This study is the third examination of the Custody Rating Scale (CRS) to assess its reliability, validity and practical utility. Accurate inmate classification is critical to the effective management of prison populations and to meet the Correctional Service of Canada's legislative and policy mandates. Objective classification methods are needed to ensure excessive controls are not imposed on offenders, help direct the use of limited resources and generate accurate offender information for long-term accommodation planning. The 1988 introduction of the CRS established objective standardized criteria for the initial classification of federal offenders. (An automated version of the Scale became a component of the penitentiary placement model in 1991.)

A sample of 6,745 active offender files with complete and accurate CRS evaluations was drawn from the Offender Management System in March 1995. Unlike previous pilot or field tests, this review used a large national sample, and data reflect the prison environment at that time. Files were reviewed for errors, scoring defects, irregularities and incomplete administration of the Scale. The frequency of detected errors was insignificant and confirmed that implementation of the automated version of the CRS has all but eliminated application error as a source of concern. The Offender Management System also improved access to the documents required for a competent and accurate administration of the Scale.

This study indicates that the CRS continues to perform well as assessed by a variety of traditional psychometric and operational criteria. Introduction of the automated version ensures the Scale is applied to all offenders at admission and greatly reduces omissions, computational errors and irregularities in the application of the security classification protocols.

The study exposed a number of regional differences, and to ensure the uniform application of the Scale, a number of recommendations were proposed to address identified deficiencies.