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Serious Community Incidents Among Federal Offenders on Conditional Release

Serious community incidents typically involved offenders on Statutory Release. Common proximal risk factors included substance use, flight from supervision, and non-compliance with release conditions.

Why we did this study

The vast majority of offenders serving a federal sentence are eventually released on a form of [conditional release](#), whether discretionary (i.e., Day Parole or Full Parole) or non-discretionary (i.e., Statutory Release). The current study examined serious violent incidents committed by offenders on conditional release between January 1st, 2021 and March 31st, 2022. This period, corresponding with the COVID-19 pandemic, was marked by a shift in the nature of police-reported crime within the community (Moreau, 2021; i.e., a decrease overall but increase in certain violent crimes) and presented unique social circumstances for offender reintegration.

What we did

An incident-based data extraction was conducted to identify serious violent community incidents instigated by offenders under community supervision between January 1st, 2021 and March 31st, 2022. Cases for inclusion included those marked by serious harm, i.e., victim injuries necessitating substantial medical intervention and/or resulting in serious bodily harm or death, as well as all violent incidents of a sexual nature. Information was collected from case documents pertaining to the circumstances and nature of violent incidents and the profile of instigators involved. Incident categorization was based on report descriptions and not necessarily the nature of final criminal charges.

What we found

Between January 1st, 2021 and March 31st, 2022, there were 80 documented serious violent incidents committed by federal offenders on conditional release. This included incidents categorized as assault (38), sexual violence (22), homicide (8), attempted murder (5), and other types of violent incidents (e.g., robbery; 7). The Prairie Region accounted for the highest proportion of serious violent incidents (44%).

Instigators (81) were often Indigenous (47%) or a member of an ethno-cultural minority group (22%). Men accounted for 96% of instigators. Most often, instigators had been released from a medium security environment (62%).

Three-quarters of instigators were on Statutory Release at the time of the incident. A residency condition (e.g., required to reside at a Community Residential Facility) was imposed on just over half (56%) of the instigators.

A majority (59%) had a [Level A Frequency of Contact](#) (i.e., a minimum of four parole supervision meetings per month). The median time between release and the violent incident was 144 days (just under five months). Just over half (52%) of instigators had a previous suspension of conditional release on their current sentence.

Common proximal risk factors included substance use (56%), flight from supervision (42%), non-compliance with release conditions (36%), family conflict/stress (25%), and association with criminal/negative associates (26%).

In a notable subset of cases (47%), the victim was previously known to the offender. In many cases, incidents fell in line with the offender's previous offending cycle, though in some cases, the incident represented an escalation and/or shift in offending.

What it means

Conditional release allows offenders to serve a portion of their sentence in the community while under supervision, facilitating a gradual and structured reintegration process. Most offenders will complete periods of conditional release without incurring new criminal charges. The present study found trends in serious violent offending on conditional release reflected broader patterns in reoffending: prevalence is higher among offenders on non-discretionary rather than discretionary release, and outcomes are marked by differences in race/ethnicity (Public Safety Canada, 2022; Stewart et al., 2019). Monitoring of release outcomes sheds light on opportunities to enhance community supervision and interventions through an increased ability to target common need areas.

References

- Moreau, G. (2021). *Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2020*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Statistics Canada.
- Public Safety Canada. (2022). *Corrections and Conditional Release statistical overview 2020*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.
- Stewart, L. A., Wilton, G., Baglole, S. & Miller, R. (2019). A comprehensive study of recidivism rates among Canadian federal offenders. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

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