



Research at a glance

Temporary Absences Reduce Unemployment and Returns to Custody for Women Offenders

KEY WORDS: *temporary absences, women offenders, community reintegration, dosage effects, returns to custody*

What it means

Temporary absences (TAs) play an important and effective role in the gradual reintegration of women offenders into the community, and generally, the more TAs the offenders participate in, the greater the benefits.

What we found

Overall, 44% of women offenders received a TA during their sentence. Women who received a TA were generally more likely to be higher risk, higher need, have lower Reintegration Potential, and were serving a longer sentence. This is consistent with the Risk/Need/Responsivity principles, which state that resources are most effective when targeted to higher risk offenders.

Participation in TAs was also related to community outcomes. A significant dosage effect was found for returns to custody for any reason and returns to custody for a new offence: the more TAs an offender received, the lower the chances of returning to custody. For unemployment and returns without an offence, merely participating in a TA (yes/no) demonstrated a significant reduction in these negative outcomes.

Why we did this study

The objective of TAs 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 strengthen connections in the community or pursue rehabilitative opportunities not available in institutions.

Given the costs associated with temporary absences, as well as the potential risk to public safety inherent in allowing offenders conditional access to the community, it is necessary to determine how they are being administered and whether they are achieving their objectives.

A separate study has examined temporary absences for all CSC offenders, but additional research is needed to examine if the findings are applicable to women offenders.

What we did

The purpose of the current study was to examine who received TAs and to explore the impact of participating in TAs on community outcomes for women offenders.

The final sample included 1,683 women offenders released to the community between April 1, 2005 and March 31, 2011. Medical and administrative TAs were removed from the dataset because there is less discretion in granting these absences and they are less related to rehabilitative efforts.

Outcomes included unemployment, any return to custody, return to custody with a new offence, and return to custody without a new offence. The outcomes considered whether the event occurred within two years of release, except for returns without a new offence, which used a one-year follow-up. This was because few offenders had two years of opportunity for revocation (i.e., two years of post-release community supervision).

For more information

Helmus, L., & Ternes, M. (2015). *Temporary absences reduce unemployment and returns to custody for women offenders* (Research Report R-354). 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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