

Release on temporary licence

Temporary release from prison to support offenders' reintegration into society.

First published

27 August 2015

Effect scale	Quality of evidence				
	Effect Impact on crime	Mechanism How it works	Moderator Where it works	Implementation How to do it	Economic cost What it costs
 Some reduction	 Low	 Moderate	 Low	 Low	No information

Focus of the intervention

Release on temporary licence – also known as temporary release from prison – allows offenders a short period of absence from a correctional establishment.

This usually occurs towards the end of their sentence or when they are due for probation.

Temporary release can be for home leave or work leave, where offenders are allowed to take on paid or voluntary work but must spend the days and nights when they are not working back in custody.

This intervention aims to reintegrate offenders back into the community and in the case of work release, enhance their skills for their return to society.

This narrative is based on one systematic review covering 23 studies, all of which were conducted in the USA.

The main outcome for this narrative is reoffending (key measures include rearrest, returns to custody and completed probation), though the work release schemes also use employment as a measure of success.

Effect – how effective is it?

There is some evidence that the intervention has reduced crime, but overall the intervention has not had a statistically significant effect on crime.

Four of the five studies assessing home release schemes found that participants in the temporary release scheme committed significantly fewer offences than offenders in a control group. Two of these studies used rearrest as their outcome, while the other two used returns to custody for more than 30 days.

Of the 11 studies that assessed work release schemes, the results were more mixed. Six of the studies found no significant differences between those who participated in the scheme and those who did not.

From the studies that did find significant differences, two found less reoffending, two found greater levels of employment and two found that participants were more likely to successfully complete their probation.

Six studies focused on a particular work release scheme for offenders with substance abuse problems, finding significantly less reoffending amongst programme participants, as well as significantly less substance abuse. However, this programme included therapeutic community treatment, which was not part of the other schemes.

How strong is the evidence?

Although the review was systematic, many forms of bias that could influence the study conclusions remain.

No statistical synthesis of results across studies was attempted, with only individual study results presented.

While the review had an effective and well-designed search strategy, it did not take into account potential biases from study design differences, reliability between reviewers or differences in

outcome measures.

Biases identified within the primary studies included a lack of information about:

- research and analytical procedures
- the implementation of the initiative
- participant characteristics
- in some cases, the adequacy of control of other factors that might affect the outcomes

Mechanism – how does it work?

A number of mechanisms are suggested to explain why temporary release from prison schemes may reduce reoffending.

By allowing offenders to re-establish family and social ties and build up support systems, temporary release helps facilitate the transition back into the community and encourages offenders not to commit criminal activities upon release.

While on release they can make arrangements for accommodation, work and training.

Work release helps to build the skills needed to boost their employment prospects when they are released from custody. It also allows prisoners to build up modest savings, which they can use to contribute towards their needs and those of their dependants.

The temporary release programme which focuses on substance-abusing offenders also provides them with support to stop using illicit substances upon their release, which may help lower the chances of reoffending.

Of the two studies that looked at employment rates, both found that participants in work release programmes had significantly higher rates of employment after release.

Three of the four studies that considered drug usage after programme participation found significantly lower frequencies of use or relapses back into drug usage. The other study found no significant difference.

Moderators – in which contexts does it work best?

A number of potential moderators are mentioned in the review but are not investigated. These include:

- whether the programmes are delivered in institutional (halfway houses, open or minimum security prisons) or community settings
- the severity of the offences committed by the participants of the temporary release programmes
- the duration of the programmes

One study looked at female offenders, but no significant differences in reoffending were found between treatment and control groups.

The programme for substance-abusing offenders was a work release programme involving a therapeutic community treatment element. Three of the four studies (with similar outcomes) found that offenders who participated in the programme with the therapeutic element were significantly less likely to be rearrested and significantly less likely to reuse illicit substances upon their release than those who did not have the therapeutic element included in the work.

Implementation – what can be said about implementing this initiative?

Temporary release schemes are short periods of absence from prison for offenders who are nearing the completion of their sentence.

These programmes may be delivered in institutional or community facilities, focusing on job readiness, community resources, housing and family reintegration.

In the USA, those states which have temporary release schemes may use halfway houses, pre-release facilities and day reporting centres for those who are preparing to be released back into the community.

Work release schemes focus on offenders maintaining or acquiring vocational skills for their re-entry into employment upon their release.

These programmes may be used:

- as leverage to encourage good behaviour in custody
- to assess whether prisoners are ready for probation

- in some cases to reduce prison overcrowding and lower the associated costs

Economic considerations – how much might it cost?

The review does not mention costs or benefits. No formal economic analysis is provided.

General considerations

All of the studies within the review were from the USA, so the ability to generalise findings to the UK context is unknown.

Summary

There is some evidence that the intervention has reduced crime, but overall the intervention has not had a statistically significant effect on crime.

Release on temporary licence aims to prepare offenders for release into the community by:

- reintegrating them with their family
- helping to sort out accommodation or work
- providing vocational training to secure employment

Those release schemes with therapeutic elements are more successful for substance-abusing offenders than schemes without this component.

Reviews

Review one

Reference

- Cheliotis, L. K. (2008) 'Reconsidering the effectiveness of temporary release: A systematic review', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 8, 153-168

Summary prepared by

This narrative was prepared by UCL Jill Dando Institute and was co-funded by the College of Policing and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). ESRC grant title: 'University Consortium for Evidence-Based Crime Reduction'. Grant reference: ES/L007223/1.

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