THE EFFECTIVENESS, EFFICIENCY AND RELEVANCY OF CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS: A SYSTEM'S PERSPECTIVE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Research has repeatedly found that those offenders who successfully complete programs targeted to their risk are less likely to commit new offences. As well, the provision of education, employment and other correctional programs (e.g. substance abuse, violence prevention, sexual offending, family violence prevention), at the most appropriate time in the offender's sentence, contributes to safe transition to the community. As well, ample empirical evidence now exists on the effect of correctional programs on reduced misconduct rates in custodial settings.

A major study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2006), having reviewed 291 rigorous evaluations in English-speaking countries over the last 35 years, reports that completion of cognitive behavioural treatment programs reduces recidivism significantly in the cases of general-, drug- and sex-offender programs in custody and in the community. The Washington study also reports that the correctional industry's programs in prison, employment and job assistance programs in the community and vocational education programs reduce reoffending significantly. Similarly education programs in custodial settings result in a decrease in recidivism.

Correctional Service of Canada's own evaluation results of correctional programs in 2009 report substantial decreases in readmissions among those offenders who participated in programs versus comparable groups who did not, for example: programs in substance abuse, violence prevention, sex offender programming and community maintenance. Moreover, cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness analyses associated correctional program delivery expenditures to improved institutional outcomes (discretionary release) and community outcomes (recidivism). As well, continued relevancy of correctional programs was found in relation to addressing risk levels and specific criminogenic needs of the current Canadian federal offender population.

To date, four major themes have emerged out of the international literature on correctional program effectiveness. First, *Dr. Don A. Andrews, Carleton University, Canada*, outlined a set of principles of effective correctional programs. He clearly states that "recidivism is predictable and can be influenced." More specifically, ongoing programs that have implemented systematic risk and needs assessment show the most promise for reducing reoffending rates; effective programs reduce major dynamic risk factors and/ or enhance major protective or strength factors; community-based services are preferred over residential/ institutional settings; and the best of the family interventions are not offered in agency offices but in the natural settings of the home and community.

Secondly, *Dr. Paul Gendreau, University of New Brunswick, Canada*, identifies the types of interventions that reduce reoffending. He claims that "when it comes to reducing offender recidivism, the only game in town, is appropriate cognitive-behavioural treatment which embody known principles of effective intervention." Accordingly, it is fair to say, the consensus is reached that effective (appropriate) programs are behavioural, highly structured in nature and target criminogenic factors.

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Thirdly, *Dr. Freidrich Lösel, University of Erlagen-Nurnberg, Germany*, informs what empirical research can tell us about impacts. He contends that "community-based programming tends to produce greater results than programming delivered in custody." Also, he reports that on average, offender treatment tends to reduce recidivism by approximately 10 percentage points. However, methodological studies also suggest that the potential upper limit of such reductions is actually between 30 and 40 percentage points. Moreover, an organization that is emotionally and socially responsive, well-structured, norm-oriented and controlling can be important not only to program interaction but also to future non-offending.

Finally, *Dr. James McGuire, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom*, has highlighted the need for program accreditation processes. He suggests that "the optimal route selected by a number of services is the development of procedures for accreditation of programs designed to reduce recidivism." This means there should be a clear, evidence-based theoretical model underpinning the program; program material should identify factors linked to offending; to be effective, programs should be inter-linked with a case management process, and guidelines for implementation within services; and program materials should include assessment and evaluation measures, and a framework for evaluation of the program's overall delivery, short-term, and long-term impact.

This paper builds on the evidence-based literature on effective correctional programming (Motiuk & Serin, 2001) and accompanies the others broadly focused on risk/needs assessment and evidence-based correctional programs. It sets forth a framework for correctional program evaluation and performance measurement.

II. DEFINING CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS

Basically, correctional programs and/or interventions can be viewed as a structured set of learning opportunities provided to offenders so they can change for the better and remain crime-free (McGuire, 2000). The approach assumes offenders have needs that directly cause their criminal behaviour, that we can identify those needs accurately, that appropriate intervention is available, that intervention will address these needs, and that reduced need will diminish criminal behaviour.

The foregoing is consistent with Social Learning Theory perspectives (Albert Bandura and Don Andrews) on reducing reoffending and the correctional mandates to contribute to public, staff and offender safety. Correctional programs whether in institutional or community-based settings have a common objective: "the adjustment of behaviour from a pattern that is criminal or anti-social to one that is more law-abiding or pro-social." In corrections, fostering positive change among offenders is the primary way of contributing to public safety. The task is more than making correctional programs available, it is actively encouraging and assisting offenders to participate in them. This means that the best correctional programs are available. These are correctional programs that concentrate on criminal recidivism, what causes it and what can be done to change it.

III. EFFECTIVENESS, EFFICIENCY AND RELEVANCY

As noted earlier, Correctional Service Canada completed a major evaluation of its core correctional programs in 2009. Some program examples include substance abuse, violence prevention, family violence, sex offender and maintenance programs. Notwithstanding the enormous effort that went into such an undertaking, some important lessons were learned with respect to the following: collection of data, developing metrics, engaging program management and delivery staff interpreting findings and making recommendations. The basic outline for the evaluation report was examining the following: *program effectiveness, cost-efficiency, cost-effectiveness,* and *continued relevance* across a wide set of nationally offered correctional programs.

First and foremost, program effectiveness was operationally defined as "the extent to which a policy, program, or initiative is meeting its planned result." Secondly, cost-efficiency is "the extent to which correctional programs are producing planned outputs in relation to financial resources used." Thirdly, cost-effectiveness is "the relationship between the amount spent and the results achieved relative to alternative design and delivery approaches." Fourth and finally, continued relevance is defined as "the extent to which correctional programs continue to realistically address an actual need."

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Notwithstanding the finding that Correctional Service Canada's programs are effective insofar as program participation was associated with reductions in recidivism, including technical revocations and reoffending (with a non-violent, a violent and/or a sexual offence), the evaluators reported that "between 70 to 90 cents of every dollar spent on programs is allocated towards successful completions." In relation to cost-effectiveness the evaluation established that "on average, every dollar spent on programming resulted in a return ranging from 1 to 8 dollars." These returns represent cost savings of fewer days of incarceration (avoided days inside and extended days outside). Furthermore, the evaluators reported that correctional programs were continuing to address the risk levels and specific criminogenic needs of the current offender population, and thus continued to be a "relevant, effective means of enhancing public safety and reducing reoffending."

IV. MOUNTING THE EVIDENCE FOR PRACTICE

Not surprisingly, effectiveness findings were observed to vary by program, intensity level, and demographic of the federal offender population. As such, Correctional Service Canada's correctional program results are consistent with a previous body of national evidence which confirms that targeting specific criminogenic needs is a relevant and effective means of enhancing public safety and reducing reoffending. As reported and tabled below in *Safe Return of Offenders to the Community* (Motiuk, Counsineau & Gileno, 2005), crime reduction through effective treatment (reported as reductions) had been observed across a number of other independent studies.

Target	Study	Design/Sample	Result
Education	"A Two Year Follow-up of Federal Offenders who Participated in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program" (R. Boe, 1998, R-60).	Compared a sample of male federal offenders who participated in ABE with a national sample of paroled offenders. Follow-up period of 2 years.	 718 paroled offenders who completed ABE-8 program had a 7.1% reduction in <i>readmissions</i> (from 24% for the benchmark group to 22.3% in the program group). 74 paroled offenders who
			completed ABE-10 program had a 21.3% reduction in <i>readmissions</i> (from 24% for the benchmark group to 18.9% in the program group).
Employment	"Prison Work Programs and Post-release Outcome: A Preliminary Investigation" (L. Motiuk & R. Belcourt, 1996, R-43).	Compared a sample of male federal offenders who participated in CORCAN with a national sample of paroled offenders. Follow-up period of 1.5 years.	52 paroled offenders who participated fully in the prison industries program (CORCAN) had a 27.8% reduction in <i>readmissions</i> (from 26.6% for the benchmark group to 19.2% in the program group).
Substance Abuse	"The High Intensity Substance Abuse Program (HISAP): Results from the Pilot Programs" (B. Grant, D. Kunic, P. MacPerson, C. McKeown, E. Hanson, 2003, R-140)	Compared a sample of federal offenders who completed HISAP with a matched sample who did not participate in HISAP. Fixed follow-up period of 6 months.	55 offenders who completed HISAP demonstrated a 19% reduction in <i>readmissions</i> to prison and 50% reduction in <i>new</i> <i>convictions</i> .

Crime Reduction Through Effective Treatment

Target	Study	Design/Sample	Result
Substance Abuse	"Institutional Methadone Maintenance Treatment: Impact on Release Outcome and Institutional Behaviour" (S. Johnson, J. Van den Ven & B. Grant, 2001, R-119)	Compared a sample of federal offenders who participated in Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) while incarcerated with a matched sample not participating. Fixed follow-up period of 12 months.	107 offenders who participated in MMT demonstrated a 46.1% reduction in <i>readmissions</i> to prison and 28.6% reduction in <i>new convictions</i> .
Substance Abuse	"Intensive Support Units (ISU) for Federal Offenders with Substance Abuse Problems: An Impact Analysis" (B. Grant, D.V. Varis, & D. Lefebvre, 2004, R 151)	Compared a sample of federal offenders who participated in the ISU while incarcerated with a matched sample that did not reside on ISUs. Follow-up period of up to 24 months.	246 offenders who participated in the ISU showed: A 36 % reduction in <i>readmission</i> to custody (from 39% for matched comparison group to 25% in the ISU group) A 40.4 % reduction in <i>readmission with a new offence</i> (from 10.9% for matched comparison group to 6.5% in the ISU group)
Living Skills	"The Impact of Cognitive Skills Training on Post-release Recidivism among Canadian Federal Offenders" (D. Robinson, 1995, R-41).	Compared a sample of federal offenders who completed Cognitive Skills Training with offenders who remained on the waiting list without programming.	1,444 offenders who completed cognitive skills training demonstrated an 11 % reduction in <i>readmissions</i> to prison and 20% reduction in <i>new</i> <i>convictions</i> .
Sex Offenders	"Applying the Risk Principle to Sex Offender Treatment" [A. Gordon & T. Nicholaichuk, 1996, FORUM, 8(2)].	Compared treated-male sex offenders with a national sample of sex offenders. Follow-up of two years.	80 higher risk sex offenders on the Clearwater Unit program showed a 58.9% reduction in <i>sexual recidivism</i> (from 14.6% for the bench-mark group to 6.0% in the program group).
Sex Offenders	"A Multi-year Multi-modal Review of Sex Offender Programs in Federal Corrections" (L. Motiuk, 1998, 17th Annual Research and Treatment Conference of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers).	Compared treated male sex offenders with a national sample of all released sex offenders. Follow-up of three years.	210 treated sex offenders showed a 50% reduction in <i>sexual recidivism</i> (from 6% for the benchmark group to 3% in the program group).
Sex Offenders	"Recidivism among Treated Sexual Offenders and Matched Controls" (Looman, J., Abracen, J., & Nicholaichuk, T., 2000, <i>Journal of Interpersonal</i> <i>Violence</i> , 15, pp. 279-290).	Compared treated high-risk male sex offenders from the RTC(O) with matched untreated sex offenders. Average time at risk was 9.99 years.	89 treated sexual offenders showed a 51% reduction in <i>sexual recidivism</i> (from 51.7% for the benchmark group to 23.6% for the treated group).
Sex Offenders	"Outcome of an Institutional Sexual Offender Treatment Program: A Comparison between Treated and Matched Untreated Offenders" (Nicholaichuk, T., Gordon, A., Gu, D., & Wong, S., 2000, Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 12, pp. 139-153).	Compared high-risk male sex offenders treated between 1982 & 1995 from the RPC(Prairies) with matched untreated sex offenders. Average time at risk was 6 years.	296 treated sexual offenders showed a 56.3% reduction in <i>sexual recidivism</i> (from 33.2% for the benchmark group to 14.5% for the treated group).

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Target	Study	Design/Sample	Result
Sex Offenders	"The Effectiveness of Therapeutic Interventions with Incarcerated Sexual Offenders" (Cortoni, F. & Nunes, K.L., 2005, Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers Annual Convention, Salt Lake City, Utah [Research Report in preparation])	Compared a sample of male sexual offenders treated in the National Sexual Offender Program between 2000 & 2004 with matched untreated sexual offenders. Average time at risk was 3 years.	 347 treated sexual offenders showed a 68%* reduction in <i>sexual recidivism</i> (from 6.9% for the benchmark group to 1.7% for the treated group). * Rate of reduction is adjusted for risk and time-at-risk (time in the community).
Sex Offenders	"Circles of Support & Accountability: An Evaluation of the Pilot Project in South- Central Ontario" [COSA] (Wilson, R., Picheca, J.E., & Prinzo, M., 2005, Research Report R-168).	Compared high-risk sexual offenders released at the end of their sentence who were involved with COSA to a matched group of offenders who did not become involved in COSA. The average follow-up time was 4.5 years.	60 high-risk sexual offenders in COSA showed a 70% reduction in <i>sexual recidivism</i> (from 16.7% for benchmark group to 5% for COSA group).
Violent Offenders	"Effectiveness Research on Violence Prevention Programming" (Cortoni, F. & Nunes, K.L., 2005. Canadian Criminal Justice Association Biannual Conference, Calgary, AB [Research Report in preparation]).	Compared a sample of male high- risk violent offenders treated in the Violence Prevention Program between 2000 & 2004 with matched untreated violent offenders. Average time at risk was 1.3 years.	 333 treated violent offenders had a 52%* reduction in violent recidivism (from 21.8% for the benchmark group to 8.5% for the treated group). * Rate of reduction is adjusted for risk levels and time-at-risk (time in the community)
Family Violence	"Evaluation of CSC's National Family Violence Prevention Programs". (British Columbia Institute Against Family Violence, 2004).	Compared treated family violence offenders to untreated family violence offenders. Follow-up of 6 months.	160 treated offenders had a 67% reduction in <i>spousal violence</i> <i>recidivism</i> (from 13% for the benchmark group to 4% for the treated group) and a 50% reduction in <i>general violence</i> <i>recidivism</i> (from 19% for the benchmark group to 10% for the treated group).

V. EFFECTIVENESS: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Education, work and personal development programs are the cornerstones of correctional intervention. They have been shown to reduce criminal behaviour and increase positive behaviour in prison. Historically, these programs have been a fixture of correctional efforts in North America for more than 150 years.

The rationale for providing program service to offenders flows directly from the amount and type of variation in personal characteristics, interpersonal influences, situational determinants and environmental conditions that offenders bring with them (Motiuk, 1991).

Certain criminogenic factors have been demonstrated as predictors of criminal behaviour; these criminogenic needs are changeable and, if altered, have demonstrated reductions in criminal conduct. It is important to conduct comprehensive assessments regarding criminogenic need.

Cognitive-behavioural-based programs, a result of Social Learning Theory application, appear to work best to reduce recidivism. Effective programs are structured and provide a measure of the level of participation and progress.

V. FACTORS IMPACTING EFFECTIVENESS

A review of the literature on program effectiveness reveals a number of factors that can have an impact. These include factors such as the *program model* (i.e. cognitive-behavioral); *responsivity*; *implementation*; *fidelity* (i.e. quality assurance) and selection of *outcome measures*.

The *responsivity* of a program deals with the setting in which it is delivered, offender and therapist characteristics, program intensity, and motivational issues. *Implementation* considerations include site selection; staff recruitment, training and retention; marketing the program within the setting (institution or community); referral criteria; credibility (organizational and operational); program integrity; and evaluation. Program *fidelity* or quality assurance concerns the need for program manuals (treatment, participant, training); expecting and assessing for drift from the original program design; conducting on-site visits; obtaining peer (external) reviews; and obtaining consumer evaluations.

VI. MEASUREMENT OF PROGRAM OUTCOME

While recidivism is the ultimate index, other intermediate measures include consumer satisfaction, change scores and thresholds, and offence-specific outcome measures. Measurement issues encompass the following: survival curves, prediction (how to use correlation coefficients [r's] in real life), length of follow-up and base rates.

VII. WHAT IS SUCCESS IN CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMMING

A. Improving Motivation.

Offenders who are highly motivated to succeed in programs represent prime candidates for successful reintegration. Motivation is often a critical factor in probation-/parole-officer support for program referral, participation, progress and early release. Accurately assessing offender motivation to target offenders for program participation and to establish release priority can make an important contribution to safe reintegration (Motiuk, 2001c).

B. Increasing Participation.

Institutional program participation often consumes a large proportion of case preparation time and can become a source of delay in eventual release. Successful program participation has been demonstrated to improve the likelihood of post-release success. Assignment to programs where the need is not identified or the program is inappropriate, may offer little or no benefit and actually contribute to conditional release failure. Program completion is a critical foundation for the safe release of offenders (Motiuk, 2001c).

C. Ensuring Completion.

The full effects of programming are not always fully known; however, completing programs provides important information about post-release success, and program non-completers or drop-outs impose a cost both in terms of wasted resources and in depriving motivated offenders of program opportunities (Motiuk, 2000c).

D. Improving Performance.

The assessment of program performance, although critical in the decision to support early release, is often subjective and largely without guidelines. Assessing program outcome/treatment gain or relating program performance to reintegration potential and post-release adjustment is important (2001c).

VII. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

The public is primarily concerned with how "corrections" is managed because correctional services are perceived as being responsible for their safety. From the public's perspective, recidivism is important because it reflects criminal futures and provides an indication of the effectiveness of correctional interventions. From a correctional-management perspective, poor adjustment in prison and/or community is an important problem because it results in disruptive or rule-breaking behaviour.

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IX. RECIDIVISM

Derived from the Latin word *recidere*, which means to fall back, the word recidivism was first used in a German publication called Pall Mall in 1886: "*Recidivism is largely represented by low foreheads, the scowling brows and cunning eyes.*" A forerunner of the word recidivism was used as far back as the 1600s. A form of the now obsolete word recide, which meant to fall back, appeared in 1609 version of the Bible: "*Recidivation into sin maketh the former repentance frustrate.*" It seems quite logical the word progressed from describing relapse into sin to referring to relapse into crime. After all, crime has long been equated with sin by many people and many cultures.

The most common definition of recidivism is the percentage of released offenders readmitted to correctional custody for a new offence during a particular period of study. So what is the recidivism rate? Although it is a popular and valid question, it really is a difficult one to answer, and to emphasize any one answer can be misleading if we don't recognize its limitations (Motiuk, 2001b).

Deciding on how to determine the number of released offenders raises several options and necessarily affects the denominator. For example, calculations may be used for the following: 1) any release (under supervision and upon completion of sentence); 2) release under supervision; and 3) the aforementioned (flow) combined with those already under community supervision (stock) to complete the full picture of community supervision caseloads. Naturally, the later is the basis on which most correctional systems would prefer to be measured as it reflects the full magnitude of correctional effort required to reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

Deciding on how to determine the number of readmitted offenders also poses some choices and necessarily affects the numerator. For example, calculations may be used for the following: 1) any return (under suspension, revocation, or new offence); 2) return for technical violations of conditions; and 3) return for a new offence (any, violent, or a specific offence like a sex offence).

Even if we know the recidivism rate, we still can't be sure what it means and what accounts for it. We run into particular problems when we try to evaluate the success of particular correctional systems or programs. Is the program successful if offenders who participated in it no longer commit offences related to the problem addressed by the program?

For example, the post-release performance of over 1,000 treated sex offender was examined for an average 3.5 year follow-up period and found that 17 cases recidivated sexually (or 1.7%). The recidivism rate of the treated sex offenders was roughly half that of entire sex offender population when released which rose to 3%. Overall, a good correctional result was obtained and whether it can be attributed in whole or in part to institution-based sex offender treatment or in combination with effective community supervision practices may matter little in the long-run. This does, however, pose methodological concerns for program evaluation purposes when recidivism rates are so low. Recidivism is a critical issue in corrections, but it is also one of the most difficult issues to address in an easy-to-understand manner. Nevertheless, the suggested practice is to track recidivism systematically and report each year.

For evaluating correctional performance, one can calculate yearly rates of return to custody for the following — any reason, any new offence, and violent offences. Also, one can examine overall contribution to crime in a particular jurisdiction. For evaluating correctional programs, one can report the change and reduction in recidivism for the following: *intended to treat, program completers, participants and drop-outs*.

X. REPORTING REDUCTIONS IN REOFFENDING

The change and reduction in recidivism (reported as the difference in recidivism rate over the comparison group — raises the overall magnitude of the effect) is measured relative to either a matched comparison group, control group (sometimes waiting list controls, intended to treat) and or general base rate for a similarly situated correctional population. (Program Group = 25% versus Comparison Group = 50%; Relative Difference = 25%; Actual Reduction is (50-25/50) = 50%).

XI. CONCLUSION

Effective, efficient and relevant correctional programming has always been about people, not just numbers. State-of-the-art programs, up-to-date referral guidelines and revisions of program delivery manuals are necessary, but unless an organization, at all levels, is committed and supportive of new initiatives, *correctional systems* will be limited in their ability to move forward into the future.

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