



Research Summary

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DANGEROUS OFFENDERS IN CANADA

Question: Are the Dangerous Offender provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada actually targeting high risk violent offenders?

Background: High risk violent offenders are a major public concern. Present provisions in the Criminal Code of Canada allow for the imposition of an indeterminate sentence for offenders who have committed serious personal injury offences and are judged likely to do so again in the future. The research examined whether the present provisions target the offenders which the legislation intended.

Method: The files of 64 Dangerous Offenders (DOs), representing nearly half of all DOs in Canada, were reviewed using a highly structured coding manual. Social, personal and criminal history characteristics were carefully documented. Similar data was also collected on a group of 34 Detention Failures (DFs). A detained inmate is one who has committed a serious offence and during the course of serving his/her sentence is seen as likely to commit

a new violent offence prior to the end of sentence. Such an inmate would be denied conditional release and would be detained until sentence expiration. A DF is a detained offender who after release at sentence expiration commits a violent offence.

Answer: If the present legislation deals with high risk violent offenders, then the DOs should be very similar to the DFs, since the DFs demonstrated violent behaviour after being assessed as likely to re-offend. The results of the file review showed the two groups to be very similar. Even on some personal characteristics they were comparable. For example, they had similar scores on measures of intelligence, approximately two-thirds were unemployed and half were single. DOs however, were older with an average age of 34, and 95% were Caucasian.

The study also assessed the two groups of offenders on two objective scales. There were no differences between DOs and DFs

on an actuarial risk scale called the Statistical Information on Recidivism scale (this scale is described in Volume 1, N°1 of *Research Summary*). There were also no statistically significant differences in the incidence of psychopathy measured by the Psychopathy Checklist. Approximately 40% of DOs were classified as psychopaths compared to 32% of DFs.

One major difference found was that the DOs were more likely to be sex offenders. Almost all of the DOs (92%) were convicted of a sexual offence. For the DFs, 35% were convicted of a sex crime. However, when only sex offenders from the DF group were considered the only difference found was that DOs had more victims. Otherwise, both sex offender groups began their sexual offending histories prior to the age of 16, the age of their victims were similar and the amount of violence used was comparable.

Policy Implications :

1. The results showed the Dangerous Offender provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada are being applied to offenders who likely pose a significant risk to the public.
2. The application of the Dangerous Offender provisions predominately with sex offenders point to a need to also target nonsexual violent offenders.
3. The characteristics of the Dangerous Offenders examined in this study can be used to identify other high risk offenders who may require special prosecution and application of the Dangerous Offender provisions.

Source: The Crown Files Research Project: A Study of Dangerous Offenders. Ottawa: Solicitor General Canada, 1996. Also available on Solicitor General Canada's Internet site
@<http://www.sgc.gc.ca>.

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