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Research at a glance

Characteristics, Institutional Adjustment, and Post-Release Success of Drug and Alcohol Users

KEY WORDS: *institutional adjustment, substance abuse, post-release outcomes, offender behaviour*

What it means

Correctional outcomes and offence profiles of offenders vary depending on the type of substances they abuse. Although alcohol users have longer sentences and were more likely to have committed a violent crime, drug users have more difficulty while incarcerated and on release. The results of the present study provide case managers and program deliverers with insight into the different characteristics of alcohol users and drug users that may inform interventions with these groups.

What we found

The majority of the sample (82%) was classified as drug users, while 12% were alcohol users, and 6% were both alcohol and drug users. The groups differed on a number of characteristics with alcohol users being significantly older, more likely to be serving their first federal sentence, and serving longer sentences than the other two groups. As well, both the alcohol users and the alcohol and drug users were more likely than drug users to have committed a violent crime while drug users were more likely to be convicted of an acquisitive crime (e.g., theft).

Drug users were more likely to have positive urinalysis results and disciplinary charges while incarcerated compared to offenders in the other two groups. The drug and alcohol group spent the most days in segregation, followed by the drug users and then alcohol users.

Drug users were more likely to be released on discretionary release (i.e., day or full parole) compared to alcohol and drug users or alcohol users. However, drug users were slightly more likely to be returned to custody within 24 months compared to the other two groups. Drug users had the highest proportion of returns for the commission of a new offence.

Why we did this study

Research indicates a strong link between substance use and crime, with alcohol users tending to commit

more violent crimes than drug users. However, little research has examined in-depth the differences in key correctional outcomes between types of substance users.

What we did

This study examined the characteristics and correctional outcomes among a retrospective cohort of men offenders who completed the Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (CASA)¹ between April 1, 2006 and March 31, 2009.

Offenders were categorized into three groups based on their ratings on the Alcohol Dependence Scale (ADS) and/or the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST). If the DAST and ADS classifications (moderate, substantial, or severe) were equivalent, the offender was included in the alcohol and drug group. If the ADS classification was more severe than the DAST score, offenders were included in the alcohol users group. If the DAST classification was more severe than the ADS classification, offenders were included in the drug users group.

For more information

Cheverie, M., Ternes, M., & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2014). *Characteristics, Institutional Adjustment and Post-Release Success of Drug and Drug Users* (Research Report R-299). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, or for other inquiries, please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

You can also visit the website for a full list of research publications.

¹ The CASA is a tool used by CSC to assess substance abuse problems. It is administered at intake to offenders where there is an indication of a substance abuse problem linked to their criminal behaviour.