

Targeting employment patterns to reduce offender risk and need

Unstable employment is a major offender risk and need factor.⁽²⁾ Offenders with unstable employment patterns are at much greater risk of re-offending than offenders with a stable employment history.

Therefore, identifying offender employment status at time of arrest, analyzing offender employment needs on admission to prison and monitoring offender employment patterns while under community supervision can provide programming targets that could potentially lead to substantial reductions in offender recidivism.

This article illustrates the value of targeting offender employment as a major risk and need factor throughout the correctional process, and demonstrates that this practice can lead to more effective and efficient offender case management.

Employment status at time of arrest The Statistical Information on Recidivism I scale⁽³⁾ was used to establish offender employment status at time of arrest. This objective classification instrument has been administered to 12,422 adult male offenders currently in the federal correctional system. Employment is one of the scale's 15 risk factors.

More than two-thirds of these federal offenders were unemployed at the time of arrest (see Table 1).

Table 1

Unemployment at Arrest as Assessed by the Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale (12,422 offenders)		
Risk level	Number of offenders within the risk level	Unemployed offenders within the risk level
Very poor	2,974	89.4%
Poor	1,732	81.7%
Fair	1,921	75.9%
Good	1,703	67.4%
Very good	4,092	46.3%
Total	12,422	69.0%

Further, the worse the level of offender risk as assessed by the scale, the greater the proportion of unemployed offenders within that risk level.

Employment needs on admission to prison The Level of Supervision Inventory⁽⁴⁾ was used to assess offender employment needs on admission to prison. The inventory is an objective risk and need classification instrument whose employment / education composites (employment and education scores added together) have been shown to predict both halfway house failure ($r = .38, p < .001$) and incarceration ($r = .37, p < .001$).⁽⁵⁾

The inventory was administered to 510 consecutive male offenders as they entered the Ontario provincial correctional system.⁽⁶⁾ Correlational analyses were conducted between four inventory employment variables and selected prison and post-release adjustment measures.

The majority of the employment variables were found to be significantly associated with prison misconduct, return to prison and parole violation (see Table 2).

Table 2

The predictive Validity of Employment Variables Assessed by the Level of Supervision Inventory (510)				
Employment variable	Offenders identified	Prison misconduct (510)	Return to prison (510)	Parole violation (170)
Currently unemployed	69.4%	0.19 ***	0.20 **	0.20 **
Frequently unemployed	67.1%	0.24 ***	0.21 *	0.26 ***
Never fully employed	47.8%	0.29 **	0.19 *	0.32 ***
Ever fired	24.1%	0.06	0.09 *	0.05
Note: *= $p < 0.05$; **= $p < 0.01$; ***= $p < 0.001$				

In November 1994, the Correctional Service of Canada implemented the Offender Intake Assessment process⁽⁷⁾ to produce a comprehensive and integrated evaluation of each offender as they enter the federal correctional system.

This process involves the systematic collection and analysis of information on each offender's criminal and mental health background, social situation and education, factors relevant to determining criminal risk (such as criminal record) and factors relevant to identifying offender needs (such as employment). The results help determine offender institutional placement and correctional plans.

The process has been implemented in all Correctional Service of Canada regions. About three-quarters of the male and two-thirds of the female admission population were recently identified as "needy" in the area of employment.

A detailed summary of the distribution of employment variables (male offenders averaged 9.7 indicators and female offenders averaged 8.5 indicators) was also obtained for 2,738 male and 31 female offenders (see Table 3).

Monitoring community supervision employment status In compliance with national standards for conditional release supervision, Correctional Service of Canada parole officers use the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale to systematically assess the needs of offenders, their risk of re-offending and any other factors that might affect their successful re-integration into the community. One of the 12 separate need areas covered by the scale is *employment pattern*.

An offender employment pattern rating of "factor seen as an asset to community adjustment" means that

there is evidence that employment has been very satisfying for the offender since their return to the community.

"No immediate need for improvement" indicates that neither employment, underemployment, sporadic employment, nor chronic unemployment have interfered with the offender's daily functioning, while "some need for improvement" means that one of these conditions has caused the offender minor adjustment problems since their return to the community.

Finally a "considerable need for improvement" rating means that the offender's employment situation has caused them serious adjustment problems.

Table 3

A Breakdown of Employment Indicators as assessed by the Offender Intake Assessment Process		
Employment Indicators	Male offenders identified	Female offenders identified
Has less than grade 8	21.9%	27.6%
Has less than grade 10	53.0%	44.8%
Has no high school diploma *	77.8%	58.6%
Finds learning difficult	30.7%	44.8%
Has learning disabilities	18.6%	16.7%
Has physical problems which interfere with learning	5.3%	0
Has memory problems	19.0%	21.4%
Has concentration problems	28.3%	32.1%
Has problems with reading	19.7%	17.9%
Has problems with writing	27.0%	17.9%
Has problems with numeracy	29.0%	28.6%
Has difficulty comprehending instructions	11.6%	20.7%
Lacks a skill area/trade/profession*	58.6%	37.9%
Dissatisfied with skill area/trade/profession	48.1%	39.3%
Has physical problems that interfere with work	15.7%	17.2%
Unemployment at time of arrest	63.2%	62.1%
Unemployed 90% or more	27.7%	24.1%
Unemployed 50% or more	54.6%	48.3%
Has an unstable job history	66.7%	55.2%
Often shows up late for work	9.0%	10.7%
Has poor attendance record	11.5%	10.7%
No employment history	9.9%	17.2%

Has difficulty meeting workload requirements	11.1%	7.4%
Lacks initiative	23.4%	13.8%
Has quit a job without another *	42.4%	24.1%
Has been laid off from a job	56.1%	53.6%
Has been fired from a job	26.1%	28.6%
Salary has been insufficient	35.5%	32.1%
Lacks employment benefits	51.5%	35.7%
Jobs lack security	56.2%	41.4%
Has difficulty with co-workers	4.9%	3.6%
Has difficulty with supervisors	12.6%	10.7%
Prior vocational assessment(s)	11.9%	4.0%
Has participated in employment programs*	25.3%	7.4%
Completed an occupational development program	12.1%	3.8%
Note: indicator numbers may vary slightly; * = p<0.05		

Early field research conducted on the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale found that parole officers could easily identify the nature and level of federal offender employment patterns (35% of this sample was identified as "needy" in the employment area) and that this assessment was consistently related with suspension ($r = .27, p < .001$) and revocation ($r = .25, p < .001$) of conditional release.⁽⁸⁾

A consistent pattern emerged when looking at the distribution of conditional release failures (suspensions) and employment need levels. The greater the offender employment need, the more likely they were to fail on conditional release.

For example, the failure rate for offenders with an employment rating of "considerable need for improvement" (36.5%) was more than six times greater than the failure rate for those with a rating of "factor seen as an asset to community adjustment" (6%).

The Service has also developed an automated means of monitoring offender risk/needs levels in the community. The Offender Management System currently contains the overall employment need levels gathered since implementation of the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale. This information can be retrieved at any time to provide caseload snapshots.

A national overview of identified employment needs (ratings of "some need for improvement" or "considerable need for improvement") in the conditional release population clearly illustrates there is considerable variation within this need area as to type of conditional release, but not as to gender (see Table 4).

Table 4

Identified Employment Need and Type of Conditional Release				
Type of conditional release	Male offenders (5,642)		Female offenders (193)	
	Number released	Have employment needs	Number released	Have employment needs
Day parole	849	53.6%	33	27,6%
Full parole	3,394	35.5%	143	44,8%
Statutory release	1,395	64.0%	17	58,6%
Total	5,642	45.%	193	44,8%

Discussion To be effective and efficient, correctional systems need to be able to produce meaningful and accurate profiles of their entire offender population. This information can be used to raise awareness about institutional and community supervision populations, and to assemble basic statistics on both overall offender risk/need levels and specified offender needs.

More important, this data can help correctional agencies to direct resources and controls to particular segments of their populations to reduce risk.

The Correctional Service of Canada's ability to systematically target and monitor the criminal risk and case need levels of its admission and conditional release populations has, therefore, moved the Service further toward the delivery of an effective and well-integrated risk management program.

(1)Second Floor, 340 Laurier Avenue West Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

(2)D.A. Andrews and J. Bonta, *Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (Cincinnati: Anderson, 1993).

(3)J. Nuffield, *Parole Decision-making in Canada: Research Towards Decision Guidelines* (Ottawa: Communication Division, 1982).

(4)D.A. Andrews, *The Level of Supervision Inventory* (Toronto: Ministry of Correctional Services [Ontario], 1982).

(5)J. Bonta and L. L. Motiuk, "Utilization of an Interview-based Classification Instrument: A Study of Correctional Halfway Houses," *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 12, 3 (1985): 333-352.

(6)L.L. Motiuk, *Antecedents and Consequences of Prison Adjustment: A Systematic Assessment and Re-assessment Approach*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Carleton University, 1991.

(7)L.L. Motiuk, "Where Are We in Our Ability to Assess Risk?" *Forum on Corrections Research*, 5, 2 (1993): 14-18.

(8)L. L. Motiuk and F. J. Porporino, *Field Test of the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale: A Study*

of Offenders on Caseload (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1989). For example, they can provide offenders with a sense of purpose, increase their awareness of positive values and beliefs, and promote problem-solving.