

Rehabilitating sexual offenders: Lessons from the Correctional Service of Canada

Capstone Project

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**Abstract**

*The rehabilitation of sex offenders is a controversial and problematic issue. This study critically appraises the research that has been conducted regarding this issue and places it in a Canadian context by examining the programs offered by the Correctional Service of Canada. A complete review of the literature that exists was conducted and, from this, three themes were identified as the most problematic areas for the rehabilitation of sex offenders: additional programs for offenders, release of offenders into the community, and the effectiveness of the programs. The information gathered was critically appraised to ensure the credibility and validity of the information. Once verified, the information regarding these themes was compared to current information from the Correctional Service of Canada. After being compared, discussion into the differences between the research and the Correctional Service of Canada's practices was conducted, and several recommendations were made into what the Correctional Service of Canada is thought to be doing effectively, and areas in which they may be able to improve.*

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### **Background - The Problem**

According to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), just over ten percent of federally incarcerated inmates in Canada are serving sentences for some kind of sexual offences (2015). Although this number may seem relatively small, there is a tremendous amount of public fear surrounding sex offenders within the Canadian population. Along with this fear comes scrutiny around the types of rehabilitation that sex offenders should receive, the degree to which they should be rehabilitated, and how sex offenders should be released back into our society. In Canada, the fact of the matter is that almost every offender who is convicted of a crime, and imprisoned in a Canadian federal institution, will one day be released back into our society (Wilson, Picheca, & Prinzo, 2007). Even those offenders convicted of first degree murder, probably the most serious offence under the Canadian Criminal Code, will be eligible for parole after twenty five years (Department of Justice, 2016). With this in mind, we must be open to the fact that offenders who are convicted of sexual offences will, at some point, reach the end of their sentences with the CSC.

If sexual offenders will one day be released from federal prison back into our society, it is in the public's and the offenders' best interests to undergo the best possible rehabilitation while the offenders serve time in the prison system. With this in mind, the CSC has a number of rehabilitation programs that are offered within their correctional facilities. Along with numerous other programs, the CSC offers four distinct programs for sex offenders. Within their prisons the CSC has a national low intensity sex offender program, a national moderate intensity sex offender program, a high intensity sex offender program, as well as a maintenance sex offender program (CSC, 2009). According to the CSC, the moderate and low intensity sex offender

programs are offered nationally while the high intensity program is regionally based, offered in Ontario, Quebec, and Prairie and Pacific regions (2009). The maintenance program is a more generic based program which focuses on a variety of issues that all offenders may experience (CSC, 2009).

Along with the programs offered by the Correctional Service of Canada, there are also a number of community based programs that offer rehabilitation for sex offenders. One of the most successful of these programs is Circles of Support and Accountability which was started by a Mennonite pastor over concern that a sex offender was being released into the community with no follow up intervention from the CSC (Wilson et al, 2007). Eventually this program would be funded by the CSC and similar programs exist across the country.

This paper will focus on the rehabilitation of sex offenders in Canada. As previously stated, the offenders that we as a public are so cautious of will eventually be released back into our society (Wilson et al, 2007). This paper will present a critical appraisal of the rehabilitation programs that are offered for sex offenders in Canada both during incarceration and after an offenders' release. Further discussion will be included relating to these programs and their effectiveness as well as recommendations to the CSC as to the effectiveness of the rehabilitation of sexual offenders in the Canadian correctional system.

### **Project Rationale**

As stated in the background, this paper will explore the rehabilitation of sexual offenders in Canada. The general issue which will be explored is the sexual offender rehabilitation programs that are offered by the CSC. Specifically, this paper will seek to address whether or not we, as Canadians, can consider the rehabilitation that sex offenders in our prison system

receive to be effective. From this, this paper wishes to draw conclusions regarding this issue and make recommendations about improvements that could be implemented in order to increase the effectiveness of sexual offender rehabilitation in Canada.

As previously stated, there is a specific need within the Canadian Correctional System for this research. According to Statistics Canada, almost sixty percent of adults sentenced to serve time in prison received sentences of one month or less (Statistics Canada, 2016). This means that almost every person who enters a Canadian prison will one day be released back into our community. The CSC states that they have a “fundamental obligation to contribute to public safety by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens...” (CSC, 2012, p. 1). It is also stated in the CSC’s mission statement that they must effectively supervise convicted inmates and intervene while they are back in the community (Correctional Service of Canada, 2012). If almost all inmates will one day be released, and the CSC’s goal is to facilitate this in the most efficient and safe manner possible, then rehabilitation of offenders must be in the forefront of all activities that the CSC conducts. This paper will strive to discover whether or not the CSC is conducting rehabilitation programs in the most effective manner possible.

The questions that this project wishes to address, creates some supplementary questions. Firstly, the definition of effectiveness needs to be explored. For the purpose of this project it will be assumed that a sex offender rehabilitation program can be considered effective related to the recidivism rates of offenders who have taken part in the program. An offender will be considered to have participated in the program if they complete the program and all its requirements from beginning to end.

A second issue is that of recidivism rates. For the purpose of this project, an offender will be considered to have reoffended if, after their release, they are convicted of another sexual offence that requires them to be returned to a CSC institution for any period of time. That is to say, that reoffending of any offence is not the criteria for recidivism rates.

A third issue is that of comparative effectiveness. The results that this project hopes to discover may be impressive on a solely domestic level; however, this should not be the only factor of effectiveness. For this reason, the effectiveness of sex offender rehabilitation programs, will be judged on a domestic platform as well as being compared to other Western countries with similar criminal justice systems to Canada.

The scope of this project is fairly narrow. As this is an undergraduate project there is no funding or additional resources available to conduct testing of any kind or to collect primary data. The scope of this project includes the following:

- Identify topical and relevant information through a literature review;
- Critically appraise the information collected in relation to the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs;
- Determine any gaps in the research; and,
- Make conclusions and recommendations based on the research conducted.

These limiting factors will make the project manageable and will also lead to more specific and real world conclusions and recommendations coming from the project at its conclusion.

## **Literature Search**

### **Methodology**

In order to start the research on these issues a thorough search and review of the Justice Institute of British Columbia's (JIBC) online library resource, as well as various articles and papers published by the CSC, was conducted. Various different keywords and combinations of search terms were used to explore the JIBC's online database. The original search term used was: 'sexual offender rehabilitation'. From this initial search, the JIBC's library system returned almost three thousand hits for review; therefore, a more narrow and condensed search criteria needed to be used. The entire library database was limited to a few, more relevant, sub-databases such as Criminal Justice Abstracts with Full Text, PsycINFO, and SocINDEX with Full Text. The search criteria were then narrowed further by limiting the results to only peer reviewed scholarly articles, articles that included full texts, and articles from the year 1990 to the present. These inclusion criteria helped to narrow the results to articles that were more meaningful to the current research question. Although these exclusion criteria helped reduce the number of reviewable articles to around one thousand five hundred, this still left far too many articles to give any meaningful information relating to rehabilitation programs that are offered to sex offenders by the CSC. Therefore, the search terms and keywords were also narrowed. The new keywords used were: 'sex offender', 'Canada', 'rehabilitation', 'Correctional Service of Canada', 'high risk', 'moderate intensity', 'low intensity', 'community based' and 'programs'. After limiting the search criteria, and focusing the search terms, the JIBC's library system returned around thirty results, for each search. This number of results is a much more manageable number



of articles to be reviewed and will provide more meaningful information when it comes to the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in Canada.

Along with these searches, more searches were also conducted to find information to compare the Canadian information to. These searches were conducted in the same manner as above, however, the keywords: 'Australia', 'New Zealand', 'England', and 'United States of America' were added. Each of these searches returned approximately one hundred articles. Although this number may seem high, it is easy to eliminate non-relevant information, and focus on research that is relevant to this project.

Lastly, various basic internet searches were conducted in order to gather information directly from the Correctional Service of Canada, and various other government agencies with pertinent information. The Government of Canada, Corrections Canada, and Statistics Canada all had various articles, information, and published studies relating to the functioning of the Canadian correctional system and the rehabilitation programs that the CSC offers. This information was used to supplement the academic research that has been conducted relating to the issue of rehabilitating sex offenders.

## **Themes**

After reviewing the existing literature relating to the issue of treatment programs for sexual offenders in Canada, a number of themes became apparent. Firstly, there has been a fair amount of research conducted by scholars and academics in this field, however, there has also been a lot of research conducted by the CSC itself. The CSC's research examined programs that can be used to help treat sex offenders within their system. The research conducted by the CSC

makes it apparent that safely and effectively treating sex offenders is an extremely important aspect of their mandate.

A second theme that emerged is that of the need for additional and supplementary treatment programs for sex offenders. Several academics, including Abracen and Looman, (2011), and Moulden, Chaimowitz, Mamak, and Hawes (2014) have discussed that the issues that cause sexual offenders to offend can often be related to a variety of other issues, such as mental health, abuse, and substance abuse. If these issues can be addressed by programs, the issue of recidivism for sexual offenders may well follow along.

The third theme that presented itself is the difficulty of releasing sex offenders back into the community. According to Public Safety Canada (2015), a warrant expiry date is the date that a person's criminal sentence officially ends. As many sex offenders are held in prison until their warrant expiry date, once they are released they receive no further supervision, support or help from the CSC or the Parole Board of Canada. The research showed a need for sex offenders to be supervised in the community and possibly continue attending treatment programs after their release.

Finally, the theme of recidivism rates or effectiveness recurs in the literature. According to both the CSC and academics such as Harris and Hanson (2004), and Schweitzer and Dwyer (2003), who have studied this field, we can measure the effectiveness of the treatment programs offered by the CSC through recidivism rates of the offenders who attend these programs and are subsequently released. The issue that occurs with this method of measuring effectiveness in the literature is whether we are looking at recidivism rates of sexual offences once sex offenders are released into the community, or recidivism rates of all criminal offences. As defined previously,

for the purposes of this project recidivism of a sexual offence will be considered to be reoffending.

### **Additional and Supplementary Programs**

The research shows that a number of other factors play into recidivism rates for sexual offenders. That is to say that mental health, substance abuse, and other contributing factors play a key role in whether or not a sexual offender will reoffend once they have been released back into the community (Abracen & Looman, 2011). According to Abracen and Looman (2011), alcohol abuse specifically is extremely high in sex offenders, much higher than in the rest of the incarcerated population in Canada. The research shows that alcohol and drug abuse are fairly easy problems for offenders to relapse into, and it is very difficult to completely cure such ailments (Abracen & Looman, 2011). The research also indicates that alcohol and drug abuse are causally linked to criminal behaviour. The glaring issue here then, is that sexual offenders may be reoffending at higher rates because of substance abuse issues. If this is the case, then clearly some kind of supplementary rehabilitation program for substance abuse issues, along with a sex offender specific rehabilitation program, would be effective in reducing recidivism rates in sex offenders.

Secondly, the research shows that mental health may play a large role in sex offenders' decision making when it comes to committing offences. The literature shows that disproportionately high numbers of sex offenders are likely to be diagnosed with low level mental health issues such as mood disorders, anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and personality disturbances (Moulden, Chaimowitz, Mamak & Hawes, 2014). Not only are sex offenders more likely to suffer from these types of mental health issues, but they are

also more likely than the general population to be diagnosed with a major mental illness, such as bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. There are multiple questions that arise from this research. Firstly, this information begs the question of whether or not sexual offender recidivism rates can be attributed to mental illnesses. If this is the case, then clearly mental health rehabilitation programs need to be supplementary, or primary, to sex offender rehabilitation programs within the CSC. Secondly, if major mental health issues are the causing factor of sexual offences, then perhaps diagnoses and treatment in a medical facility with mental health professionals on staff is a more appropriate treatment program for certain sex offenders. These questions will be explored further later in this project.

### **Releasing Offenders into the Public**

The second major theme that emerged from the literature was that of the need for additional supervision or treatment for sex offenders once they have been released from prison. As previously stated, almost all offenders convicted of crimes under Canadian law have a warrant expiry date attached to their sentences. The warrant expiry date is the date which a criminal sentence officially ends (Public Safety Canada, 2015). According to Public Safety Canada, once an offender has reached their warrant expiry date they are no longer under the supervision of the CSC, meaning that no supervision, treatment or programs are available through the CSC for the offender. The literature shows that the Canadian criminal justice system does have safeguards in place to deal with dangerous offenders. These systems include ‘dangerous offender’ designations, ‘long-term offender’ designations, and the National Sex Offender Registry (Public Safety Canada, 2015). Although these systems do exist, they do little more than keep track of offenders who have been released into the public and ensure they accrue

suitable punishment if the offender were to reoffend. These systems do little to rehabilitate offenders or preemptively lessen the likelihood that the offender will reoffend.

The literature shows that reintegrating into society after being incarcerated is a challenge in itself. According to Gideon & Sung (2011), offenders experience personal, interpersonal, and structural barriers to successfully reintegrating into society. Gideon and Sung (2011), also state that inmates who have access to various reentry programs offered by correctional services are much less likely to reoffend than offenders who do not receive this type of programming. The question then becomes, should the CSC be doing more when it comes to continuing rehabilitation for offenders after they have been released. The concept of community-based volunteer programs for sex offenders will be discussed further in response to this question. If the public wishes to no longer fear sexual offenders, and the threat they pose, ongoing treatment, and rehabilitation, appears to be a possible solution.

### **Recidivism Rates - Effectiveness**

The final major theme that emerges from the literature is that of effectiveness, not just within Canada, but when compared to other Western nations with similar criminal justice systems to Canada. According to Harris and Hanson (2004), recidivism rates for offenders committing another sexual offence appear to be quite high. Of all sexual offenders released into the community, twenty-four percent had reoffended with another sexual offence within fifteen years (Harris & Hanson, 2004). According to Harris and Hanson's study (2004), this number jumped to almost forty percent if the offender had already been convicted of a sexual offence previously. That is to say, the more sexual offences an offender had been convicted of, the more likely they were to reoffend.

The research also shows recidivism rates for sex offenders from various other countries. According to Learn, Browne, Stringer, and Hoguee (2008), the rate of sex offenders reoffending with another sexual offence after six years or more in the United Kingdom was just under twenty percent. The literature also shows that in Australia, sexual recidivism rates are twenty two percent after ten years of being released (Schweitzer & Dwyer, 2003). In New Zealand, the research shows that the sexual re-offence rate was twenty five percent for high risk sex offenders ten years after being released from prison (Skelton & Vess, 2008). Finally, in the United States of America, research shows that recidivism rates for sex offenders is over fifty percent for those who have been convicted of multiple sex offences (Nally, Lockwood, Ho, & Knutson, 2014). The recidivism rate of the United States is made even more shocking, as the study was only a five year follow up from the offender's release (Nally et al, 2014). A further comparison and analysis of this information, and conclusions as to the effectiveness of the CSC's rehabilitation programs, will be explored later in this project.

### **Critical Appraisal**

#### **Additional and Supplementary Programs**

Discussing the research conducted on how additional rehabilitation programs may benefit the rehabilitation of sex offenders, there are a number of key factors to consider. The articles put forward by Abracen and Looman (2011), as well as Moulden et al. (2014), discuss the impacts that external factors can have on sex offenders and their likelihood of reoffending.

These authors discuss how issues such as substance abuse and mental health have a lasting effect on offenders and could be considered to be the overwhelming factor as to why some offenders reoffend rather than only a drive to commit sexually deviant offences. Abracen

and Looman (2011) discuss the fact that substance abuse is considered as a predictor of future dangerous behaviour. Abracen and Looman (2011) also discuss that there has been some debate in the literature around whether drug and/or alcohol abuse causes violent behaviour, however, they do state that the link between substance abuse and violent offending cannot be argued. The authors state that the research shows that sexual offenders who commit more offences after having been released from prison have a higher incidence rate of alcohol abuse than those who do not (Abracen & Looman, 2011). Abracen and Looman (2011) argue, interestingly, that the connection between alcohol abuse and sexual offending may not be as clear as it initially appears. Rather than alcohol abuse causing someone to sexually offend, there may be a pattern between negative emotionality, such as intimacy deficits, and alcohol abuse (Abracen & Looman, 2011). If this is the case, the question raised must be; should sexual offender rehabilitation focus on background issues such as mental health issues like negative emotionality, as well as incorporating aspects of rehabilitation for alcohol abuse?

Abracen and Looman (2011) show interesting and valid data and research for the idea that substance abuse may play an important factor in sex offender recidivism. The authors conducted their research at a CSC facility with offenders who were part of a high risk sex offender rehabilitation program (Abracen and Looman, 2011). This makes the results of their study of particular interest for this project as the sample of offenders used were both Canadian, and sex offenders with a high risk of reoffending. The authors then conducted three different questionnaire style tests upon the participants (Abracen & Looman, 2011). These tests were the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (MAST), the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST), and the Static-99 test. All three of these tests ask participants questions relating to their alcohol use, their

use of illicit drugs and, finally, questions which will give an indicator of future sex offence recidivism (Abracen & Looman, 2011). It can be inferred that the results of these tests will give the authors reliable information regarding sexual recidivism rates and substance abuse as these tests are recognized internationally as being reasonable indicators of the issues they are concerned with (Hanson & Thornton, n.d.).

The authors concluded that sexual offenders consistently showed higher scores on the MAST alcohol abuse test than other violent, but non-sexual, offenders (Abracen & Looman, 2011). This research study is clearly related to the purposes of this study. The authors of this study have conducted multiple research studies on the issues related to sex offenders and their recidivism rates and submit peer reviewed articles to scholarly journals for publication. Their results, in the context of this paper, show a clear need to incorporate an aspect of substance abuse rehabilitation, with a focus on alcohol abuse, to sex offender treatment programs in Canada.

The second article that discusses the impact that supplementary treatment programs may have on the recidivism rates of sexual offenders is that of authors Moulden, Chaimowitz, Mamak and Hawes, (2014). In this article, the differences between sexual offenders who are involved with the forensic mental health system were compared to sexual offenders who were involved with the correctional system in Canada (Moulden et al, 2014). This study is of interest to this project as it is comparing Canadian offenders between these two settings. Moulden and colleagues (2014) concluded that there were very few differences between the two groups of sex offenders when it came to age, gender, education level, early childhood home life, victim selection, and a variety of other factors (Moulden et al, 2014). What is interesting, and makes this research study so applicable to the current paper, is that Moulden et al (2014) found



statistical differences between the recidivism rates of the two groups. Moulden et al. (2014) discuss that this major gap between recidivism rates may come down to the fact that those offenders involved with the forensic mental health system may suffer from more severe mental illnesses, whereas those involved with the correctional system may suffer from lesser mental illnesses, such as antisocial behaviour, and personality (Moulden, 2014).

This study is once again peer reviewed research and published in a credible journal. The study conducted by the authors is one that holds a lot of value to this research paper. While sex offenders may be housed in different styles of incarceration, the results clearly show that mental health issues have a considerable impact on sexual offenders and their recidivism rates. This idea will be discussed later in this paper, however, the overwhelming concept that comes from this research, and plays into this paper, is the fact that mental health programs would appear to be a useful tool in the successful rehabilitation of sexual offenders in the Canadian correctional system.

### **Releasing Offenders into the Public**

The second theme put forward above is the idea that more programs are needed for sex offenders after they are released back into the public. As mentioned previously in this paper, according to Public Safety Canada (2015), many sex offenders are held in CSC facilities until the end of their sentences, meaning the CSC has no further jurisdiction over them once they are released into the community.

One article which discusses the importance of continuing support for offenders is that of Robin J. Wilson, Janice E. Picheca, and Michelle Prinzo (2007). This article, discusses the impact that a volunteer based support program for released sex offenders has had on a number of

stakeholders involved in the project (Wilson et al, 2007). This article is of particular interest to the current project as it lays out how additional support for offenders after their release is a more effective way to reduce recidivism than long term probation or supervision orders (Wilson et al, 2007). The authors (2007) discuss the Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) program which was developed by a pastor, after a sex offender was released into his community and public backlash swelled. According to Wilson et al. (2007), COSA offers humane support to sex offenders and a realistic accountability framework. The author's research used a comprehensive questionnaire to gather reliable data from offenders participating in the program, volunteers working at the agency, professionals who had contributed in some way to the development of the program, and members of the public, where COSA is facilitated (Wilson et al, 2007). The results of this study provide crucial information to this paper as it not only includes offenders and the people trying to rehabilitate them, but also members of the community where the offenders are being released. The information gathered from members of the community could be considered to be a secondary measure of how effective a rehabilitation program is as, usually, the public remains angry and afraid when these types of offenders are released into their communities (Wilson et al, 2007).

One aspect of Wilson et al.'s (2007) research becomes especially interesting when considered in the context of this paper. The authors report that eighty-three percent of the interviewed members of COSA joined the program because they did not have any other form of social support, and that they were willing to try anything to help facilitate their reintegration into the community. (Wilson et al, 2007). This fact will be discussed in another section of this paper,

however it raises a multitude of questions regarding the CSC's ability to properly rehabilitate sex offenders.

A second piece of pertinent research that came from Wilson et al.'s study (2007), was the statistical information relating to how community members felt about COSA. Wilson et al. (2007) reported that although one-hundred percent of community members interviewed stated that they would be upset if a sex offender was released into their community, sixty-eight percent of the respondents said that they would have a more positive view of the situation if the offender was a member of COSA (Wilson et al, 2007). Clearly this research shows in an unbiased manner that the more community support and rehabilitation an offender has access to after their release from a CSC facility, the more effective their rehabilitation can be.

A second paper, written by Patrick Lussier, Carmen Gress, Nadine Deslauriers-Varin and Joanna Amirault (2014), discusses the CHROME program in British Columbia, Canada. This project is of interest to this paper as it is not only a Canadian study with Canadian participants, but was conducted in the local region of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The authors state that the CHROME program is designed to help sex offenders understand the cycle of their behaviour and works to help offenders from relapsing into behaviours which could lead to them reoffending (Lussier et al, 2014). This program once again highlights the importance of community based programs to help sex offenders once they have been released from the custody of the CSC. For the purposes of this project, Lussier et al's paper (2014) provides further framework that, for the good of all stakeholders involved, more community supervision is needed for sex offenders who are being released into the community.

**Recidivism Rates - Effectiveness**

The final theme to be critically appraised is that of the effectiveness of the CSC's sex offender rehabilitation programs, both on a domestic and international scale. As mentioned above, Canada's recidivism rate aligns fairly similarly with the countries to which it was compared. While Canada's recidivism rate for sexual offenders sits at twenty-four percent (Harris & Hanson, 2004), the recidivism rate is twenty-two percent in the United Kingdom (Learn et al, 2008), twenty-two percent in Australia (Schweitzer & Dwyer, 2003), twenty-five percent in New Zealand (Skelton & Vess, 2008), and fifty percent in the United States of America (Nally et al, 2014). The one outlier within these statistics is clearly the United States.

On a domestic level, the Canadian federal recidivism rates are equaled in the Pacific region, which sits at just under twenty-five percent, but is much higher than the rates of recidivism in certain prairie provinces, such as Alberta and Manitoba, which sit at five and ten percent respectively (Harris & Hanson, 2004). With all of these statistics, it is important in the context of this project to include that the criteria for recidivism is slightly different across the board. Some locations use the conviction of another sexual offence as the criteria, while some geographic regions use the charge and conviction of another sexual offence as the criteria for recidivism (Harris & Hanson, 2004).

For the purposes of this project, this information can be considered extremely valuable in trying to compare recidivism rates in Canada to other countries. For the countries of the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand especially, the statistics create a reasonably valid comparison to Canada. As all of these aforementioned countries are commonwealth countries, they all derive their criminal justice systems from the English 'common law' developed in the

middle-ages (Harder, 2010). This makes the comparison even more compelling as the systems used to rehabilitate sex offenders are similar across the different countries.

The comparison of sexual offender recidivism rates to the United States (USA) is compelling in the context of this research paper based purely on Canada's geographic proximity to the USA. The comparison between Canada and the USA is relevant to this project as it provides statistics that differ significantly from Canada as far as recidivism rates of sexual offenders are concerned. If no other information can be gleaned from this difference, at the very least the USA may provide some information as to what not to do when it comes to rehabilitating sexual offenders. Of course there are some major differences between Canada and the USA, which may prove to be the causing factors of this statistical difference. The massive population difference between the two countries, the differences in styles of policing, charging offenders, and rates of incarceration may also play a factor.

The comparison of Canada's rates of sex offender recidivism to the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA, gives this paper more depth and meaning when it comes to the conclusions and recommendations as to what the CSC can improve upon in the rehabilitation programs that it offers to its sex offender population.

The themes presented in this critical appraisal are important to the context of this paper. The preceding information gives context and relevance to the discussion below. The information presented is valid, complete and echoes other existing literature on similar topics. The research conducted is appropriate in both an academic setting and in the context of this research paper. Furthermore, the information presented can be applied to the question this research seeks to

answer. That is: how effective is the current CSC models for rehabilitating sexual offenders so they can be released back into our society in the safest and most productive way possible.

### **Discussion**

As evidenced throughout this paper, there a number of ways in which the rehabilitation of sex offenders can be considered effective. The following section of this paper will attempt to discuss these themes in the context of the CSC, and the approaches that the organization currently takes to rehabilitative its sex offender population.

The CSC has a legal mandate to provide programs and services that are aimed at offenders' criminal behaviour (Correctional Service of Canada, 2016). These programs are designed to reduce offenders' future reoffending and are based on research that has been proven to reduce the rates of recidivism among offenders (Correctional Service of Canada, 2016). The specific programs offered for sex offenders, under the supervision of the CSC, are the National High Intensity Sex Offender Program, the National Moderate Intensity Sex Offender Program, and the Sex Offender Maintenance Program (Correctional Service of Canada, 2014). These programs consist of group sessions, and some individual sessions, which focus on helping offenders understand their behaviour, the impacts it has, their emotions and thinking related to sexual violence, and how to manage their harmful behaviour (Correctional Service of Canada, 2014). In addition to these programs, the CSC also offers National Substance Abuse Programs, which consist of group sessions, and individual sessions, and teach offenders how to avoid relapse, and what behaviours they may need to change in order to do so (Correctional Service of Canada, 2014). The National Sex Offender Programs incorporate some mental health treatment,

however, the CSC also states that certain offenders with mental health issues, may not be able to participate in regular programming (Correctional Service of Canada, 2014).

The two immediately apparent flaws in these programs, offered by the CSC, is the length of the programs and the fact that every program offered by the CSC is optional. The National Sex Offender Program consists of over two hundred hours of sessions while the substance abuse program offered consists of just under two hundred hours of sessions (Correctional Service of Canada, 2014). It could be argued that nearly four hundred hours of therapy, while possibly effective, may not be overly appealing to all offenders who may need these types of programs. Secondly, as the programs are not mandatory for any offender, the programs may not be attended by offenders who need them most. Furthermore, offenders may choose to skip sessions as there are no repercussions for doing so.

The second issue to be discussed is that of releasing offenders into the public, and the jurisdiction that the CSC has to offer programs to these offenders. The CSC states that only offenders who are either incarcerated in an institution, or on conditional release in the community, are eligible to participate in the programs that are offered (Correctional Service of Canada, 2014). As previously mentioned in this paper, sex offenders are often held in prisons until the very end of their mandated sentence meaning the CSC has no jurisdiction over their activities once they leave prison, other than to impose a long term offender order or similar program, which does little to rehabilitate the offender and may actually have a detrimental effect on an offender (Public Safety Canada, 2015). The CSC does state that there are various programs offered to offenders who live in community run provincial facilities, community

correctional centres or Aboriginal healing centres, however these are often few and far between, and difficult for offenders to access (Correctional Service of Canada, 2014).

Lastly, the issue of the effectiveness of these programs is to be discussed. An evaluation of the CSC's sex offender programs (2009) found that offenders who had participated in the programs did have a reduced level of recidivism when compared to offenders who had not participated in the program, however, they also stated that the results were not statistically significant (Correctional Service of Canada, 2009). Although the CSC's own evaluation did not seem to prove the programs they offer were effective, it could be argued that on an international scale they should be considered effective. As Canada shares very similar recidivism rates for sex offenders with various other commonwealth countries, it can be argued that the system is working as well as can be hoped for. When compared to the United States, Canada's recidivism rates are almost half, which strongly suggests the programs offered by the CSC are twice as effective as those offered by the American correctional systems.

### **Recommendations**

After reviewing and evaluating the literature, and comparing this information to the current standards and practices of the CSC, there are a number of recommendations that can be made. These recommendations include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Design sexual offender rehabilitation programs that incorporate substance abuse treatment as a complete package.
- 2) Incorporate more mental health treatment into CSC programs, and especially the National Sex Offender Programs.
- 3) Mandate that certain programs be taken by offenders, especially high risk offenders.



- 4) Design more community-based programs that can be offered to sex offenders once they have been released into the community.
- 5) Continue to update and manage sex offender programs to reflect continuing research in the field of sex offender rehabilitation.

Firstly, as stated previously in this paper, the issues of mental health and substance abuse have a large role in sex offender recidivism rates and their ability to properly manage themselves once they have been released (Abracen & Looman, 2011). If the CSC is able to effectively incorporate treatment for these kinds of issues into their National Sex Offender Programs, there is the potential that these programs will become more effective. By incorporating this type of treatment into sex offender rehabilitation programs, the need for offenders to attend two, distinctly separate programs for potentially linked issues, is eliminated.

Secondly, the research shows that offenders who participate in sex offender rehabilitation programs, have lower recidivism rates than those who do not. The CSC should be able to mandate that specific offenders participate in certain programs and impose sanctions if this mandate is not met. By forcing certain high risk offenders to participate in sex offender rehabilitation programs, it is probable that recidivism rates for sex offenders will continue to decrease however, further research is needed to ensure this would be the case.

Thirdly, the CSC needs to create more community based programs for offenders who are not under their direct supervision. If there were more programs offered to sex offenders who have been released from prison, it can be concluded that the incidence of sexual recidivism will drop. Along with the offenders themselves, the research also shows that the population of the

community where an offender is being released will feel happier, and safer, knowing that the offender is receiving continued support and treatment from the CSC (Wilson et al, 2007).

Finally, the CSC should continue their practice of developing programs based on ‘what works’. According to the CSC, their programs “are guided by the most recent evidence in correctional research, relevant theory and current practices” (Correctional Service of Canada, 2016. p. 1). Through continuing to keep up with the newest research available, the CSC will be able to continue to offer effective programs, and keep up with other comparable countries in the area of sex offender rehabilitation.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research shows that the Correctional Service of Canada’s sexual offender rehabilitation programs are fairly comprehensive and effective. Through designing programs around the most current research, the CSC is able to offer comprehensive programs in the area of reducing recidivism for sexual offenders incarcerated in their facilities. Although there are areas in which the CSC is able to improve, it is obvious that a fair amount of research and development has gone into ensuring that sex offenders are met with programs which will encourage them to challenge their emotions, and are directed at resolving underlying issues which could cause them to reoffend. Through these programs, and continued and additional support for sex offenders outside of CSC facilities, the Correctional Service of Canada will continue to ensure that all stakeholders needs are met when it comes to the issue of rehabilitating sex offenders in Canada.

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