



Research at a glance

Who Gets Temporary Absences and Work Releases?: A Profile

KEY WORDS: *temporary absences, work release, community reintegration, profile*

What it means

Temporary Absences (TAs) and Work Releases (WRs) are often the first step in community reintegration as they allow for offenders to engage in appropriate community behaviour and subsequently demonstrate that their risk can be successfully mitigated in the community. This study indicates that TAs and WRs are more likely to be given to offenders who can benefit the most from these opportunities, and without undue risk to public safety. Research examining whether offenders participating in TAs and WRs have better release and community outcomes is also underway.

What we found

The strongest predictor of who participated in TAs/WRs was sentence length; offenders with longer sentences were more likely to participate. Additionally, TAs/WRs were also more common for moderate risk offenders who were rated higher on motivation level and had fewer problems with institutional adjustment and on prior periods of community supervision. This appears to balance the risk principle of effective correctional practice (i.e., not investing valuable resources on the lowest risk offenders) without undue risk to public safety (i.e., by selecting offenders with better institutional and community behaviour and who displayed higher motivation ratings). Women were more likely to receive TAs than men, and Aboriginal offenders were more likely to receive Escorted Temporary Absences (ETAs) than non-Aboriginal offenders.

Some factors predicted ETAs in the opposite direction compared to unescorted TAs (UTAs) and/or WRs. Offenders with higher need in the substance abuse and personal/emotional domain and with higher scores on offence severity were more likely to receive ETAs but less likely to receive UTAs compared to offenders with lower scores in these domains. Additionally, offenders with a current sex offence and with higher need in the family/marital domain were more likely to receive ETAs but less likely to receive UTAs and WRs. This suggests that

decision-makers selected offenders they deemed to be more suitable for supervised access to the community, but not unsupervised access.

Why we did this study

The objective of TAs and WRs is to assist in community reintegration by allowing gradual and conditional access to the community while supporting offender rehabilitation efforts. This is achieved by allowing certain eligible and approved offenders to leave the institution for short periods of time to obtain work experience, strengthen connections in the community, or pursue rehabilitative opportunities not available in institutions.

Given the costs associated with TAs/WRs, as well as the potential risk to public safety inherent in allowing offenders conditional access to the community, it is necessary to determine whether they are being administered appropriately.

What we did

The purpose of the current study was to examine who received TAs, ETAs, UTAs, and WRs. The population included 27,098 offenders released to the community between April 1, 2005 and March 31, 2011. Medical and administrative TAs were excluded because there is less discretion in granting these absences and they are less related to rehabilitative efforts.

For more information

Helmus, L., & Ternes, M. (2015). *Who gets temporary absences and work releases? A profile* (Research Report, R-351). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, or for other inquiries, please e-mail research@csc-scc.gc.ca or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

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