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Research in Brief

Severity of Substance Use, Discretionary Release, and Return to Federal Custody

KEY WORDS: *substance use, severity, return to custody, Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (CASA)*

What it means

Offenders with serious substance abuse problems are less successful in the community than offenders with no, or minor, substance abuse problems. The Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC's) substance abuse treatment programs target problem intensity through treatment duration; these programs decrease an offender's likelihood of returning to custody¹.

What we found

As severity of substance use problems increased, offenders were less likely to be granted discretionary release² and more likely to return to custody (see Table). Among readmitted offenders, those without a substance abuse problem remained in the community for almost a month longer than those with a substantial or severe problem. Most returns to custody were due to a revocation without an offence (see Figure). Those with a substantial or severe problem were most likely to commit a new offence (violent or non-violent).

Why we did this study

Overall, 70-80% of federal offenders have an identified substance use problem³. This study explored whether substance abuse severity affects success in the community after release.

What we did

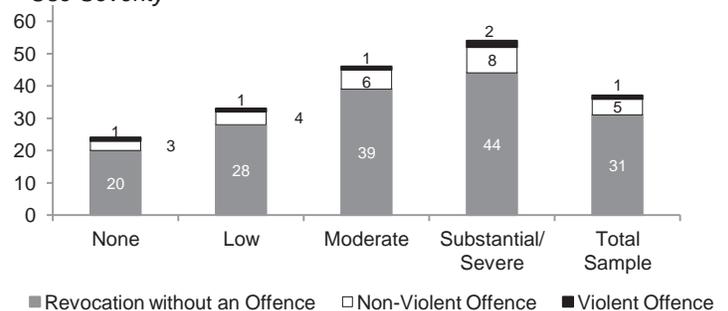
A total of 12,935 men who completed the Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (CASA) at admission were followed to examine the association between substance use severity and release type, time spent in the community, and return to custody⁴. The offenders were followed for a

maximum of 18 months⁵ after release, until the end of their sentence.

Release Type, Return to Custody, and Substance Use Severity

Substance Use Problem Severity	Discretionary Release		Any Return (18 Month Follow-up)		Days in Community for Readmitted Offenders	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	M	(SD)
None (n = 3,832)	55	(2,093)	23	(891)	222	(115)
Low (n = 3,976)	49	(1,937)	34	(1,336)	214	(110)
Moderate (n = 2,011)	45	(898)	47	(939)	206	(104)
Substantial/Severe (n = 3,116)	36	(1,115)	54	(1,695)	197	(103)
Total Sample (N = 12,935)	47	(6,043)	38	(4,861)	208	(108)

Reasons for Readmission to Custody across Substance Use Severity



For more information

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.

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¹ Doherty, S., Ternes, M., & Matheson, F. (2014). *An examination of the effectiveness of the National Substance Abuse Program High Intensity (NSAP-H) on institutional adjustment and post-release outcomes* (Research Report R-290). Ottawa, ON: CSC

² Release type includes discretionary release (i.e., day parole or full parole) and non-discretionary release (i.e., statutory release).

³ Grant, B. A., Kunic, D., MacPherson, P., McKeown, C., & Hansen, E. (2003). *The High Intensity Substance Abuse Program (HISAP): Results from the pilot programs*. (Research Report R-140). Ottawa, ON: CSC

⁴ CASA completion occurred between April 2006 and March 2011. Offenders in the Pacific Region are underestimated in this sample, as

CASA administration was discontinued in January 2010. CASA administration was reinstated in the Pacific Region in February 2013. ⁵ Results were similar when fixed 12-month (N = 8,325) and 18-month (N = 4,994) follow-up periods were used.

