

Offender needs identification and analysis in community corrections

Systematic assessment of offender needs, their risk of reoffending, and any other factor that could affect successful offender reintegration into the community is a major component of both the Correctional Service of Canada and National Parole Board standards for conditional release supervision. In fact, this emphasis on ensuring that criminogenic needs drive community-based programming and service delivery has evolved into the Correctional Service of Canada Correctional Strategy.

As such, an Ontario Region working group recently adopted and adapted the Case Needs Identification and Analysis portion of an offender intake and assessment project (in development at the time and currently being implemented) for use in community *corrections*.

The process combines criminal risk assessment with the identification and analysis of seven offender need areas or criminogenic factors (employment, marital/family, associates/social interaction, substance abuse, community functioning, personal/emotional orientation, and attitude) in an attempt to capture all relevant "criminal history risk" and "case need" information.

A pilot test of this community-based Case Needs Identification and Analysis process was recently conducted in all Ontario Region parole offices and private-sector agencies. This article examines the validity of this enhanced case-management approach to offender needs identification and analysis in community corrections.⁽²⁾ Research method A sample of 573 federally sentenced male offenders who were released from institutions in Ontario Region over a six-month period was gathered for this study (31 female offenders were also examined, but the small sample allowed for only descriptive analysis). As expected, the largest proportion of releases came out of Ontario Region's Central district (55%), followed by the Eastern and Northern district (26%) and the Western district (19%).

Twenty-two of the conditional release sites were Correctional Service of Canada parole offices (including one community correctional centre), while seven were private agency offices (Elizabeth Fry Society; John Howard Society and the Salvation Army). More specifically, the majority of cases were under the direct supervision of the Correctional Service of Canada, with about 16% under the supervision of a private agency.

The conditional release suspension rates calculated for this study represent the suspension of an offender's conditional release for any reason. Risk assessment To determine a level of criminal risk, case managers rely on either the National Parole Board's risk assessment, the Statistical information on Recidivism Scale, or their own judgment of criminal risk based on a thorough review of the offender's criminal record. In this male release sample, 53% of the offenders were classified as low-risk and 47% as high-risk cases.

The pilot testing reconfirmed that case manager assessments of risk (based on the offender's criminal history) can predict conditional release outcome. The conditional release suspension (within six months) rate for low-risk cases was substantially lower (12%) than for high-risk cases (31.3%), and this difference was statistically significant. Need assessment An assessed level of need is simply the compilation of case manager judgments into one of three categories: low-need, medium-need or high-

need. In this male release sample, case managers assessed 44.8% of the offenders as medium-need, 28% as low-need and 27.3% as high-need cases.

The pilot testing identified a relationship between level of need and the outcome of conditional release, replicating the findings of earlier research. The offenders assessed as low-need cases had the lowest conditional release suspension rate (11.7%), followed by medium-need cases (19%) and substantially apart from the high-need cases (33.8%). These differences were also statistically significant. Risk/need assessment A risk/need assessment combines the risk and need assessment levels of offenders. It is noteworthy that the percentage distribution of males assessed as *low-risk/low-need*, *low-risk/medium-need* and *high-risk/high-need* were roughly equivalent (24.3%, 26.7% and 25.2%, respectively) and accounted for the majority of the sample.

The offenders assessed as *high-risk/high-need* were four times as likely to have their conditional release suspended as those assessed as *low-risk/low-need* (see Table 1). Specifically, more than one third (36.7%) of the offenders assessed as high-risk/high-need had their conditional release suspended within six months of their initial assessment, compared with just 9% of those assessed as *low-risk/low-need*. In a nutshell, the combination of case manager assessments of risk and need improved the accuracy of predicting which offenders were most likely to succeed or fail on conditional release.

Table 1

Conditional Release Outcome by Risk/Need Level (573 Offenders)		
	Cases	Conditional release suspended
Risk/need level		
Low-risk/low-need	24.3 %	9.0 %
Low-risk/medium-need	26.7 %	15.7 %
Low-risk/high-need	2.2 %	0
High-risk/low-need	3.5 %	31.6 %
High-risk/medium-need	18.2 %	24.0 %
High-risk/high-need	25.2 %	36.7 %

Identified needs As mentioned, the community-based Case Needs Identification and Analysis identifies and analyzes seven key offender need areas: employment, marital/family, associates/social interaction, substance abuse, community functioning, personal/emotional orientation, and attitude.

Statistical analyses revealed that all seven need areas were significantly related to an offender's likelihood of succeeding or failing on conditional release (see Table 2).

Table 2

Conditional Release Outcome for Cases with Identified Needs (573 Offenders)			
	Offenders with need	Suspension within four months	Suspension within statistical relationships
Need areas			
Employment	47.6 %	27.9 %	<0.001
Marital/family	43.5 %	15,7 %	<0.01
Associates/social interaction	41.8 %	28.9 %	<0.001
Substance abuse	53.1 %	26.3 %	<0.001
Community functioning	28.9 %	30.3 %	<0.001
Personal/emotional orientation	44.9 %	26.9 %	<0.01
Attitude	23.3 %	36.1 %	<0.001

More specifically, some of the factors (within these broad categories) found to be important in predicting an offender's failure on conditional release were a lack of education, unstable job history; marital problems, poor family functioning, criminal associations, poor financial management, weak cognitive skills and antisocial behaviour.

However, variables such as a learning disability; physical impairment, physical or sexual abuse as a child, social isolation, assertiveness, health, self-presentation, sexual dysfunction and mental deficiency were found to be unrelated to an offender's conditional release outcome.

Interestingly, case manager ratings of offender motivation to address identified needs in the marital/family, associates/social interaction, community functioning, personal/emotional orientation and attitude areas were predictive of conditional release outcome. In other words, the less motivated the offenders were rated in these areas, the more likely they were to have their conditional release suspended.

Discussion The pilot testing of the community based Case Needs Identification and Analysis process revealed that static (such as criminal history) and dynamic (such as employment or substance abuse) factors continue to play an important role in the successful reintegration of offenders into the community. It would seem that this systematic approach to offender risk/need assessment can be used effectively to determine the intensity of supervision required for each offender by capitalizing on case managers' professional judgment of criminal risk and offender needs.

As well, this tool can provide a useful means of monitoring changes in an offender's behaviour, attitudes and circumstances related to release outcome. More important, the Case Needs Identification and Analysis process can provide important targets for community intervention. If criminogenic needs can be effectively targeted, then appropriate programming applied to address them should reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

The Case Needs Identification and Analysis process was instituted as a labour-intensive pencil-and-paper exercise. However, the process lends itself well to full automation and has been transformed into a computer based offender assessment system. This automated approach to offender assessment allows for

standardized risk/need assessment reports, easy production of correctional plans and progress summaries, and the creation of valuable databases.

The focus of the Case Needs Identification and Analysis process has, therefore, shifted from a correctional strategy exercise of simply surveying offender needs to an enhanced community offender **management** strategy.

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(2)For more detailed information, please consult the complete report: L.L. Motiuk and S.L. Brown, *The Validity of Offender Needs Identification and Analysis in Community Corrections* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993), Report 34.