Effect of Accelerated Release from Prison on Public Safety: A Review of the Literature

National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD)
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Purpose of the Literature Review

- Examine accelerated release efforts throughout the United States and Canada, at different time periods and with different prison populations.
- Identify the impetus for accelerated release and procedures used.
- Assess the effect of accelerated release on public safety as measured by recidivism.
Methods for the Literature Review

- **Database used:**
  - Rutgers University Don Gottfredson Criminal Justice Library
  - National Institute of Corrections Information Center
  - National Criminal Justice Reference Service

- **Key Words used: (alone and in combination)**
  - Early release
  - Prison population caps
  - Recidivism
  - Public safety
  - Effect

- **Timeframe specified for studies**
  - 1980-2007

- **Type of publications requested**
  - Articles published in peer-reviewed publications
  - Monographs
  - State Reports

- **Jurisdictions**
  - US and Canada
Literature Review: Article Screening

- Received over 30 studies, papers and monographs from Rutgers University Library, NIC and the NCRS
- Excluded studies not addressing accelerated release and recidivism in methods and results (ex: studies reporting on recidivism only)
- Excluded studies with unclear methods (ex: not able to identify population source)
Results from Article Screening Process

- 14 peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, state reports, and policy-related and national data reports were reviewed and are reported in this presentation.
- The cited studies and reports used data from 1981 to 2004.
- Examined accelerated release from prison in different geographical settings and at different times and its impact on public safety over the span of 22 years.
Literature Review: Overview of Geographical Regions

Jurisdictions represented in the cited studies and reports

– US
  - Washington State
  - California
  - Colorado
  - Texas
  - Montana
  - Wisconsin
  - Illinois
  - Michigan
  - Florida

– Canada
Impetus for Studies and Reports

- Most studies and reports reported the impetus for accelerated release (AR) was to relieve prison overcrowding.
- Some studies reported testing of risk assessment tools as a secondary goal for AR.
- Smaller number of studies cited testing collaboration with community programs as a third goal for AR.
Accelerated Release Time
- Studies reported accelerated release ranging from 60 to (approximately) 130 days earlier than actual sentence time.

Post-release behavior
- Was usually observed over a 6- and 12-month follow up period.

Public Safety
- Was measured through conviction of new felony offense, criminal parole violation, and technical parole violation.
Most studies targeted adult males.

Only one study focused on adult women.

Population selected for accelerated release were most often:

- Non-violent offenders.
- Offenders eligible for parole.
- Offenders whose crimes could be addressed in community settings (usually substance abuse).
Literature Review: Findings

Most of the cited studies and reports found:
- *No significant difference* in rates of recidivism among accelerated release and full-term offenders.

Some studies found:
- *Lower recidivism rates* among accelerated releases than those who served a full-term in prison.
For Example… **Same rates** for Accelerated Release

- In Illinois, inmates released via the Supplemental Meritorious Good Time (SMGT) had the *same* recidivism rates as those inmates not released via the SMGT. (Study #9 in report).
- In Wisconsin, *no evidence* was found that accelerated release extension from 90 to 135 days resulted in a disproportionate increase in criminal activity:
  - At 6-month follow up, only 7% of the 135-day Special Action Release (SAR) group and 6% of the 90-day SAR group had committed felony offenses for which they were convicted and sentenced. (Study #7 in report).
Literature Review: Findings

For example… **Lower rates** among Accelerated Release

- During an 18-month follow up, the Florida Community Control Program (FCCP) had *lower* rates of new convictions.
  
  Only 19.7% of the FCCP group had a new offense, compared to 24.3% of new offenses among those offenders who spent 9 months in prison. (Study #11 in report)

- In a study in urban jails in the northeastern US:
  
  78% of the offenders released to the community-based, substance abuse treatment program reported *no new convictions* in comparison to 66% of those early release offenders that did not participate in treatment. (Study #13)
For example… offenders released to community settings (ex: substance abuse treatment needs)

- In Canada, approximately one half of the offenders (52%) successfully completed their sentences in the community or had been successfully living in the community for at least one year post release when the follow up period ended. (Study #14 in report)
Crime in Study Sites

NCCD reviewed annual crime rates throughout the different regions reported in the studies during the same time the studies took place.

– Crime data in the states where studies took place show decreases even as accelerated release was being implemented.
For example…

- In Florida, the crime rates declined from 1,188 per 100,000 residents in 1993 to 1,137 per 100,000 in 1994.


- Crime rates in Illinois during the study period decreased from 959 per 100,000 population in 1993 to 886 per 100,000 in 1996.

  FBI Uniform Crime Reports (Study #9)
Literature Review on Accelerated Release
What Worked?

- Selecting non-violent offenders for accelerated release.
- Designing AR as an incentive for non-violent behavior in prisons.
- Allocating probation officers to maintain contact with AR groups (accountability).
- Linking AR groups to community-based services and programs (e.g., employment, housing, substance abuse and mental health treatment).
Policy issues raised in the literature on Accelerated Release

- Accelerated release versus systematic sentencing reform
- Equity concerns in the accelerated release process
- Victims issues
- The "Willie Horton" phenomenon
- Resource considerations