

Community supervision: Current practices and future directions

by **Shelley Brown¹** and **Edward Zamble²**

Community supervision is the final and arguably the most important link in the offender reintegration process. On any given day, about 10,000 offenders are on some form of federal conditional release, be it temporary absence, program release, day parole, full parole or statutory release. The Correctional Service of Canada currently employs 900 parole staff in 67 parole offices across Canada: two thirds are directly responsible for parole supervision and one third are responsible for managerial and administrative tasks. Approximately 167 community-based residential facilities or halfway houses are owned and operated by either the Correctional Service of Canada or non-governmental agencies such as the Salvation Army, the John Howard Society or the Elizabeth Fry Society.³

Recent legislative changes proposing long-term community supervision for high-risk offenders,⁴ along with external Service audit reports⁵ and internal Service documents,⁶ have increased the attention paid to community and alternative supervision strategies. This article has two purposes: first, to provide a brief overview of the Service's current community supervision practices and, second, to explore emerging trends in the adult and juvenile offender literature that may help the Service improve its community supervision practices

Current Service supervision practices

The objective of parole supervision is "to help offenders on conditional release become law-abiding citizens by providing them with assistance and service and by ensuring that proper control is maintained, to minimize the risk of their committing new offences."⁷ The parole officer is responsible for providing "appropriate supervision based upon ongoing risk and needs assessment of the offender. The supervision may include counselling, verification of the offender's behaviour, confirmation of employment and referral to agencies and individuals as required."⁸ In short, the parole officer is tasked with the dual responsibility of protecting society through control mechanisms, such as monitoring offender behaviour, and of facilitating the successful reintegration of offenders through rehabilitative efforts.

Parole officers use a variety of strategies and tools to help carry out their responsibilities. One such tool, the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale (CRNMS), helps with the implementation, revision and monitoring of the risk/needs assessment and correctional plan initiated at the beginning of the offender's sentence. The CRNMS is a standardized risk/needs assessment tool that generates a low-risk or high-risk rating coupled with an overall needs rating of low, moderate or high. Although the risk rating is determined primarily from the Statistical Information on Recidivism (SIR) Scale and the National Parole Board's overall risk rating, the overall needs rating is derived from a compilation of 12 individual criminogenic need domains.⁹ The CRNMS is responsible for focusing the nature of the supervision, as well as program and counselling requirements specified in the community treatment plan. The CRNMS results also dictate the frequency of supervision contacts between the parole officer and the offender.

Parole officers are also expected to maintain close ties with the police and the offender's family, friends and employer to verify the offender's employment or education and residence status through scheduled and unscheduled site visits, and to monitor the offender's compliance with special National Parole Board conditions. The final and most extreme strategy available to the parole officer is to issue a warrant to either temporarily or permanently suspend the offender's conditional release status.¹⁰

The next generation of community corrections

Since 1992, the Correctional Service of Canada has examined compliance with conditional release supervision standards through national and regional audits. The overall results were positive, but the audits indicated a need for improved training. Deficiencies in

some correctional plans were found,¹¹ as well as confusion over the scoring and administration of the CRNMS. Unfortunately, these audits did not provide a detailed analysis of the quality or usefulness of supervision contacts, nor did they assess the amount of time dedicated to counselling or rehabilitative efforts versus surveillance or control-oriented strategies. Such analyses are important, given recent empirical evidence demonstrating the ineffectiveness of intensive supervision programs (ISPs).

ISPs are probation and parole supervision models characterized by control strategies such as intensive monitoring and surveillance rather than treatment-oriented programs. Although the evidence clearly demonstrates that these approaches do not decrease recidivism, ISPs with a strong rehabilitation component do seem to reduce recidivism. Further, it has been argued that intensive rehabilitation supervision strategies, delivered according to the principles of risk, need and responsivity, would provide a promising foundation for the next generation of community corrections.¹² However, the next generation of community corrections might also benefit from recent advancements delineated in the coping-relapse model of criminal offending as well as recent innovations in the treatment of chronic juvenile delinquency.

Perhaps the best example of an effective treatment approach is multisystemic therapy (MST), an innovative, community-based program targeting chronic juvenile offenders. MST is heavily rooted in Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model of development.¹³ Further, it was also derived from several multi-way, longitudinal, causal modelling studies of juvenile delinquency,¹⁴ as well as studies demonstrating the inability of community-based interventions targeting only one or two components of a youth's ecology to reduce antisocial behaviour.¹⁵ Collectively, these initiatives galvanized Dr. Scott Henggeler to develop, implement and evaluate MST.

Briefly, MST is a highly individualized, cognitive-behavioural, community-based treatment program. It treats problems specifically related to the youth's antisocial problems, and addresses the environmental systems known to foster juvenile delinquency, such as parental discipline and monitoring practices, family-affective relations, peer associations and scholastic performance. MST is a flexible treatment approach that adapts to the adolescent's strengths, weaknesses and ecology, and is typically available seven days a week, 24 hours a day, depending on the nature and severity of the client's needs. Controlled evaluation studies and independent reviews have unanimously concluded that MST is one of the most promising treatment programs currently available for youths with serious problems.¹⁶ Clearly, MST, like the Service's standard treatment programs, operates according to the risk, need and responsivity principles; however, unlike most Service programs, MST moves beyond the offender and into the offender's ecology.

Until recently, MST was exclusively American. In May 1997, under the leadership of Dr. Alan Leschied, the federal Department of Justice and the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services launched an ambitious research project entitled Clinical Trials of Multisystemic Therapy Targeting High-Risk Offenders. This four-year initiative targeting Phase I

young offenders at high risk of future criminal involvement is currently being piloted in four Ontario cities. Dr. Leschied and his colleagues are working closely with Henggeler's staff to ensure treatment integrity.¹⁷ The results of this initiative are eagerly awaited.

Adapting a similar treatment strategy for certain groups of high-risk adult offenders being supervised in the community merits exploration, despite inherent obstacles. However, before attempting to develop an MST program for adult offenders, it would be prudent to identify a theoretical model of

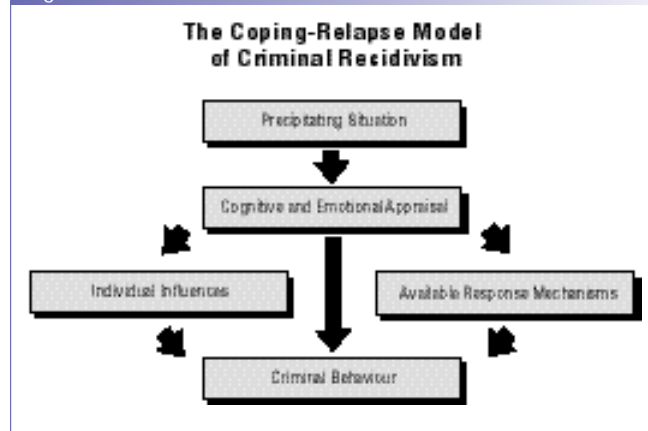
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criminal relapse that not only describes nonspecific proximal antecedents to criminal recidivism, but also outlines unique offence precursors for different types of criminal offending.

The coping-relapse model of criminal recidivism recently proposed by Zamble and Quinsey¹⁸ could provide the initial theoretical framework for this task. The coping-relapse model delineates an adult model of criminal reoffending in chronic offenders guided by the principles of developmental psychology,¹⁹ coping theory²⁰ and, to some extent, the general relapse prevention literature.²¹ The theory makes a firm distinction between the origins of criminal behaviour and the factors responsible for its continuation or resumption. The theory then argues that recidivism is the result of a breakdown process. The model starts with the occurrence of a precipitating environmental situation that is highly variable, ranging from chronic life stressors such as marital discord to relatively mundane daily hassles such as crowded public transportation. At this stage, the individual appraises the situation using cognitive or emotional criteria, or both, to determine whether the situation is personally threatening or challenging. Individual influences and response mechanisms govern whether the event is perceived as challenging. Individual influences are generally enduring static traits, such as temperament and emotional reactivity, while response mechanisms are generally dynamic traits such as coping ability, substance abuse, criminal cognitions, and criminal knowledge and experience.

If internal and external mediating factors cause an individual to perceive a situation as problematic, the person will likely respond maladaptively. Individuals who respond violently to perceived personal challenges, believe that the use of violence is justifiable, associate with others they know to be criminals, and happen to be under the influence of an intoxicant are likely to respond to everyday interpersonal stress with criminal assault. The theory proposes a continuous and interactive process in which each final response results in a new sequence of events

Figure 1



resulting in another precipitating situation, another appraisal and, eventually, another response (see Figure 1).

The coping-relapse model is well-supported by recent empirical work,²² although it certainly requires further investigation. Contemporary treatment programs for sex offenders and, more recently, violent offenders, are based largely on the theoretical premise that dynamic antecedents play a significant role in the recidivism process. However, empirical support for this position is weak, based entirely on a scattering of retrospective studies.²³ In fact, the predictive validity of retrospectively rated antecedents in substance-abuse relapse has been questioned.²⁴ Despite the practical and organizational difficulties, the prospective and systematic assessment and reassessment of dynamic risk is paramount if we are to develop sound, empirically based treatment strategies.

Are we ready for the next generation of community corrections?

Whether we are ready may be an irrelevant question, in light of growing prison populations and new legislation supporting the long-term community supervision of high-risk offenders. It is clear that recidivism is a complex process involving multi-problem offenders in multi-problem environments. Intervention strategies striving for long-term reductions in recidivism must do more than treat the offender's criminogenic needs in the confines of a clinical or parole-supervision

office. It must also address the criminogenic needs of the ecology that reinforces the offender's criminal behaviour, as well as the manner in which the offender and the environment interact.

Is the Correctional Service of Canada ready for such an approach? We believe the answer is yes. For almost a year, relapse prevention has been part of the standard curriculum for case management recruits.²⁵ Similarly, recent recommendations by parole officers concerning alternative supervision strategies are entirely compatible with the coping-relapse model and MST. Parole officers recognize the importance of understanding and analyzing offender crime cycles, using relapse-prevention techniques

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that involve the offender's family, addressing the family's need for access to services and intervention, using multidisciplinary supervision teams and, lastly, emphasizing home and community visits over office visits.²⁶

Developing and testing a conceptual model for the next generation of community corrections will take time, effort and resources. However, collaborative research efforts involving Service field staff, managers and researchers, along with recognized academic experts, should prove most promising. ■

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³ Correctional Service of Canada, "Introduction: Mandate and Mission," in the Service's Electronic Infonet: Infocenter: Strategic Documents: CSC Outlook 1996/97 to 98/99 [On-line] (Available <http://infonet/infonet/strategic/introduction.htm>, 1997).

⁴ *Statutes of Canada*, An Act to amend the *Criminal Code* (high-risk offenders), the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, the *Criminal Records Act*, the *Prisons and Reformatories Act* and the *Department of the Solicitor General Act* (Chapter 17, 1997).

⁵ *Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the House of Commons*, Chapter 18: Correctional Service Canada — Supervision of Released Offenders (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1994).

⁶ M. Larivière and D. Pennock, Differential Supervision and Strategies for Intervention Project (Correctional Service of Canada, draft document).

⁷ Correctional Service of Canada, "Commissioner's Directive 780: Parole Supervision," in the Service's Electronic Infonet: Law and Policy: Commissioners' Directives [On-line] (Available <http://infonet/infonet/strategic/introduction.htm>, 1997).

⁸ Correctional Service of Canada, Commissioner's Directives.

⁹ L. L. Motiuk, "The Community Risk/Needs Management Scale: An Effective Supervision Tool," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9, 2 (1997): 8-12.

¹⁰ Correctional Service of Canada, "Case Management Manual: Part V: Community Supervision," in the Service's Electronic Infonet: Law and Policy: Case Management Manual [On-line] (Available <http://infonet/infonet/strategic/introduction.htm>, 1997).

¹¹ F. Luciani, "Conditional Release Supervision Standards Revisited: An Examination of Compliance in Ontario Region," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 6, 3 (1994): 26-29.

Related Reading

Task Force on Reintegration — 1997 Final Report is available from the Offender Programs and Reintegration Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, Ottawa.

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- ²³ W. D. Pithers, K. M. Kashima, G. F. Cumming, L. S. Beal and M. M. Buell, "Relapse Prevention of Sexual Aggression," in R. A. Prentky and V. L. Quinsey (eds.), *Human Sexual Aggression: Current Perspectives* (New York: New York Academy of Science, 1988): 244-260. See also Zamble and Quinsey, *The Process of Criminal Recidivism*. And see V. L. Quinsey, G. Coleman, B. Jones and I. Altrows, Proximal Antecedents of Eloping and Reoffending Among Mentally Disordered Offenders, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 12 (1997): 794-813.
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