



Research at a glance

Unlawfully at Large: A Profile of Federal Offenders Who Breach Conditional Release

KEY WORDS: *unlawfully at large, conditional release, characteristics, profile, revocation*

Why we did this study

In Canada, conditional release is an important strategy for offender management. However, concerns have been raised regarding offenders who have difficulty transitioning to the community and go unlawfully at large (UAL). There is a paucity of empirical research in this area and a need to better understand the characteristics of this group.

What we did

The characteristics of 18,321 offenders released from the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) between April 2006 and March 2009 were examined, and conditional release outcomes were recorded until March 2010. Of this group, a total of 3,990 offenders (22%) went unlawfully at large by the end of the follow-up period.

UAL features including length of time to UAL, as well as revocations with and without offence were explored. Further, UAL offenders were compared to those who did not go UAL to identify factors related to UAL status.

What we found

Offenders who went UAL tended to do so soon after release (50% within two months). Once UAL, 50% of offenders returned (or were apprehended) within about one week. Eighty percent of this group had their release revoked. The overwhelming majority (84%) were revoked without being charged with a new offence – only 16% were revoked with an offence.

UAL offenders were more likely to be single, younger, Aboriginal, have lower levels of education, unstable job histories, longer periods of unemployment, and more problematic substance use than non-UAL offenders. Greater proportions of UAL offenders were also convicted of violent, property, and escape/UAL offence types and had more extensive criminal histories.

Although UAL offenders were more likely to be enrolled in institutional correctional programs, they

were less likely to complete programming. They were also more likely to have institutional charges (both serious and minor) than non-UAL offenders and, when they were released, were more likely to have a residency condition.

Overall, a variety of static and dynamic risk factors predicted UAL status. Predictors of UAL status were largely consistent for non-Aboriginal male offenders, Aboriginal male offenders, and female offenders. Additionally, the predictors demonstrated marked similarity to risk factors for general criminal behaviour and going UAL from an institutional setting.

What it means

Though some different predictors of UAL status emerged across gender and ethnicity, there were many commonalities (e.g., unemployment / job instability and a history of drug use) suggesting that a focus on correctional interventions to address these issues may be areas to pursue to reduce UALs in the future. Moreover, this study demonstrated that the first two months on release in the community appear to be critical risk periods for going UAL. The findings also suggest that it may be possible to develop a tool to assess risk of going UAL.

For more information

Dunbar, L., & Helmus, L. (2014). *Unlawfully at large: A profile of federal offenders who breach conditional release*. Research Report R-271. 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.

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