

The revocation of conditionally-released women: A research summary

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The purpose and focus of this study was to identify predictors of conditional release failure amongst substance abusing women offenders and the variables associated with failure on conditional release. The sample consisted of 483 women offenders who were serving, or had recently served federal sentences under the supervision of Correctional Services Canada (CSC). All women had been identified as having a substance abuse problem at intake assessment. The conditional release of the women offenders included day parole, full parole, and statutory release.

Assessment

Prior to release, it is necessary to assess the likelihood that the offender will commit another offence before the expiration of his or her sentence. One aspect of the risk principle for effective correctional programming is that recidivism can be predicted at better than chance levels if relevant criminogenic factors are considered². Although this principle can be applied across various sub-populations of offenders, it is likely that the relevancy of certain risk and need factors vary. In hopes of identifying predictors of conditional release failure, this study identifies prominent risk and need factors within the sub-population of federal substance abusing women offenders.

In a meta-analytic review, Gendreau, Little and Goggin³ reported that factors such as antisocial companions, antisocial cognitions, antisocial personality, criminal history, and substance abuse were some of the strongest predictors of criminal recidivism. Researchers have generally found that recidivism or return to custody for women offenders is associated with problems in the criminogenic need areas of education/employment⁴; marital/family⁵; antisocial associates⁶, and antisocial attitudes⁷.

Substance Abuse Treatment

The efficacy of substance abuse treatment in reducing recidivism has not yet been clearly demonstrated in research with women offenders. In their meta-analysis, Dowden and Andrews⁸ found that whether or not programs targeted substance abuse was not significantly correlated with reductions in recidivism for women ($r = -.01$). This suggests that substance abuse treatment may not result in reductions in recidivism for women offenders. However, Dowden

and Blanchette⁹ reported that, within a sample of 44 substance abusing women offenders who were recommended for substance abuse treatment, the 27 who received such treatment had a significantly lower recidivism rate than their untreated counterparts. In the present study, revocation rates were compared between women who completed any substance abuse treatment program while incarcerated, and those who did not.

Variables

Several independent variables were examined: age, admission offence type, substance abuse treatment, and the (CIS) Community Intervention Scale (formerly known as the Community Risk/Management Scale¹⁰). The CIS defines seven domains that may be contributing factors to an individual's reoffending: Employment, Marital/Family Relations, Associates and Social Interaction, Substance Abuse, Community Functioning, Personal/Emotional Orientation, and Attitude. Three types of conditional release failure were considered (a) general revocation, (b) revocation with a new offence, and (c) revocation with a new violent offence. Revocation was defined as returning to federal custody after release and before warrant expiry. The base rate of general revocation was high (48%), revocation with a new offence was moderate (16%); revocation with a new violent offence was low (4%). For the most part, variables that predicted the more specific outcomes were also associated with the most general revocation variable.

Background

Most federally sentenced women offenders are granted parole and complete their sentences while living in the community. All participants had been granted a conditional release between January 1, 1995 and December 31, 2000: 73% of the women were released on day parole ($n = 353$); 9% were released on full parole ($n = 41$), and 18% were released at their statutory release date ($n = 89$). The average age of the women at release was 32.63 years ($SD = 8.08$); their ages ranged from 18 to 57.

Admitting Offences

Admission offence type was scored from the Offender Management Database (OMS; CSC's automated

record system). Each admission offence was coded as falling into one of several distinct categories: (a) Drug (e.g. possession, trafficking), (b) Fraud/Theft/Break and Enter, (c) Miscellaneous Nonviolent (e.g. court order breaches, impaired driving, etc.), (d) Assault (e.g. assault, assault causing bodily harm, etc.), (e) Robbery, (f) Sexual, (g) Homicide (e.g. murder, manslaughter, infanticide), (h) Miscellaneous Violent (e.g. firearms offences, kidnapping). It should be noted that although the categories were distinct, offenders often had more than one admitting offence.

Revocation

Age was significantly and negatively associated with revocation. Several admission offence types were positively associated with revocation including theft, miscellaneous non-violent offences, and robbery demonstrated a significant association with revocation: employment, associates, substance abuse, community, and attitude. The overall CIS Need and Risk ratings also demonstrated a moderate association with revocation failure. Having completed substance abuse treatment was not associated with conditional release outcome.

Predictors

A backwards logistic regression reduced the list of predictive variables to six unique predictors: age, overall CIS need rating, employment needs, substance abuse rating, attitude, and having an admission offence of theft, fraud, or break and enter. These results suggest that the prediction of post-release outcome for substance abusing women can be improved by attending to the noted risk and need factors.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that are predictive of revocation of conditional release for substance abusing women. In sum, the base rate of revocation in this sample (48%) was considerably higher than that reported in earlier research studies. However, the sample for this study consisted of only substance abusing women, who are at greater risk for recidivism compared to women who do not have substance abuse problems.

Age at release was negatively associated with revocation; and release age made a significant unique contribution towards predicting revocation in the regression model. Overall, it appears that age is a significant risk factor for substance abusing women offenders. Notably, type of release was not related to revocation: the rates of revocation, revocation with a new offence, and revocation with a new violent offence were the same across each type of release.

Examination of release conditions indicated that there were regional variations on the number of conditions imposed upon offenders. Women in Ontario received the most conditions, and women in the Prairie region received the least number of conditions. Regional variations in the number of conditions imposed do not appear to be related to risk or need levels. The authors of this study speculate that this variation may be attributed to differences amongst the decision-making bodies. Interestingly, the nature and number of imposed release conditions were not related to revocation rates. It was expected that the number of conditions would be positively associated with revocation: that high-risk offenders would be subject to more conditions, and would be supervised more closely, thereby increasing their chances of “failure”. This hypothesis was not borne out. Prospective research might examine this issue further by looking at the nature and number of conditions in relation to the precise reasons for revocation.

It was interesting to note that relatively few substance abusing women had conditions imposed related to drugs and alcohol. This contradicts the thought that women offenders with substance abuse problems are likely to fail on conditional release because of imposed conditions related to their addiction.

Several interesting associations between admitting offence and conditional release revocation were observed. Having a current theft/fraud/break and enter offence was a moderate predictor of revocation, and revocation with a new offence. Similarly, the miscellaneous non-violent category was also associated with revocation. Having a current drug offence was not associated with revocation. Robbery was the only type of violent admitting offence that was positively associated with revocation. Notably, having a current offence involving homicide was associated with lower rates of reincarceration.

The logistic regression analysis indicated that the current offence of theft/fraud/or break and enter was the strongest single offence type predictor, and that it captured the predictive aspects of the other admission offence variables. The results suggest that a simple indicator of “severity of current offence” may not be an appropriate risk indicator for substance abusing women offenders. Instead of gauging the severity of the crime, it may be more appropriate to categorize offences according to if they were motivated by monetary gain (excluding drug offences). This variable might be particularly salient amongst women who have a substance abuse problem because having a serious drug addiction makes it difficult to hold down a job, and because maintaining an addiction is expensive. This hypothesis is tentative, and will require further investigation in a sample that includes

women who have a substance abuse problem, and women who do not have a substance abuse problem.

The study also found that substance abusing women offenders had more needs than non-substance abusers, and that they had higher need levels overall. In the present sample of substance abusing women, the prevalence rates of identified needs across six of the seven CIS domains were higher than those based on a large mixed sample of women offenders, as reported by Dowden et al.¹¹

It was surprising to find that 80% of the sample were identified as having a substance abuse problem at release, because 100% of the sample was identified as having a substance abuse problem at intake. Results indicated that the differences between intake assessment and release assessment were, in part, attributable to offenders having addressed their substance abuse problems through treatment. It is also possible that some offenders addressed their problems without treatment. Alternatively, the differences may be attributable to the assessment process. Assessment at admission and assessment at release may have been informed by different facts. Lastly, the workers who assessed the same facts at intake and release may have disagreed with respect to the appropriate rating. Further research on the inter-rater reliability of the OIA process and the CIS might help to clarify this matter.

Five of the seven Community Intervention Scale need domains were significantly associated with recidivism: Employment, Associates, Substance Abuse, Community and Attitude. The overall CIS Risk and Need ratings were also moderate predictors of revocation. These results are largely consistent with those of Dowden et al.¹², who

examined the predictive validity of the CIS within a sample of women offenders. The exception was that the Personal/Emotional domain was predictive in their sample, but it was not within the current sample of substance abusing women.

The regression analyses indicated that most of the CIS domains were independent predictors of revocation. The overall risk rating, and the community functioning domain did not make unique contributions towards predicting revocation. The results indicated that both of these variables overlapped considerably with the overall Need rating.

This study failed to find an association between substance abuse treatment and revocation. This finding is consistent with some prior studies^{13,14}, and inconsistent with others¹⁵. Although current results suggest that having received substance abuse treatment while incarcerated does not seem to be a predictor of conditional release success among women substance abusers, more research is still warranted.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that current assessment practices — the use of the CIS in particular — are effective within the subpopulation of substance abusing women offenders. The results support the view that substance abuse is only one of many need factors, and that consideration of other known dynamic factors is relevant and necessary in the prediction of post-release outcome. ■

Note: This article is an abstract of the original Research Report R-133 and is only a summary of the research conducted by P. Verbrugge, K. Nunes, S. Johnson and K. Taylor. The original report is posted on the Correctional Service of Canada Website.

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³ Gendreau, P., Little, T. & Goggin, C. (1996). A meta-analysis of the predictors of adult offender recidivism: What Works! *Criminology*, 34, 575-607.

⁴ Blanchette, K. (1996). *The Relationship between Criminal History, Mental Disorder, and Recidivism Among Federally Sentenced Female Offenders*. Unpublished Masters Thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON.

⁵ Blanchette, K., & Motiuk, L. L. (1995). *Female Offender Risk Assessment: The Case Management Strategies Approach*. Poster presented at the Annual Convention of the Canadian Psychological Association, Charlottetown, PEI.

⁶ Dowden, C., & Andrews, D. A. (1999). What works for female offenders: A meta-analytic review. *Crime and Delinquency*, 45, 438-452.

⁷ Brown, S.L., & Motiuk, L.L. (in press). The Dynamic Factor Component of the Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) Process: A Psychometric, Meta-analytic and Field Review. Research Branch, Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

⁸ Op.Cit. , Dowden & Andrews (1999).

⁹ Dowden, C., & Blanchette, K. (1999). *An Investigation into the Characteristics of Substance-Abusing Women Offenders: Risk, Need and Post-Release Outcome*. Research Report No. R-81. Research Branch, Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

¹⁰ Motiuk, L.L., & Porporino, F. (1989b). *Field Test of the Community Risk Needs Management Scale: A Study of Offenders on Caseload*. Research Report No. R-06. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

¹¹ Dowden, C., Serin, R., & Blanchette, K. (2001). *The Application of the Community Intervention Scale to Women Offenders: Preliminary Findings*. Research Report No. R-97. Research Branch, Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

¹² Op.Cit., Dowden et al. (2001).

¹³ Bonta, J., Pang, B., & Wallace-Capretta, S. (1995). Predictors of recidivism among incarcerated female offenders. *The Prison Journal*, 75, 277-294.

¹⁴ Op.Cit., Dowden & Andrews (1999).

¹⁵ Op.Cit. , Dowden & Blanchette (1999).