

The demographic characteristics of offenders on day parole

In the Canadian correctional system, conditional release programs (day parole, full parole and statutory release⁽²⁾) make it possible for offenders to be released from prison to serve a portion of their sentence in the community. Throughout the period of conditional release, the offender may be returned to prison if there is a failure to meet certain legally binding conditions concerning residency and behaviour.

When full parole is granted or the statutory release date is reached, offenders are released into the community until their sentence has expired. However, day parole is unique in that it is granted for a relatively short period (frequently six months) and its completion does not coincide with the expiry of the offender's sentence.

Day parole is also unique because the offenders must live in a correctional facility (prison or halfway house) or must report to such a facility at regular intervals, restricting their activities in the community and ensuring tighter control of the offenders by correctional officials.

At present, offenders become eligible for day parole six months before the date at which they are eligible for full parole, which is set at one third of their sentence. However, this method of calculating eligibility has only been in use since November 1992.⁽³⁾ Before that, offenders generally became eligible for day parole after they had served one sixth of their sentence.⁽⁴⁾

This article examines the demographic characteristics of offenders on day parole and, in particular, their failure (of day parole) rate, in an attempt to identify risk factors -a matter of considerable importance in view of the relatively short interval between the start of offender sentences and their eligibility for day parole. Method of study The data for this study were obtained by reviewing offender records. A representative sample of 929 non-native male offenders was chosen from among those who completed (successfully or otherwise) their day parole in the 1990-1991 fiscal year. All female (44) and native male offenders (77) who completed day parole during the year were also included in the sample. Type of day parole and sentence length There are three basic types of day parole. Regular day parole, which lasts for approximately four to six months, requires the offender to return to a community correctional centre, community residential centre or institution each evening. Special projects day parole allows offenders simply to work outside the institution during the day. Finally, there is the "other" category of day parole, which only requires the offender to return to an institution or community centre periodically.

The majority of those in the sample had been granted regular day parole (87% of the male offenders, 95% of the female offenders, and 97% of the native offenders), with only a small proportion of the male offenders released on special projects day parole (8%) or other type of day parole (3%) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Day Parole Type and Sentence Characteristics of Offenders on Day Parole
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	Male offenders	Female offenders	Native male offenders
Day parole type			
Regular	87.3 %	95.0 %	97.2 %
Special Projects	8.1 %	2.5 %	0
Other	2.6 %	2.5 %	2.8%
Total Sentence			
2-4 years	63.8 %	65.9 %	66.2 %
5-9 years	24.8 %	31.8 %	28.6 %
10 years or longer	8.1 %	0	2.6 %
Life	3.3 %	2.3 %	2.6 %
Number *	929	44	77
* The total numbers of the various categories may not equal the total samples because of missing values.			

Approximately two thirds of the entire group were serving sentences of two to four years in length. As you might expect, the number of offenders in each category dropped as the sentences got longer. Twenty-five percent of the male offenders, 32% of the female offenders and 29% of the native offenders were serving sentences of five to nine years in length, and only approximately 3% of each group were serving a life sentence. Demographic characteristics The majority of the offenders on day parole were between the ages of 26 and 40. This age group accounted for roughly 60% of the male and native offenders and slightly more than half of the female offenders. The male and native offenders in the sample followed roughly the same age distribution, but the female population was slightly younger, with close to a third in the 17-25 age group (see Table 2).

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics (at the time of their offence) of Offenders on Day Parole			
	Male offenders	Female offenders	Native male offenders
Age *			
17 - 25 years old	22.0 %	29.5 %	25.0 %
26 - 40	59.0 %	52.3 %	60.5%
Older than 40	19.0 %	18.2 %	14.5 %
Marital Status			
Single	35.7 %	35.0 %	29.6 %
Married or common law relationship	49.6 %	52.5 %	56.3 %

Separated, divorced or widowed	14.7 %	12.5 %	14.1 %
Employment Status			
Unemployed	50.3 %	57.1 %	60.0 %
Employed	45.8 %	40.5 %	29.2 %
Student, retired or incarcerated	3.9 %	2.4 %	10.8 %
Education level			
8th grade or less	30.8 %	27.9 %	56.8 %
Grade 9 -13	59.1 %	65.1 %	41.9 %
Post secondary	10.1 %	7.0 %	1.3 %
Number **	929	44	77
* This is the only category not measured at the time of the offence, it was measured at the time of the study			
** The total numbers of the various categories may not equal the total samples because of missing values.			

There was little variation in marital status among the three groups. Approximately half of the offenders in all three groups were married or involved in a common-law relationship at the time of their offence, while roughly 14% of offenders in all three groups were divorced, separated or widowed. However, there were slightly fewer single native offenders on day parole (30%) than male or female offenders (36 and 35%, respectively).

As for employment, more than half of the offenders were unemployed at the time of their offence. The male offender group had the lowest proportion unemployed, at 50%, with the proportion rising to 57% for female offenders and 60% for native offenders.

Close to two thirds (65%) of the female offenders had some level of secondary school education at the time of their offence, and another 7% had received post-secondary education. Similarly, 59% of the male offenders had some level of secondary school education and another 10% had received post-secondary schooling. However, just 42% of the native offenders had received some level of secondary school education at the time of their offence, and the majority (57%) had received less than a ninth-grade education. Failure rate Two types of failure rates were considered in this study. One rate corresponds to the overall day parole failure rate and includes all types of failure: breach of day parole special conditions, revocation of day parole without a new offence, and revocation of day parole because of a new offence. The other rate covers only revocations of day parole because of a new offence. This second rate was calculated in an attempt to determine whether day parole failures were due to the commission of a new offence or simply to "technical" violations.

Because of the small number of women in the sample, the failure rate of female offenders was not examined in detail. However, the overall failure rate for this group was 30%, of which 5% involved a new offence. Small numbers also resulted in the native offenders being included in the male offender

calculations.

The overall failure rate among male offenders was 27% (all forms of day parole), with close to 10% due to a new offence. More specifically, approximately one quarter (26%) of the offenders on regular day parole had their release revoked, 10% of them for a new offence (see Table 3). These rates were lower for special projects day parole and the other types of day parole (both had roughly a 10% overall failure rate, with approximately 4% due to new offence).

Table 3

Day Parole Failure Rates for Day Parole Type and Sentence Characteristics		
	Overall failure rate (for each group)	Failure due to new offence (for each group)
Day Parole Type		
Regular	26.3 %	9.7 %
Special Projects	10.4 %	3.0 %
Other	8.3 %	4.2 %
Total Sentence		
2-4 years	25.7 %	9.3 %
5-9 years	27.2%	9.2%
10 years and longer	32.9 %	11.8%
Life	12.1%	3.0%

Approximately one quarter of offenders serving a sentence of 2-4 years or 5-9 years in length had their conditional release revoked (26% and 27%, respectively). This number rose to roughly one third (33%) of offenders serving a sentence of 10 years or more but was much lower for offenders serving a life sentence (12%).

The trend was similar for the rate of revocation due to a new offence, with a failure rate of just under 10% for the two groups (2-4 years, 5-9 years) of offenders serving sentences shorter than 10 years, slightly higher (12%) for those serving sentences of 10 years or longer, and then lower (3%) for those serving life sentences. Failure rates and demographic characteristics Generally, both failure rates were inversely proportional to age. The overall failure rate was 41% for those under 25, 25% for those 26-40 years old, and 14% for those older than 40. Similarly, the rate of failure due to a new offence was 15% for the youngest age group, 9% for those in the middle, and 5% for the oldest group (see Table 4).

Table 4

Day Parole Failure for Offender Demographic Characteristics		
	Overall Failure rate (for each group)	Failure due to new offence (for each group)
Age *		
17 - 25 years old	40.6 %	14.8 %
26 - 40	24.8 %	8.5 %
Older than 40	14.0 %	5.4 %
Marital Status		
Single	28.5 %	9.5 %
Married or common law relationship	21.9 %	7.6 %
Separated, divorced or widowed	28.0 %	7.0 %
Employment Status		
Unemployed	33.9 %	9.5 %
Employed	16.8 %	7.7 %
Student, retired or incarcerated	31.0 %	19.0 %
Education level		
8th grade or less	28.9 %	9.9 %
Grade 9 -13	25.9 %	8.0 %
Post secondary	19.4 %	12.9 %
* This is the only category not measured at the time of the offence, it was measured at the time of the study		

In relation to marital status, offenders who were married or involved in a common-law relationship at the time of their offence(s) had the lowest overall failure rate, at 22%. Single offenders and divorced, separated or widowed offenders had slightly higher failure rates (29% and 28%, respectively). However, the divorced, separated or widowed offenders had the lowest rate of failure due to a new offence (7%).

Further, offenders who were employed at the time of their offence(s) were twice as likely to be successful on day parole (17% overall failure rate) as those who were not (34% and 31% for the other two groups). On the other hand, offenders who were students, retired or incarcerated at the time of their offence(s) had their release revoked because of a further offence twice as often as the other two groups (19% compared with 10% and 8%). However, this result must be considered with caution, as the student, retired or incarcerated group was much smaller than the unemployed and employed groups.

Finally, the overall failure rate decreased with the offenders' level of education at the time of their offence(s), from 29% for those who had less than a ninth-grade education, to 26% for those with some level of secondary school education, to 19% for those with a post-secondary education. However,

education made little difference to the rate of failure due to a new offence (13% for offenders with a post-secondary education, 10% for those with less than a ninth-grade education, and 8% for those with some level of secondary school education). The typical day parole offender The typical offender released on day parole can be described as a non-native male between the ages of 26 and 40 who probably committed a robbery, property or drug-related offence and, at the time of the offence(s), was married or involved in a common-law relationship, was unemployed, and had completed some secondary school education.

However, the typical offender whose day parole is revoked is somewhat different. The offender is under 25, probably committed a property offence, assault, theft or attempted murder and, at the time of the offence, was neither married nor involved in a common-law relationship, was unemployed, and had less than a ninth-grade education.

This thumbnail sketch suggests areas for further study as we attempt to identify risk factors that could lead to an offender's failure on day parole. Such directed research is crucial to ongoing attempts to improve the correctional system's ability to chose the best offenders for specific forms of conditional release and the best forms of conditional release for specific offenders.

(1)Research and Statistics Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 4B-340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

(2)Statutory release replaced mandatory supervision in the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, which came into effect on November 1, 1993. Statutory release allows an offender to be released into the community after serving two thirds of a fixed-term sentence (life sentences for crimes such as first and second-degree murder are not of a fixed length).

(3)*Corrections and Conditional Release Act*.

(4)*Parole Act*.