

Recidivism Among Walkaways While at Large

Escapes from correctional institutions are rare, except from minimum-security institutions.⁽²⁾ These institutions have no fences, walls or armed control posts around their perimeters. Because of this, an escape from a minimum-security institution is referred to as a "walkaway," not as an escape in the common sense of the word.

Minimum-security institutions focus on the rehabilitation and social reintegration of offenders, so inmates have access to the community through temporary absences and day parole. Offenders classified to serve their sentences in minimum-security institutions are not considered likely to walk away, or if they do, are not considered a serious risk to the community.

There is little empirical research on escape behaviour in general, so not much is known about the risk of escaped offenders reoffending while at large. The Correctional Service of Canada's Institutional Operations Division recently examined the number of walkways recaptured and charged with serious offences in the 1992-1993 fiscal year.⁽³⁾ Walkaway Profile During this period, there were 189 walkways. Of the 174 who were recaptured as of 13 April 1993, 12 (6.8%) were charged with serious offences (see the figure). These offences included: robbery ⁽⁷⁾, assault causing bodily harm ⁽²⁾, attempted murder ⁽²⁾ and sexual assault ⁽¹⁾. The following is a descriptive profile of the 12 offenders:

- nine were single (unmarried);
- the average age of the offenders was 32 years old;
- eight had a history of both parole failure and escape behaviour;
- six had served previous federal terms;
- 11 had been involved in at least three previous institutional security incidents;
- on average, the offender had 34 criminal convictions (convictions ranged from 1 to 70);
- the major offence committed by nine of these offenders was robbery, two were serving life sentences for murder; and
- excluding the offenders serving life terms, the average length of sentence was 11.4 years.

Thus, the majority of these walkways were repeat offenders and could have been considered institutional troublemakers and habitual escapees. 1991 Walkaway Report A previous report⁽⁴⁾ analyzed walkaway incidents and the rates of walkways per 1,000 inmates from federal minimum-security institutions between 1 April and 30 September 1991. The report focused on 79 walk-away incidents involving 95 offenders⁽⁵⁾ and the offences committed by the escapees while at large in the community.

As of 12 December 1991, 84 of the 95 inmates (88.4%) who walked away between 1 April and 30 September 1991 were recaptured. Of the 84 recaptured inmates, about half (48.8%) were re-apprehended within one week, and three quarters (75%) of them had not committed a new offence while at large.

However, one quarter ⁽²¹⁾ of the inmates who walked away were charged with new criminal offences when recaptured. Fifteen were charged with minor offences (e.g., theft, fraud, break and enter), while the remaining six were charged with serious offences (two with assault with a weapon and four with armed

robbery). In other words, only 6 of the 84 recaptured inmates (7.1%) were charged with a serious offence.

Previous research from other jurisdictions also found that most walkways do not commit new offences while at large and only a few commit serious offences.⁽⁶⁾ However, comparisons of results must be made cautiously because of differences in definitions of escape and new offence, and of differences in inmate populations, criminal justice systems and research methods.

Conclusions It is easy to conclude that escapes occur because offenders do not want to be confined. But, even though most incarcerated offenders would like to be free, the majority do not attempt to escape, even from minimum-security institutions. Therefore, to further reduce escapes, correctional authorities must develop a clearer understanding of the other factors that cause inmates to attempt to escape.⁽⁷⁾ Appropriate intervention programs could then be introduced to prevent escapes to an even greater degree, further reducing the threat posed by potential escapees to institutional staff and the community.

A sensational incident involving an escapee can cause the public to overlook effective operations in the correctional system. One must also examine the success stories,⁽⁸⁾ such as the number of inmates who do not escape and who are reintegrated into society as law-abiding citizens.

Finally, it is suggested that further research be conducted on the crimes committed by walkways and escapees while at large.

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⁽²⁾S.P. Davis, "Survey: Inmate Populations Up - But Escapes Down," *Corrections Compendium, XIV, 5 (May 1991): 8-12.*

⁽³⁾Data on offender profiles and on new charges (offences) were provided by CPIC (Canadian Police Information Centre) and SPS (Security Profile System) data bases.

⁽⁴⁾R. Sturrock, *Mid-Year Report on Walkways from Minimum Security Institutions (1991-04-01 to 1991-09-30) (Ottawa: Institutional Operations Division, Correctional Service of Canada, May 1992).*

⁽⁵⁾*Ibid.*, p.3.

⁽⁶⁾See A. Gorta and T. Sillavan, "Escapes from New South Wales Gaols: Placing the Risk In Perspective," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology, 24 (1991): 204-218.* See also L.K. Holt, *Statistical Bulletin on Escapees for 1986: A Profile of Escapees and Returns From Escape during 1986 and Individuals on Escape Status on December 31, 1986 (Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Department of Correction, 1987).* And see T.H. Murphy, *Prediction of Minimum Security Walkways (Lansing, Mich.: Michigan Department of Corrections, 1984).* And see D. Porritt, "The Threat From Escapes: Some Facts About Prison Escapes," *Research Bulletin, No.6 (Sydney, New South Wales: New South Wales Department of Corrective Services, March 1982).*

⁽⁷⁾See J. Johnston and L. Motiuk, *Factors Related to Unlawful Walkways from Minimum Security*

Institutions (*Ottawa: Research and Statistics Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 1992*). See also R. Sturrock, F. Porporino and J. Johnston, Literature Review on the Factors Related to Escape from Correctional Institutions (*Ottawa: Research and Statistics Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 1990*).

⁽⁸⁾See "Beaver Creek Institution: What About Success Stories," *The Banner*, September 23, 1992, p. A2.