

Research Brief

**A Preliminary Investigation of
Institutional Outcomes for
LifeLine Participants**

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**A Preliminary Investigation of Institutional Outcomes
for LifeLine Participants**

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Executive Summary

Key words: *LifeLine, Lifers, outcomes*

Offenders serving life sentences ('Lifers') comprise one-fifth of the total offender population and this number has grown by more than 20% over the past ten years (Young, Broom & Ruddell, in press). Lifers are a unique subset of the general offender population and are subject to lengthy periods of incarceration and indefinite supervision upon release.

Despite their growing numbers, very few programs or interventions address the particular needs of Lifers. LifeLine is a national program that provides in-reach and community services to offenders serving life or indeterminate sentences. Previous research on the efficacy of LifeLine has been mostly qualitative in nature and though the program was viewed positively by those involved, there has been little in the way of quantitative investigation to-date. The current study focused on the analysis of existing quantitative data in order to demonstrate the impact of LifeLine on institutional outcomes.

Study 1 compared Lifers who had used the services of LifeLine ('participants') and those who had not ('non-participants') on a number of intake measures and institutional outcome variables. Study 2 investigated whether length of time spent using LifeLine services was associated with institutional outcomes.

The results of Study 1 indicated that offenders who had not used LifeLine services were significantly more likely to have been involved as a perpetrator or associate in minor institutional incidents. There were no differences between groups in terms of involvement in major institutional incidents. Further, Study 2 found that a greater amount of time spent using LifeLine services was significantly related to less time spent in involuntary segregation. Overall, LifeLine participants and non-participants differed significantly on only one outcome variable, though general trends reflected positively on participation in the LifeLine program. Importantly, the results also indicated that participants and non-participants differed on a number of intake assessment variables including dynamic need and motivation. This may point to possible selection bias in group participation.

The results of this research highlight the potential benefits of the LifeLine program for participants. Additionally, the results indicate the need for more accurate and detailed collection of quantitative data on service provision. Future research on outcomes of LifeLine participants would benefit from improved and expanded data collection.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Executive Summary	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables	v
Introduction.....	1
Method	3
Study One.....	3
Participants.....	3
Analysis.....	3
Measures	4
The Offender Intake Assessment (OIA)	4
Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis (DFIA).....	4
Study Two.....	5
Participants.....	5
Analysis.....	5
Measures	5
Results.....	6
Study One.....	6
Demographics	6
Risk, Need & Motivation.....	6
Need Domains.....	7
Institutional Incidents.....	8
Institutional Outcomes	9
Study Two.....	10
Institutional Incidents.....	10
Institutional Outcomes	11
Discussion.....	13
References.....	15

List of Tables

Table 1	<i>Proportion of LifeLine participants and non-participants belonging to each race category.....</i>	6
Table 2	<i>Risk, need and motivation levels at intake of LifeLine participants and non-participants</i>	7
Table 3	<i>Proportion of LifeLine participants and non-participants with some/considerable need in the seven need domains.....</i>	8
Table 4	<i>Proportion of LifeLine participants and non-participants with institutional incidents....</i>	9
Table 5	<i>Institutional outcome variables: LifeLine participants vs. non-participants</i>	10
Table 6	<i>Level of participation in LifeLine and involvement in institutional incidents</i>	11
Table 7	<i>Level of participation in LifeLine in relation to institutional outcomes</i>	12

Introduction

Offenders serving life sentences (also known as ‘Lifers’) are a unique subset of the general offender population. Their long-term incarceration and supervision presents particular challenges both for the offender and the correctional system including limited access to programming, difficulty adjusting to the institutional environment and problems with motivation (Santos, 2003; Young, Broom & Ruddell, in press; Zamble, 1992).

Offenders sentenced to life in Canada are under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) until they die. Recent research has shown that Lifers represent 22% of all federal offenders in Canada, and the number of offenders sentenced to life has increased by over 20% since 1998 (Young, Broom & Ruddell, in press). As the number of new offenders sentenced to life continues to outpace the number of Lifers who die, this population will continue to grow, creating increasing challenges for their management and rehabilitation. The Task Force on Long-Term Sentences (1991) recommended a comprehensive strategy for the management of the growing long-term offender population including the development of programs and services designed to address the unique needs and challenges faced by offenders with long-term sentences (see Perron & Corriveau, 1992, for a summary of the Task Force Report). In 1990, a working committee composed of government and community representatives created a report outlining the elements of a proposed service for life- and long-term sentenced offenders called ‘LifeLine’ (Braithwaite, 2006).

Implemented in 1991, LifeLine is a national program that provides services to offenders sentenced to life or indeterminate periods of incarceration (Olotu et al, in press) through a partnership between Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), Parole Board of Canada, and various community organizations (Braithwaite, 2006; CSC online, 2009). The program involves three main components: in-reach services, community resources and public awareness. In-reach services are designed to help Lifers adjust within the institution and prepare for release while community resources assist in the reintegration process. Public awareness components include informing the public about the mandate and services of LifeLine as well as promoting crime prevention (Olotu et al, in press). In-reach workers are Lifers or long-term offenders on parole who have been under community supervision for at least five years without reoffending or

breaking the conditions of their parole.

While previous examinations of the program have demonstrated positive opinions of LifeLine on the part of staff, participants, volunteers and stakeholders (Olotu et al, in press), these outcomes have been based on anecdotal or qualitative data due to a lack of available quantitative data. As such, this research aimed to answer three main questions related to outcomes for LifeLine participants. First, data were collected from the Offender Management System (OMS) to determine whether LifeLine participants and non-participants differed in terms of overall risk and dynamic need at admission. Any differences between the groups at admission might indicate possible selection bias and care must be taken when interpreting subsequent outcome analyses. The program in-reach services are designed to assist Lifers in adjusting to their long-term incarceration; therefore, our second research question focused on whether LifeLine participants show better institutional adjustment than non-participants. For these analyses, institutional incidents, segregation placements and program completion were used as proxy indicators of institutional adjustment. Finally, this study investigated whether amount of time spent using LifeLine services was related to institutional outcomes.

The results of this study are important in providing a preliminary analysis of the effectiveness of the LifeLine program in aiding life-sentenced offenders adapt to their carceral environment. Suggestions are made for future improvements in data collection.

Method

This investigation is comprised of two study components. Study 1 compares LifeLine participants and non-participants on measures of risk and need, and a number of institutional outcome variables. Study 2 includes only those offenders from Study 1 who had participated in LifeLine services and is designed to investigate whether the length of time spent using LifeLine services affects institutional outcomes.

Study One

Participants

Information was extracted from OMS for new Lifer admissions to federal institutions between August 2007 and January 2010 only¹ ($n=337$ men²). ‘Lifers’ were those offenders sentenced to life as a minimum or maximum sentence³ and excluded those designated as Dangerous Offenders and deportees. Between August 2007 and March 2010, 110 (29.7%) of these new admissions had used LifeLine services (considered LifeLine ‘participants’ for this study).

Analysis

Contingency tables were created for binary and categorical data (i.e. risk, need, motivation, involvement in institutional incidents and self-harm) and Pearson chi-square statistics were used to identify overall group differences. Independent samples t-tests were used to investigate whether participants and non-participants differed significantly on number of times in segregation and amount of time spent in voluntary and involuntary segregation. Offenders could not be compared on release outcomes as none would have reached their parole eligibility date by the end of the study period.

¹ Data on LifeLine participation was not reliably recorded by in-reach workers prior to August 2007, therefore only new Lifer admission from August 2007 were included. This method drastically decreased the number of LifeLine participants available for inclusion in the study, though the reliability of the data is much greater.

² 19 women with life sentences (life minimum, life maximum) were admitted during the study period, and only two of these women had participated in LifeLine. Women were therefore excluded from the analyses.

³ ‘Life minimum’ and ‘life maximum’, while both sentences ensuring the offender remains under federal supervision until his death, differ in terms of the length of time during which the offender must remain incarcerated prior to being eligible for parole consideration. ‘Life minimum’ requires that a longer period be served.

Measures

Information on LifeLine participation was gathered from spreadsheets maintained by the community-based agencies over-seeing the program in the various regions and was provided to the Research Branch by Citizen Engagement. The data consisted of details of offender contacts with LifeLine volunteers between August 2007 and March 2010. Variables included were date of meeting, length of meeting, offender first and last name and FPS number. Additional data on the Lifer admissions cohort was extracted from the Offender Management System, including measures of risk, dynamic need variables, institutional incidents and segregation.

The Offender Intake Assessment (OIA)

The Offender Intake Assessment (OIA; Commissioner's Directive 705-6, 2007) is "a comprehensive and integrated evaluation of the offender at the time of admission to the federal system" (Motiuk, 1997). 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 (Dynamic Needs Identification and Analysis, DFIA). Overall static and dynamic factor ratings (risk and need) are analyzed, with scores given on a 3-point scale from 'High' to 'Low'. Level of motivation is also assessed at intake and is assessed on the same 3-point scale, with 'High' indicating high levels of motivation. Level of motivation is determined through the analysis of all intake measures and is evaluated against a set of criteria (Commissioner's Directive 705-6, 2007). An offender's risk, need and motivation assessments become part of his or her 'Correctional Plan' and can be updated periodically to reflect changes in the factors contributing to the offender's criminal behaviour. For the purposes of this study, the intake risk, need and motivation assessments are used.

Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis (DFIA)

The DFIA 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.

Study Two

Participants

In order to compare LifeLine participants, the admission cohort from study one was utilized, with all LifeLine participants being retained for study two (110 males). Offenders who had not used the services of LifeLine were excluded from study two analyses (227 males). Excel spreadsheets containing data regarding number of minutes spent using LifeLine services were provided by each region. Due to data quality issues (i.e. FPS numbers entered incorrectly, variations in data entry) information from the Ontario and Pacific regions were disregarded from analyses, leaving a total of 84 participants included in study two. These 84 men likely represent an underestimate of the total number of men in the cohort who received LifeLine services. A median split was used in order to separate the participants into two groups based on amount of time spent using LifeLine services: High Participation (greater than three hours) and Low Participation (less than or equal to three hours).

Analysis

Contingency tables were created for binary and categorical data and Pearson chi-square statistics were used to determine whether group difference existed between the High and Low participation groups on a number of institutional outcomes. Separate logistic and linear regression analyses were conducted in order to determine whether length of time spent using LifeLine services (as a continuous variable) affected institutional outcomes. A number of dependant outcome variables (including segregation and incidents) were analyzed with 'length of time' acting as the co-variate in each analysis.

Measures

The measures used in Study 2 included data extracted from the Offender Management System related to institutional incidents, segregation and program completion.

Results

Study One

Demographics

The majority of male participants and non-participants were Caucasian (63.6% and 52.7% respectively). Table 1 presents a breakdown of LifeLine participants and non-participants by race. A significantly larger proportion of non-participants were Black (21.7% versus 8.2% of participants). There was no significant difference between the proportion of participants and non-participants who self-identified as Aboriginal (19.1% and 13.3% respectively). The vast majority of both groups were serving life minimum sentences (96.4% for participants and 99.1% for non-participants), and most had been convicted of either first- or second-degree murder. There was no difference between participants and non-participants in average age at intake (35 years and 33 years respectively) and most were either single or in a common law relationship at admission.

Table 1

Proportion of LifeLine participants and non-participants belonging to each race category

Race	LifeLine Participation			
	Participants (<i>n</i> =110)		Non-Participants (<i>n</i> =226)	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
White	63.6	(70)	52.7	(119)
Black	8.2	(9)	21.7	(49)
Aboriginal	19.1	(21)	13.3	(30)
Other	9.1	(10)	12.4	(28)

$\chi^2 = 22.29, df=12, p<0.05$

Risk, Need & Motivation

The majority of both participants and non-participants were assessed as high risk and high need at admission (Table 2). There were no significant group differences on either measure. Further, most offenders in both groups were assessed as having medium levels of motivation at

admission, though a slightly higher proportion of participants than non-participants were assessed as having high levels of motivation. This difference was approaching significance ($\chi^2=5.14, df=2, p=.077$).

Table 2

Risk, need and motivation levels at intake of LifeLine participants and non-participants

Measure	LifeLine Participation			
	Participants (n=99)		Non-Participants (n=170)	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
Risk				
Low	7.1	(7)	7.1	(12)
Medium	11.1	(11)	13.5	(23)
High	81.8	(81)	79.4	(135)
Need				
Low	1.0	(1)	1.8	(3)
Medium	13.1	(13)	15.3	(26)
High	85.9	(85)	82.9	(141)
Motivation				
Low	27.3	(27)	30.6	(52)
Medium	59.6	(59)	64.1	(109)
High	13.1	(13)	5.3	(9)

Need Domains

Offenders who had not participated in LifeLine were significantly more likely to be assessed as having some or considerable need in the domain areas of Employment, Associates, Community Functioning, Personal/Emotional needs and Attitude. Table 3 presents the data on the need domains. The groups did not differ significantly in the Marital/Family or Substance Abuse domains. Almost all offenders exhibited need in the Personal/Emotional domain (greater than 90%), while less than a third were assessed as having need in the Community Functioning domain.

Table 3

Proportion of LifeLine participants and non-participants with some/considerable need in the seven need domains

Need Domain (some/considerable need)	LifeLine Participation			
	Participants		Non-Participants	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
Employment***	45.5	(45)	68.8	(117)
Marital/Family	44.4	(44)	41.8	(71)
Associates*	53.5	(53)	68.2	(116)
Substance Abuse	66.7	(66)	60.6	(103)
Community Functioning*	13.1	(13)	25.3	(43)
Personal/Emotional*	93.9	(93)	98.8	(168)
Attitudes	65.7	(65)	81.8	(139)

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

Institutional Incidents

As can be seen from Table 4, most offenders, both participants and non-participants, were not victims or perpetrators in major incidents, and most were not victims in minor incidents. Offenders who had not participated in LifeLine, however, were significantly more likely to have been a perpetrator or associate in a minor institutional incident (49.3% versus 33.6% of participants). Less than 2% of offenders in either group engaged in self-harm behavior.

Table 4

Proportion of LifeLine participants and non-participants with institutional incidents

Institutional Incidents	LifeLine Participation			
	Participants		Non-Participants	
	(n=110)		(n=227)	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
Major Incident, Victim	8.2	(9)	6.6	(15)
Minor Incident, Victim	0.9	(1)	1.8	(4)
Major Incident, Perpetrator/Associate	13.6	(15)	14.5	(33)
Minor Incident, Perpetrator/Associate**	33.6	(37)	49.3	(112)
Incidents of Self-Harm	1.8	(2)	1.3	(3)

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

Table 5 presents data on segregation and program completion. Participants and non-participants did not differ significantly on these institutional outcomes. The trends, however, were positive. On average, participants were in segregation less frequently than non-participants and completed more programs. Interestingly, non-participants spent less time in involuntary segregation on average. Again, this difference was not significant.

Table 5

Institutional outcome variables: LifeLine participants vs. non-participants

Institutional Outcome	LifeLine Participation	
	Participants <i>M</i> (SD)	Non-Participants <i>M</i> (SD)
Number of times in segregation	(<i>n</i> =110) 1.18 (1.59)	(<i>n</i> =227) 1.24 (1.46)
Number of days in voluntary segregation	(<i>n</i> =106) 8.42 (51.70)	(<i>n</i> =223) 9.89 (35.88)
Number of days in involuntary segregation	(<i>n</i> =105) 30.65 (66.09)	(<i>n</i> =214) 27.98 (55.56)
Number of programs completed	(<i>n</i> =110) 0.64 (1.17)	(<i>n</i> =227) 0.43 (0.99)

Study Two

Participants spent a total of 444 hours using LifeLine services, with an average of 5.3 hours per person (minimum = 5 minutes; maximum = 39.2 hours).

Institutional Incidents

Most participants were not victims or perpetrators in major or minor incidents. Chi-square analyses indicated no significant differences between high and low groups (see Table 6). Logistic regression analysis confirmed that amount of time spent using LifeLine services was not significantly predictive of involvement in institutional incidents.

Table 6

Level of participation in LifeLine and involvement in institutional incidents

Institutional Incidents	Level of Participation			
	High		Low	
	(n=42)		(n=42)	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
Major Incident, Victim	7.1	(3)	11.9	(5)
Minor Incident, Victim	0.0	(0)	0.0	(0)
Major Incident, Perpetrator/Associate	14.3	(6)	19.0	(8)
Minor Incident, Perpetrator/Associate	21.4	(9)	28.6	(12)
Incidents of Self-Harm	0.0	(0)	4.8	(2)

Institutional Outcomes

The majority of participants had not spent time in voluntary segregation, though 50% had been in involuntary segregation. Independent samples t-tests indicated no significant difference between participants in the High and Low groups on any of the institutional outcomes (Table 7). Linear regression analysis, however, indicated that amount of LifeLine participation was significantly predictive of number of days spent in involuntary segregation. Specifically, a greater number of minutes spent using LifeLine services was related to fewer days spent in involuntary segregation.

Table 7

Level of participation in LifeLine in relation to institutional outcomes

Institutional Outcome	LifeLine Participation	
	High <i>M</i> (SD)	Low <i>M</i> (SD)
Number of times in segregation	(<i>n</i> =42) 1.14 (1.69)	(<i>n</i> =42) 1.67 (1.66)
Number of days in voluntary segregation	(<i>n</i> =40) 15.93 (80.37)	(<i>n</i> =41) 20.02 (92.84)
Number of days in involuntary segregation	(<i>n</i> =41) 29.00 (78.98)	(<i>n</i> =39) 59.77 (89.88)
Number of programs completed	(<i>n</i> =42) 0.67 (1.34)	(<i>n</i> =42) 0.45 (1.04)

Discussion

Overall, only one significant difference was found between LifeLine participants and non-participants; however, general trends reflected positively on participation in the LifeLine program. Offenders who had not participated in LifeLine were more likely to have been perpetrators or associates in minor institutional incidents. Further, analyses indicated that a greater amount of time spent using LifeLine services was significantly related to less time spent in involuntary segregation. There are two possible explanations for these findings. Offenders who participate in LifeLine may be less inclined to engage in negative institutional behaviour. Their participation in LifeLine may indicate their overall intrinsic motivation to integrate successfully into the institution. Alternatively, an offender's participation in LifeLine may positively influence his institutional behaviour through guidance and advice provided by in-reach workers. It is difficult to relate these positive trends to the use of the program specifically, though fairly consistent positive trends may indicate that LifeLine is useful in helping Lifers adjust to the institutional climate and prepare for long-term incarceration.

Though participants and non-participants differed significantly in a number of need domains, this is not reflective of the efficacy of the LifeLine program. The DFIA is assessed at intake and therefore any differences discovered between the groups existed prior to involvement with the LifeLine service. In addition, a higher proportion of participants were rated as highly motivated at intake. This may indicate a possible group selection bias in that highly motivated, lower need offenders are more likely to use the services of LifeLine. However, it is important to note that some of the offenders captured in the 'non-participant' group may, in fact, have used the services of LifeLine. The quality of the data collected varied by region and a large number of contact entries did not include offender FPS, therefore the number of minutes spent using LifeLine services may be higher than reported and some offenders may be incorrectly categorized as non-participants.

It is also possible that some offenders in the admissions cohort used the services of LifeLine prior to their life sentence admission in 2007. Though LifeLine is mandated to provide services to offenders serving life sentences, prior research (Olotu et al, in press) indicated that a large number of long-term offenders were also receiving services through LifeLine. If a current Lifer had served a long-term sentence prior to his admission in 2007, he may have used LifeLine

services before records of in-reach contacts were kept. Therefore, the admissions cohort may not include 'pure' groups of participants and non-participants.

The results of this research highlight the potential benefit of the LifeLine program by uncovering positive trends in service participation. Results also indicate the need for collection of robust, accurate, and detailed quantitative data on service provision. Future research on the LifeLine service would benefit from improved and increased quantitative data collection, as well as an extended data collection period in which more long-term institutional and community outcomes can be examined.

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