

Examining reintegration potential for Aboriginal Offenders

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The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) examines offenders' static and dynamic factors at intake, prior to conditional release, and every six months thereafter. The objective of this article is to more closely examine the discrimination capacity of Reintegration Potential Reassessment (RPR) in order to validate its use with Aboriginal offenders.²

Various CSC studies led to the development of Reintegration Potential Reassessment (RPR), which has been proven to effectively predict re-offending.³ The RPR is used to assist in offender reintegration, while serving to orient interventions so that they provide greater support to those on the path to reintegration. However, the validity of the RPR has not been assessed for Aboriginal offenders, and there is some question as to whether it is appropriate for this cultural context. In addition, studies have found significant differences in the profiles of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders,⁴ indicating the importance of examining reintegration potential for use with Aboriginal offenders.

In addition to discussing the validity of the RPR for use with Aboriginal offenders, this article also discusses specific variables that may enhance Aboriginal offender reintegration.

Methodology

Analyses are based on information from two sources. The first source of data was the CSC Offender Management System. The sample was comprised of 30,041 cases of male offenders who were released on day parole, full parole or statutory release between January 1996 and June 2000. Of these, 25,222 (84%) of the releases involved non-Aboriginal offenders and 4,819 (16%) involved Aboriginal offenders. These cases were followed for up to three years to examine re-admissions to federal custody.

The second source of data came from a study conducted by Johnston.⁵ This study focused on 518 randomly chosen Aboriginal offenders in 1996, representing approximately one-third of all incarcerated Aboriginal offenders.

Offender profile

The analyses confirmed other studies in finding statistically significant differences in the profiles of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders in federal institutions. These differences suggest that

Aboriginal offenders, compared to non-Aboriginal offenders are:

- younger, with an average age of 35 versus 38;
- less likely to be granted day parole (59% versus 66%), but more likely to be granted statutory release (34% versus 26%);
- more likely to be classified as high risk (42% versus 23%);
- more likely to be classified as having high needs (41% versus 26%);
- more likely to be classified as both high risk and high need (30% versus 15%); and,
- rated higher on each of the seven needs and have a greater number of high-level needs (4 on average versus 3).

Relationship with recidivism

The study also looked at the relationship between certain variables and recidivism among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders.⁶ As indicated in Table 1, larger proportions of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal offenders were re-admitted to a federal institution. Within a six-month period, 18% of Aboriginal offenders were re-admitted compared to 11% of non-Aboriginal offenders. These differences remained for longer follow-up periods (33% versus 20% for a one-year follow-up period). No significant differences emerged between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders in whether the re-admissions were for technical violations or new offences.

Although Aboriginal offenders were re-admitted more often than non-Aboriginal offenders for all types of release, the largest differences occurred for those released on full parole (21% versus 9%).

Table 1

Re-admissions to federal custody within six months		
Type of Release	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Overall Recidivism	18%	11%
Day Parole	14%	7%
Full Parole	21%	9%
Statutory Release	25%	21%

It appears that the RPR is predictive of community supervision outcome for Aboriginal offenders. As illustrated in Table 2, the proportion of recidivists

with high risk and need levels follow fairly similar trends for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders. However, improvements to community assessments could be made for high risk/low need and low risk/high need designations, where larger proportions of Aboriginal offenders recidivated (38% versus 10%; 37% versus 12%).

Table 2

Percentage of recidivists by level of risk and need

Risk Level	Aboriginal			Non-Aboriginal		
	Need Level			Need Level		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Low	1.7%	2.5%	37.5%	0.8%	5.1%	12.4%
Medium	5.9%	14.8%	31.9%	3.7%	11.7%	20.9%
High	38.2%	15.2%	25.4%	9.6%	10.6%	26.2%

The results also revealed a number of statistically significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders:

- the younger the offender, the wider the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders on recidivism;
- although risk and need level predicted recidivism, weaker correlations existed for Aboriginal offenders;
- weaker correlations existed for Aboriginal offenders between individual needs and recidivism, except for needs concerning social interaction and attitude;
- although the number of high needs predicted recidivism, the relationship is more linear among non-Aboriginal offenders.

Validity and relevance of reintegration potential

Analyses more closely tied to the actual use of the RPR, including discriminative and predictive validity analyses, reveal the presence of statistically significant differences in the two groups. These differences, more than any others, demonstrate the importance of considering culture. Except for needs concerning social interaction and attitude, all other needs provide better discriminative capacity for non-Aboriginal offenders.

As indicated in Table 3, the number of high needs and the overall need level are the two best predictors of recidivism for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders. For other variables, however, appreciable differences occur with respect to the order of importance and number of best predictors.

Other main points emerging from these analyses are:

Table 3

Best predictors of recidivism

Predictors	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
	Order	Odds-Ratio	Order	Odds-Ratio
Risk Level	5	0.69		
Need Level	2	1.14	2	1.58
Employment Need			4	0.84
Marital/Family Need				
Associates/Social Interaction Need	3	0.88	5	0.69
Substance Abuse Need	6	0.62	3	0.84
Community Functioning Need			6	0.62
Personal/Emotional Need			7	0.42
Attitude Need	4	0.82		
Number of High Needs	1	1.45	1	2.13

- the addition of age to the other variables has the effect of increasing its predictive value for both groups, but more so for Aboriginal offenders;
- the Métis sub-group and the sub-group of Aboriginals excluding the Métis and Inuit also reveal significant differences.

These analyses support the hypothesis that weighting based on standardized regression coefficients, and taking into account the best predictors identified for Aboriginal offenders, could be very promising in terms of improving the RPR's predictive capacity for the Aboriginal offender population. Particular attention should be paid to the relevance of adding the age variable to enhance the predictive value of reintegration potential for Aboriginal offenders. Lastly, consideration should be given to analyses that take into account First Nations, Métis and Inuit sub-groups. In certain cases, more precise data would need to be collected with respect to the status, native community and current residence of Aboriginal offenders in order to examine all of these possibilities.

Analyses on variables specific to Aboriginal culture

Data from Johnston's study allowed analyses of a number of areas that may be related to recidivism and/or reintegration back into society. These variables include attendance at a residential school, participation in cultural or spiritual activities, the use of traditional Aboriginal services such as Elders, Aboriginal Liaison Officers and mentoring, as well as participation in Aboriginal-only programs or other programs.

Due to a lack of sufficient data to conduct more sophisticated analyses, only simple correlations could be calculated. Before making a definitive

conclusion as to their impact on reintegration, the findings listed below should be confirmed by studies based on a larger amount of data. The main findings are:

- attendance at residential schools does not appear to be related to recidivism, but this finding may be due to the small sample and the impossibility of taking intergenerational influence into account;
- participation in cultural activities was strongly correlated with a decrease in recidivism, but had a less clear impact on reintegration (since those who participate are lower risk and needs than those who do not participate);
- participation in spiritual activities and Elder's advice were strongly correlated with a decrease in recidivism and likely impacted on reintegration (since those who participate have the same level of risk and needs as those who do not participate);
- participation in programs focusing on employment and education was strongly correlated with a decrease in recidivism, but only for Aboriginal-specific programs;

- participation in programs focusing on social relationships, community needs and emotional needs were strongly correlated with a decrease in recidivism, regardless of whether the programs were specifically for Aboriginals or not;
- the low number of Aboriginals who participate in Aboriginal-specific programs and the positive results associated with participation in these programs seem to confirm Johnston's observation that the low number of participants is not attributable to a lack of motivation, but rather that there is very little access to these programs.

Generally, it can be concluded that some Aboriginal-specific programs and services show promise in terms of being potential predictors of recidivism, but perhaps even more in terms of facilitating reintegration. These programs and services fit quite well into the context of CSC's mission. Although there is still very little access to some of these programs, the early results strongly encourage further development, especially since they respond to demands from Aboriginal groups and are supported by other studies. ■

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² For more in-depth information on this project, see Sioui, R., and Thibault, J. (2001). *The relevance of a cultural adaptation for Aboriginals of the Reintegration Potential Reassessment Scale (RPRS)*, Research Report R-109, Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

³ Motiuk, L. L., and Brown, S. L. (1993). *The validity of offender needs identification and analysis in community corrections*. Research Report R-34, Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada. Also see Motiuk, L. L., and Porporino, F. J. (1989). *Offender risk/needs assessment: A study of conditional releases*. Research Report R-01, Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

⁴ Trevethan, S., Carrière, G., MacKillop, B., Finn, A., Robinson, D., Porporino, F., and Millson, W. (1999). *A one-day snapshot of offenders in Canada's adult correctional facilities*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada. Also see Motiuk, L., and Nafekh, M. (2000). Aboriginal offenders in federal corrections: A profile. *Forum on Corrections Research* 12(1), 10-15.

⁵ Johnston, C. (1998). *Aboriginal offender survey: Case files and interview sample*, Research Report R-61. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

⁶ Recidivism was based upon any re-admissions to a federal institution within six months of release (including new offences and technical violations).