

Intervention Implications for **Reducing Risk of** Post-Release Inmates

“Walking Away” from Community Correctional Placements

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Abstract

Public safety concerns regarding the release of inmates from prison, and the relative absence of research concerning how to address this problem, has prompted a need for empirical investigation of the adjustment of post-release inmates in the community. This study focuses particularly on whether the released individual fails to return in a timely way on authorized pass (“walk-aways”) in the community setting in which he has been placed, with the ultimate purpose of enhancing the effectiveness of relevant risk-reducing interventions. Although a very small percentage of individuals in community placement actually walk away, we were able to obtain stratified random samples comparing those who have walked away from community placement (N=100) with a comparable group of individuals who did not walk away (N=100) during the year 2000. Individuals were followed for a total of one year post-release from prison. The Correctional Offender Management Profiles for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS), a broad-based assessment tool covering a multidimensional set of well-known criminogenic factors, was used to collect relevant information on participants; these data were reviewed and used in the current study. Relatively few demographic or COMPAS variables distinguished between these two groups. Among the few that did were the COMPAS scales of Failure to Appear, Community Non-Compliance, and Violence, which were significantly higher for the “walk-away” group, as were COMPAS scales Criminal Involvement and History of Non-Compliance. Walk-aways were also significantly younger and more likely to have **a history of** “Other Offenses Against a Person,” which include offenses such as hit and run, coercion, **and** reckless endangerment. Logistic regression analysis indicated that age and substance abuse

were significantly associated with risk for walking away from community placement.

Results suggest that certain COMPAS scales, accompanied by age and substance abuse information, may be useful in identifying individuals at risk for failing to return to facilities while on authorized passes into the community.

Method

A random stratified sample of inmates (N=200) who had been released from New Jersey correctional institutions during the year 2000 and assessed for community placement in a facility owned by Community Educational Centers (CEC) was obtained. CEC is a private company specializing in the assessment and community rehabilitation of released inmates in a number of states, contracting with New Jersey to provide such services. Inclusion criteria were gender (male), age (between the ages of 18-65), released from a New Jersey prison between 1-1-00 and 12-30-00 to CEC for community placement, and recommended for placement by CEC into a community correctional setting. Data collection was "file only," so there was no personal contact with any of the individuals being studied.

The sample was stratified to allow random selection of a total of 100 inmates who failed to return in a timely way from authorized pass while in community placement during the year 2000. Another 100 randomly selected cases were selected for review from among the group of inmates who did not walk away under this definition. Data were obtained on each individual for age, race, criminal offense, number of previous arrests, number of previous convictions, and length of remaining sentence. The COMPAS, a broad-based assessment tool covering a multidimensional set of established criminogenic factors, was also utilized to collect inmate data. The COMPAS contains a number of scales relevant to risk for violent, criminal, and otherwise antisocial behavior.

The two groups were compared for statistically significant distinguishing variables using logistic regression. The number of variables were selected considering the accepted standard of 10-20 participants per variable.

Discussion

- Limited but significant sections of the COMPAS may be useful in identifying individuals who are considered high risk from leaving facilities without authorization
- A closer look at inmates who commit “Other Offenses Against a Person” may be warranted in future studies to determine it’s overall relevance to “walk-aways”
- Community residential placements may want to consider the variables of younger age, substance abuse, and the relevant COMPAS scales in combination with history of or/or current thoughts of walking away. In order to avoid high rates of false positives, however, such consideration should be limited to identifying “walk away potential” as a problem, and having it addressed in the course of interventions.
- It would also be useful to integrate rehabilitative work on walk away potential with broader issues such as high risk situations, the impact of substance abuse, and the nature of decision-making, all of which have impact on multiple areas of functioning and the potential to affect overall community adjustment.
- It would be helpful for other agencies and companies to take affirmative steps to investigate risk factors for walking away from placement **like CEC has undertaken**, and to strengthen the range and intensity of existing interventions for those identified as at higher risk for walking away.
- CEC is continuing to investigate the relationship between risk factors and risk reduction intervention strategies, both for walking away and for other indicators of community adjustment, to enhance the effectiveness of interventions and decision-making.

