

# Correctional research in support of key strategic challenges and outcomes

Larry Motiuk<sup>1</sup>

Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada

Each fiscal year an approved program of corrections research related to policy, programming and management issues is conducted by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). While the main goal of the Service's research efforts is to contribute to public, staff and offender safety, it does so in partnership with other sectors at National Headquarters and administrative regions of the Service, other government and non-government organizations as well as academia. Active research collaborations are deemed essential to the fulfillment of the Service's mission and mandate.

This article offers an overview of the role and mandate of a research function for a correctional agency. More specifically, it describes how a comprehensive and integrated program of research is developed, then approved and subsequently carried out in support of key strategic challenges being faced by the Service. Examples of research initiatives underway are provided as well as some preliminary results that are being translated into correctional practice. Finally, a framework is presented that may possibly guide future measurement efforts towards the realization of a major objective for the Service — the safe and effective reintegration of offenders. For the three phases of the correctional process (admission, institutional placement and community supervision), reintegration activities are highlighted, anticipated results are hypothesized and measures offered.

The essential framework that guides the operational research efforts of the Service include the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*, the Mission Document of the CSC, and the Estimates Part III — Report on Plans and Priorities. To date, the activities of the Research Branch of the CSC have been focused generally in this fashion. However, a number of other major research initiatives are undertaken throughout the fiscal year at the request of the Service's Executive Committee (EXCOM) as well as the National Headquarters Management Committee because of their obvious relevance to important operational initiatives.

Key strategic challenges facing CSC include the following: changing offender profile, over-representation of Aboriginal offenders, need for community capacity to support offenders under supervision and beyond sentence completion to prevent re-offending, and need to realign and

transform corporate practices and systems to meet these new demands in a fiscally responsible manner. In order to address these challenges the Service has identified four strategic outcomes (see Figure 1) to focus on over the next three years (2003/2006):

Figure 1



In support of the realization of these key strategic challenges outcomes, a 2003–2004 *Research Program* was designed and approved by EXCOM to provide the Service with accurate research-based information and analysis that can be used to facilitate operational planning and decision making. Consequently, the 2003–04 Research Plan outlines a list of national research projects directed towards advancing the Service's mandate related to crime prevention and public protection. Moreover, an inventory of regional research initiatives by field practitioners is also provided that lists projects in progress or under consideration.

## Research plans for 2003–2004

In general terms, the following highlights the Service's research plans for 2003–2004:

*Conduct research that contributes to the management of addictions and the harmful consequences of drug use in support of Canada's National Drug Strategy;*

*Engage Aboriginal communities in Aboriginal focused corrections research;*

*Develop a protocol for assessing the characteristics and behaviours associated with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE), the types of interventions required, and staff training needs;*

*Provide more research on targeted treatment to respond to offenders with mental health problems;*

*Assist in developing approaches to better integrate security, case management, and programming for offenders presenting similar risk/needs profiles;*

*Examine operational strategies to control the supply and reduce the demand for drugs;*

*Design and test of a climate indicators and profiling system to improve prediction, prevention, and management of critical incidents and emergencies;*

*Advance new research on strategic intelligence approaches to address the risks posed by offenders;*

*Explore the efficacy of the accommodation strategy for federally sentenced women;*

*Review community-based accommodation measures to help ensure the safe and timely reintegration of offenders;*

*Initiate research directed toward an integrated security, case management, and programming approaches targeted to smaller groups of offenders who share similar needs (in institutions, through transition to the community);*

*Carry out research and surveys on citizen engagement;*

*Review studies on restorative justice approaches in corrections;*

*Make available research that enhances processes and practices that will ensure a safe, healthy, and supportive workplace, and the effective management of CSC;*

*Offer research support to staff to manage the challenges of the correctional environment; and*

*Support Canada's foreign policy priority in human rights and criminal justice matters through providing research expertise and helping establish safe and humane corrections.*

## Examples of research to action

### 1. Contributing to institutional and community safety:

A research-based *Climate Indicator and Profiling System (CIPS)* has been developed and implemented across the Service's maximum-security institutions. Comprehensive information is being gathered during field trials to allow institutions to track how their population profiles are changing, so that they can better identify some of the factors that are most likely associated with institutional climate risk and make strategic changes. In addition, CIPS is responding to a recognized need to collect and track standard daily climate indicators of immediate institutional vulnerability, apart from longer term trends, in order to facilitate more immediate population management strategies. Outcome results are not yet available.

A High Intensity Substance Abuse Program (HISAP) has been developed, implemented and internationally accredited. Research results from the pilot programs showed that offenders who completed HISAP demonstrated a 69% reduction in institutional misconduct, a 19% reduction in re-admissions to prison and a 50% reduction in new convictions.

### 2. Contributing to effective Aboriginal corrections:

In collaboration with a number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit organizations, a series of research studies have been conducted resulting in improved capacity to conduct Aboriginal-specific research within Aboriginal communities and raising operational awareness of the importance of delivering services that address the needs of different Aboriginal groups.

### 3. Contributions to gender responsive assessment and programming:

The Service's classification tools used to allocate necessary controls and program resources for women offenders have been validated and re-validated for initial security placement, security reclassification, risk and needs assessment, reintegration potential assessment and reassessment. These offender classification instruments are critical to the effective and efficient risk management of women offenders while under federal sentence. Research-based gender responsive interventions (Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Psychosocial Rehabilitation, Spirit of a Warrior, Circles of Change) have been developed and implemented across the Service. Outcome results are not yet available.

A research-based Women Offender Substance Abuse Program (WOSAP) has been developed and implemented across the Service. The Centre for

Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is working in collaboration with the Service’s Addictions Research Centre (ARC) on this innovative program designed specifically to address the substance abuse needs of women offenders. Outcome results are not yet available.

With key strategic challenges as varied and complex as those that confront CSC, applied research has to attempt to inform and influence in different ways and at many levels. Understandably, within an operational agency focused on public safety, there are limited resources that can be exclusively dedicated to the conduct of applied corrections research. Nevertheless, the ever-expanding set of operational questions necessitates research priority setting, coordination of efforts, effective integration, communication of findings and implementation.

### Reintegration — A research framework

Correctional service providers in collaboration with releasing authorities can and do affect the safe release of offenders into the community. The application of reintegration efforts should yield public safety dividends in terms of lower rates of incidents while in custody and criminal re-offending upon return to the community. Therefore, outcome questions flow logically from the three major

components of the reintegration process — *admission phase* (orientation, assessment, planning), *institutional phase* (programming) and *community phase* (supervision, programming, community service utilization).

Whenever reintegration research is being undertaken, comparative analyses are conducted in relation to a matched group based on specified criteria. If possible, attempts are made to match on admission date, sentence length, and level of risk and need. This approach has the effect of introducing in the research design controls for the following — *temporality, exposure and propensity*. As well, reintegration outcome measures may include but not necessarily limited to such areas as: cost(s), programming involvement(s), security incidents, release type, supervision performance and return/re-offending rates. Data are obtained from five main sources: cost centres, case files, timeline interviews, participant/staff feedback questionnaires, and the Service’s Offender Management System (OMS).

The following three tables offer an overall reintegration research framework that provides a schematic representation of reintegration activities, anticipated results and measures.

Reintegration Research — Admission Phase		
Reintegration Activities	Anticipated Results	Measures
Classifying Initial Security Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offenders will be appropriately placed to the least restrictive measures of confinement commensurate with their institutional adjustment risk, escape risk, and public safety risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial security level designations</li> <li>Placement distributions</li> <li>Override rates</li> <li>Security incident rates</li> </ul>
Profiling Reintegration Potential - At Intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identification of early release candidates</li> <li>Establishment of case preparation priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial security level designations</li> <li>Release risk distributions</li> <li>Programming requirements at admission</li> <li>Reintegration potential distributions</li> </ul>
Developing Correctional Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case plans upon which release is predicated will be produced in a timely manner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Correctional plans completion dates</li> </ul>
Improving Institutional Program Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accurately assessing offender motivation will help to target offenders for program participation and to establish release priority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivation levels</li> </ul>

Table 2

Reintegration Research — Institutional Phase		
Reintegration Activities	Anticipated Results	Measures
Increasing Institutional Program Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assignment to programs where the need is identified</li> <li>• Case preparation time and delays reduced</li> <li>• Institutional program participation will improve institutional adjustment and likelihood of early release/post-release success</li> <li>• Reduced costs given economies of scale due to increase in participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matching rates of needs to programs</li> <li>• Program participation rates/costs</li> <li>• Security incident rates</li> <li>• Discretionary release rates</li> <li>• Post-release success rates</li> <li>• Cost per participant</li> </ul>
Ensuring Institutional Program Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing programs will improve institutional adjustment and likelihood of early release/post-release success</li> <li>• Reducing the number of program non-completions or dropouts will reduce costs in terms of wasted programming resources and in depriving motivated offenders program opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program completion rates</li> <li>• Security incident rates</li> <li>• Discretionary release rates</li> <li>• Post-release success rates</li> </ul>
Improving Institutional Program Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-program outcomes or treatment gain will influence decisions to support early release, vary reintegration potential during incarceration and influence positive post-release adjustment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program performance ratings</li> <li>• Security incident rates</li> <li>• Discretionary release rates</li> <li>• Post-release success rates</li> </ul>
Moderating Administrative Segregation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced placement in administrative segregation for disciplinary or voluntary reasons can improve reintegration progress and influence early release</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-voluntary segregation rates/reasons</li> <li>• Voluntary segregation rates/reasons</li> </ul>
Reclassifying Security Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reclassification and expeditious transfer of offenders to the 'least restrictive measures of confinement' will improve chances for discretionary release</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security reclassification designations</li> <li>• Placement distributions</li> <li>• Override rates</li> <li>• Security incident rates</li> </ul>
Increasing Successful Temporary Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in either escorted or unescorted temporary absence programs will establish credibility for early release</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Escorted temporary absence rates</li> <li>• Unescorted temporary absence rates</li> </ul>
Enhancing Case Preparation Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieving efficiencies at any one of the critical stages along the case management continuum will result in reductions in "days of incarceration" and corresponding increase in community supervision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case preparation timelines</li> </ul>
Profiling of Reintegration Potential - Pre-release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of good candidates for pre-release and re-entry priorities will improve reintegration efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reintegration potential distributions</li> </ul>
Profiling of Reintegration Potential - At-release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation of re-entry priorities at time of release will facilitate successful community adjustment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reintegration potential distributions</li> </ul>

Table 2 (continued)

Reintegration Research — Institutional Phase		
Reintegration Activities	Anticipated Results	Measures
Enhancing Community Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective use of frequency of contact guidelines, special conditions, community residential facilities, halfway house placements will improve offenders' successful reintegration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community supervision levels</li> <li>Special conditions</li> <li>Residential placements</li> </ul>
Moderating Suspension Warrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving suspension efficiencies and narrowing disparities in practice will increase the potential to sustain more offenders in the community under supervision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suspension warrant rates</li> </ul>
Moderating Technical Violations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding the technical revocation decision-making process an/or finding alternatives to revocation submissions and understanding the process may improve reintegration efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical violation rates/reasons</li> </ul>
Increasing Community-based Program Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assignment to community-based programs where the need is identified</li> <li>Community-based program participation will improve likelihood of post-release success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matching rates of needs to programs</li> <li>Program participation rates/costs</li> <li>Community supervision completion rates</li> </ul>
Ensuring Community-based Program Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completing community-based programs will improve the likelihood of post-release success</li> <li>Reducing the number of program non-completions in the community will reduce costs in terms of wasted programming resources and in depriving motivated offenders program opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matching rates of needs to programs</li> <li>Community-based program completion rates</li> <li>Community supervision completion rates</li> </ul>
Improving Community-based Program Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-program outcomes or treatment gain will influence decisions to reduce frequency of contact, vary reintegration potential while under supervision sentence and influence positive community adjustment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Program performance ratings</li> <li>Community incident rates</li> <li>Community supervision completion rates</li> </ul>
Improving Access to Community-based Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assignment to community-based services where the need is identified</li> <li>Community-based service utilization when required will improve likelihood of community reintegration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matching rates of needs to services</li> <li>Service referrals</li> <li>Service utilization rates</li> <li>Community supervision completion rates</li> </ul>
Reduced Re-offending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced re-admissions to provincial and federal corrections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reconviction rates/type</li> <li>Time to reconviction</li> <li>Re-admission rates</li> </ul>

Table 3

Reintegration Research — Community Phase		
Reintegration Activities	Anticipated Results	Measures
Profiling of Reintegration Potential - At-release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirmation of re-entry priorities at time of release will facilitate successful community adjustment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reintegration potential distributions</li> </ul>
Enhancing Community Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective use of frequency of contact guidelines, special conditions, community residential facilities, halfway house placements will improve offenders successful reintegration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community supervision levels</li> <li>Special conditions</li> <li>Residential placements</li> </ul>
Moderating Suspension Warrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving suspension efficiencies and narrowing disparities in practice will increase the potential to sustain more offenders in the community under supervision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suspension warrant rates</li> </ul>
Moderating Technical Violations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding the technical revocation decision-making process an/or finding alternatives to revocation submissions and understanding the process may improve reintegration efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical violation rates/reasons</li> </ul>
Increasing Community-based Program Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assignment to community-based programs where the need is identified</li> <li>Community-based program participation will improve likelihood of post-release success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matching rates of needs to programs</li> <li>Program participation rates/costs</li> <li>Community supervision completion rates</li> </ul>
Ensuring Community-based Program Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completing community-based programs will improve the likelihood of post-release success</li> <li>Reducing the number of program non-completions in the community will reduce costs in terms of wasted programming resources and in depriving motivated offenders program opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matching rates of needs to programs</li> <li>Community-based program completion rates</li> <li>Community supervision completion rates</li> </ul>
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Improving Access to Community-based Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assignment to community-based services where the need is identified</li> <li>Community-based service utilization when required will improve likelihood of community reintegration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matching rates of needs to services</li> <li>Service referrals</li> <li>Service utilization rates</li> <li>Community supervision completion rates</li> </ul>
Reduced Re-offending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduced re-admissions to provincial and federal corrections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reconviction rates/type</li> <li>Time to reconviction</li> <li>Re-admission rates</li> </ul>

## Summary

Contemporary issues in corrections continue to direct research resources and focus efforts on offender classification, effective programming, and a plethora of crime reduction strategies. Since its inception, the research functions of the Service, like those in other jurisdictions, have made significant advances in their operations with increased and constantly improved offender assessment and intervention technology. The great amount of conceptual and practical work that has gone into evidence-based correctional practice is being documented in the literature. Consequently, applied research has contributed greatly to crime prevention and the modernization of corrections.

As we look at changing demographics, technologies and nature of criminal activities that are facing national and international corrections today, it is not surprising to find that the demand for sharing knowledge and specialized corrections expertise is high. The ultimate test of any correctional agencies research function, of course, will be whether further breakthroughs can still be made in reducing the likelihood of criminal futures. ■

<sup>1</sup> 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9

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