

Offender motivation for treatment as a responsivity factor

The Correctional Service of Canada's Correctional Strategy is based on a rehabilitation model that assumes that offenders have needs that directly cause their criminal behaviour, that we can diagnose these needs accurately, that appropriate intervention is available, that intervention will reduce these needs, and that reduced need will diminish criminal behaviour.

More generally, effective correctional rehabilitation is commonly considered to be founded on four principles: the risk principle, the need principle, the responsivity principle and the principle of professional discretion.⁽²⁾

This article examines the responsivity principle - focusing on offender motivation for treatment as a responsivity factor. The article assesses the relationship between ratings of offender motivation for treatment and conditional release outcome. Treatability Discussions of treatability in noncorrectional literature tend to focus on client characteristics associated with openness to treatment. However, those working in correctional settings rarely deal with responsive clients. Many in the offender population are not wellspoken, intelligent or highly motivated to change. In short, correctional staff are usually working with higher-risk clients whom many clinicians might consider untreatable. The responsivity principle While the responsivity principle emphasizes client characteristics, it also focuses on the conditions of program delivery that promote positive change. This generally involves behavioural intervention, using techniques such as modelling, graduated practice, role playing, reinforcement and cognitive restructuring.

Within the cognitive-behavioural framework, services should be designed to fit individual offender conceptual levels and personality styles. It is also critical to have a positive therapist-offender relationship.

However, offender motivation for treatment has proved to be an elusive responsivity factor in correctional populations. Offender willingness to address identified problems probably peaks as they prepare their case for a parole hearing. But few offenders would agree to participate in community-based programming after release - unless they have to.

In the past, many clinicians have refused to treat offenders who would not actively engage in the process. However, there is now an available body of literature that focuses on motivation as an intermediate treatment target and provides guidelines for increasing client motivation for treatment. Methodology The Correctional Service of Canada's Ontario Region recently developed an instrument that allows case workers to assess the level and type of offender need and to recommend appropriate intervention.⁽³⁾

The Community Offender Management Strategy requires case management officers to assess the level of offender need (low, medium or high) in seven domains linked to criminal behaviour. Case supervisors then rate offender motivation to address each area of need.

Table 1

Offender Motivation for Treatment and Conditional Release Outcome		
Need domain	Motivation level	Release suspended within six months
Employment	Low	36.2%
	Moderate	31.1%
	High	22.9%
Marital/family	Low	34.4%
	Moderate	27.8%
	High	20.5%
Associates/social interaction	Low	31.0%
	Moderate	29.7%
	High	20.5%
Substance abuse	Low	36.2%
	Moderate	31.1%
	High	22.9%
Community functioning	Low	36.7%
	Moderate	28.9%
	High	18.8%
Persona/emotion orientation	Low	39.3%
	Moderate	26.0%
	High	21.3%
Attitude	Low	34.5%
	Moderate	27.0%
	High	19.3%

A motivation rating of *low* means the offender strongly rejects the need for change or is unwilling to participate in recommended programs. *Moderate* means the offender may not fully accept the assessment but will participate in recommended programs, while high means the offender is self-motivated and actively addresses problem areas.

Case management officers complete the initial assessment within 30 days of an offender's release and reassess each offender at least every six months.

The data for this study were collected from almost all parole offices in the Service's Ontario Region over a two-year period covering 2,400 offender assessments.⁽⁴⁾ Conditional release suspension data was collected and calculated after an average release period of six months. Motivation and type of need The case supervisors assessed about half of the offenders studied as highly motivated to address significant need areas. The domain these offenders were most willing to address through programming was employment (59.5% were highly motivated), while the domain they were least interested in addressing was attitude (44.1% were highly motivated).

The motivation level for all domains was significantly related to conditional release outcome. Offenders rated as highly motivated had generally better outcomes than offenders rated as moderately motivated and considerably better outcomes than those with low motivation (see Table 1). Motivation and level of need The combination of offender motivation ratings with offender level of need assessments for each domain improves predictions of conditional release outcome within six months of release.

In general, the greatest difference was found between high need / low motivation offenders and low need/high motivation offenders.

The high need / low motivation offenders were two to three times more likely to have their conditional release suspended than the low need/high motivation offenders (see Table 2).

Table 2

Level of Need/Offender Motivation and Conditional Release Outcome		
Need domain	Level of Need/ offender motivation	Release suspended within six months
Employment	Low need/high motivation	13.7%
	High need/low motivation	48.0%
Marital/family	Low need/high motivation	14.2%
	High need/low motivation	35.7%
Associates/social interaction	Low need/high motivation	14.9%
	High need/low motivation	41.2%
Substance abuse	Low need/high motivation	16.5%
	High need/low motivation	41.2%
Community functioning	Low need/high motivation	16.1%
	High need/low motivation	38.5%
Persona/emotion orientation	Low need/high motivation	15.5%
	High need/low motivation	40.0%
Attitude	Low need/high motivation	14.2%
	High need/low motivation	35.7%

Motivation and risk level As expected, high-risk offenders tended to be rated as less motivated than low-risk offenders. When general motivation across all seven domains was assessed for high- and low-risk offenders, 76.1% of the most motivated offenders (rated as highly motivated in all seven domains) were low-risk offenders, while 71.2% of the least motivated offenders (rated as having low motivation in all seven domains) were high-risk offenders.

Offenders with the best conditional release outcomes were low risk and highly motivated (just 8.5% of

this type of offender had their conditional release suspended within the six-month period).

However, motivation level did not seem to significantly affect the conditional release outcomes of high-risk offenders. The conditional release suspension rate for high-risk offenders rated as highly motivated in all domains was not significantly different from the rate for high-risk offenders with low motivation in all domains (36.2% versus 35.4%). Motivation for treatment as a responsivity factor These results indicate that motivation for treatment is a significant responsivity factor in correctional populations. Simple motivation ratings were significantly related to conditional release outcome for all seven need domains in the Community Offender Management Strategy. Further, high-need offenders with poor motivation had the poorest conditional release outcomes.

However, it appears that risk rating is not improved by also considering motivation level when dealing with high-risk offenders.

Despite the empirical support for motivation as a responsivity factor, the relationship between motivation for treatment and conditional release outcome is not as strong as the relationship between risk and need ratings and outcome. As such, motivation for treatment should be considered as just one component of a thorough assessment.

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(2) These conclusions are based largely on the work of Don Andrews.

(3) C. Townson, "An improved risk-assessment process: Ontario Region's Community Offender Management Strategy," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 6, 3 (1994): 17-19.

(4) The total number of offenders varied slightly in each calculation because of missing data.