard to marital status, the clients most likely to be successful were those who were currently married. They had a success rate of 77 percent. The two least successful groups were those who had never married (59 percent) and those in common-law marriages (56 percent). Neither the race of the client nor place of last residence was significantly related to outcome. Clients who lived with their parents or spouse and those who lived with other relatives or friends prior to incarceration had a slightly lower success rate than those clients who lived alone, although this was not statistically significant.

Beha's research indicated that clients who held jobs for longer periods of time prior to their incarceration were more likely to complete the halfway house program. In this research, 72 percent of the clients who held jobs for longer than 8 months were successful while only 60 percent of those whose longest job lasted less than 8 months were successful. Clients who were active on a full-time basis for a greater percentage of weeks during the 2 years preceding their incarceration were slightly more likely to be successful than were those who were full-time active for lesser times. However, this relationship was not statistically significant.

In Beha's study clients with a record of drug use were not as likely to succeed in the halfway house. In this study, 65 percent of the clients with no drug problems successfully completed the program as opposed to 61 percent of those with a drug problem. Clients who reported drug use at least once a week were less likely than others to be successful in the program. These differences are in the expected direction but they are not statistically significant. There was no relationship between drinking history and outcome nor were clients who had attempted suicide in the past significantly more likely to fail in the program than those who had not.

There is a marked difference in the client's likelihood of success depending on the referral source. Over 80 percent of the clients referred by local municipalities were successful. Since these were predominantly female misdemeanants, a high success rate might be expected for this group. Federal referrals also had a high success rate of 76 percent. However, referrals from state and county

sources were considerably less likely to be successful. Only 47 percent of the state and 50 percent of the county referrals successfully completed the program.

The client's success or failure was also related to his or her age at first arrest. Only 57 percent of the residents who were arrested as juveniles successfully completed the program. Two-thirds of those arrested for the first time between the ages of 18 to 25 were successful, while 86 percent of those whose first arrest occurred after age 25 were successful. This suggests that persons who began their criminal activity at an early age are less likely to succeed in the halfway house than those who began at later stages in their lives.

Clients with more convictions were significantly less likely to be successful than those with fewer convictions. Less than half of the residents with six or more convictions successfully completed the program while almost three-quarters of those with only one conviction were successful. In addition, the length of time spent in incarceration was also related to success or failure. In contrast to the findings in Beha's research, in this study, the greater the time spent incarcerated as an adult, the less was the likelihood of successfully completing the halfway house program. There are at least two plausible explanations for this. First, clients with more time spent in prison may have committed more serious offenses or had a longer history of offenses than those with less time in prison. The long-timers may abuse the less structured environment of the halfway house. The second explanation would suggest that the longer prison terms make it difficult for persons to adjust to the less structured community environment.

Conclusions

Traditionally, halfway houses handled relatively homogenous populations. Some dealt with particular types of offenders (e.g., persons with alcohol or drug problems) while others dealt with persons from a single referral source (e.g., Federal parolees). As funding, particularly government funding, becomes increasingly more difficult to locate, halfway houses may become increasingly more heterogeneous. Their residents may range from felons to misdemeanants, from first time offenders to many time offenders, from highly educated to illiterates, and from those with severe psychological and behavioral problems to those with more stable psychological and behavioral patterns. This heterogeneity may require halfway houses to reevaluate their programs, their admission re-

quirements, their staffing and their effectiveness. This reevaluation must address very practical questions such as: Can the halfway house as it is presently arranged deal with all types of clients? Can the program be altered to deal with the diversity of clientele? Can specialized programs be handled in-house or should they be contracted out? Can necessary changes be made given existing funding levels?

These policy questions can only be answered after careful consideration of the current status of the halfway house. This article presented an examination of one halfway house with a heterogeneous population and analyzed the relationship between demographic, social and legal factors and the success or failure of residents in the halfway house program. A significant number of the clients had experienced social and psychological problems; a large proportion had been either unemployed or underemployed in their communities; one-third were either separated or divorced; almost half did not have a high school diploma or equivalent; many had experienced problems with drinking or drug use; one in seven had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital; one in eight had attempted suicide.

Despite the fact that these clients had a history of social and psychological problems, the overall rate of success in the program was high (64 percent). This may be an indication that this particular halfway house treatment program is effective. However, this success rate varied considerable along a number of dimensions. As Glaser (1975) noted, various correctional programs have different effects on different types of offenders. In this study, gender, education, months on longest job and history of prior outpatient therapy for psychological problems were all related to the success or failure of residents. These are the only demographic and social characteristics that were significantly related to success or failure. All of the legal variables were related to success or failure (although the strength of the relationships varied). Referral source, the number of adult convictions and incarcerations, number of months incarcerated as an adult, and number of days in the program were all related to success or failure in the program.

Administrators of halfway houses need to consider these findings in addressing a number of questions. Most administrators, for example, are limited in their acceptance of residents by financial and size constraints. The issue becomes one of the appropriateness of halfway house placements. Individuals who are more likely to succeed in the program may be the more appropriate ones to accept.

Admissions criteria may need to be reevaluated to emphasize the factors which are related to successful completion of the program. On the other hand, administrators may choose to alter their programs or to initiate new programs that will better meet the needs of those clients who now fail in the program. For administrators, the course of action recommended is one that carefully considers the implications of research findings concerning the operation and effectiveness of halfway houses. For researchers, the course of action recommended is one that works toward the continued refinement of predictive measures of success in halfway house programs for different types of offenders. Differences between findings of previous research and those reported here need to be explored in more detail. One likely source for these differences lies in the greater diversity of clients in Cope House, but further analysis involving a number of halfway houses is necessary before reaching any firm conclusions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, H., and Seiter, R. *Community Based Corrections*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981.
- Beha, J. A., Testing the functions and effects of the parole halfway house: One case study. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 1977, 67, 335-350.
- Glaser, D., Achieving better questions: A half-century's progress in correctional research. *Federal Probation*, September 1975, 3-9.
- Latessa, E., and Allen, H., Halfway houses and parole: A national assessment. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 1982, 10, 153-163.
- Le Clair, D., *Varying Time Criteria in Recidivism Follow-up Studies: A Test of the "Cross-over Effects" Phenomenon*. Boston: Massachusetts Department of Correction, 1983.
- Meta Metrics, Inc., *Evaluation of Connecticut Community Programs*. Washington, D.C., 1983.
- Moczydowski, K., Predictors of success in a correctional halfway house for youthful and adult offenders. *Corrective and Social Psychiatry and Journal of Behavior Technology, Methods and Therapy*, 1980, 26, 59-72.
- Moran, E., Kass, W., and Munz, D., In-program evaluation of a community correctional agency for high risk offenders. *Corrective and Social Psychiatry and Journal of Behavior Technology, Methods and Therapy*, 1977, 23, 48-52.
- Seiter, R., Carlson, E., Bowman, H., Grandfield, J., and Beran, N., *Halfway Houses: National Evaluation Program: Phase I, Summary Report*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1977.
- Sullivan, D.C., Siegel, L., and Clear, T., The halfway house movement, ten years later: Reappraisal of correctional innovation. *Canadian Journal of Crime and Corrections*, 1974, 16, 188-197.