

Sex offenders and their survival time on conditional release

The suspension provisions of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act *allow the National Parole Board (or a person designated by the Board, such as a parole officer) to suspend the parole or statutory release (mandatory supervision) of federally sentenced offenders, authorize their arrest, and recommit them to custody until the suspension is cancelled, their parole or statutory release is completely terminated, or their sentence expires.*

Conditional release can be suspended for a variety of reasons, but for sex offenders it is usually because there are indications of an impending further sexual offence.

Few studies have examined the nature and frequency of the suspension rates of offenders on conditional release. Further although numerous studies have examined sex offender recidivism, none have addressed the suspension of sex offenders' conditional release. This study attempts to fill this gap.⁽²⁾

Why?

The suspension of sex offenders' conditional release is an important measure of their post release community adjustment and a vital aspect of any relapse-prevention program. Research method In 1991, a national sex offender census was conducted to accurately identify the number, types and characteristics of federally sentenced sex offenders. The census yielded information on 3,066 sex offenders, 30% of whom were under community supervision.

This study extends the census by using "survival time" models to analyze the time until suspension of sex offenders' conditional release. Survival analysis is a statistical technique that estimates the time taken to reach some event and the rate of occurrence of that event. This allows not only for the identification of offenders likely to have their conditional release suspended, but also for an assessment of how quickly the suspensions will occur.

It is important to note that a distinction is made between suspension warrants that have been issued and those that have been executed. Conditional release is suspended by means of a warrant that is ultimately executed by a peace officer, and the warrant is not considered to have been executed until the offender has actually been arrested. However, for a variety of reasons, correctional authorities may chose to withdraw or cancel the warrant before the offender is actually apprehended. If this happens, the suspension warrant is said to have been issued rather than executed.

From the census data, 793 sex offenders were identified as being on community supervision at the time of the census and available for followup. An additional 216 sex offenders were released from institutions after the census, forming a "new release" group for follow-up.

Of the 793 sex offenders under community supervision at the time of the census, 12.7% were on day parole, 49.4% were on full parole, and 37.8% were on mandatory supervision. of the 216 newly released sex offenders, 15.3% were on day parole, 22.7% were on full parole, and 62.4% were on mandatory supervision. Therefore, the proportion of offenders released on mandatory supervision in the newly

released group was almost twice that of the census group.

The two groups also differed significantly with respect to ethnicity and sentence length. The newly released sex offenders were more likely to be native and to be serving longer sentences.

Suspension data were retrieved from the Correctional Service of Canada's automated Parole Supervision System database. The sex offenders on conditional release at the time of the census were tracked from this time, allowing for a 17-month follow-up period. By the time the suspension data were gathered, this group had been on conditional release for approximately three years.

In contrast, the newly released sex offenders had been identified in institutions at the time of the census and were subsequently released. Therefore, the follow-up period for this group is variable, ranging from 8.4 to 16.3 months, or of about one year. Sex offender suspension rates As expected, conditional release suspension rates for the newly released sex offenders (after the census) were substantially higher than for the offenders already released (at the time of the census). The follow-up of the sex offenders already in the community revealed that suspension warrants had been issued for 144 offenders (18.2%), and warrants had been executed for 78 (9.8%).

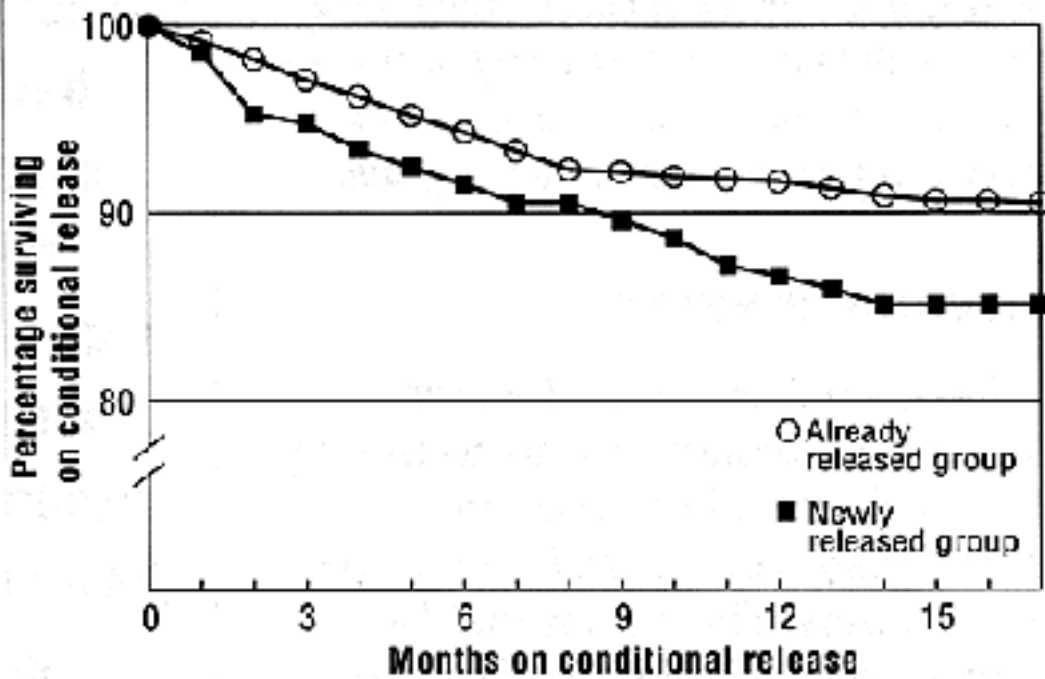
For the newly released sex offenders, suspension warrants had been issued for 65 offenders (30.1%) and warrants had been executed for 34 (15.8%). Therefore, the suspension rate for the newly released sex offenders was almost double that of the sex offenders already in the community. Survival time Although both groups were issued suspension warrants at a continuous rate, the newly released sex offenders had their conditional release suspended significantly faster than those already on conditional release at the time of the census.

More specifically, the survival rate (not being issued a suspension warrant) at six months after release was 91.7% for the already released group and 82.8% for those newly released. At 12 months, these numbers had dropped to 86.1% for those already released and 74.6% for those newly released, and by the end of the study period they had dropped to 82.7% and 68.8%, respectively.

A similar pattern emerged when survival times for the two groups were compared in terms of suspension warrants being executed (see Figure 1). Once again, the survival time on conditional release was higher for the sex offenders who had already been released into the community (90.5% at the end of the study period) than for the newly released sex offenders (85.1% at the end of the study period).

Figure 1

Survival Time on Conditional Release: Suspension Warrants Executed



Survival time and offender characteristics Data on survival times and various offender characteristics were also analyzed for both groups. The following are general descriptions of several of the more important findings.

While the newly released sex offenders were more likely to be released on mandatory supervision than on day or full parole, these offenders also had their conditional release suspended at a significantly greater and faster rate than the newly released sex offenders on day or full parole.

Unmarried sex offenders (in both groups) had their conditional release suspended at a greater and faster rate than their married counterparts.

Sex offenders with a history of sexual offending had their conditional release suspended at a greater and faster rate than first-time sex offenders. Further, sex offenders whose most recent offence was not sexual in nature but who had committed sexual offences in the past were just as likely (if not more so) to have their conditional release suspended as sex offenders with both a past and current history of sexual offending.

Along the same lines, sexual assaulters had the greatest and fastest rate of conditional release suspension (in relation to sex offence type) followed by paedophiles and then incest offenders. Further, sex offenders who used force and caused physical injury to female adult victims had the greatest and fastest rate of conditional release suspension (in relation to victim characteristics).

Sex offenders who had abused alcohol or drugs in the past or during their current sexual offence were also more likely to have their conditional release suspended and at a faster rate.

Finally, sex offenders identified as *high-risk/high/need* cases on the Community Risk/Need Management Scale were substantially more likely to have their conditional release suspended than *low-risk/low-need* cases. The Community Risk/Need Management Scale is a systematic approach used by the Correctional Service of Canada to assess the needs of offenders, their risk of reoffending, and any other factors that might affect their successful reintegration into the community. Discussion One limitation of this study was that it didn't address the reason(s) for the suspension of an offender's conditional release. Future investigations should do so. Another limitation was that it did not more fully explore the effects of sex offender treatment on survival time. A focused look at the effect of treatment on conditional release suspension should consider the differential impact of various treatment programs (such as cognitive-behavioural or pharmacological), institutional versus community based treatment programs, and relapse-prevention programs.

Nevertheless, the results of this investigation indicate that both static (such as sex offence history) and dynamic (such as employment or substance abuse) factors play an important role in sex offenders' conditional release outcome. Further, it would seem that risk/need factors commonly associated with the general offender population also apply to the sex offender population. However, there are certain risk factors (such as victimization patterns) uniquely related to the supervision of sexual offenders.

This suggests that a systematic approach to assessing and reassessing a sex offender's needs, coupled with an awareness of sexual preferences (age and gender) and sex offence history, can improve the community supervision of sex offenders.

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(2)For more detailed information, please consult the complete report: L.L. Motiuk and S.L. Brown, *Survival Time Until Suspension for Sex Offenders on Conditional Release* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993), Report 31.