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PRELIMINARY REPORT ON ALCOHOL USE AT WILDCAT

Vera Institute of Justice  
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I. Introduction

In July 1972, the Vera Institute of Justice established Wildcat Service Corporation, a program of supported work for ex-addicts and ex-offenders. In doing so, Vera recognized the magnitude and complexity of problems confronting those it planned to employ. Alcohol was identified as one of those problems but not given top priority. Recently, however, Wildcat management has become increasingly concerned about alcohol problems among Wildcat employees.

Management's concern with employee alcohol use stems from many sources. As a young corporation, Wildcat channeled its efforts toward establishing itself; as the corporation has reached maturity, it has been able to devote more resources to searching out and solving problems not directly associated with productivity. Recent studies reported in the scientific literature<sup>1</sup> suggest a possible link between methadone maintenance and alcohol problems, a link which would be of interest to Wildcat as an employer

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<sup>1</sup>  
Bihari, B. "Alcoholism and methadone maintenance,"  
Amer. J. Drug and Alcohol Abuse, 1:79-87, 1974.

of many methadone-maintained persons. Supervisors' reports of employee alcohol problems have increased due to both increased awareness, and perhaps, an increase in the problems themselves.

Although Wildcat's particular experience is with the alcohol problems of ex-addicts, its experience with employee alcohol problems is typical of many mainstream corporations. Management in a variety of industries is increasingly concerned with the number of problem drinkers and their effect on industry and on themselves. This awareness is coupled with both the desire to attack the problem and a lack of solutions.

With a mandate from Wildcat management, the Vera Institute has used the presently available tools to explore the nature and extent of the alcohol problem at Wildcat. This preliminary report outlines the data currently available. More appropriate measures are needed to provide a better estimate of the scope and character of alcohol problems at Wildcat, and to propose solutions for Wildcat's alcohol problems in particular, and for the alcohol problems of methadone-maintained ex-addicts and industry workers in general.

## II. Wildcat Service Corporation

Wildcat Service Corporation, a public service company, employs about 1200 ex-addicts and/or ex-offenders. Wildcat was established in an effort to test the possibility that ex-addicts and ex-offenders can, through the medium of "supported work," break out of the revolving door of drugs and crime. The term "supported work" refers to the low stress work environment which Wildcat seeks to establish.

By providing ex-addicts and ex-offenders with meaningful jobs and salaries on which they pay taxes, the Vera Institute hoped to demonstrate that they could become self-sufficient, contributing members of society. Since the creation of Wildcat, Vera has conducted research to test the concept of supported work.\* This research has centered on three areas of study: an examination of the day-to-day operations of Wildcat; a four year controlled study comparing approximately 300 qualified applicants offered jobs at Wildcat (experimentals) with 300 qualified applicants who were not (controls); and

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"Wildcat: The First Two Years, Second Annual Research Report on Supported Work," describes the findings of the research in detail.

cost-benefit analyses. Data from the first two types of research studies will be used in this report.

Wildcat Service Corporation employees work in small crews on public service projects which are developed in cooperation with municipal and community agencies, thus providing needed services for the community while offering work to the ex-addict or ex-offender. Wildcat crewmembers are paid with monies from service contracts with city and federal agencies and with funds obtained through a special waiver granted by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare whereby public assistance benefits for supported work employees are diverted into a salary pool.

At the heart of the beliefs behind Wildcat is a confidence in the therapeutic effect of work and in the work ethic. Drug addicts who relinquish their habits and enter treatment programs are frequently unable to find or to keep work; ex-offenders are frequently unable to do the same because of the stigma of their criminal records. This failure may in turn lead to a return to the lifestyles which first fostered addiction or criminal activity. Wildcat tries to break the cycle by employing the ex-addict

or ex-offender, helping him or her to gain confidence, developing work skills which prospective employers seek, and eventually, assisting in finding permanent employment outside of Wildcat.

Wildcat believes that employing ex-addicts and ex-offenders in a supported setting can provide both needed public services to local customers at a competitive rate, and a positive change in the non-work behavior of the employees. Alcohol use by Wildcat crewmembers may impede realization of both objectives. In devising a solution for the problem of alcohol use, Wildcat management is caught between the constraints of the two objectives. If Wildcat strives to establish itself as a service provider, then it may be unable to devote resources to helping an employee with his alcohol problem. If the corporation chooses to focus on its goal of changing the behavior of its employees, then it will spend more of its resources on counseling and therapy for alcohol problems.

Concern over employee alcohol problems is heightened because Wildcat employees who are methadone-

maintained (86% of the total Wildcat population) are suspected to be more likely to have alcohol problems. Drug programs report that methadone maintained ex-addicts frequently develop alcohol problems after entering treatment. Recent studies have suggested that approximately 20 to 30% of the addicts in treatment have had or will have alcohol problems.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>

Ibid.



### III. Alcohol Use at Wildcat

Awareness of the prevalence of alcohol problems and concern over the effect of those problems on both the work and non-work aspects of its employees' lives has lead Wildcat to examine the extent and the nature of the alcohol problem. To this end, this report undertakes to do three things: to estimate the extent of alcohol problems at Wildcat; to explore the relation between alcohol problems and the non-work or rehabilitative aspects of an ex-addict's life; and to explore the relationship of alcohol problems to work.

In order to do so, data was gathered in several different manners. Questions regarding alcohol use were administered to controlled study participants in yearly interviews. Discussions with Wildcat staff and employees were held. Vera staff visited crews in the field in an attempt to observe the extent of alcohol problems. Supervisors' and counselors' records were examined to discover the number of alcohol-related disciplinary actions.

Questions concerning alcohol use and problems have been integrated into the first annual interview administered to the research sample ("the Manhattan

sample") of the controlled study. These include:

- 1) the CAGE questions, a set of four alcohol-related items designed to identify the "hidden alcoholic;"<sup>3\*</sup>
- 2) questions about frequency of drinking of various types of alcoholic beverages during the year; and
- 3) open-ended discussion of drug use and alcohol problems.

The following table shows the number and proportion of the Manhattan sample identified as problem drinkers. For the purposes of this report, those who were identified by the CAGE questions or daily drinking questions will be considered problem drinkers.

Table 1. Estimate of Problem Drinkers in the Manhattan Sample (N=227)

<u>Measure used to identify</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
CAGE and daily drinking	30	13
CAGE only	21	9
Daily drinking only	27	12
TOTAL	78	34

3 Ewing, J. and Rouse, B., "Identifying the hidden alcoholic," Paper presented at the 29th International Congress on Alcohol and Drug Dependence, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, February 3, 1970.

\* The CAGE questions were administered to 227 controls and experimentals, a subsample of the Manhattan sample.

The CAGE and daily drinking measures identified 78 persons or 34% of the Manhattan sample as likely to be problem drinkers. In order to validate that estimate, self-reports of current or past drinking problems by sample members were analyzed. Seventy-seven people reported a current or past drinking problem. Fourteen of the 77 had not been identified by the CAGE or daily drinking measures. Thus, if the two measures (CAGE and daily drinking) are supplemented by self-reports of drinking problems, 92 persons of the sample of 227, or 41% of the sample, are identified as problem drinkers.

Table 2. Validation of Estimate of Problem Drinkers in the Manhattan Sample (N=227)

	N	%
a. <u>Total identified by CAGE and/or daily drinking measure</u>	78	34
b. Of the total identified by CAGE and daily drinking measures, reporting a current or past problem	63	28
c. Reporting a current or past problem but not identified by CAGE or daily drinking measures	14	6
d. Total problem drinkers in sample (a + c)	92	41

Analyses were made of the sample of problem drinkers selected by the CAGE and frequency measures in order to assess the impact of problem drinking on employment, drug-use, crime, and other factors.

A. CAGE Sample

Affirmative answers by a respondent to two or more of the four CAGE questions (reprinted below) were used as a means of screening participants for alcohol problems.<sup>4</sup>

The CAGE Questions

1. Have you ever felt you ought to cut down on your drinking? (C---cut down)
2. Have people ever annoyed you by criticizing or talking about your drinking? (A---annoyed)
3. Have you ever felt guilty about your drinking? (G---guilty)
4. Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover? (E---eye opener)

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<sup>4</sup> Ewing and Rouse, op.cit.

The CAGE questions were administered to a group of 227 experimentals and controls in the first annual interview. Fifty-one or 22% answered affirmatively to two or more of the four CAGE questions, and were thus identified as likely to have serious alcohol problems.\*

The CAGE group was analyzed to discover if sex, age, or other demographic factors could be identified as predictors of problem drinkers. No significant differences in demographic characteristics between the CAGE group and the rest of the Manhattan sample were found.

Physical health often reflects the effects of heavy and prolonged drinking, and health-related alcohol problems will in turn bear upon an employee's ability to perform well. Studies have suggested that "alcoholism has greater and more serious medical consequences than does addiction to any other drug."<sup>5</sup> One indication of physical health, hospitalizations per year, is telling. Fifty-two percent of the CAGE group

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\* Of the 51, 30 are from the experimental group and 21 are from the control group.

<sup>5</sup> Bacon, M., "The dependency conflict hypothesis and the frequency of drunkenness," Quart J. Stud. Alcohol, 35:863-876, 1974.

controls and 37% of the CAGE group experimentals, or a combined 45% of the CAGE group, were hospitalized during the first year. In contrast, 17% of the Manhattan sample were hospitalized during the same time period.

An employee's job performance may be affected in part by the degree of stability in his home life. Difficulties associated with alcoholism that affect the family are many, and range from incursion of debts to marital conflict and child abuse. The CAGE group was asked about the quality of their family relationships in the open-ended discussion portion of the annual interviews. Most of the group made no mention of their families. None indicated that their drinking affected their family relationships. Thirty percent of the controls and one-half of the experimentals mentioned that their family relationships were good. This was usually expressed by saying something like, "My family has always stuck by me." The remainder of both groups made no mention of family relationships.

In order to determine whether the CAGE group mentioned their families less often than did the rest of the Manhattan sample, a random sampling of 30 other first year annual interviews (15 controls and 15 experimentals) was made. Although the CAGE group did in fact

discuss their families less often than did the others, the difference was not significant.

Table 2 shows that the CAGE group lived alone significantly more often than did the rest of the Manhattan sample. CAGE experimentals lived with a drinker significantly more often than did their Manhattan sample counterparts. Although an equal proportion of both groups have children, fewer CAGE controls had children living with them. There were no differences among the experimentals.

Table 2: CAGE Group-Living Arrangements

	CAGE Con. N=21	Man. Sample Con. N=90	CAGE Exps. N=30	Man. Sample Exps. N=86
Live alone	37%	31%	23%	16%
Live with drinker	11%	3%	21%	7%
Have children	57%	60%	70%	66%
Live with children	8%	32%	38%	42%

Studies of criminal offenders indicate that heavy drinking is associated with crime, and, in particular, with interpersonal crimes. Additional evidence that alcohol promotes illegal activity can be seen in a comparison of self-reported arrests and hustling for the CAGE and Manhattan sample groups.

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Boyatzis, R., "The effect of alcohol consumption on the aggressive behavior of men;" Quart J. Stud. Alc., - 35:959-972, 1974.

Table 3. CAGE Group - Arrests and Hustling  
in First Year\*

	CAGE Group N=51	Man. Sample N=176
Arrested during the first year	31%	17%
Arrested for violent crimes	15%	5%
Hustling reported during the first year	53%	31%

The CAGE group reported significantly more arrests and hustling than did the rest of the Manhattan sample. Verified data on arrests indicate that one-half of the CAGE group's arrests were for violent crimes, in contrast to 29% of the sample as a whole.

Drug use\*\* among experimentals in the CAGE group is significantly higher than that of the rest of the Manhattan sample. The pattern for controls is reversed.

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\* Data from the experimental and control subgroups of the CAGE group and Manhattan sample have been combined because no significant differences between the subgroups exist.

Records reported for arrests have been checked against police records for accuracy. Hustling rates are self-reported, and it is possible that respondents are more willing to report hustling.

\*\* Self-reported illicit drug use excluding marijuana and alcohol.



Table 4: CAGE Group - Drug Use

	CAGE Con. N=21	Man. Sample Con. N=90	CAGE Exps. N=30	Man. Sample Exps. N=86
Used drugs during entire year	29%	40%	40%	18%

B. Daily Drinking Sample

In addition to those identified by the CAGE questions as alcoholic or having alcohol problems, 27 other experimentals and controls in the Manhattan sample reported daily use of alcohol. These 27 people represent 12% of the total sample, and comprise alcohol drinkers who were not identified by the CAGE questions.

The group identified as daily drinkers was compared to the rest of the Manhattan sample and the CAGE group along the variables used in the CAGE analysis of this report. (See pp. 8-15.)

Statistical profiles of the daily drinking (high frequency of drinking) group mirror those of the CAGE group. Differences between the high frequency and low frequency (those not identified as daily drinkers) groups also mirror those between the CAGE group and the rest of the Manhattan sample.

- Demographic profiles of high and low frequency drinkers were similar.
- Frequent drinkers report more drug use and criminal activity than the low frequency drinkers.

C. Alcohol Use and Work

Job performance and other work-related data for the CAGE group, frequent drinkers, and others was analyzed to determine the nature of the relationship between alcohol problems and work.

1. The CAGE group was compared to the Manhattan sample in regard to constancy of employment.

Table 5: CAGE Group - Employment Status\*

	CAGE Group N=51	Man. Sample N=176
Worked during first year	75%	72%
Mean number of weeks worked	21.1 wks.	26.75 wks.
Employed at the time of first annual interview	27%	51%

\* Data from the experimental and control subgroups of the CAGE group and Manhattan sample have been combined because no significant differences between the subgroups within the CAGE group and Manhattan sample exist. Differences between the CAGE group and Manhattan sample are shown in the table.

In discussions, most CAGE persons did not speak of their jobs beyond reporting that they were working. Ten percent of the CAGE group reported that alcohol use affects their work or employability, and explained that effect as alcohol-related medical problems which caused problems with supervisors over alcohol use.

2. The CAGE group and daily drinking experimentals were compared. CAGE group experimentals were more likely than daily drinkers to be terminated for negative reasons; less likely to be promoted out; had twice the number of absences per month; and worked at Wildcat a fewer number of weeks.

Table 6: CAGE and Daily Drinker Experimentals - Job Performance Data

	CAGE Exps. (N=21)	Daily Drinker Exps. (N=15)	Man. Sample Exps.*
Weeks worked at Wildcat	28.7 wks.	32.3 wks.	40.0 wks.
Average monthly absences	20.7%	10.0%	9%
Negative terminations	57%	25%	23%
Promotions out	14%	20%	19%

\* Number of weeks worked at Wildcat is an average figure for Wildcat employees in the first year. The absenteeism rate is an average over wildcat's first two years. Negative terminations and promotions out are per the total number of Wildcat employees (N=467) at the end of 12 months.

3. The job performance of a sample of 55 employees who had been identified as possible problem drinkers was analyzed. These problem drinkers were identified with information from weekly status reports (because they had been suspended, demoted, terminated or put on inactive status for alcohol-related reasons), and by the Employee Services Unit logs of the types of problems for which employees received counseling.

The absenteeism rate for the problem drinkers is consistently, although not significantly higher than for the general employee population (Table 7). It should be noted that the monthly variations in individual attendance were marked, a possible indication of "binge" drinking.

Table 7. Problem Drinkers - Attendance Summary

	<u>Four Month Average Attendance Rate</u>
Problem drinkers	10.9%
General employee population	8.8%

Punctuality data fails to reveal significant difference between the incidence of lateness and early departures for problem drinkers and the general samples, although there is a higher incidence of both lateness and early departures for the problem drinkers.

Status changes of the sample of problem drinkers were compared to those of the overall Wildcat population along five variables: promotions, demotions, suspensions, inactive status, and terminations for a six-month period.\*

Table 8. Problem Drinkers - Status Changes

	Problem Drinkers Per 100 Emp.	General Employee Population Per 100 Emp.
Promotions outside Wildcat	0	1.1
Promotions within Wildcat	0	.3
Demotions	.5	.3
Suspensions	13.1	13.9
Inactives	6.0	1.9
Terminations	6.5	2.0

\* It should be noted that the number of sample members varied slightly each month, as some were terminated or inactive and thus eliminated from the sample. The numbers were adjusted accordingly to allow for comparison.

The performance data for the alcohol sample was computed by taking the number of status changes in that category for all the months for which data on the number of suspensions was available divided by the number of cases used, and multiplied by 100 to result in a status change rate per 100 employed. These rates were compared to the average of the unit average monthly rates per 100 employed from September through March, data which was taken from the Wildcat monthly reports.

Suspensions: Suspension rates were considerably higher for problem drinkers than for those of the total employee population. All of the suspensions for the sample of problem drinkers were either for alcohol-related infractions (drinking or intoxication on the job) or for absenteeism. Fifty-three percent of suspensions for problem drinkers were for absenteeism and punctuality, and 47% for alcohol-related reasons.

Inactives: Inactive rates were higher for problem drinkers than for the rest of Wildcat. Since inactive status can be obtained only for health reasons, problem drinkers have more health problems than the overall employee population. In addition, several inactives were the result of detoxification from alcohol.

Terminations: Terminations of alcohol abusing employees are more frequent than for the overall population. The reason most often cited is absenteeism.

#### IV. Summary and Conclusions

Forty percent of the random sample of Wildcat employees have been identified as probably alcoholic, having current or past drinking problems, or drinking frequently. This estimate, although based on three different measures, is suspected to under-represent the extent of alcohol problems at Wildcat.

Subjective information on the incidence of alcohol use and problems at Wildcat, from discussions with employees and staff, indicates perceptions of a high level of alcohol use and related problems.

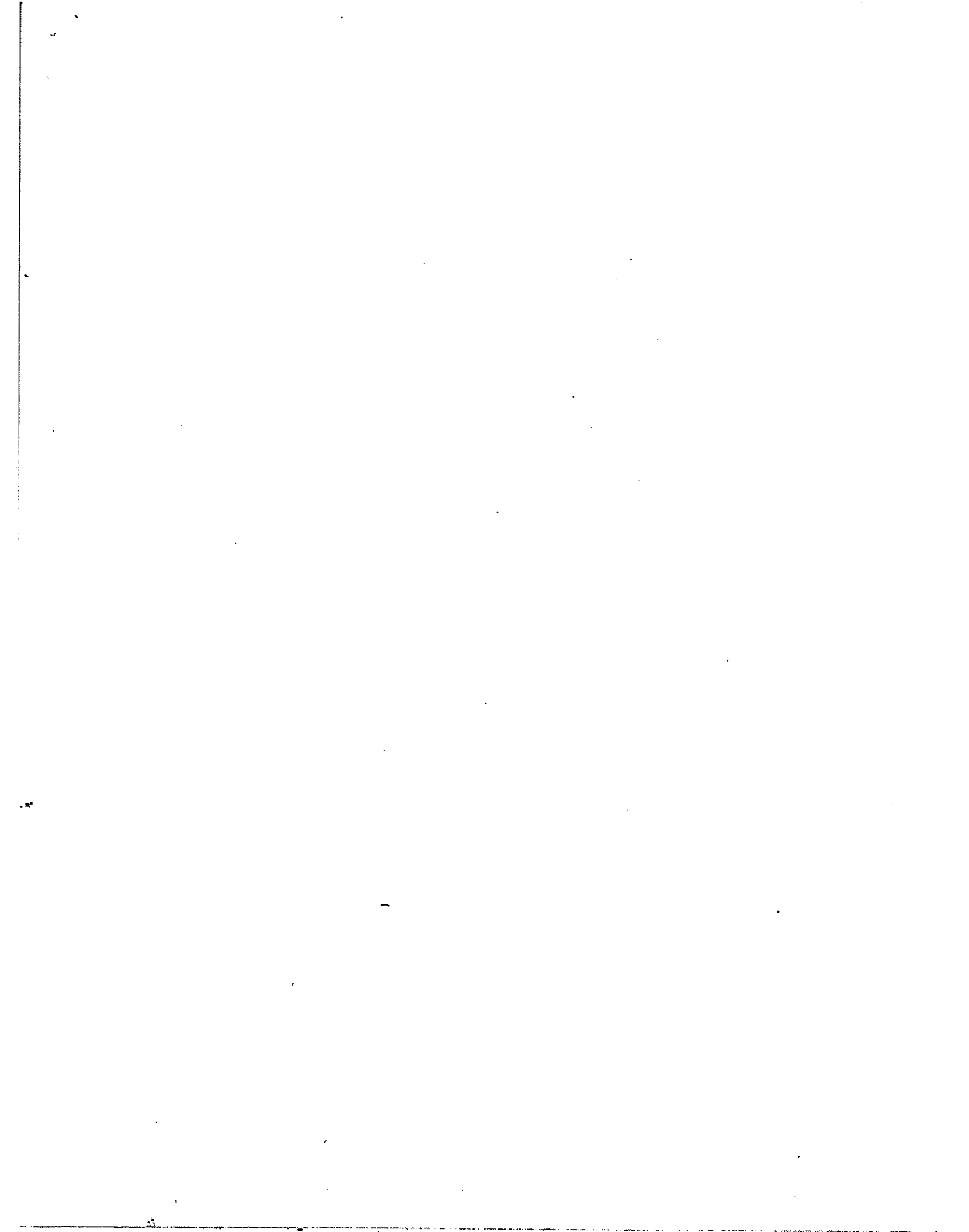
Employees agree that there is drinking on job sites and at lunch, as in other corporations. A supervisor claims that in a two week period, of the 15 individual crews he visited, (each with an average of 5 crew members), there was at least one crew-member displaying recognizable signs of intoxication at each site. Counselors have reported visiting sites where the entire crew was either drinking or intoxicated.

Another reason that the extent of alcohol use is expected to be higher than the CAGE and frequency measures indicate is the relationship of methadone maintenance to alcohol use. The combination of alcohol

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and methadone is thought by some to create a "nodding high," and may be an approximation of a heroin-induced high. It was recently reported that one-half of the persons admitted to a New York City methadone program are<sup>8</sup> addicted to alcohol.

The suspicion that polydrug use is a problem for Wildcat is borne out by research findings: 44% of the experimental and control groups report that they have been drinking more since the cessation of regular heroin use. Also, 88% of the CAGE group were in methadone programs during the year prior to the first annual interview, and 82% of the CAGE group indicated that alcohol was or had been a problem.

Alcohol problems may be more serious in populations which are drug-dependent. It is reported that physiological addiction to alcohol can occur within three to nine months for drug-dependent persons, while the time period for addiction among non-drug-dependent persons is five to 15 years.<sup>9</sup> In addition, recent medical studies have reported that methadone-maintained alcoholics consume two to four times the amount (four to sixteen pints of wine) of alcohol daily as do non-

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8. Bihari, B., Op.cit.

9. Bihari, B., "Alcoholism in M.M.T.P. patients: etiological factors and treatment approaches," Proceedings Fifth National Conference on Methadone Treatment, 1974.

drug-dependent alcoholics, who average two to four pints a day. This report concluded that "Both the condensation of the time it takes to become addicted to alcohol and the large amounts consumed produce medical problems of greater severity and more rapidly in drug-dependent populations."<sup>10</sup>

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In order to deal with problem drinking among its employees, Wildcat needs first to obtain a satisfactory estimate of the extent of such drinking in the corporation. Second, Wildcat needs a corporation-wide policy concerning employee alcohol problems -- a need common to the private sector as well. Wildcat departs from the norm in its goal of rehabilitation and consequent need to balance the tolerance needed by the employee with an alcohol problem with the demands of providing public services.

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10. Ibid.