



Research at a glance

The Impact of Correctional Program Referral Guidelines on Low-Risk Men Offenders

KEY WORDS: *low-risk offenders, risk principle, correctional programming*

What it means

The National Correctional Program Referral Guidelines (NCPRG) have been implemented according to policy. Outcomes for low-risk offenders did not change as a result of the implementation of these guidelines. The proportion of low-risk offenders referred to correctional programs did not change with the implementation of the guidelines and low-risk offenders who were referred to programs generally met the over-ride criteria specified in policy.

What we found

Results indicated that, although there was a slight decrease in the proportion of low-risk offenders enrolled in programs since the implementation of NCPRG, there was no change in their discretionary release decisions or in the proportion of sentence served prior to release. Offenders in the pre- and post-NCPRG implementation groups did not substantively differ on rates of institutional charges or admission to segregation. Likewise, rates of recidivism for low-risk offenders did not differ significantly between pre- and post- implementation of guidelines. Longer term trends indicated that the slight decline in proportion of low-risk offenders referred to programs began prior to NCPRG implementation. Most low-risk offenders referred to programs met the prescribed over-ride criteria.

Why we did this study

The NCPRG, implemented by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) in July 2009, prioritized programming for high-risk offenders and limited participation for low-risk offenders. These guidelines are in keeping with the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model of effective corrections that maintains that higher intensity interventions should be reserved for higher risk cases (Andrews and Bonta, 2010). The primary purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the NCPRG implementation on low-risk offenders. Given the recent adoption of the Integrated Correctional Program Model (ICPM) suite of programs, a separate additional analysis looked at the pattern of referrals of low-risk offenders to the

ICPM over time and determined whether low-risk offenders referred to programs met the over-ride criteria specified in the guidelines.

What we did

Two admission cohorts of men offenders were compared on several indices: (1) the pre-NCPRG group, consisting of 1,525 low-risk offenders admitted to CSC between June 30, 2006 and June 30, 2007; and (2) the post-NCPRG group, consisting of 1,846 low-risk offenders admitted between July 30, 2009 and July 30, 2010. Participation was limited to offenders admitted in the Quebec, Ontario, and Prairie regions. Risk was assessed by the Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale-Revised (SIR-R1) for non-Aboriginal offenders and the Custody Rating Scale for Aboriginal offenders. Longer term trends for low-risk offenders referred to nationally recognized correctional programs and ICPM were also examined. Files of a random sample of low-risk offenders referred to programs were examined to determine the proportion of who met the over-ride criteria.

For more information

Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2010). Rehabilitating criminal justice policy and practice. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 16, 39-55.

Sapers, J., Power, J., Wilton, G., & Stewart, L. (2014). *Impact of Correctional Program Referral Guidelines on Low-Risk Men Offenders* (Research Report R-327). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

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