

Is parole a successful  
form of rehabilitation?



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## INTRODUCTION

Parole and community corrections are important in alternative sentencing and may result in increased public safety and prevent citizens from entering the criminal justice system in the future. Imprisonment is often the least effective way to reduce the rate of recidivism and it is the most expensive part of the public safety system (NCJRS, 2018).

The Etymology Dictionary defines parole as, “ the release of a prisoner temporarily or permanently before the completion of a sentence.” On the promise of good behavior, the prisoner is granted release before the completion of their maximum sentence (Evrard, 1971). Originally parole is from the French for “ voice, spoken words or word of honor” and it became associated in the Middle Ages with the release of prisoners who “ gave their word” to behave. This is different from amnesty in that the parolees are still considered to be serving their sentences and may be returned to prison if they violate the conditions of their parole (Evrard, 1971).

Considering all aspects of corrections and rehabilitation, the essential goals remain the same: the resocialization of the offender and the protection of society (Jewkes & Bennett, 2013). Parole, as a part of the correctional system, grew out of the shift in emphasis in penal philosophy from punishment to rehabilitation. The beginnings of parole in the United States goes back to two movements in prison reform. One movement was a belief that good conduct in prison should be rewarded by shortening the sentence (Evrard, 1971). The second movement was the idea that release should be made conditional, based upon the inmates conduct in prison and upon their

continued good conduct while outside the prison. The principle of conditional release was used in the English prison colonies of Australia as early as 1790 (Snarr & Wolford, 1996).

Parole is one form of correctional supervision that takes place in the community. Individuals are placed on parole after serving a portion of their sentence. The conditional release of prisoners before the completion of their sentences has always aroused much controversy, especially when they commit new crimes while on parole. So, the question is, do parolees have a greater chance for success, that is fewer re-arrests, because they benefit from community supervision and increased access to community programs?

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

Of those in prison at any time, the statistical information from the literature indicates that approximately 97-99% will eventually be returned to society. While some inmates are released straight into the community, the majority of those released will be on parole, under some form of supervision and 'bound' to a set of conditions (Ellis & Marshall, 2000). So, parole is one of the most important types of release used to return offenders to society. This means about 10% of those in some sort of correctional supervision are on parole. Offenders may be placed on parole as a result of a discretionary release or by a mandatory release based on earned good time credit (Snarr & Wolford, 1996).

Based on the literature, studies show that a predictable portion of parolees are reconvicted within two years, depending on their criminal history. However, the difference between predicted and actual rates of reconviction

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appear to be relatively small (Ellis & Marshall, 2000). The reduction from predicted to actual reconviction rates is greater for those prisoners sentenced to more than four years (Ellis & Marshall, 2000). Ellis found, parolees that were reconvicted within two years took longer after their release to be re-convicted than prisoners that were released at the end of their sentence. This suggests that parole delays reoffending.

The literature shows that some complete parole successfully while others do not. Measuring the success of parole raises several issues such as:

1. the way recidivism is defined and
2. the way prior experiences are linked to parole outcomes.

In efforts to develop a fair system, some parole boards have been abolished, more determinate sentencing legislation has been passed, and various forms of parole guidelines have been instated.

Overall, it looks like parole supervision has a small effect on the rates of rearrests. With mandatory parolees, which accounts for the largest portion of released prisoners, doing no better than those prisoners released without supervision. In some cases, they fare worse. Discretionary parolees are slightly less likely to be rearrested, and this difference is even smaller after taking into account personal characteristics and criminal histories (Solomon, Kachnowski, & Bhati, 2005). Solomon and his colleagues believe, parole supervision can function as a surveillance tool by monitoring and sanctioning those who violate conditions of release. This has the potential of averting future. reoffending.

By creating well established rules and/or incentives parole supervision can be designed as a social integration tool that can engage ex-inmates in positive societal activities, for example; work, drug treatment and other programs that may help reentry transitions. The literature is organized around three significant points:

1. Do prisoners released with and without supervision differ with respect to demographics, incarceration characteristics, and criminal histories?
2. Do prisoners released with and without supervision recidivate at different rates?
3. And finally, if there are differences in recidivism outcomes between those released with and without supervision, when and for whom does supervision matter most?

To evaluate the relationship between parole with supervision and recidivism, the literature examines if an inmate is supervised after release and how they were released. Those released conditionally are released to supervision by two different methods, discretionary release and mandatory release.

Prisoners released to supervision by discretionary release have been screened by a board or some other authority to determine if they are ready to be released into the community. Mandatory release happens when an inmate has served the original sentence, minus their good time credit, and serves the remainder of their sentence under supervision in the community. And finally, there is unconditional release, the prisoner has served all of their sentence and must be released without any conditions or supervision.

The literature suggests that those released in all three groups have similar demographics. With unconditional releasees and mandatory parolees

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appearing to be more at risk when compared to discretionary parolees. They had more prior arrests and were more likely to have been arrested for a violent offense. That is, the unconditional releasees were more likely to be serving time for a violent crime. Also, they served longer terms on the average, and are away from society for a longer period. This suggests that they may have become more removed from any positive societal interaction.

The researchers attempted to control for predictors of rearrests, such as, demographic and criminal history. After these statistical controls were in place, the differences in post-release outcomes were less obvious. Both unconditional and mandatory parolees had a predicted reoccurrence of rearrest at about 60%, where discretionary parolees had a predicted probability rate that was slightly lower at 57% (Solomon et al., 2005).

While the research shows parole has a positive effect in reducing reoffending, unconditional releases only slightly differed from mandatory parole releases regarding ethnicity and actuarial risk, these differences did not reach a level of statistical significance when compared with discretionary parolees (Ostermann, 2015). Discretionary and mandatory parole groups significantly differed, but mandatory releases showed a significantly lower rate of rearrest, reconviction, and postrelease parole violation (Ostermann, 2015).

## DISCUSSION

At the end of 2016, there were more than four million adults in the United States, either on parole or probation. Many of these adult's struggle with a mental illness or substance abuse. This challenges probation and parole

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officials to properly set conditions for supervision (NCJRS, 2018). The question becomes, does parole work? Even, using the comparison of reconviction trends for paroled and non-paroled inmates the question remains unanswered, as seen by attempts to abolish or limit it in various jurisdictions (Ellis & Marshall, 2000). The literature suggests that the predictive accuracy of the parole authorities and on their ability to predict future criminality is low, even though the main function of parole is the release of inmates at the time when they pose the least threat to society. An error may be made in one of two directions: First, it may be a prediction that an inmate does not represent a risk when in fact he does or second, a prediction that there is serious risk when there is none. A bad prediction represents a failure to protect society from the risk posed by inmates. The literature appears to concentrate on the second.

Studies of parole prediction have shown that all prediction methods result, in a significant proportion, have shown that there is or believed to be serious risk when there is none. Because of the failure of the current methods the conclusion is an injustice is done to offender incorrectly identified as risks and that their incarceration be based on these predictions (Carter, Glaser, & Wilkins, 1984).

So, is it possible to establish whether parole works? Well, if the most important measure of parole is to free up some prison space, then the answer to this economic argument is, yes. However, the most important measure of success in societal terms is whether parole contributes towards the reduction of future reoffending. If a parolee avoids reoffending during their period of parole but returns to the same pattern of behavior as

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those not released on parole, then the only gain has been the freeing up of prison space (Ellis & Marshall, 2000).

Despite its widespread use, little is known about whether parole supervision increases public safety or improves reentry transitions. The research indicates that less than half of those on parole successfully complete their parole without violating a condition of release or committing a new crime. And about two-thirds of all inmates are rearrested within three years of release. However, no national studies have compared the criminal activity of prisoners who are supervised after release to that of their unsupervised counterparts (Solomon, 2005, 2006).

## CONCLUSION

My finding is that discretionary parolees appear less likely to be rearrested than those with unconditional releases. And the literature on parolees seems to suggest that parole boards are making good decisions by choosing lower risk prisoners for release. Also it suggests that supervision has a more beneficial impact on this group than on mandatory parolees (Solomon et al., 2005). We have examined whether there is a "parole effect" on reconviction rates along a number of dimensions and it is clear that those prisoners subject to post-release supervision have lower reconviction rates and, by inference, re-offending rates than those released at the end of their full sentence (Ellis & Marshall, 2000).

The bottom line suggests that those who were released unconditionally were predicted to be more likely to experience new criminal involvement when compared with those who were released to parole supervision. While the <https://assignbuster.com/is-parole-a-successful-form-of-rehabilitation/>



effectiveness of parole may seem small, the research on treatment programs for offenders in general concludes that any reduction in reoffending is a “good” thing (Vennard & Hedderman, 1998).

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