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_____ **Research Report** _____

**Community Outcomes for
Offenders Serving a Life Sentence**

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**Community Outcomes for
Offenders Serving a Life Sentence**

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May 2012

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Executive Summary

Key words: *Lifers, community success, reintegration, readmission, indeterminate sentences*

Offenders given a life sentence (“Lifers”) pose unique challenges for justice systems as they are subject to long periods of incarceration and indefinite supervision. The current study explores community outcomes for life sentenced offenders and the variables associated with success in the community. For the purposes of this study, Lifers were categorized into three groups based on relative success in the community during the first five years of release: no readmissions, readmission with an offence, and readmission without an offence.

Of those Lifers who were readmitted with five years of release, only 12.4% were readmitted with an offence. Men and women Lifers were equally likely to be successful in the community, while Aboriginal offenders were more likely than non-Aboriginal offenders to be readmitted for any reason.

Lifers who remained in the community did not differ from those who were readmitted with respect to risk assessed at intake. However, at their initial intake, readmitted Lifers were assessed as having higher levels of criminogenic need. Further, the odds of being returned to custody with an offence were 3.5 times greater for offenders who had at least some need in the Associates domain at admission.

Institutional adjustment and behaviour were significantly related to success in the community. Lifers who remained in the community for at least 5 years were less likely to have spent time in segregation and less likely to have been involved as a perpetrator or associate in minor institutional incidents.

Lifers readmitted without an offence spent less time in the community, were generally higher need, and demonstrated more problems with institutional adjustment than offenders readmitted with offence. These results may indicate an inability to cope with the institutional environment and the need for more intense supervision on release.

Overall, just over one-quarter (28.5%) of Lifers were readmitted within 5 years. The low rate of re-offence (3.5% over 5 years) suggests that CSC has been able to effectively manage the risk posed by Lifers released to the community. The variables associated with parole outcome, particularly dynamic factors, further highlight the need for focused intervention and support strategies in the institutions aimed specifically at assisting the Lifer population transition safely into the community.

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Introduction

The rates of ‘successful’ community reintegration for life-sentenced offenders are relatively high, though little is known about the factors associated with success for this population. In Canada, life and indeterminate sentences are reserved for the most abhorrent criminal offences including murder, manslaughter and serious violent crimes against the person. Sentences for serious crimes should be sufficiently lengthy to serve both as a deterrent and as condemnation of the criminal act (Department of Justice, 2005). Arguably, lengthy sentences may also be justified as a means to protect society from the potential risks posed by violent or repeat offenders. Indeed, public views on offenders convicted of serious violent crimes may be influenced by impassioned media representations of them as “monsters” (“Dismantling the façade”, 2010) who are incapable of rehabilitation. Recent media reports suggest that Canadians favour more punitive consequences for individuals convicted of serious violent crimes, including reinstatement of the death penalty (“Hang tough on crime”, 2011). The principal concern of correctional jurisdictions is public safety and, certainly, offenders convicted of murder or other serious violent crimes have, at some point, posed a significant risk to the public. The question is whether these offenders pose a significant risk to the public indefinitely. Should there be cause for concern when these offenders are released from prison?

In 1976, the death penalty as a punishment for capital murder was abolished in Canada and was replaced by mandatory life sentences for first- and second-degree murder.¹ Life-sentenced offenders (“Lifers”) are unique among the general offender population. Due to the serious nature of their offence (usually homicide), they are subject to lengthy periods of incarceration and, when released, remain under correctional supervision until they die. Their long-term incarceration and indefinite supervision present significant challenges not only for the offender but for the correctional systems tasked with managing their risk and assisting eligible offenders with safe reintegration to the community. Specifically, challenges have been noted with access to correctional programming, institutional adjustment, and offender motivation (Santos, 2003; Young, Broom & Ruddell, in press; Zamble, 1992).

Although Lifers are supervised indefinitely, the length of time served in a federal institution varies. In Canada, offenders who have been convicted of first degree murder are

¹ According to the *Criminal Code of Canada*, other offences that may be subject to a life sentence include robbery, attempted murder, and aggravated sexual assault.

sentenced to a mandatory 25 years imprisonment before the possibility of parole (*Criminal Code* s. 745, 1985). The Parole Board of Canada (PBC) determines whether the offender meets the criteria for parole, and he or she may be granted release to the community under supervision. If released to the community (i.e. on day or full parole) these offenders are required to abide by certain conditions; however, unlike other offenders released on parole, these conditions must be followed for the rest of their lives. Day parole prepares an offender for full release and requires the offender to return nightly to a community-based residential facility. Offenders serving a life sentence are eligible to apply for day parole three years before their full parole eligibility date. Under full parole, an offender lives in the community and must report to a parole officer on a regular basis. An offender may be returned to custody if the conditions of parole are violated or if the offender commits a new offence.

For Lifers who have been convicted of second degree murder or other serious offences, the sentencing judge decides the full parole eligibility date at trial with a minimum of 10 years and a maximum of 25 years of incarceration before parole eligibility (*Criminal Code*, s. 745, 1985). Despite the serious nature of their offences, more than 60% of offenders convicted of murder are granted day parole the first time they apply for parole (NPB, 2002). The proportion of life-sentenced offenders on conditional release has grown by 5% over the last ten years, with more than one-third (37%) of the current Lifer population under supervision in the community (Young et al., in press). Further, nearly one-third of all federal parolees are Lifers (NPB, 2009).

Due to the violent nature of their index offence(s), the public may perceive that Lifers pose a significant risk to reoffend in a violent manner when released to the community. Recent research has shown that this is not the case. Parole board statistics (NPB, 2002) show that offenders incarcerated for first or second degree murder fared better in the community than offenders with determinate sentences who were incarcerated for violent and non-violent offences, with successful completions² averaging around 90%. Between 1975 and 1999, there were 11,783 homicide offenders³ released to the community, with 37 (0.3%) later reconvicted of a homicide offence (NPB, 2002). Similarly, offenders serving indeterminate sentences have also been shown to have lower rates of violent and non-violent recidivism at the end of a seven year follow-up in comparison to offenders serving long-term and shorter-term determinate sentences

² For Lifers, a 'successful completion' of parole is achieved only when they die.

³ Homicide includes Murder 1, Murder 2 and manslaughter. Of the 11,783 offenders in the study, 7,752 were originally serving sentences for manslaughter.

(Johnson & Grant, 2000). Rates of revocation for technical violations⁴ or new offences have been shown to be at least comparable to the general offender population over the long term (Porporino, 1991; NPB, 2002).

One of the priorities of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is the safety and security of staff and offenders in federal institutions. Life sentenced offenders, particularly those convicted of first degree murder, have been spending increasingly longer periods of time in custody since the abolition of the death penalty (Nafekh & Flight, 2002). Understanding the unique needs and challenges associated with the Lifer population, in particular institutional adjustment, are of importance in maintaining a safe environment for both correctional staff and inmates. CSC has also prioritized the safe transition of eligible offenders into the community. The majority of life-sentenced offenders will be granted some form of conditional release (NPB, 2002) therefore it is important to determine if Lifers pose a significant risk to the public and whether that risk is being appropriately managed in the community.

With these priorities in mind, this research aimed to answer three main questions related to community outcomes for life-sentenced offenders. First, data were collected to determine overall parole outcomes for life-sentenced offenders. Due to the indefinite nature of their sentences, Lifers can only ‘successfully’ complete a period of conditional release when they die. Therefore, defining what ‘success’ means for this group is difficult. The Task Force on Long Term Offenders (CSC, 1998)⁵ suggested a minimum of five years in the community crime-free as a proxy for ‘success’. This definition was used as the basis for this report, with a slight modification in order to create a three-group rather than standard “successful” versus “unsuccessful” two-group comparison. For the purposes of this study, conditionally released life-sentenced offenders were defined in three ways: those who had not been readmitted within the first 5 years after release, those who had reoffended, and those who were readmitted without offence. The two ‘unsuccessful’ groups (those readmitted with and without an offence) were separated for this report as it was hypothesized that they would present with different risk and need profiles as well as differences in institutional adjustment.

⁴ A technical violation is a breach of conditions of release. Such conditions may include a curfew, abstaining from alcohol and drugs and participation in community treatment programs (Grant & Gillis, 1999).

⁵ The impetus for this study was derived from the recommendations made in *The Report of the Task Force on Long-Term Offenders* (CSC, 1998).

The second goal of this study was to determine whether differences existed between the groups with respect to demographics, offence-related characteristics, static risk, criminogenic need and institutional outcomes. Finally, regression analyses were completed in order to identify the variables associated with a return to custody with and without an offence among Lifers in the community. It was hypothesized that offenders who had not been readmitted within the first 5 years after release would be lower risk, and present with fewer identified needs at the initial admission. Further, it was hypothesized that offenders in this group would have more positive institutional adjustment based on analyses of a variety of institutional outcomes.

The Lifer population is growing and aging (Young et al., in press) and in order to continue to ensure their safe transition into the community, it is necessary to analyze the characteristics of those offenders who are ‘successful’ and compare them to those who are ‘unsuccessful’ on release. By doing so, CSC will be able to better meet the needs and manage the risk of this unique population through the development of appropriate and effective programming and management strategies, both institutional and community-based.

Method

To conduct the following analyses, information was drawn from the automated Offender Management System (OMS) of the Correctional Service of Canada. The OMS contains information gathered from the time of admission to the federal system to the end of an offender's sentence, as well as any subsequent readmissions to federal custody.

Participants

Included in analyses are 1,129 offenders who were serving life sentences and had been released into the community on day or full parole over a ten-year period from April 1995 to March 2005.⁷ Offenders can be sentenced to 'life' as a minimum or maximum sentence. Both sentences require that an offender remain under the jurisdiction of CSC for life but differ in terms of the length of time that must be served in a federal institution before parole eligibility. Parole eligibility for life minimum sentences varies between 10 to 25 years, whereas eligibility for life maximum sentences is earlier, varying between 7 to 10 years.

Offenders were followed until March 2010, and grouped into three categories based on community outcome over the five year period; no readmission within 5 years, readmitted with an offence, and readmitted without an offence. In defining readmissions with or without an offence, a Lifer was considered to have re-offended if their reincarceration was labelled "Revocation with Outstanding Charge" or "Revocation with Offence". An offender was grouped into the 'readmitted without offence' category if their reincarceration was labelled "Termination of Conditional Release without Offence", "Revocation without Offence", or "Conditional Release Inoperative". The "Conditional Release Inoperative" readmission type is used when the offender is reincarcerated due to a change in the parole eligibility date. Only first release outcome during the ten-year period was reported; any subsequent releases or readmissions within that time were not investigated.

Analytic Approach

Contingency tables were created for binary and categorical data and Pearson chi square

⁷ The earliest sentence commencement date was February 1950 and the latest was January 2001.

statistics were used to identify overall group differences. Adjusted standardized residuals (ASR) were calculated for each cell of the contingency tables. A residual is the difference between the observed and expected frequencies in a cell, and it identifies the strength of a chi square association. Adjusted standardized residuals follow a normal distribution (with a mean = 0 and standard deviation = 1) and are therefore essentially z-scores. Any ASR with an absolute value greater than or equal to +/- 2 (or 2 standard deviations from the mean) indicates a significant deviation from the mean. In a contingency table with two levels (either row or column), the ASR in one cell will be equal in magnitude but opposite in sign to the ASR in the cell directly beside (or below/above) it (SPSS, n.d.; Bewick, Cheek & Ball, 2004). Where significant group differences were detected in tables with more than two each of rows and columns, separate pairwise comparisons of independent proportions were conducted using z-tests. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and t-tests were used when examining continuous variables.

To examine the relative contribution of variables associated with a Lifer being readmitted with or without offence, a multinomial logistic regression was performed using stepwise selection and entry and stay significance levels of 0.05. The stepwise method builds a model by adding variables one at a time. If a variable starts and continues to be significant at the 0.05 level after the addition of other predictors, it remains in the model. If, however, previously selected variables are no longer significant at the 0.05 level due to the addition of other predictor variables, the stepwise procedure eliminates the previously selected variables from the model. Lifers who had not been readmitted within the first 5 years after release were used as the reference group for this regression. Variables for which group differences were found in the descriptive analyses were included as covariates in the regression model. Nagelkerke's generalized coefficient of determination (R^2 ; Nagelkerke, 1991) was used to assess the fit of the final model. Nagelkerke's R^2 is the proportion of variation in the data explained by the model, from 0.0 to 1.0, with a larger number indicating a better fit of the model.

Measures

Offender Intake Assessment (OIA)

The Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) is "a comprehensive and integrated evaluation of the offender at the time of admission to the federal system" (Motiuk, 1997, p. 18). This

evaluation involves the collection of information related to the offender's mental and physical health, social, educational and criminal history and other factors related to risk and need. The OIA is comprised of two parts: a static risk assessment and an evaluation of dynamic needs, including the Dynamic Needs Identification and Analysis (CSC, 2007).

As part of the OIA, overall static risk and criminogenic need levels are assigned by intake parole officers. For each, they assign a rating on a 3-point scale from 'High' to 'Low' based on the results of several analytical tools completed at admission.

Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis (DFIA)

The DFIA portion of the OIA is comprised of seven domains representing criminogenic need areas (associates/social interaction, attitudes, community functioning, employment/education, marital/family, personal/emotional and substance abuse). The domains are scored on a 4-point scale: factor is seen as an asset, no need, some need and considerable need. For ease of comparisons, the domains were collapsed into two categories: asset/no need and some/considerable need.

It should be noted that a large proportion of Lifers in the sample were missing OIA/DFIA data. The Offender Intake Assessment was introduced in late 1994 and approximately 80% of Lifers in the sample were admitted prior to the OIA implementation date. After the implementation of the OIA, a 'shell' intake assessment was completed on the population of federal offenders who were incarcerated pre-OIA, therefore only the overall ratings in each of the domains listed above are available (Pennell, personal communication, August 10, 2010). As such, though DFIA indicator data were missing for 90% of the sample, over three-quarters (77%) had overall ratings in the seven domains, as well as static and dynamic ratings.

Correctional programs

CSC defines a correctional program as "a structured intervention that addresses the factors directly linked to offenders' criminal behaviour" (CSC, 2003, p. 1). Offenders are assigned to programs based on individual Correctional Plans which outline their assessed areas of need and relevant criminogenic factors. This study focuses on offender completion of five correctional programs: violence prevention, sex offender, substance abuse, family violence and living skills.⁸ Completion of a correctional program was coded as either 'yes' or 'no' dependent

⁸ These are considered 'core' or 'primary' programs. Other programs include personal development programs, education and special needs programs. Participation in these programs was not included in the analyses.

upon whether, at some point in his or her current sentence, an offender had or had not completed at least one of the programs listed above.

Institutional Incidents

An institutional incident is “any behaviour that occurs within the institution and results in a formal charge” (Cortoni, Nunes & Latendresse, 2006, p. 6). Incidents are categorized by seriousness (major or minor) and offender role in the incident (i.e. victim or perpetrator/associate). Major incidents include behaviour such as fighting or possession of unauthorized items while minor incidents include such behaviour as disobeying orders or being disrespectful toward staff (Cortoni et al, 2006). Involvement in institutional incidents was coded as either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ for this study.

Temporary Absences

Temporary absences from a federal institution, including work releases, may be granted in order to help offenders maintain community ties, attend programs or community activities that aid in rehabilitation or to undergo medical treatment (CSC, 2010). Life sentenced offenders are eligible for escorted temporary absences (ETAs) at any time during their sentence, and unescorted temporary absences (UTAs) three years before full parole eligibility, subject to Parole Board of Canada approval. All temporary absences, with the exception of those approved for medical or compassionate reasons, must be consistent with the offender’s Correctional Plan.⁹

⁹ Information on type of temporary absence (i.e. medical, family-related) was not available for this study.

Results

Readmissions

Of the 1,129 Lifers released to the community between April 1995 and March 2005, slightly more than one quarter (28.5%, $n = 322$) had been readmitted to a federal institution within the first five years after release. The vast majority (87.6%; $n = 282$) of those readmitted within the first five years were readmitted without an offence and only 3.5% ($n = 40$) of all Lifers released were readmitted with an offence during the five-year follow-up. On average, those readmitted without an offence spent significantly less time in the community (1.8 years, $SD = 1.2$) than those readmitted with an offence (2.3 years, $SD = 1.4$; $t(320) = 2.54$, $p < .05$).

Table 1

First release outcome for Lifers with a five year follow-up

Community Outcome	Lifers Released to the Community ($N = 1,129$)	
	%	(n)
No Readmission within 5 years	71.5	(807)
Readmitted without Offence	25.0	(282)
Readmitted with Offence	3.5	(40)

Sentencing, Offence Type and Release

The majority of all Lifers in the sample (95.0%) were serving life as a minimum sentence. Less than 1% of the sample (9 offenders) had a death sentence commuted to a life sentence as a result of the abolishment of the death penalty in 1976. There were no overall group differences in sentence type.

With respect to offence type, the majority of offenders in all three groups (80% or greater) were serving life sentences for second degree murder, however there were significant group differences ($X^2 = 17.57$, $df(6)$, $p < .01$). Lifers convicted of an 'Other' offence, were significantly more likely than those convicted of second degree murder to be readmitted with an

offence (8.8% vs. 3.4%; $z = 2.08, p < .05$),¹⁰ and significantly more likely than those convicted of either first or second degree murder to be readmitted without an offence (38.6% vs. 19.1% and 24.5% respectively; $z = 2.75, p < .01$ and $z = 2.37, p < .05$ respectively). There were no Lifers convicted of manslaughter later readmitted with offence (Table 2).

Table 2
Community outcome of Lifers by offence type on sentencing

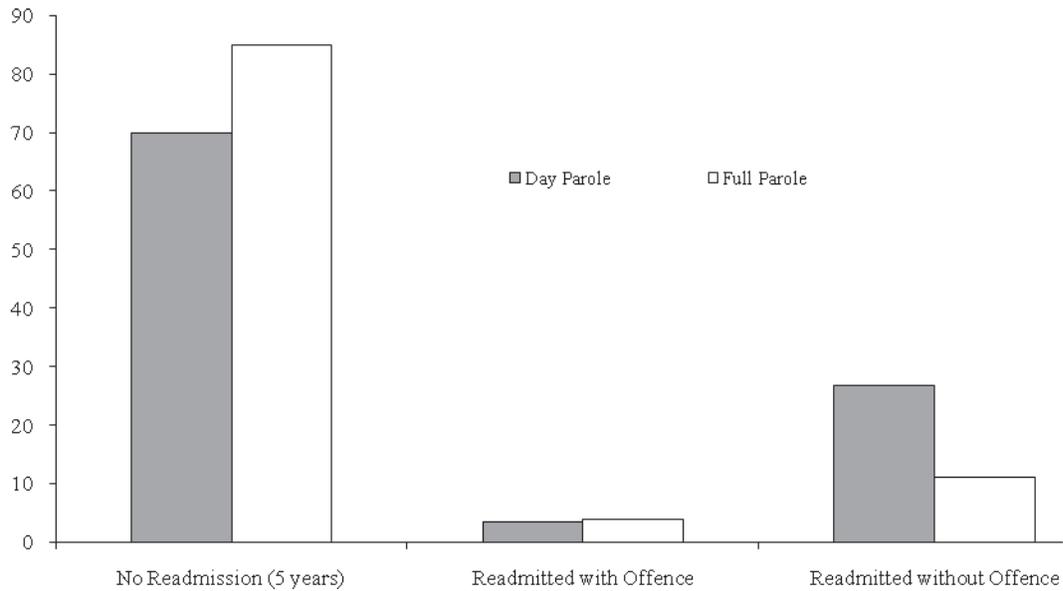
Offence Type	Community Outcome (%)		
	No Readmission within 5 years	Readmitted without Offence	Readmitted with Offence
First Degree Murder ($n = 115$)	78.3	19.1	2.6
Second Degree Murder ($n = 941$)	72.1	24.5	3.4
Manslaughter ($n = 16$)	56.3	43.8	0.0
Other ($n = 57$)	52.6	38.6	8.8

Note. ‘Other’ offence types include: armed robbery, assault, assault a peace officer, attempted murder, break & enter and commit sexual assault, kidnapping, rape, sexual assault.

With respect to release type, most Lifers were first released on day parole, however there were significant differences between the groups ($\chi^2 = 14.58, df(2), p < .001$). Lifers who had not been readmitted were significantly more likely to have been released on full parole, and Lifers readmitted without an offence were significantly more likely to have been released on day parole. The group that had been readmitted with an offence were equally likely to be released on day or full parole (Figure 1).

¹⁰ 95% of Lifers convicted of manslaughter and 55% of Lifers convicted of an offence classified as ‘Other’ were serving Life as a maximum sentence (i.e. earlier parole eligibility dates).

Figure 1. Community outcomes of Lifers by release type



Demographics

Gender

Approximately 95% of all Lifers in the sample were men. Table 3 presents the percentages of offenders in each group by gender. The percentage of male offenders who were not readmitted within the first five years (71.2%) did not differ significantly from the percentage of women Lifers who were not readmitted (77.8%). There were only 54 women Lifers in the sample, including only 1 readmitted with an offence and 11 readmitted without an offence. These small numbers preclude meaningful three-group comparisons. For a profile of women Lifers, see Young et al (in press).

Table 3

Community outcomes of men and women Lifers

Gender	Community Outcome (%)		
	No Readmission within 5 years	Readmitted without Offence	Readmitted with Offence
Men (<i>n</i> = 1,075)	71.2	25.2	3.6
Women (<i>n</i> = 54)	77.8	20.4	1.9

Marital status and age

Lifers in all three groups were most likely to be single and 34 years old, on average, at admission ($SD = 11.6$) and 44 years old at release ($SD = 10.6$; see Table 4). Two one-way analyses of variance indicated that the three groups did not differ significantly from each other in terms of age at admission or age at release. The youngest offender in this cohort was 15 years old at admission,¹¹ with the oldest being 74 years. At release, the youngest offender was 20 years old¹² and the oldest was 82 years.

Table 4

Average age at admission and release by community outcome

	Community Outcome (%)					
	No Readmission within 5 years		Readmitted without Offence		Readmitted with Offence	
	<i>(n</i> = 806)		<i>(n</i> = 282)		<i>(n</i> = 40)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age at Admission	34.2	(11.9)	34.3	(10.9)	35.2	(11.1)
Age at Release	44.7	(11.2)	43.8	(9.0)	43.0	(9.1)

¹¹ This offender was sentenced under the Young Offenders Act (YOA).

¹² For young offenders sentenced to life imprisonment, parole eligibility depends on the offence and the age of the offender at the time of the offence. An offender under 16 years of age convicted of first or second degree murder is eligible for full parole at 5 to 7 years and day parole at 4/5ths of that time (*Criminal Code of Canada s. 745.1*).

As the majority of Lifers were convicted of second degree murder (83%), average age was compared across offence types to determine whether this group had a disproportionate influence on the average age of the sample (Table 5). Offenders with first degree murder, second degree murder and manslaughter convictions were similar in age at admission. Interestingly, offenders in the ‘Other’ offence category were significantly older at admission ($F(3, 1124) = 6.5, p < .001$). Offenders with first degree murder and ‘other’ offences were similar in age at release, and significantly older than the other groups ($F(3, 1124) = 15.6, p < .001$).

The greater average age at release of offenders convicted of first degree murder is reasonable considering these offenders are serving life minimum sentences which require a longer period of time served in federal custody before parole eligibility. Intake data indicate that offenders convicted of ‘Other’ offences were more likely to have had previous involvement with the adult correctional system (either court appearances or actual convictions). This may indicate a more entrenched criminally-oriented lifestyle among this sub-population, with progressively more serious offences resulting in a life maximum sentence later in life.

Table 5
Average age at admission and release by offence type

Offence Type	Age at Admission		Age at Release	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
First Degree Murder (<i>n</i> = 115)	32.5	(11.5)	48.9	(10.0)
Second Degree Murder (<i>n</i> = 941)	34.1	(11.5)	43.6	(10.5)
Manslaughter (<i>n</i> = 16)	34.3	(11.6)	43.5	(10.4)
Other (<i>n</i> = 57)	40.5	(10.8)	50.5	(9.4)

Note. Offenders with a manslaughter offence were similar in age to those with a second degree murder offence, though the differences between this group and the others did not reach statistical significance.

Race

Table 6 presents data on race and reveals a significant difference in outcome across race groups ($X^2 = 16.36$, $df(6)$, $p < .05$). Aboriginal Lifers were less likely to be successful in the community and their rate of re-offending (6%) was double that of the other groups (approximately 3%). It is interesting to note that Lifers in the 'Other' race category had a particularly high percentage of offenders who were successful in the community (86.5%), with a relatively lower percentage having been returned to custody without an offence.

Table 6
Community outcome of Lifers by race

Race	Community Outcome (%)		
	No Readmission within 5 years	Readmitted without Offence	Readmitted with Offence
Caucasian ($n = 877$)	72.5	24.4	3.1
Black ($n = 36$)	80.6	16.7	2.8
Aboriginal ($n = 179$)	61.5	32.4	6.1
Other ($n = 37$)	86.5	10.8	2.7

Static Risk and Criminogenic Need

On Static Risk, there were no significant differences between risk levels and community outcomes ($X^2 = 8.78$, $df(4)$, $p = .07$). However, there were significant differences between criminogenic need levels on outcomes ($X^2 = 9.98$, $df(4)$, $p < .05$). Specifically, high need offenders were significantly more likely to be readmitted without an offence (29.7%) compared to moderate need offenders (20.7%; $z = -2.77$, $p < .01$). Neither group had different rates of readmission without offence compared to low need offenders (23.0%). Conversely, moderate need offenders were significantly more likely to succeed with no readmissions (76.2%) compared to high need offenders (66.5%; $z = 2.866$, $p < .01$). Readmissions with a new offence

were consistently low, with no significant differences based on level of need (see Table 7).

Table 7

Static risk and criminogenic need of Lifers at intake by community outcome

OIA Indicator	Community Outcome (%)		
	No Readmission within 5 years (<i>n</i> = 613)	Readmitted without Offence (<i>n</i> = 227)	Readmitted with Offence (<i>n</i> = 29)
Static Risk			
Low (<i>n</i> = 78)	80.8	19.2	0.0
Moderate (<i>n</i> = 171)	64.9	29.8	5.3
High (<i>n</i> = 620)	70.8	26.0	3.2
Criminogenic Need*			
Low (<i>n</i> = 74)	75.7	23.0	1.4
Moderate (<i>n</i> = 290)	76.2	20.7	3.1
High (<i>n</i> = 505)	66.5	29.7	3.8

**p* < .05.

Criminogenic Need Domains

All readmitted Lifers were significantly more likely than those who had not been readmitted to have been assessed as having some/considerable need related to Associates ($X^2 = 19.39$, $df(2)$, $p < .001$). For example, 86% of Lifers who were readmitted with an offence had at least some need related to Associates compared to 56% of Lifers who were not readmitted. Table 8 presents additional data on the percentage of offenders assessed as having at least some need in each of the seven criminogenic need domain areas.

Lifers readmitted without an offence were significantly more likely to have been assessed as having some/considerable need related to Substance Abuse ($X^2 = 11.02$, $df(2)$, $p < .01$) and Attitudes ($X^2 = 14.31$, $df(2)$, $p < .001$). More than 70% of all Lifers had some or considerable need related to Substance Abuse, and more than 90% had some or considerable need related to the Personal/Emotional domain. These percentages are consistent with the general offender population (CSC, 2009).

Table 8

Proportion of Lifers indicating 'some/considerable need' in the seven Need Domains at admission

Need Domain	Community Outcome (%)		
	No Readmission within 5 years (<i>n</i> = 613)	Readmitted without Offence (<i>n</i> = 227)	Readmitted with Offence (<i>n</i> = 29)
Employment/Education	61.3	66.5	79.3
Family/Marital	66.4	67.8	65.5
Associates***	56.4	69.2	86.2
Substance Abuse**	71.6	82.8	75.9
Community Functioning	62.0	65.2	75.9
Personal/Emotional	94.0	92.5	93.1
Attitude***	48.1	61.7	65.5

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Institutional Outcomes/Events

The three groups of Lifers differed significantly on a number of institutional outcomes and events (Table 9). Just over one-quarter (27.6%) of offenders who were not readmitted had spent at least one day in segregation during their incarceration. This proportion was significantly smaller than those readmitted with an offence (52.5%; $z = -3.39, p < .001$) and those readmitted without an offence (57.8%; $z = -9.12, p < .001$). Similarly, offenders who had not been readmitted were significantly less likely to have been placed in involuntary segregation than either of the other two groups ($z = -3.57, p < .001$ and $z = -8.32, p < .001$, respectively), and significantly less likely to have been in voluntary segregation than those offenders readmitted without an offence ($z = -6.55, p < .001$).

Approximately 80% of Lifers who had not been readmitted were released on escorted temporary absences (ETAs) during their incarceration, which was a significantly smaller percentage than either the Lifers readmitted with ($z = -2.29, p < .05$) or without an offence ($z = -3.52, p < .001$). The proportion of offenders released on unescorted temporary absences (UTAs)

did not differ significantly between the groups. The Parole Board of Canada has an ETA approval rate of 90% for Lifers (NPB, 2009) therefore the differences noted between groups may be a function of actual ETA requests by the offenders, not a disparity in Board approvals. The Lifers who had not been readmitted may have been less likely to request escorted temporary absences than the Lifers who were later readmitted.¹³

With respect to major and minor institutional incidents, there was only one difference between the three groups. Lifers who were not readmitted were significantly less likely than offenders who were readmitted without an offence to be involved in minor institutional incidents as a perpetrator or associate ($z = -2.29, p < .05$).

Interestingly, the percentage of Lifers who were not readmitted and who had successfully completed a correctional program while in a federal institution (73.5%) was significantly lower than for Lifers readmitted with (95.0%; $z = -3.05, p < .05$) and without an offence (91.8%; $z = -6.03, p < .001$). This difference may be due to identified needs at admission. As noted above, Lifers who were not readmitted had less identified need areas at admission and a lower overall assessed level of need. Offenders with greater needs may be identified as requiring more correctional programming. Therefore, a smaller proportion of offenders completing programs may not indicate negative institutional adjustment. Rather, this might reflect that a smaller proportion of offenders in that group were identified at intake as requiring programs.

¹³ Unfortunately, data on TA requests by offenders was not available for this study.

Table 9

Institutional outcomes of Lifers by community success

Institutional Outcome Variable	Community Outcome (%)			
	No Readmission within 5 years <i>n</i> = 807	Readmitted without Offence <i>n</i> = 282	Readmitted with Offence <i>n</i> = 40	All Lifers <i>N</i> = 1,129
Segregation				
Ever in Segregation***	27.6	57.8	52.5	36.0
Ever in Voluntary Segregation***	5.0	17.4	10.3	8.2
Ever in Involuntary Segregation***	24.7	51.4	50.0	32.2
Temporary Absences				
Escorted Temporary Absence***	80.5	89.7	95.0	83.3
Unescorted Temporary Absence	57.0	64.5	62.5	59.1
Institutional Incidents				
Major Incident (Victim)	5.7	5.0	5.0	5.5
Major Incident (Perpetrator)	14.9	17.7	17.5	15.7
Minor Incident (Victim)	1.5	1.8	2.5	1.6
Minor Incident (Perpetrator)*	44.2	52.1	55.0	46.6
Programs				
Completed a correctional program***	73.5	90.8	95.0	78.6

p* < .05. **p* < .001.

Variables Associated with Readmissions

Analyses were conducted using multinomial logistic regression in order to create a model that would identify variables associated with readmission to a federal institution with or without offence. A total of 14 variables were selected for the model from the data based on theoretical relevance and the results of the descriptive analyses reported above. If chi square analyses revealed significant group differences for a particular variable, that variable was included in the regression model. A stepwise procedure was used to enter the variables into the model, with selection and stay significance levels of 0.05. Slightly more than 20% ($n = 263$) of the sample were deleted due to missing values.

A total of 6 variables¹⁴ were found to be significantly related to the outcome variables (readmission with and without an offence) controlling for each covariate in the model. Tables 10 and 11 present the results of the regression. Note that the tables are separated by readmission type, but represent two halves of the same model. Overall, the final model explained approximately 16% of the variation in readmissions.

All variables included in the model were either binary or categorical. The results of the regression analyses indicate the odds of being readmitted to a federal institution (with or without offence) compared to the reference group (as indicated in the tables). For example, the odds of a Lifer who had been convicted of an offence other than homicide being returned to custody for a new offence were 5.2 times greater than for those Lifers who had been convicted of a homicide offence (Table 10).

¹⁴ Variables that were entered into the model but not selected in the final model were: Aboriginal ancestry, criminogenic need, static risk, Substance Abuse need domain, Attitudes need domain, involuntary segregation, program completion and escorted temporary absences (ETAs).

Table 10

Factors associated with a return to custody with offence among Lifers in the community

	Regression Coefficient (SE)	Wald Chi- Square (df)	Odds Ratio (95% CI)
Intercept	-4.89 (0.60)	67.05 (1)***	-
Offence Type			
Homicide (reference)	0	-	1
Other	1.65 (0.61)	7.22 (1)**	5.20 (1.56, 17.33)
Associates Domain (some/considerable need)	1.25 (0.55)	5.12 (1)***	3.50 (1.18, 10.36)
First Release Type			
Day Parole (reference)	0	-	1
Full Parole	-1.33 (1.05)	1.60 (1)	0.26 (0.03, 2.07)
Segregation	1.00 (0.43)	5.39 (1)*	2.71 (1.17, 6.31)
Voluntary Segregation	0.48 (0.61)	0.61 (1)	1.61 (0.49, 5.34)
Minor Institutional Incident (Perpetrator/Associate)	0.62 (0.41)	2.27 (1)	1.86 (0.83, 4.15)
Model Fit Statistics			
Overall Likelihood Ratio Test, chi- square (df)		109.07 (12)***	
Nagelkerke's Adjusted R ²		0.16	

Note. CI = Confidence Interval. For binary variables, the reference group does not possess the characteristic.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$,

Table 11

Factors associated with a return to custody without offence among Lifers in the community

	Regression Coefficient (SE)	Wald Chi- Square (df)	Odds Ratio (95% CI)
Intercept	-1.86 (0.18)	111.87 (1)***	-
Offence Type			
Homicide (reference)	0	-	1
Other	0.98 (0.35)	8.09 (1)**	2.68 (1.36, 5.29)
Associates Domain (some/considerable need)	0.30 (0.18)	2.87 (1)	1.35 (0.95, 1.90)
First Release Type			
Day Parole (reference)	0	-	1
Full Parole	-1.21 (0.41)	8.87 (1)**	0.30 (0.13, 0.66)
Segregation	0.91 (0.18)	25.44 (1)***	2.48 (1.74, 3.53)
Voluntary Segregation	0.94 (0.27)	12.03 (1)***	2.55 (1.50, 4.33)
Minor Institutional Incident (Perpetrator/Associate)	0.37 (0.17)	4.88 (1)*	1.45 (1.04, 2.00)
Model Fit Statistics			
Overall Likelihood Ratio Test, chi- square (df)		109.07 (12)***	
Nagelkerke's Adjusted R ²		0.16	

Note. CI = Confidence Interval. For binary variables, the reference group does not possess the characteristic.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$,

There were two variables associated with both readmission types (offence type and segregation). The remaining variables were associated with one or the other readmission type. Voluntary segregation, involvement in minor institutional incidents as a perpetrator and release on full parole were all associated with readmission without an offence, however these were not associated with readmission with an offence. The Associates need domain was related to readmission with an offence, but not readmission without an offence. For example, Lifers who had been involved in minor institutional incidents as a perpetrator or associate had higher odds of being returned to custody *without* an offence than those who had not been involved in such

incidents (Table 11). Involvement in a minor institutional incident as a perpetrator or associate did not increase or decrease the odds of a return to custody *with* an offence. Conversely, the odds of being returned to custody *with* a new offence was 3.5 times greater for Lifers who were assessed as having at least some need in the Associates domain as compared to those who had no assessed need in this area (Table 10). Need in the Associates domain did not significantly increase or decrease the odds of a return to custody *without* an offence. The relatively few significant associations in Table 10 may be a result of lack of power due to the small number of Lifers who were readmitted with an offence ($n = 40$).

Discussion

Lifers, in general, have a very low re-offence rate (3.5%) over the first five years following initial release from custody with an overall readmission rate that is comparable to the reported rates for offenders released on full parole (Public Safety, 2010). These data support prior research on conditional release outcomes for offenders serving a life sentence (e.g. NPB, 2002; NPB, 2009). Moreover, the results show that Lifers convicted of a homicide offence were more likely to be successful in the community than those convicted of any other type of offence. Parole Board of Canada statistics (NPB, 2009) indicate that, over a ten year period, only 1% of offenders serving a life sentence for murder were returned to custody with a new offence.

In general, male Lifers and their female counterparts were equally successful in the community while Aboriginal Lifers were more likely than non-Aboriginals to be readmitted for any reason. It should be noted, however, that ethnicity was not significantly related to outcome when considered with other demographic and institutional variables in the multivariate analysis. That is, when taking into account the factors associated with a return to custody as outlined in Tables 10 and 11, Aboriginal Lifers on conditional release were not more or less likely to be readmitted than non-Aboriginal Lifers.

All Lifers in this study were similar with respect to level of static risk assessed at intake but those offenders who had not been readmitted within the first five years after release were assessed as having lower levels of criminogenic need than the readmitted groups. The lack of variability with respect to risk may be due to the manner in which this measure is calculated at intake. The assessment of risk is based on criminal history, offence severity and sex offence history (CSC, 2007). Due to the severe, and often times lethal, nature of a Lifer's index offence, a high score on the offence severity portion of the risk appraisal may create little variability between groups. Need, however, is assessed through the combined analysis of the seven need domain areas and would be more specific to each offenders' criminogenic needs.

With respect to the need domain areas, offenders who were readmitted were assessed as having greater levels of need related to Associates, Substance Abuse and Attitudes at admission. The results of the regression suggest that Lifers assessed as having some or considerable need related to Associates at intake were more likely to be readmitted with an offence but not more likely to be readmitted without an offence. This finding is in keeping with previous research

that has found the Associates domain to be one of the strongest predictors of re-offending (Goggin, Gendreau & Gray, 1998). Lifers that have difficulty with criminal associates at intake might maintain these problematic ties throughout incarceration and, when released, may be more likely to fall back into the pro-criminal lifestyle. Offenders who develop or maintain criminal ties may be lacking the skills required to develop pro-social relationships. Dynamic factors, such as those related to the Associates domain, can be used to monitor change. Years of research have shown that changes in dynamic risk factors are associated with changes in the probability of recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). It may be that more focused treatment for Lifers is required in this area prior to release. Corrections could benefit from future research into criminal associations among Lifers both within the community and the institution in order to clarify this result.

Results indicated that institutional adjustment and behaviour were significantly related to success in the community. Not surprisingly, offenders who remained in the community were less likely to have spent time in segregation. For offenders who had spent at least one day in segregation, the odds of being readmitted to a federal institution with or without an offence were two and a half times greater than for those who had not been in segregation. Moreover, the odds of being returned to custody without an offence were also two and a half times greater for offenders who had spent at least one day in voluntary segregation. Offenders who were readmitted without an offence were also more likely to have been involved in minor institutional incidents as a perpetrator or associate. It is interesting to note, however, that institutional incidents were not related to readmissions with an offence. Acting out in the institution was not associated with re-offending on release. Segregation placements and involvement in institutional incidents may be indicative of an inability to cope with the institutional environment resulting in acting out behaviour or conflict with other inmates. Lifers who are better able to integrate themselves into the institutional environment, for example, by exercising self-control or avoiding conflicts that could result in charges, may be more likely to successfully negotiate their reintegration into the community.

Lifers who were readmitted without an offence (i.e. for a technical violation) spent less time in the community before their return to custody, were generally higher need (especially with respect to Substance Abuse), and demonstrated more problems with institutional adjustment than offenders readmitted with an offence. These results together may indicate that this group of

offenders required higher levels of supervision both in the institution and in the community after release. The parole officers for these Lifers may have suspended their conditional release if there were behavioural signs suggesting that they were not coping well with release and were violating conditions of release or at risk of committing an offence. Seven times as many Lifers were returned to custody without an offence as were returned with an offence. This is an important finding and highlights the ability of CSC to effectively manage the risk of the Lifer population in a community setting. The cost of maintaining an offender in the community under supervision is significantly lower than the cost of incarceration. This, coupled with the fact that Lifers have very low re-offence rates, would suggest that the management of Lifers in the community under supervision is a more efficient use of resources than prolonged incarceration.

This research highlights parole outcomes for Lifers released to the community after a period of incarceration. An examination of the demographic, criminogenic, and behavioural differences between Lifers who had successfully remained in the community for five years and those who had not further highlight the need for focused management, intervention and support strategies aimed specifically at addressing the unique needs of the Lifer population. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of variables not available in the present examination, such as an investigation into whether time spent in custody and mental health are related to supervision strategies and parole outcomes for Lifers.

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