

What Does Type of Offence Tell Us about Recidivism?

What happens to federal offenders after they are released? Is there a significant difference in the return rates of those released to full parole and those released on mandatory supervision? Does the length of the initial sentence bear on the rate of return? Does recidivism depend on whether or not an offender is serving a sentence for an offence under the Schedule to the *Parole Act*. These are questions the Correctional Service of Canada recently asked when reviewing offender careers.

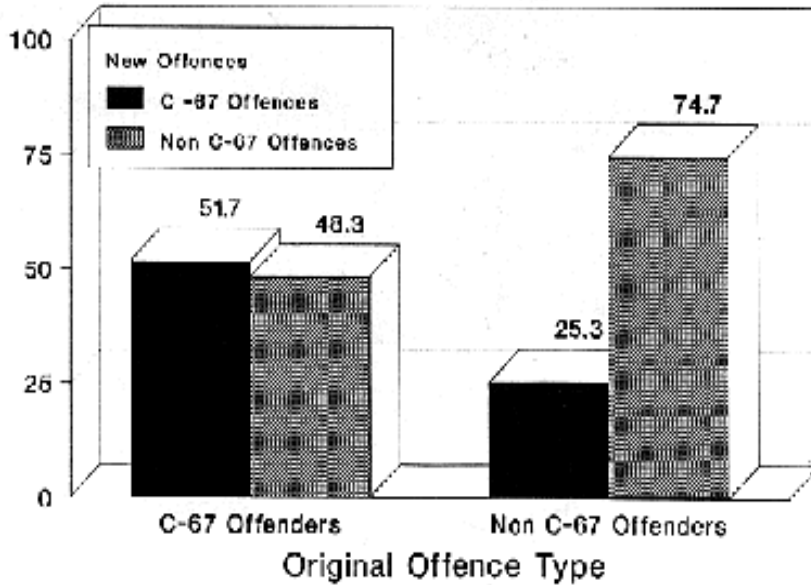
Data was obtained from the Correctional Service of Canada Offender Information System for 1979-1985. This provided for a minimum four-year and maximum ten-year follow-up period, during which offenders could be sentenced for an additional term in a federal institution.

Of the 15,000 released cases that were reviewed for the ten-year period, it was discovered that 5435, or 36%, had been readmitted.¹ Overall, offenders who had originally been sentenced on a scheduled offence were no more likely to return to federal institutions than offenders who had been sentenced for a nonscheduled offence. However, there was one important difference in the recidivism patterns for the two groups: an offender initially convicted for a scheduled offence was more likely to be reconvicted for another scheduled offence.

Figure 1 shows the original and reconviction offence categories for those offenders who returned to federal institutions. The figure illustrates that of the offenders who were initially sentenced for a scheduled offence, about half (51.7%) who recidivated returned for new scheduled offences and the remaining (48.3%) returned for non-scheduled offences. However, of the nonscheduled offenders who recidivated, only about one quarter (25 %) were readmitted for scheduled offences. The majority of these non-scheduled recidivists returned to federal institutions for non-scheduled offences.

Figure 1

Types of New Offences Among Readmitted Offenders



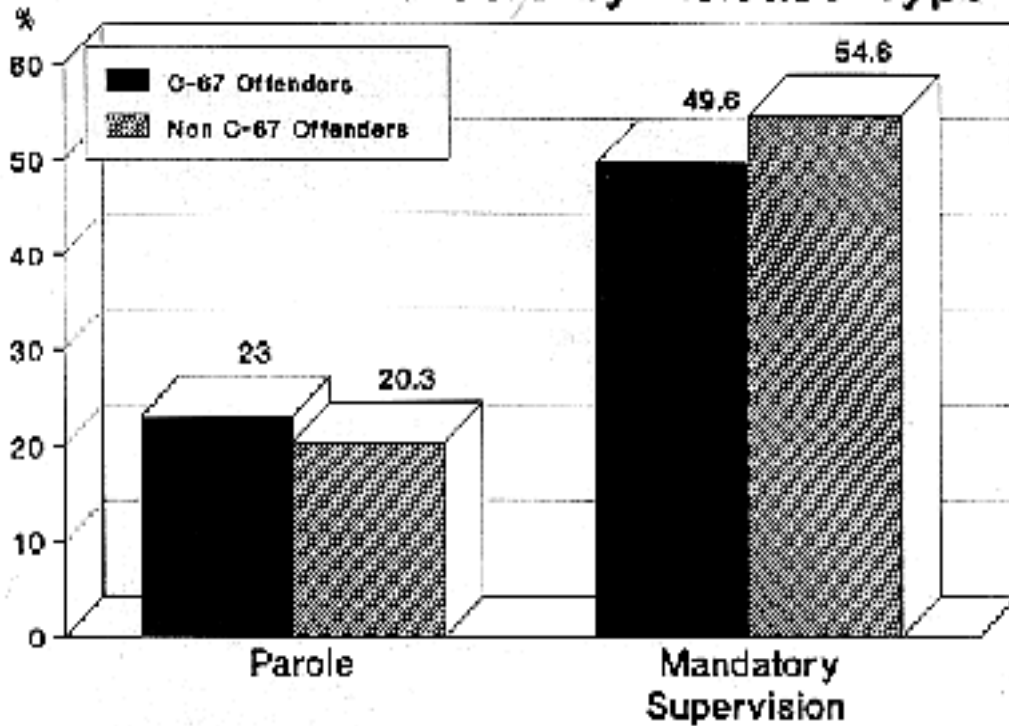
The finding suggests that offenders serving sentences for less serious offences are more likely to return for the same type of offence if they are reconvicted. Offenders serving sentences for more serious offences, on the other hand, have about a 50/50 chance of returning on a reconviction for a serious offence.

Another factor that was examined concerned the relationship between sentence length and reconvictions. The return rate of offenders serving sentences of four years or less was compared with offenders serving longer sentences. There were no significant differences in the overall readmission rates of offenders serving short and long sentences. However, within the nonscheduled group, those serving longer sentences were half as likely (22.6%) as those serving short sentences (40.3%) to return.

There was a substantial difference in the readmission rates of offenders who were released on parole and mandatory supervision. Offenders released on parole returned to federal institutions at a rate of 21.5 %, while mandatory supervision cases returned at a rate of 52.1 %. Hence, the recidivism rate for mandatory supervision cases was more than double the rate for parole cases. As Figure 2 shows, this pattern held up regardless of the non or scheduled status of the original offence.

Figure 2

Readmission Percentages for C-67 and Non C-67 Offenders by Release Type



(1) Since readmission to federal institutions was the recidivism criterion in this study, reconvictions resulting in provincial prison terms or other sentences are not included. Therefore, the overall recidivism rate may be underestimated for this sample. In addition, the length of follow-up time varies from one offender to another in the sample. Offenders for which data were available for shorter follow-up periods, therefore, have less opportunity to recidivate than offenders with longer follow-up periods. The variable follow-up periods may also serve to underestimate the overall recidivism rate.