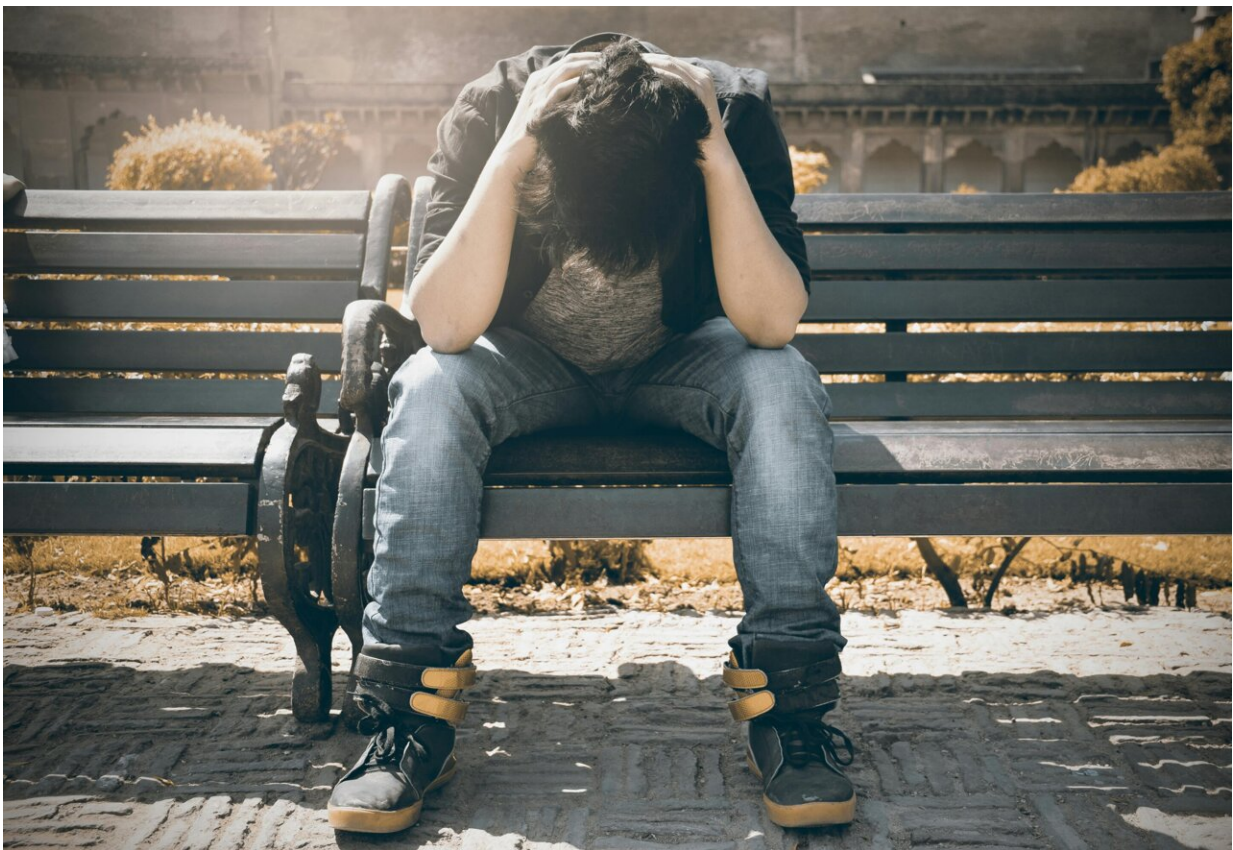


Public notifications make it challenging for prisoners to reintegrate after release

June 11 2024, by Sandy Jung



Credit: Inzmam Khan from Pexels

In Canada, when someone is about to complete serving their prison sentence, they are typically assessed for risk of violence by the prison. If they are deemed to pose a significant threat to the community, a package

is prepared and shared with the police, who are notified about the release.

Police may then apply to the courts for a judicial order and the individual is told they must enter an agreement to be supervised. These orders might include conditions that forbid drinking or staying out past a curfew, for example. Courts can also require community notifications.

These notifications are meant to let the public know that an individual is being released in their community. People convicted of crimes are [released from prison every day](#), either after completing their full sentence or while being [supervised under parole](#).

Members of the public might often react negatively to community notifications about people released from prison, especially if the individual has a violent past. Research has shown that the public is most outraged and misperceives the risk of reoffending when the individual has committed a [violent or sexual crime](#), and it's even worse when it's a [sexual crime against children](#).

Community notifications

Community notifications are intended to be helpful by informing the public. However, they can also make [reintegrating back into the community challenging for released individuals](#).

Notifications to the public are seen as the "[least draconian](#)" option by some when it comes to dealing with [repeat offenders](#) compared to a lifetime or lengthy period of supervision, such as being designated a [dangerous or long-term offender](#).

However, you can only imagine what an incarcerated individual might think when they are told: "You've done your time and you will be

released, but now we're going to supervise you for another year or two, and this time it will be under the watchful eye of a police officer—and everyone in the community will know your name, your face and what you did. Good luck with keeping your nose clean and avoiding another arrest."

People who have completed their prison sentences and are released are no longer in the provincial or federal correctional system, and bodies like the National Parole Board [have no jurisdiction](#) over them. So, police are then expected to manage any public safety risk that released individuals may pose.

Yet, police are primarily trained in enforcing the law, investigating [criminal activity](#) and addressing emergency situations as they arise. There is [little training on managing offenders](#) and engaging in rehabilitation to lower their risk to themselves or others.

Helping offenders reintegrate

If police integrate certain principles in their practices, [they can effectively address and reduce the risk of harm](#). These evidence-based principles, which are called [risk, need and responsivity principles](#), tell us that police should direct more attention to higher risk individuals, spend more time targeting [risk factors](#) that cause criminal behavior and learn to build better relationships and rapport with offenders. This would be further effective [using a multi-agency approach](#) to help offenders reintegrate into society.

Research has shown that [police do quite well when they use risk assessments](#). When they focus their attention on risk factors like [substance abuse](#), marital conflicts and monitoring criminal associations, and when they are compassionate and use trauma-informed approaches, the risk for violent and sexual offending is more likely reduced.

Of course, risk management and reintegration pose many challenges. Police have to help stabilize people's lives by effectively helping them find sustainable work and positive activities.

People with convictions may face difficulty finding suitable housing or getting into [treatment programs](#) that help with substance abuse and mental health. The pressure to ensure stability is most critical [within the first few months after release](#).

Supervising and supporting violent offenders is not an easy task or an easy sell to the public. Our [research](#) has shown that it doesn't matter how we present information, the public is less inclined to see [any merit in reintegration or rehabilitation](#).

However, with specialized training, police can be instrumental in reducing risk. And with the support of the community, released offenders are more likely to gain stability and live a productive crime-free life. These are goals that we all share as members of our community.

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