



Reconsidering the effectiveness of temporary release: A systematic review

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a systematic review of the 'what works' literature on temporary release, particularly as concerns home leave and work release programs. Against the 'nothing works' proposition, the findings suggest that both home leave and work release schemes can be effective in reducing recidivism rates, while work release may also enhance post-release employment prospects. The final section discusses the directions future evaluative research should take, with special reference to the need for drawing the link between the procedural and outcome dimensions of temporary release.

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1. Introduction

In light of rapidly rising prison populations in a vast number of jurisdictions, on the one hand, and high corresponding recidivism rates, on the other, the need for renewed focus on reintegrating prisoners into the community has become urgent.¹

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¹ Admittedly, the use of buzzwords like 'reintegration', 'resettlement', or 're-entry' is potentially misleading, for they largely assume that prisoners, albeit socio-economically disadvantaged in their vast majority, were once integrated into the community.

As of October, 2006, more than 9.25 million people were held in prisons throughout the world, whether as pre-trial detainees or sentenced prisoners. Of these, a staggering 2.2 million were kept in US establishments, reflecting not only a record 33-year continuous rise in the use of incarceration nationally, but also the highest incarceration rate globally (some 738 per 100,000 of the national population; e.g., [Walmsley, 2007](#)). Even more alarmingly, a recent study by the US Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed that, within three years of their release from prison, 68% of state prisoners were rearrested for one or more serious crimes, 47% were reconvicted, and 52% were returned to prison ([Langan & Levin, 2002](#)). On the other shore of the Atlantic, with a prison population currently standing over 80,000 (nearly double the figure of 1990), and a respective rate of 148 per 100,000, England and Wales lock up more prisoners than any other country in Western Europe, far in excess of such countries as France, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Ireland ([Walmsley, 2007](#)). At the same time, 67% of adult prisoners in England and Wales are reconvicted within two years of their discharge ([Cuppleditch & Evans, 2005](#)).

Against this background, recent years have also seen an impressive revival of interest in the use of programs dealing with the punishment, treatment, or supervision of offenders in the community, the prisoners' temporary release scheme being at the center stage of this movement. The temporary release scheme, also known under terms like 'release on temporary license' and 'furlough', provides for short periods of authorized absence from the establishment, most usually granted when nearing the end of the custodial sentence or release on parole. In the preponderance of cases, the scheme takes the form of either a few day's home leave or work release, whereby prisoners undertake paid work in free-world settings during the day whilst spending non-working days and nights in custody. Such programs may be housed in either institutional or community facilities.

In theory, temporary release is meant to alleviate the practical and emotional harms of institutionalization (e.g., idleness, isolation, low self-esteem), and facilitate prisoners' transition to civilian life, but also help them abstain from criminal and other risk-prone activities (e.g., use of illicit substances) in the period following permanent release. To this end, prisoners are given the opportunity to strengthen or re-establish family and social ties, and make arrangements for accommodation, work, and/or training upon discharge. In the case of work release, prisoners may also make some modest savings, contribute to the financial needs of their dependants, and maintain or acquire vocational skills, thus also enhancing their post-release employment prospects.² At a less manifest, but perhaps more pragmatic level, temporary release can serve as a lever to encourage good custodial conduct, assess prisoners' readiness for parole, and/or reduce prison overcrowding and associated costs ([Alper, 1974](#); [Cheliotis, in press](#); [Glaser, 1964](#); [Markley, 1973](#); [Wheeler, 1961](#)).

In the United States, a recent nationwide survey of 45 correctional agencies showed that all but New Jersey had a formal re-entry programme in place. The vast majority of programs targeted job readiness, community resources, housing, and family reunification. Approximately one-third of the state systems surveyed used halfway houses, pre-release facilities, and day reporting centres for those preparing for re-entry. The proportion of prisoners placed in transition detention ranged from 3.5% in West Virginia to 90% in New Hampshire, while provisions were made for all prisoners in North Dakota ([American Correctional Association, 2004](#), pp.8–24). As concerns the federal system, a snapshot report for November, 2004 showed that the rate of participants in a social furlough program (which most often entailed placement onto a community service project) was slightly over seven per 100 eligible inmates, and each participant received approximately five furloughs ([B. Saylor, personal communication, February 2, 2005](#)).

The view from Europe has been more striking. To give a flavor of this, in England and Wales, there was an all-time high of 287,732 temporary release grants in 2002, up from 164,521 in 1995, amounting to a rise of 75%. The most commonly granted licenses were facility licenses ($n=177,341$), followed by resettlement licenses ($n=49,195$) and compassionate licenses ($n=10,654$), while local visits amounted to 50,452 ([Home Office, 2003a](#)).³ In Germany, the average number of home leaves (*Hafturlaube*) granted per 100 prisoners rose from 243 in 1977 to 649 in 1996. Similarly, the rate of short or day prison leaves (*Ausgänge*) increased from 219 to 1069 per 100 prisoners. Work releases (*Freigänge*) also increased from 32 to 43 per 100 prisoners ([Dünkel & Rössner, 2001](#)). In 2003, there were 285,392 home leave grants, and 569,235 short prison leave grants; also, 17,263 prisoners were placed onto work release ([Feest & Lesting, 2005](#); see also [Bammann & Feest, 2004](#)). In France, a total of 33,786 permissions to leave the prison (*permissions de sortir*) were granted in 2003; of these, 24,267 afforded prisoners the opportunity to maintain family ties. Also, 6261 offenders participated in a partial-release scheme (*semi-liberté*) that enabled them to have a professional occupation,

² In most cases, a proportion of the prisoners' wages are withheld as a contribution to the cost of their confinement, whilst parts can also be deducted to clear debts, and pay court-ordered compensation or income taxes. On a related point, [Maruna and LeBel \(2002: 168\)](#) argue for the plausibility of a 'strengths-based' re-entry model that stretches beyond seeking to remedy for the offenders' needs, rather encouraging them 'to make amends, demonstrate their value and potential, and experience success in support and leadership roles'. This approach, [Maruna and LeBel](#) suggest, promotes a 'relational reintegration', as it assigns prisoners a meaningful role in the community (e.g. through active parental responsibility and voluntary community service work), thereby also symbolically de-stigmatizing them in the eyes of the free society.

³ Data referring to the pre-1995 period may not be directly comparable with that for later years, since the classification categories of temporary licenses were revised in 1995. During the same period, the annual average prison population also rose by 39%, from 50,962 in 1995 to 70,778 in 2002 ([Home Office, 2003b](#)). As for the types of temporary release mentioned here, *facility license* enables prisoners 'to participate in regime related courses, like work or educational programs, and restorative activities such as restoring individual property, as well as to attend official proceedings or visit legal advisers'. *Resettlement license* helps inmates 'maintain family ties and links with the community', and '[make] suitable arrangements for accommodation, work, and training on release'. *Compassionate license* is reserved for prisoners facing exceptional personal circumstances that most usually concern visits to dying relatives or funerals, and attending medical appointments. The Prison Rule 9 and the PSI (i.e. Prison Service Instruction) 63/2000 also provide for *escorted absences*, also known as 'local' or 'town visits', to allow prisoners who exhibit good custodial behaviour to visit the locality of the establishment under supervision ([Livingstone, Owen & Macdonald, 2003: 285–6](#)).

take courses or vocational training, or receive medical treatment outside open prison establishments (Ministère de la justice, 2004: 7).⁴

Despite these developments, however, questions abound as to whether, and the extent to, which temporary release actually fulfils its intended aims, rehabilitative or otherwise. Although correctional treatment evaluations have long been the subject of summary reports and meta-analyses (see Lipsey, 1992, 1995), temporary release has received little scholarly attention to date. In fact, the only authoritative review to have touched upon the effectiveness of temporary release schemes is that by Lipton, Martinson and Wilks (1975) who analyzed work release evaluation studies conducted up to 1967. More recent accounts (e.g., LeClair & Guarino-Ghezzi, 1997; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Wilson, Gallagher, Coggeshall & MacKenzie, 1999) barely scratch the surface of the issue, for they not only focus almost solely on recidivism, but also fail to exhaust the available research evidence. In an effort to fill that gap, this article offers a comprehensive and systematic review of the 'what works' literature on temporary release, particularly as concerns home leave and work release schemes, covering over 40 years of research and extending across a range of outcome measures, clustered into the following dimensions: recidivism, risk-prone behaviours, attitudinal change, and social adjustment. To the extent that the evidence licenses firm conclusions, it can be said that both home leave and work release schemes can be effective in reducing recidivism rates, while work release may also enhance post-release employment prospects. The final section reflects critically upon the existing evidence to catalogue the directions future evaluative research should take. Particular attention is paid to the need for drawing the link between the procedural and outcome dimensions of temporary release.

2. Research study method

Systematic reviews of the literature employ rigorous methods for locating, assessing, and synthesizing evidence from prior evaluation studies. They require clear objectives, explicit criteria for inclusion or exclusion of studies, thorough searches for eligible studies, careful extraction and coding of key features of studies, and a structured and detailed report of the methods and conclusions of the review (Farrington & Petrosino, 2001). This systematic review builds upon the Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods, developed by Sherman et al. (1997) to identify effective crime prevention programs. The Maryland scale is concerned with the overall internal validity of evaluations (i.e., with inferences about whether observed intervention–outcome covariation reflects a causal relationship between them), and, as shown below, ranks their methodological quality from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest):

Level 1: correlation between a type or level of intervention and an outcome measure at a single point in time, with no comparable control condition.

Level 2: measures of outcome on a program group, both before and after the intervention, with no control condition, or measures of outcome on a program group after the intervention, relative to a non-equivalent control group.

Level 3: comparison between a program group and an equivalent control group, both before and after the intervention.

Level 4: comparison between multiple program and control groups, both before and after the intervention, with control of confounding variables.

Level 5: random assignment of treatment and control conditions to groups.

Random assignment is considered to be the most convincing method of evaluating correctional programs, for it allows maximum possible control of confounding variables. Most crucially, randomization tackles the threat of selection bias in the assignment of subjects to groups (Farrington, 1983; compare Martin, Inciardi, & O'Connell, 2003). In practice, however, randomization is employed less often than its merits would suggest, mainly due to practical and ethical concerns surrounding its implementation (e.g., in withholding a potentially effective treatment from control group participants; see Shadish, Cook, &

⁴ To provide some further evidence from select European countries, in Portugal, the number of short and long prison leaves rose from 2675 in 1991 to 17,961 in 2003, amounting to an increase of 571% (J. Pimentel, personal communication, February 14, 2005). In Spain, the number of temporary leaves granted by the General State Administration (GSA) increased by 12% between 1996 and 2003, from 28,388 to 31,893, yet the ratio of temporary leaves per prisoner fell, mainly due to the rise in the overall prison population. It is interesting to note that, during the same period, the Catalan penitentiary administration granted 40% more temporary leaves than GSA (Cid, 2005). In the largest establishment in Greece, i.e., the Male Prison of Korydallos, there was a nearly fifty-fold increase in the granting of home leaves within twelve years, from just 20 in 1990 to 991 in 2001 (Cheliotis, 2006). In Northern Ireland, 2030 pre-release home leaves were granted in 2003, with an average prison population of 1198 (Northern Ireland Prison Service, 2004). In Denmark, the annual total of temporary leave grants approximates 60,000, yet each unique day on leave is counted as one leave grant (Storgaard, 2001). In Finland, 12,005 prison leaves were utilised in 2003, up from 11,558 in 1999, amounting to a rise of 4% (see Rikosseuraamusvirasto, 2003: 17). In Sweden, despite a 34% decline in the overall number of home leaves granted from 1994 through 2003 (the corresponding numbers fell from 54,941 to 35,787, partly due to modified directives), the period from 2001 onwards has known a steady rise (Kriminalvården, 2004: 78). Also, 453 prisoners began taking part in work release programs in 2003 (Prison and Probation Administration, 2004). In Belgium, the application of work release knew a steady increase from 192 in 1970 to 553 in 1997. Also, 9422 furloughs were granted to 2428 prisoners in 1997 (Snacken, 2001). In Central and Eastern Europe, home leave is utilised most freely in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM, and Slovenia, whilst the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland introduced restrictions following media outrage over serious breaches of the pertinent conditions. Even so, in Poland, about a quarter of sentenced prisoners were placed onto home leave in 2001 (Walmsley, 2003; see also Walmsley, 1996). A necessary distinction should be drawn between the annual number of temporary license grants within a given jurisdiction and the respective number of licensees, for many eligible prisoners receive licenses as frequently as three to six times a year. Unfortunately, many correctional agencies maintain statistics only on the totals of home leaves or work releases granted annually (that is, if they distinguish between different types of temporary release) and not on the number of prisoners placed onto the programs.

Campbell, 2002, pp.280–91). The most common alternatives to randomization are quasi-experimental designs. These are experiments that lack random assignment of units to treatment and control conditions, but otherwise resemble randomized experiments in both purposes and structural features (Cook & Campbell, 1979). For Rossi, Freeman and Lipsey (1999), quasi-experimentation requires that study groups be equated by matching or statistical procedures on variables potentially associated with intervention outcomes. To the same end, researchers may also employ what Shadish et al. (2002, p.105) refer to as 'primacy of control by design', namely add design elements such as multiple program and control groups. All such quasi-experimental designs fall into levels 3 or 4 of the Maryland scale, as long as they have both pre- and post-test measures of outcome(s) on program and control groups. Most researchers consider level 3 designs the minimum design that is adequate for drawing valid conclusions about whether a program is effective or not.

Despite its usability, however, the Maryland scale has also drawn a considerable deal of criticism, principally for failing to encompass all possible designs. This problem emerged during the course of the present review and related to the eligibility of evaluations involving a post-test-only (or *ex post facto*) comparison between a program group and an *equivalent* control group. While not meeting level 3 criteria, such designs should arguably not be equated with level 2 studies (which either lack a comparable control group or do not involve any control comparison at all), for they deal with threats to internal validity (e.g., selection bias, regression to the mean) more adequately (see also Farrington, 2003). It was thus considered necessary slightly to modify the Maryland scale to provide for post-test-only, comparable experimental-control designs as a distinct level of methodological quality, designated for the purposes of this review as '2 1/2'.

2.1. Criteria for inclusion of evaluation studies

Ideally, studies included in this systematic review would have been limited only to the strongest evaluation designs (level 3 or higher), but the small number of available analyses militated against this. Thus, the present review included studies that met the following eligibility criteria:

- The program or one of the programs evaluated concerned the release of prisoners on temporary license, either in the form of home leave (unescorted/under minimal supervision) or work release (as such schemes were described in the introduction). For programs involving one or more other interventions (e.g., placement in a residential centre combining therapeutic community treatment with a work release component), only those programs in which release on temporary license was the main intervention were included. Following Farrington and Welsh (2002), the determination of what was the main intervention was based on the author of the report identifying it as such, or the importance the report gave to release on temporary license compared to other interventions. Crucially, the review also included studies that assessed release on temporary license as a comparison intervention, i.e., alternative to another type of treatment, provided that the rest of the eligibility criteria were fully met.
- At least one of the following intervention outcomes was assessed: recidivism following final discharge, risk-prone behaviors (e.g., drug use, alcohol intoxication), attitudinal change (e.g., self-esteem, achievement motivation), and post-release social adjustment including work involvement, family cohesion, and relationships to significant others. Post-release recidivism was the most common outcome evaluated, with the most relevant measures being the rates of return to custody, reconviction, and arrest. When a study also reported on effects extending beyond the scope of the present review (e.g., cost-effectiveness), only measurements related to the aforementioned outcomes were extracted.
- At minimum, the research design involved post-test observations on the outcome(s) on an experimental and an equivalent comparison unit of analysis. Particularly as concerns recidivism, outcome measures were presented in the following order: return to custody, then conviction, then arrest, then other measures of recidivism (e.g. interval between release and return to custody). When multiple, consecutive post-test observations on the same units and variable(s) were available from a single research project, outcome measures representing the longest follow-up period were selected. This meant selecting the most recent from a series of reports based on the same study, or selecting the most recent measurement from a single paper. Correlation between intervention and outcome(s) was established by means of statistical measures of the effect size and the associated confidence intervals. Alternatively, measures of statistical significance (i.e. the probability of obtaining the observed effect size if the null hypothesis of no relationship is true) were reported. In most cases, group comparability was attained through matching the study units on an aggregate basis, or using proxy pre-tests or regression analysis, all on likely correlates of the post-test (e.g., age, marital status, number of prior convictions, sentence length). It is important to note that, in some reports included in the review, matching was less than optimal. The comparison unit included either a non-program group, or a group that received an alternative kind of treatment, or a group of participants who did not successfully complete the program.
- The sample size of both the experimental and the comparison groups was above 30. It was considered that measures and comparisons of change based on smaller samples were potentially misleading. Also, any analysis with less than 30 participants in either of the study groups would have inadequate statistical power to detect changes in the outcome(s).

2.2. Search strategies

The following search strategies were utilized to locate studies meeting the inclusion criteria: searches of online bibliographic databases, searches of past reviews of the pertinent literature, searches of bibliographies of evaluation reports, and contacts with leading academics and researchers in the field of correctional intervention. The following online bibliographic databases were

searched: Criminal Justice Abstracts, National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Social Science Abstracts (SocialSciAbs), Psychology Information (PsychInfo), Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC), Government Publications Office Monthly Catalogue (GPO Monthly), Public Affairs Information Service (PAIS) International, Dissertation Abstracts. These databases were selected on the basis of the most comprehensive coverage of criminological, criminal justice and social science literatures.

The following terms were used to search the databases: release on temporary license, temporary license, license, temporary absence, home leave, home visit, pre-release furlough, home furlough, furlough, work release, work furlough, and halfway house. In attempting to screen every possible study, both published and unpublished reports were considered in these searches. This minimized publication bias, namely the threat that studies reporting significant effects are more likely to be published and thus to be included in the sample. In addition, the searches were international in scope, also covering jurisdictions outside the Anglophone world. The searches were completed in February 2005 and reflect material published or reported up to the end of that date. It should be noted that I was unable to obtain copies of a few studies that may or may not have met the criteria for inclusion. These primarily consisted of U.S. governmental reports dating from the 1960s and 1970s. Twenty-three studies were eligible and included in the review. Every effort was made to retrieve missing information by contacting the authors.

2.3. Analytical techniques

Temporary release evaluations were divided into home leave and work release evaluations. Each study was placed into a level on the Maryland scale. Treatment effects on the same units and outcome variables were then combined to determine whether home leave and work release schemes were effective or not. In doing so, I again proceeded slightly to modify the relevant classification framework developed by Sherman et al. (1997), to provide for level 2 1/2 studies as the minimum eligible research design:

What works: for a program to be considered effective, there must be at least two level-2 1/2 to level-5 evaluations showing statistically significant and desirable results, and the bulk of the remaining evidence must support the same conclusion.

What does not work: for a program to be considered ineffective, there must be at least two level-2 1/2 to level-5 with statistical significance showing undesirable results, and the bulk of the remaining evidence must support the same conclusion.

What is promising: for a program to be considered promising, there must be one level-2 1/2 to level-5 evaluation with statistical significance showing desirable results, and the bulk of the remaining evidence must support that conclusion.

What is unknown: any program that does not fall into one of the above categories is coded as having unknown effects.

Albeit somewhat arbitrary, such a classification model is valuable in situations where little or no attempt has been made to systematize and, subsequently, to analyze research evidence on a given correctional program.

3. Results of the review

Tables 1 and 2 present key features of all eligible home leave and work release evaluations, respectively. The studies are listed in chronological order based on the date of publication or submission in the case of unpublished dissertations. A coding protocol was developed to record the most substantive and methodological features of each study. These include the study author(s), date and type of document, location and context of intervention, type and duration of main intervention, and other interventions (if any), sample sizes and composition, outcome measure(s) and data source, research design, comparison group, follow-up period, and treatment effects.

3.1. Home leave

Five evaluations of home leave schemes met the criteria for inclusion in the review. All evaluations had a level 2 1/2 rating, and focused on an outcome measure of recidivism. The studies were published between 1972 and 1994, and all were conducted in the United States. The experimental sample size ranged from 35 to 621 subjects (mean = 321), whereas the control sample size ranged from 69 to 903 subjects (mean = 318). In four of the five studies, the follow-up period was 12 months after final discharge or release on parole. Also, four studies compared home leave participants to a non-program group.

In the earliest study, Holt and Miller (1972) assessed the effectiveness of a home leave scheme operating in a combined medium and minimum security prison in California. The researchers compared the rates of return to custody and post-release arrest of 35 parolees who received one or two leaves prior to release on parole, to the corresponding rates of an equivalent group of 129 parolees who did not participate in the program. Comparability of the two groups was established by means of base expectancy prediction analysis (that is to say, the two groups were compared in terms of predicted parole outcome on six items, e.g., commitment offense, prior narcotic use, age, race/ethnicity), and the follow-up period was 12 months after release on parole. The program group was found to have lower rates of return to custody, yet, not at a statistically significant level. In terms of post-release arrest rates, however, home leave participants did significantly better than their controls.

Table 1
Summary of home leave evaluation studies meeting inclusion criteria

Study author(s), date and type of document	Location and context of intervention	Type of intervention	Sample sizes and composition	Outcome measure(s) and data source	Research design	Comparison group	Follow-up period ^a	Treatment effects ^b
Holt and Miller (1972); governmental report	California, United States; one combined medium and minimum security prison	Home leave ('temporary release'; one or two leaves prior to release on parole)	164 individuals E=35 C=129	Recidivism (return to custody); n.a.	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups, using proxy-pretests	Non-program group	12 months (following release on parole)	Return to custody 0 Post-release arrest +
LeClair (1978), peer-reviewed publication	Massachusetts, United States; two maximum, one medium, and four minimum security prisons, and seven pre-release centers	Home leave ('home furlough'; one or more leaves during imprisonment)	878 males E=610 C=268	Recidivism (return to custody for 30 days or more); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups, using proxy pre-tests	Non-program group	12 months (following permanent release)	Return to custody for 30 days or more +
			841 males E=621 C=220	Recidivism (return to custody for 30 days or more); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups, using proxy pre-tests	Non-program group	12 months (following permanent release)	Return to custody for 30 days or more +
Bagdon and Ryan (1993), peer-reviewed publication	Vermont, United States; one correctional facility ^c	Home leave ('prerelease furlough')	105 individuals E=36 C=69	Recidivism (reconviction); n.a.	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups; retrospectively chosen E	Home leave under intensive supervision (under house arrest conditions)	12 months (following permanent release)	Reconviction 0
Harer (1994), governmental report	United States; federal prisons ^d	Home leave ('social furlough'; at least one leave during imprisonment)	1205 males and females with at least 3-month sentences (89% males; 92% aged 25+; 70% Whites) E=302 C=903	Recidivism (post-release arrest or parole revocation); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups	Non-program group	36 months (following permanent release)	Post-release arrest or parole revocation +

Notes: E=experimental group; C=control group; n.a.=not available.

^a The period of time in which treatment effects were measured after the end of the intervention.

^b '0'=no statistically significant treatment effects; '+'=desirable treatment effects meeting the level of statistical significance; '-'=undesirable treatment effects meeting the level of statistical significance.

^c No information was provided on the security level of the establishment.

^d This represents the entire set of primary sampling units.

Table 2

Summary of work release evaluation studies meeting inclusion criteria

Study author(s), date and type of document	Location and context of intervention	Type of intervention—other interventions	Sample sizes and composition	Outcome measure(s) and data source	Research design	Comparison group(s)	Follow-up period	Treatment effects
Waldo et al. (1973); peer-reviewed publication	Florida, United States; Florida prison facilities ^a	Work release (6-month program)	132 individuals E=87 C=45	Attitudinal change (perceived legitimate opportunity, achievement motivation, legal self-concept, self-esteem, focal concerns); self-reports	5 random assignment of units to experimental and control conditions	Non-program group	6 months (post-test measurements taken prior to permanent release)	Perceived legitimate opportunity 0 Achievement motivation 0 Legal self-concept 0 Self-esteem – Focal concerns 0
Rudolf and Esselstyn (1973), peer-reviewed publication	California, United States; one minimum security prison	Work release ('work furlough')	200 individuals E=100 C=100	Recidivism (return to custody; post-release arrest; interval between release and return to custody; time spent in custody during follow-up; severity of re-offending); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups	Non-program group	18 months (following permanent release)	Return to custody + Post-release arrest + Interval between release and return to custody + Time spent in custody during follow-up + Severity of re-offending + Reconviction + Post-release arrest +
Jeffery and Woolpert (1974); peer-reviewed publication	California, United States; one work release facility	Work release ('work furlough')	201 males E=109 (mean age: 31.8; 62% whites) C=92 (mean age: 30.1; 51% whites)	Recidivism (post-release reconviction; post-release arrest); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups; retrospectively chosen C	Non-program group	48 months (following permanent release)	Return to custody 0 Employment rates + ^c
Lamb and Goertz (1974); peer-reviewed publication	California, United States; one community rehabilitation centre	Work release ('community rehabilitation program'); therapeutic community treatment and occasional weekend passes	62 adult males E=31 C=31	Recidivism (return to custody for any reason) work involvement (employment rates); n.a.	5 random assignment of units to experimental and control groups	Non-program group ^b	12 months (following permanent release)	Return to custody 0 Employment rates + ^c
Waldo and Chiricos (1977); peer-reviewed publication	Florida, United States; Florida prison facilities ^a	Work release (2- to 6-month program)	281 individuals E=188 C=93	Recidivism (return to custody, number of returns to custody, return to custody for one or more felonies, length of sentence received, interval between release and return to custody, number of convictions, post-release arrest, number of post-release arrests, monthly rate of post-release arrests, number of bookings by the police, number of charges by the police, monthly rate of charges by the police, total severity of all charges, average severity of all offences, most serious charge); self-reports and official records	5 random assignment of units to experimental and control groups	Non-work release group (controls 'continued to participate in the correctional programs in which they were then involved')	Self-reports: 24 months (following permanent release) FBI data: 46 months (following permanent release)	Return to custody (Florida Division of Corrections data) 0 Return to custody (FBI data) 0 Return to custody for one or more felonies 0 Number of returns to custody 0 Length of sentence received 0 Interval between release and return to custody 0 Number of convictions 0 Post-release arrest 0 Number of post-release arrests (self-reports) 0 Number of post-release arrests (FBI data) 0 Monthly rate of post-release arrests 0 Number of bookings by the police 0 Number of charges by the police (self-reports) 0 Number of charges by the police (FBI data) 0 Monthly rate of charges by the police 0 Total severity of all charges 0 Average severity of all offences 0 Most serious charge 0 Sentence length +
Witte (1977); peer-reviewed publication	North Carolina, United States; One administrative area	Work release	641 males E=297 C=344	Recidivism (sentence length); self-reports and official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups	Non-program group	37 months (on the average, following permanent release)	Sentence length +

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Study author(s), date and type of document	Location and context of intervention	Type of intervention—other interventions	Sample sizes and composition	Outcome measure(s) and data source	Research design	Comparison group(s)	Follow-up period	Treatment effects
Jones (1979); unpublished Ph.D. dissertation	Missouri, United States; Missouri halfway houses	Work release	606 males $E=303$ (mean age: 27.4; 57% whites) $C=303$ (mean age: 27.6; 51% blacks)	Recidivism (return to custody); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups	Non-program group	36 months (following permanent release) ^d	Return to custody 0
Lee (in press); unpublished Ph.D. dissertation	Kansas, United States; one work release facility	Work release (4-month program); occasional furloughs when nearing parole date; 67 participants had prior vocational training	370 males $E=140$ (mean age at release: 26.1; 53% blacks) $C1=94$ (mean age at release: 25.5; 56% whites) $C2=136$ (mean age at release: 25.5; 66% whites)	Recidivism (parole success); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups	Retrospectively chosen nonprogram group (C1) same-period non-program group (C2)	32 months (following release on parole)	Parole success Vs. C1 + Vs. C2 +
		Work release with no prior vocational training	140 males (mean age at release: 26.1; 53% blacks) $E=73$ $C=67$	Recidivism (parole success; interval between discharge and parole violation; period of stay on parole; interval between parole and first postrelease arrest; arrests during first one year on parole; conviction after discharge from parole; recommitment offence severity; minimum sentence for recommitment; maximum sentence for recommitment); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups	Work release with prior vocational training	32 months (following release on parole)	Parole success + Conviction after discharge from parole 0 Arrests during first one year on parole 0 Recombitment offence severity 0 Minimum sentence for recommitment 0 Maximum sentence for recommitment 0 Period of stay on parole 0 Interval between discharge and parole violation 0 Interval between parole and first post-release arrest +
Johnson (1984); unpublished Ph.D. dissertation	Florida, United States; Florida work release facilities	Work release ('community work release')	1210 males $E1=690$ (participated at least once in the community correctional centre program; 661 were placed in work release jobs) $E2=458$ (community correctional centre program completers) $C=520$	Recidivism (post-release arrest) post-release work involvement (overall post-release employment history; post-release employment rate; full employment during follow-up); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups	Non-program group ^e	24 months (following permanent release)	Post-release arrest $E1$ 0; $E2$ 0 Overall post-release employment history $E1$ +; $E2$ + Post-release employment rate $E1$ 0; $E2$ + Full employment during follow-up $E1$ 0; $E2$ 0 ^f
Turner and Petersilia (1996); peer-reviewed publication	Washington, United States; six work release facilities	Work release; some drug treatment exposure	218 males $E=112$ (mean age: 30.4; 50% whites) $C=106$ (mean age: 31.4; 63% whites)	Recidivism (return to custody; post-release reconviction; post-release arrest); official records	5 random assignment of units to experimental and control conditions ^d	Non-program group	12 months (after assignment to study conditions; includes 3 months following permanent release)	Return to custody 0 Post-release reconviction 0 Post-release arrest 0
Leonard (2001); unpublished M.A. dissertation	Pennsylvania, United States; one correctional facility ^g	Work release	444 males (mean age: 31.1; 69% whites) $E=140$ $C=304$	Recidivism (return to custody for any reason); official records	2 1/2 post-test only with equivalent experimental and control groups	Non-program group	36 months (following permanent release)	Return to custody 0

^a This represents the entire set of primary sampling units.

^b Approximately one fourth of the men in the comparison group entered the county jail's work furlough program. Yet, the experimental group worked an average of more than four times as many days in paid employment in the community as did the comparison group.

^c Due to insufficient group numbers (i.e. less than 30) in the 12-month follow-up, this measurement concerns the 6-month follow-up period ($E=44$; $C=47$).

^d Subjects discharged in 1974 ($E=97$; $C=97$) were followed for 3 years; subjects discharged in 1975 ($E=99$; $C=99$) were followed for 2 years; subjects discharged between January 1, and June 30, 1977 ($E=107$; $C=07$) were followed for 1 year.

^e Some subjects had participated in vocational education, prison industry programs, and/or prison-based work assignments.

^f Overall post-release employment history' refers to work experience accumulated throughout the follow-up period, with full-time employment weighing more than part-time employment. 'Employment rates' refers to a dichotomous variable distinguishing between being employed and unemployed during follow-up.

^g No information was provided on the security level of the establishment.

In a study of the home furlough program for male prisoners in Massachusetts, [LeClair \(1978\)](#) examined the rates of return to custody for 30 days or more of 610 prisoners who received one or more furloughs during imprisonment, relative to an equivalent group of 268 prisoners who did not participate in the program. All prisoners had been released from state correctional institutions during 1973 and were tracked for 12 months after their release. Base expectancy prediction analysis was employed to control for non-random selection bias. It was found that the program group had significantly lower rates of return to custody (16%) than those released with no furlough (27%). The same result was obtained with a sample of 621 program participants and a comparable sample of 220 non-program prisoners, all released from Massachusetts' state correctional facilities in 1974: furloughed prisoners returned to custody at a 16% rate, as compared to a 31% rate for non-furloughed prisoners.

In a three-year follow-up study of 1205 male and female prisoners discharged from federal institutions during the first six months of 1987, [Harer \(1994\)](#) operationalized recidivism as post-release arrest or parole revocation. A quarter of the inmates ($n=302$) received at least one social furlough during imprisonment, while the rest ($n=903$) did not participate in the program. Results indicated that placement onto the social furlough scheme was significantly related to reduced recidivism rates. After controlling for background characteristics by means of logistic regression analysis, Harer found that furloughees recidivated at a rate 13% lower than their non-program counterparts.

Finally, in evaluating a pre-release furlough program in north-western Vermont, [Bagdon and Ryan \(1993\)](#) compared a retrospectively chosen group of 36 offenders furloughed under minimal supervision to a similar group of 69 offenders furloughed under intensive supervision at a later stage. Although, paradoxically, offenders in the intensive supervision group were significantly more likely to be serving a sentence for a non-violent offence, the two groups did not differ in the remaining variables examined (i.e., average minimum and maximum sentence, felony history, and average length of furloughs). The study assessed recidivism in terms of reconviction of another crime within 12 months following permanent release from prison. It was found that, while offenders in the minimal supervision group performed better, the difference was not statistically significant.

In summary, the available evidence suggests that home leave schemes can be effective in decreasing return to custody and post-release arrest rates of ex-offenders. It is crucial to note that non-eligible evaluations also support the proposition that home leave participation has a positive impact upon lowered rates of return to custody (e.g., [LeClair & Guarrino-Ghezzi, 1991](#); [Mershon, 1979](#); [Motiuk & Belcourt, 1996](#); [Williams, 1982](#)). As for the effects of home leave on reconviction rates, there is insufficient evidence to allow any conclusions.

3.2. Work release

Twelve studies met the minimum methodological standards in this area. There were four level 5 studies, and eight level 2 1/2 studies. All but one focused on at least one outcome measure of recidivism. The studies span 28 years of research, and all were conducted in the United States. The experimental sample size ranged from 31 to 690 subjects (mean=210), whereas the control sample size ranged from 31 to 520 subjects (mean=172). Also, 11 of the 12 studies compared work release participants to a non-program group. There was considerable variation in the onset and duration of the follow-up period examined in each study.

In a level 5 study in San Mateo, California, [Lamb and Goertzel \(1974\)](#) evaluated the effectiveness of Ellsworth House, a community rehabilitation program which allowed adult male offenders to engage in competitive employment in the community while participating in a therapeutic scheme at the house. From 1971 through 1973, offenders already sentenced to the San Mateo County Jail for a term of four months or more were randomly assigned either to the program, or to a comparison group of offenders who remained in the jail system. Results indicated that program participation had no significant impact on rates of return of custody, but served substantially to enhance post-release employment prospects. In particular, program participants were slightly more likely to return to custody within one year following final discharge, but had considerably higher employment rates than their controls.

In what is perhaps the most thorough study to date, [Waldo and Chiricos \(1977\)](#) utilized 18 different indices of recidivism from three separate data sources (i.e. self-reports, Division of Corrections files, and FBI records) to assess the effectiveness of work release in Florida. Between July and December 1969, 281 prisoners were randomly assigned either to work release ($n=188$), or to continue to participate in the correctional programs in which they were then involved ($n=93$). The follow-up period between final discharge and the various measures of recidivism ranged from a low of 24 months on self-reports to a high of 46 months on the FBI data. All measurements of return to custody, reconviction, post-release arrest, bookings and charges by the police, and the severity of offenses, failed to yield significant differences between groups. In summary, the study showed 'no evidence that participation on work release makes any difference in recidivism, regardless of the operational definition of recidivism, or the control variables [and data sources] utilized' ([Waldo & Chiricos, 1977, p.637](#)).

In another level 5 study conducted by [Turner and Petersilia \(1996\)](#) in Seattle, Washington, 218 eligible male work release applicants were randomly assigned to either one of six work release facilities ($n=112$), or to remain in prison to complete their sentences ($n=106$). Matched sampling was also employed to boost sample sizes, whilst analyses involved controls for group differences. During a period of 12 months after assignment to study conditions (which included an average of three months after prisoners' final discharge), work release participants were less likely to be returned to prison, reconvicted, and rearrested, but differences were not statistically significant.

Turning to level 2 1/2 studies, [Rudoff and Esselstyn \(1973\)](#) evaluated the work furlough program in a minimum security prison in Santa Clara County, California. Two carefully matched samples of 100 work furlough and 100 non-furlough prisoners were followed-up for 18 months after permanent release from prison. It was found that 'the post-release performance of the work furlough inmates was far better than that of the non-furlough inmates on all major measures of recidivism', that is, on rates of return to custody and post-release arrest, interval between release and return to custody, time spent in custody during follow-up, and severity of re-offending.

In another study, [Jeffery and Woolpert \(1974\)](#) evaluated the work furlough program for male misdemeanants in a county facility at San Mateo, in California. A group of 109 prisoners who participated in the program during the first four months of 1967 was compared to a retrospectively chosen and matched group of 92 prisoners who served their sentences in the county jail system during the year 1965. The two outcome variables measured were reconviction and post-release arrest rates. Results indicated that, within 48 months after final discharge, work release participants had significantly fewer convictions and arrests than the control group. Interestingly, [Jeffery and Woolpert \(1974, p.410\)](#) also found that 'work furlough reduced recidivism rates amongst men with moderate or extensive criminal records, but had no reliable effect on those sentenced for a first or second offence'.

An evaluation of the work release program in South Piedmont, North Carolina, compared a random sample of 297 males who participated in the scheme at some point between 1969 and 1971, to a group of 344 male non-work releasees who 'had no obvious reason for being ineligible' for placement onto the program during the same period ([Witte, 1977, p.239](#)). Over an average follow-up period of 37 months after final discharge, work releasees received significantly shorter sentences in the event of return to custody. This difference was even more pronounced when adjusted for the most serious offence committed after release. The disparity in sentence length held up when multiple regression analysis was used to control for pre-existing inter-group differences: compared to the non-program group, work release participants experienced a significant 13-month decline in the average length of sentence received during the follow-up period. The study also reported on an array of other measurements of recidivism (e.g., return to custody, reconviction), but also of work involvement, family cohesion, and attitudinal change, yet failed to clarify the statistical significance of differences between groups, and/or to apply controls for potential selection bias.

In a study of work release in Wichita, Kansas, [Lee \(in press\)](#) assessed the performance of 370 male offenders 32 months following their release on parole. Three different groups were evaluated on a variety of recidivism measures. The first group consisted of 140 prisoners who participated in the program for an average period of 4 months at some point between 1976 and 1979, and was compared to a retrospectively chosen non-program group ($n=94$) and a same-period non-program group ($n=136$). A significant difference between work releasees and controls was found only in relation to successful completion of parole. That is, work release participants had a significantly higher rate of parole success (75%) than the two non-work release groups (50% and 62% respectively). This finding upheld when analysis of covariance was applied to adjust for background differences amongst groups. The work release group was subsequently divided into those who had prior vocational training and those who had not. The two groups comprised the same types of offenders with similar background characteristics. Surprisingly, work releasees with prior vocational training had a significantly higher parole failure rate, and were arrested significantly earlier than those without training.

In an evaluation of the work release program in Missouri, [Jones \(1979\)](#) studied the rates of return to custody of 303 offenders who were placed onto the scheme between January 1974 and June 1977, relative to a group of 303 offenders who remained in prison during the same period. All subjects were males and were matched on age, residence, criminal history, and offence, yet not on other important variables like marital status and racial background. Though work releasees, particularly older property offenders with moderate criminal involvement, were less likely than non-work releasees to recidivate throughout a three-year follow-up period, the overall difference was not significant.

Using two-year follow-up data on 1210 ex-offenders who were released from the Florida Department of Corrections in 1978, [Johnson \(1984\)](#) examined the relationship between work release participation and post-release arrest and work involvement. After controlling for selection factors, it was found that neither work release participants, nor those who successfully completed the program were significantly more likely than non-participants to avoid arrest over the follow-up period. Both treatment groups, however, did significantly better in accumulating work experience within two years after discharge. Subsequent analysis also showed that, compared to non-work releasees, work release completers were more likely to be employed than unemployed, yet neither treatment group were more likely to be fully employed.

In a more recent evaluation of work release in Pennsylvania, a random sample of 444 male prisoners who served their sentences at the Beaver County Jail from 1994 through 1996, were followed-up for three years after permanent release ([Leonard, 2001](#)). The outcome variable measured was return to custody for any reason. Results indicated a significant correlation between work release participation and rates of recidivism. Work release participants ($n=140$) returned to custody at a 53% rate, as compared to a 63% rate of those who were not placed onto the program ($n=304$). However, when logistic regression analysis was employed to control for confounding variables, the significance disappeared.

In the only eligible study of attitude change of work release participants, [Waldo, Chiricos, and Dobrin \(1973\)](#) randomly assigned 132 prisoners to work release ($n=87$) and non-work release ($n=45$) groups from the pool of eligible prisoners in Florida. Pre-test data were gathered approximately six months prior to prisoners' final discharge (for work release prisoners, this was just prior to placement onto the program), whilst post-test measurements were taken immediately prior to permanent release from prison. The study showed 'no significant difference between work release participants and non-release controls with regard to perceptions of legitimate opportunity, achievement motivation, legal self-concept, and focal concerns'; also, 'the level of self-esteem expressed by work release participants ... [was] significantly lower than that expressed by the control group' ([Waldo et al., 1973, p.369](#); original emphasis).

From the evidence presented here, it can be concluded that *work release schemes can be effective in decreasing return to custody and post-release arrest rates of ex-offenders*. This finding receives strong support from non-eligible studies (e.g., [Broadhurst, Maller, Maller, & Duffecy, 1988](#); [Fine, 1978](#); [LeClair, 1988a,b](#); [Marion, 2002](#); [Macdonald & Bala, 1983](#); [Rosenblum & Whitcomb, 1978](#); but compare [Bass, 1975](#)). *Work release programs also show considerable promise in lowering reconviction rates,*

especially when non-eligible studies are taken into account (e.g., Brown, 1992; Rosenblum & Whitcomb, 1978; compare Beha, 1977). Past research also suggests that *work release can be effective in enhancing post-release employment prospects* (see also Marion, 2002). Yet, it remains largely unknown whether work release participation relates to attitudinal changes (see Stevens, 1994).

The discussion now turns to a series of reports assessing the effectiveness of the CREST Outreach Center, which is an integrated therapeutic community work release program for male and female substance abusing criminal offenders in Wilmington, Delaware. The reports in question, unlike other studies focusing on similar schemes, met the criteria for inclusion in the systematic review. Though the main emphasis of the program at CREST is on therapeutic community intervention, rather than on work release, its effectiveness is compared against a conventional work release scheme. As the number of eligible participants exceeded the capacity at CREST, researchers at the University of Delaware were given the opportunity to randomly assign eligible prisoners with no prior prison-based therapeutic community treatment to either CREST or a conventional work release setting. It should be noted, however, that some clients were placed in CREST non-randomly, but rather by a judge, prison counselor, or prison review board. The basic quasi-experimental contrast in all reports was between the CREST group and the conventional work release group (hereafter referred to as 'TCs' and 'work releasees' respectively). Yet, some also distinguished between TC completers and dropouts, and/or included non-randomly selected groups in the comparisons (e.g., prison-based therapeutic community treatment graduates who went on to CREST for work release treatment, or CREST participants who voluntarily received aftercare). The outcome measure was always based on self-reports and, wherever applicable, on blood/urine screens. All follow-ups mentioned below refer to periods after baseline interviews and assignment to study conditions, and include 6 months of residence in either the therapeutic community work release establishment or a conventional work release setting (Table 3).

To begin with, McCollister et al. compared work releasees to TCs in terms of the time spent in custody for any reason over a follow-up period of 18 months. Results showed that TCs had a significantly better performance, with approximately 30 fewer days of reincarceration. The TC group was subsequently divided into participants who received no aftercare, and those who voluntarily proceeded to receive the aftercare component. Both groups spent fewer days in custody than work releasees, but differences were not tested for statistical significance. Also, analyses did not include controls for potential self-selection bias (McCollister et al., 2003).

Inciardi et al. assessed the Delaware therapeutic community work release program in terms of post-release arrests, abstinence from drug use 30 days prior to follow-up interviews, post-release frequency of drug use, and post-release frequency of alcohol use to the point of intoxication. Two purposive samples were also included in the study. The first consisted of offenders who received prison-based therapeutic community treatment but no further treatment, whilst the second comprised offenders who had exposure to both prison-based and work-release therapeutic community treatment. Analyses included controls for group differences. The longest follow-up period reported was 18 months. It was found that TCs and those exposed to both prison-based and work-release therapeutic community treatment fared significantly better than work releasees on all four outcome variables. When compared to the prison-based therapeutic community treatment group, work releasees were more likely to remain arrest-free, but had a poorer performance on the frequency of drug use and alcohol intoxication criteria. These differences were non-significant (Inciardi, Martin, Butzin, Hooper & Harrison, 1997).

More recently, Inciardi, Martin and Butzin (2004) examined post-release arrest on a new charge and drug relapse, but compared work releasees to TC dropouts, TC completers without aftercare, and TC completers with aftercare, over a follow-up period of 60 months. After controlling for group differences, the researchers demonstrated that TC completers with or without aftercare had significantly greater probabilities of remaining both arrest- and drug-free than work releasees. Also, TC dropouts were slightly, yet not significantly, less likely to be rearrested for a new offence relative to work releasees, but they were significantly more likely to abstain from drug use. Similar results were obtained by Martin et al. (2003) who compared work releasees to randomly and non-randomly assigned TCs. The outcome variables measured were post-release arrest for a new offence and post-release frequency of drug use, both over an 18-month follow-up period. After controlling for group differences, the researchers demonstrated that either TC group was significantly more likely to remain arrest-free and to reduce drug use than work releasees.

In the only available study focusing specifically on female offenders, Farrell (2000) compared 38 work releasees to 41 TCs, all followed-up for 18 months. Rates of arrest or self-reported involvement in a criminal offence were identical for the two groups. Work releasees, however, were more likely to relapse on drugs, although not at a statistically significant level. Also, TCs were significantly more likely to receive post-release drug treatment and to be connected with treatment groups. No substantial differences were found in relation to house mobility, responsibility of children, work and educational involvement, relationships to significant others, identification to, and isolation from, the community.

Finally, Harrison, Butzin, Inciardi and Martin (1998) compared work releasees to TC completers and TC dropouts in terms of HIV risk behaviors. Analyses included controls for baseline variables. Results showed that, during 18 months of follow-up, both TC groups did significantly better than work releasees in HIV risk factors such as injecting drug use, condom use, and sexual intercourse for drug exchanges. No significant differences were found between groups in relation to the number of sex partners.

In conclusion, it appears that therapeutic community treatment, particularly when combined with work release, is more effective than mere placement in a conventional work release program. However, although work releasees fared worse than their controls on nearly all outcome measurements, the findings are not generalizable, for there are no other studies with similar groups compared on the same outcome measures.

Table 3
Summary of CREST evaluations meeting the inclusion criteria

Study author(s), date and type of document	Location and context of intervention	Type of intervention—other interventions	Sample sizes and composition	Outcome measure(s) and data source	Research design	Comparison group(s)	Follow-up period ^a	Treatment effects ^b
Inciardi et al. (1997); peer-reviewed publication	Delaware, United States; one work release facility	Work release (6-month program); no prior prison-based therapeutic community treatment exposure; some drug treatment exposure during work release	448 male and female drug abusers $E=184$ (82% males; mean age: 29.4; 68% African-Americans) $C1=38$ (100% males; mean age: 31.6; 84% African-Americans) $C2=183$ (77% males; mean age: 29.1; 72% African-Americans) $C3=43$ (93% males; mean age: 31.8; 91% African-Americans)	Recidivism (post-release arrest) Drug treatment (abstinence from drugs 30 days prior to follow-up; post-release frequency of drug use; post-release frequency of alcohol use to intoxication); self-reports and urine screens	4 random assignment of units to experimental and control conditions	Prison-based therapeutic community treatment only (C1) work release therapeutic community only (C2) both prison-based and work-release therapeutic community treatment (C3)	18 months (following baseline interviews and assignment to study conditions; includes 12 months after permanent release)	Post-release arrest Vs. C1 0; Vs. C2 –; Vs. C3 – Abstinence from drugs 30 days prior to follow-up Vs. C1 0; Vs. C2 –; Vs. C3 – Post-release frequency of drug use Vs. C1 0; Vs. C2 –; Vs. C3 – Post-release frequency of alcohol use to intoxication Vs. C1 0; Vs. C2 –; Vs. C3 – Injecting drug use Vs. C1 –; Vs. C2 – Condom use Vs. C1 –; Vs. C2 – Sexual intercourse for drug exchanges Vs. C1 –; Vs. C2 – Number of sex partners Vs. C1 0; Vs. C2 0 ^e
Harrison et al. (1998); peer-reviewed publication	Delaware, United States; one work release facility	Work release (6-month program); no prior prison-based therapeutic community treatment exposure; some drug treatment exposure during work release	1004 male and female drug abusers (80% males; age: $81\% \leq 35$; 70% African-Americans) ^c	HIV risk behavior (injecting drug use; condom use; sexual intercourse for drug exchanges; number of sex partners); self-reports	4 random assignment of units to experimental and control conditions ^d	Incomplete work release therapeutic community treatment (C1) completed work release therapeutic community treatment (C2)	18 months (following baseline interviews and assignment to study conditions; includes 12 months after permanent release)	Post-release commission of criminal offence or post-release arrest 0 Post-release drug relapse 0 Post-release drug treatment – Post-release connection with drug treatment groups – Post-release house mobility 0 Post-release responsibility of children 0 Post-release work
Farrell (2000); peer-reviewed publication	Delaware, United States; one work release facility	Work release (6-month program); no prior prison-based therapeutic community treatment exposure; some drug treatment exposure during work release	79 female drug abusers $E=38$ (mean age: 36; 76% African-Americans) $C=41$ (mean age: 35; 71% African-Americans)	Recidivism (post-release commission of criminal offence or post-release arrest) Drug treatment (post-release drug relapse; post-release drug treatment; post-release connection with drug treatment groups); Social adjustment (post-release house mobility; post-release responsibility for children; post-release work involvement; post-release educational involvement; post-release relationship to significant others; post-release identification to the community; post-release	5 random assignment of units to experimental and control conditions	Work release therapeutic community	18 months (following baseline interviews and assignment to study conditions; includes 12 months after permanent release)	Post-release commission of criminal offence or post-release arrest 0 Post-release drug relapse 0 Post-release drug treatment – Post-release connection with drug treatment groups – Post-release house mobility 0 Post-release responsibility of children 0 Post-release work

				isolation from the community); self-reports				involvement 0 Post-release educational involvement 0 Post-release relationship to significant others 0 Post-release identification to the community 0 Post-release isolation from the community 0 Time spent in custody during follow-up –
McCollister et al. (2003); peer-reviewed publication	Delaware, United States; one work release facility	Work release (6-month program); no prior prison-based therapeutic community treatment exposure; some drug treatment exposure during work release	836 male and female drug abusers $E=249$ (81% males; mean age: 29.7; 67% African-Americans; no prior therapeutic community treatment) $C=587$ (76% males; mean age: 30.6; 74% African-Americans; 27% received prior prison-based therapeutic community treatment)	Recidivism (time spent in custody during follow-up); self-reports	4 random assignment of units to experimental and control conditions	Work release therapeutic community treatment	18 months (following baseline interviews and assignment to study conditions; includes 12 months after permanent release)	
Martin et al. (2003); peer-reviewed publication	Delaware, United States; one work release facility	Work release (6-month program); no prior prison-based therapeutic community treatment exposure; attendance at alcoholics anonymous or narcotics anonymous meetings during work release	750 male and female drug abusers $E=248$ (81% males; mean age: 29.8; 30% whites) $C1=182$ (77% males; mean age: 29.2; 25% whites) $C2=320$ (79% males; mean age: 31.5; 28% whites)	Recidivism (post-release arrest for new offence, excluding parole violations) drug treatment (post-release frequency of drug use); self-reports	4 random assignment of units to experimental and control conditions	Randomly assigned to work release therapeutic community treatment ($C1$) non-randomly assigned to work release therapeutic community treatment ($C2$) ^f	18 months (following baseline interviews and assignment to study conditions; includes 12 months after permanent release)	Post-release arrest for new offence Vs. $C1 -$; Vs. $C2 -$ Post-release frequency of drug use Vs. $C1 -$; Vs. $C2 -$
Inciardi et al. (2004); peer-reviewed publication	Delaware, United States; one work release facility	Work release (6-month program); no prior prison-based therapeutic community treatment exposure; attendance at alcoholics anonymous or narcotics anonymous meetings during work release	540 male and female drug abusers	Recidivism (post-release arrest for new offence, excluding parole violations) drug treatment (post-release drug relapse); self-reports and blood/urine screens	4 random assignment of units to experimental and control conditions	Incomplete work release therapeutic community treatment ($C1$) completed work release therapeutic community treatment without aftercare ($C2$) completed work release therapeutic community treatment with aftercare ($C3$)	60 months (following baseline interviews and assignment to study conditions; includes 54 months after permanent release)	Post-release arrest for new offence Vs. $C1 0$; Vs. $C2 -$; Vs. $C3 -$ Post-release drug relapse Vs. $C1 -$; Vs. $C2 -$; Vs. $C3 -$

Notes: E =experimental group; C =control group; n.a.=not available. For the purposes of the present review, the conventional work release group has been presented as the experimental group.

^a The period of time in which treatment effects were measured after the end of the intervention.

^b '0'=no statistically significant treatment effects; '+'=desirable treatment effects meeting the level of statistical significance; '-'=undesirable treatment effects meeting the level of statistical significance.

^c Data refer to the entire baseline sample of participants who were tested for HIV. Over 800 participants completed at least one follow-up (i.e. 6- and/or 18-month) interview in the 18-month follow-up period.

^d The control group was subsequently divided into program dropouts and program completers; analyses included controls for baseline variables.

^e Treatment effects refer to cumulative variables including all participants who completed at least one follow-up interview in the 18-month follow-up period, that is, either the 6-month or the 18-month follow-up interview.

^f Neither group had prior prison-based therapeutic community treatment exposure.

4. Conclusions and recommendations for future research

The present analysis is consistent with a number of recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses that have cast strong doubt upon the 'nothing works' proposition (cf., McGuire, 1995; McLaren, 1992). That is, rather than dismissing temporary release schemes altogether, it would be more accurate to conclude that placement in home leave and work release schemes can be efficacious in reducing recidivism and increasing employment rates, especially for some kinds of offenders. If one also considers that, in a number of cases, small sample sizes made it increasingly difficult for positive home leave and work release effects to achieve levels of significance above the accepted .05 alpha level, the present review licenses a renewed sense of optimism about the rehabilitative potential of temporary release. Even so, some notes of caution are warranted.

First, evaluative research on temporary release effectiveness is largely outdated and, for the most part, focused on male offenders held in American institutions. It would thus be misleading to draw steadfast conclusions about the applicability of temporary release effects across different time periods, populations, or settings. Also, most studies assess temporary release solely in terms of recidivism, often also employing non-comparable measures over varying follow-up periods. It would indeed be desirable if future evaluations included, at minimum, dichotomous indices of return to custody, reconviction, and post-release arrest over a period no less than 12 months following final discharge. At the same time, greater attention should be directed to other, perhaps more feasible, targets of temporary release, such as aiding prisoners to find employment after release and to support themselves and their families financially. Some scholars take this point to the extreme by questioning even whether recidivism is a realistic goal on which to assess community corrections. Turner and Petersilia (1996, p.162), for example, argue that '[i]f we do not want to set work release and other community-based programs up for failure, we must assign to them goals we might reasonably expect them to fulfill'.

Turning to more practical considerations, the bulk of temporary release evaluation studies lack what Lösel and Kofler (1989) refer to as 'descriptive validity', that is, the adequacy in explicating key features of an evaluation (see also Farrington, 2003). During the course of the present review, this problem related mainly to poor information on research and analytical procedures (e.g., randomized allocation of units to experimental and control conditions, sample matching, statistical controls for pre-existing differences between study groups, measures of effect size and statistical significance), but also on implementation aspects of the program under scrutiny. As regards the context of intervention, for example, it is important to distinguish between work release programs operating in institutional and community settings (e.g. halfway houses, open or minimum security prisons). The reason is the differential impact each type of work release (or else, varying regime 'depth and weight'; see Downes, 1988; King & McDermott, 1995) may have on participants. There is some evidence that '[p]lacement in the community as compared to institutional placement results in greater attitudinal change, and appears to lead to a greater reduction of the psychological – as well as the physical – distance between the client and the environment to which he must make adjustment' (Brown & Spevacek, 1971, p.40). Of equal importance appears to be the duration of the intervention. For example, in her study of work release in North Carolina, Witte (1977, p.247) found that 'an extra month on work release [led] to a one month decrease in average time sentenced during the follow-up period compared to average time sentenced prior to the sample sentence' (see also Dussich, 1975, p.132; compare Lee, *in press*; Waldo & Chiricos, 1977). A considerable number of studies also fail to provide detailed information on the background attributes of the units surveyed (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, family status, number of prior convictions, security level), whether these be program participants, completers, or dropouts, a non-program group, or a group of offenders exposed to another type of intervention. This not only hinders any attempt to test the sample generalizability and external validity of findings (i.e., to generalize conclusions to larger or other populations), but may as well pertain to insufficient knowledge of program procedures and thus to an underlying bias in the selection of prisoners onto temporary release.

In the light of the dearth of randomized experimentation, most temporary release outcome evaluations are, indeed, plagued by inadequate controls for latent correlates of program participation. It seems that researchers either tend wrongly to presume that temporary release is implemented as planned, that is, pursuant to the originally intended aims of offender rehabilitation and community reintegration, or, at best, draw on previous studies to identify variables predictive of placement in temporary release. Yet, as shown in a phalanx of past process evaluations, temporary release schemes are frequently subordinated to the optimization of institutional order and the management of selected risk populations, with prison authorities favoring relatively small subgroups of disciplined, low-risk prisoners, rather than targeting those in greater need of contact with the outside world (cf., Austin & Krisberg, 1982; Cheliotis, *in press*; Cheliotis, 2006; Grosch, 1995; Knox & Humphrey, 1981; Rudoff, 1975; Zappa, 1988). To add to this, whereas the types of risk prioritized by the prison authorities in assessing potential licensees are, more or less, uniform across spatial and temporal spans (e.g., risk of reoffending, risk of absconding), the levels of risk (i.e., how tight are the eligibility criteria) and, most importantly, the individual traits associated with specific risk categories are largely contingent upon idiosyncratic legal frameworks and politics of certain places at particular periods of time. However, just as selection bias may result from administrative practices, so too can it arise out of self-selection. There is evidence that some eligible prisoners choose, of their own accord, not to apply for participation in a temporary release program, either due to preference for other programs (e.g., parole), or because they view contact with the free community as too anxiety-provoking (Cohen & Taylor, 1972; King & Elliott, 1977), or are afraid of the temptations, especially when nearing final discharge (Brown, 1992; U.S. Bureau of Prisons, 1966). As Rossi et al. (1999, p.242) emphasize, 'those who volunteer [to participate in a program] are more interested, more appropriate or otherwise importantly different in relation to the program than those who do not volunteer'. In these respects, unless the evaluator has clearly identified the nature and extent of program delivery – which, in fact, could be a stand-alone assessment – any observed outcome might well reflect pre-existing differences between the experimental and control groups, rather than the actual effectiveness of temporary release.

It is, therefore, imperative that future evaluations address both the process and outcome dimensions of temporary release on an equal footing. As Gaes (1998, p.718) cogently states, 'the unavailability of information on program processes may be holding back the advance of the social science of intervention'.

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