

# Participation of federal offenders in community-based programs

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**T**he Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) actively assists offenders to become law abiding citizens by encouraging participation in correctional programs. Correctional programs target issues that directly contribute to criminal behaviour, and assist the offender in being equipped with the necessary skills to ensure successful reintegration into the community<sup>2</sup>. Thus, as part of the correctional plan, programs begin upon admission to a federal institution and continue throughout the reintegration process. This article focuses on the latter part of the reintegration process, focusing on various trends in program participation upon an offender's release into the community.

**T**his study examined program participation and release outcome for federal offenders on conditional release. Conditional release facilitates the successful reintegration of offenders into the community in the form of day parole, full parole or statutory release<sup>3</sup>. First, a profile of offenders participating in programs while on conditional release was conducted. Next, trends in program participation over an eight-year time period were examined. Finally, the relationship between program participation and release outcome was studied.

Offenders were profiled in terms of their most recent overall dynamic factor (criminogenic need) ratings, motivation level and reintegration potential ratings prior to conditional release. Dynamic factors are grouped into seven target domains: employment and education, marital/family relations, associates/social interaction, substance abuse, community functioning, personal emotional orientation, and attitudes<sup>4</sup>. Motivation level assesses the degree to which the offender is willing to participate in recommended correctional programs and address problem areas. Reintegration potential reassessment is based on an offender's security level, motivation level, and progress made in addressing dynamic factors. This information is initially collected via CSC's Offender Intake Assessment process, then reassessed periodically via progress monitoring procedures<sup>5</sup>.

This article reports the proportion of offenders participating in correctional programs while on conditional release over the past eight years. The degree to which there has been community involvement or support was also examined over time. Finally, conditional release outcomes (returns or revocations with a new offence) were compared for program participants versus non-participants.

## Procedure

All assessment and program data for this study were extracted from CSC's automated Offender Management System (OMS). Releases were included in the study if the following criteria applied:

- The release was the first of that sentence.
- The release was conditional (i.e., a day parole, full parole or statutory release).
- The release occurred between April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1995 and March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2002.

The sample consisted of 31,995 federal offenders comprising 33,164 releases in the given time period<sup>6</sup>. Of the releases, 48% were for day parole, 15% were for full parole and 36% were for statutory release. Overall, 43% of offenders in the sample participated in at least one program that began some time after they started their conditional release<sup>7</sup>. Eighty percent of the sample were non-Aboriginal male offenders, 15% were Aboriginal males and 5% were women.

If offenders were available for a time period of three years after their conditional release date, they were included in the follow-up section of the study. The analyses matched program participants with non-participants on static risk level. Post-release outcome was measured as any return to federal custody with a new offence within three years of release.

## Profile of offenders participating in correctional programs

Non-Aboriginal males, Aboriginal males and women were equally likely to have participated in at least one correctional program following

their release. Of the total sample, 44% of non-Aboriginal males participated in at least one correctional program post release. Similarly, the participation rate was 43% for Aboriginal males and 43% for women offenders.

As illustrated in Table 1, offenders participated in a variety of programs following their release from federal correctional facilities. This involved institutional employment (26%), substance abuse (21%), living skills (13%), education (12%) and personal development programs (11%).

Table 1

Type of program participation	
Program Category	Participants
CSC/CORCAN Institutional Employment	8,358 (26%)
Substance Abuse Programs	6,637 (21%)
Living Skills	4,087 (13%)
Education	3,760 (12%)
Personal Development Programs	3,383 (11%)
Psychological Oriented Programs	1,083 (3%)
Sex Offender Programs	1,068 (3%)
Family Violence	946 (3%)
Counter-Point	839 (3%)
Violent Offender Programs	619 (2%)

Note: Numbers may not add up as offenders may participate in more than one program

Offenders rated as high risk, having low motivation and low reintegration potential ratings just prior to release were most likely to be participating in programs ( $p < .0001$ ). Offenders with low motivation levels and low reintegration potential may be more likely to have program participation as a condition of their release.

As part of the correctional plan, offenders are encouraged to participate in programs that address their specific needs. Thus, not surprisingly, offenders rated with high overall criminogenic need were more likely to participate in programs upon their conditional release than those with lower need (69% versus 57%,  $p < .0001$ )<sup>8</sup>. Further, those with needs identified in specific dynamic factor domains prior to release were most likely to participate in programs addressing that need (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participation rates by dynamic factor domain			
Dynamic Factor Domain	Program Category	% With Need	
		Identified	Not identified
Employment and Education	CSC/CORCAN Institutional employment***	38	32
	Education***	21	15
Substance Abuse	Substance Abuse Programs***	41	7
Community Functioning	Living Skills***	20	16
Personal/Emotional Orientation	Personal Development***	13	10
Attitude	Counter-Point Program***	7	3

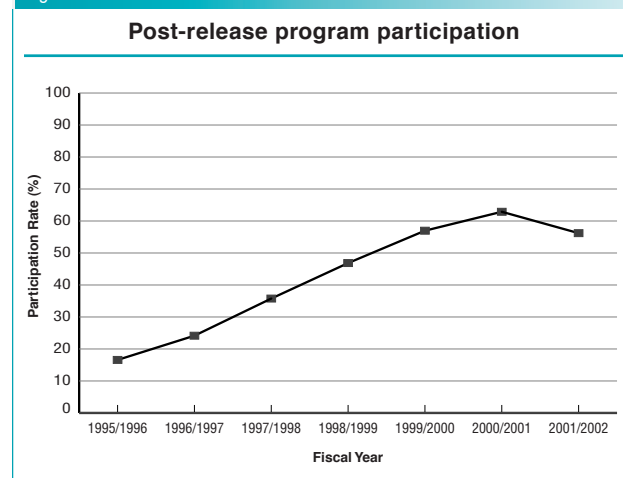
\*\*\*  $p < .0001$

## Trends in post-release program participation

Since 1995, the rate of participation in correctional programs has been steadily rising (see Figure 1). This may be due to the increasing number of Community Correctional Centres (CCCs) and Community Residential Facilities (CRFs) in Canada, and recent legislation and justice initiatives that encourage community involvement.

Among other things, CCCs (operated by the federal government) and CRFs (owned and operated by private agencies under contract with CSC) provide counselling and treatment programs to offenders on conditional release. Since 1995, there has been an increase in the number of Community Correctional Centres and Residential Facilities. This increase may be attributed to a number of factors, such as increased involvement of the community in the criminal justice process and an increase in the number of professionals in the community with expertise in program delivery.

Figure 1



Note: the drop in the 2001/2002 fiscal year participation rate may be due to gaps between release date and program commencement date. That is, offenders recently released have less time and thus less opportunity to participate in programs.

CCCs and CRFs also offer the opportunity for community involvement. As stipulated by CSC's Principles of Supervision:

*"Those providing supervision services shall take an active approach to supervision. The Parole Officer shall intervene to address the offender's needs and manage risk by making effective use of community resources and collateral contacts."<sup>9</sup>*

Thus, it is important for community-based program initiatives to recognize the value of community involvement and support. For example, the CSC-sponsored program "Circles of Support and Accountability" is a community-based program run by trained volunteers. This program is designed to provide continual treatment to long-term offenders. Similarly, offender substance abuse programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous enlist the aid of community volunteers to ensure continual support for offenders with substance abuse needs.

The community also participates in the federal criminal justice process via Citizens' Advisory Committees (CACs). These committees of volunteers provide input to penitentiaries and parole districts to assist in the delivery of correctional interventions<sup>10</sup>. Over the past 25 years, the number of CACs in Canada has been steadily growing, primarily those associated with parole offices.

### Post-release outcome of conditional releases

Outcome while on conditional release (return to federal custody with a new offence) for program participants was examined for offenders who were available for a three year follow-up period, compared to those who did not participate in programs. Results showed that, while controlling for risk, offenders participating in at least one program were less likely to return to federal custody with a new offence than non-participants (13% versus 17%,  $p < .0001$ ). On average, program participants remained in the community longer (33 months, range=.03 months to 36 months, versus 31 months, range=.07 months to 36 months,  $p < .0001$ ).

## Conclusions

Results revealed that, for offenders who participated in post-release programs, most were likely to have participated in correctional programs that addressed their specific criminogenic needs. Program participants were also less likely to return to federal custody with a new offence. Thus, findings of this study support the notion that post-release participation in appropriate programs is an effective reintegration measure. The increasing participation rate in post-release correctional programs, together with the increasing level of community involvement and justice initiatives, is a promising indicator of future success in the reintegration of offenders into the community. This research suggests that prospective studies identifying key program specifics (i.e., intensity level, targeted dynamic factor, accreditation, frequency), optimal site specifications (site accreditation) and criteria identifying prime candidates will assist in efforts that focus on reintegration into the community upon release. ■

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<sup>2</sup> See Commissioners Directive number 726 for definition and policy relating to correctional programs.

<sup>3</sup> See the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, sections 99,100,119 and 120, for definitions, eligibility criteria and terms of conditional release.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed description of the OIA, see Motiuk, L. L. (1997). Classification for correctional programming: The Offender Intake Assessment process, *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9(1), 18-22.

<sup>5</sup> See Standard Operating Practices 700-04 and 700-05.

<sup>6</sup> Offenders could be represented more than once if they had multiple sentences in the given time period.

<sup>7</sup> Note that offenders may also continue programs offered during their incarceration period while on conditional release, particularly those on day parole.

<sup>8</sup> This finding also held for all seven dynamic factor domains.

<sup>9</sup> Correctional Service of Canada Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) # 700-06.

<sup>10</sup> See Commissioner's Directive No. 023 "Citizen Advisory Committees".