This study examines the reconviction rates (within seven years) of a number of prisoners who went to HMP Grendon for therapy in the years 1984 to 1989. The findings show that prisoners treated there have lower reconviction rates than might be expected had they not gone to Grendon. Findings are similar to those of an earlier four-year follow-up study.

KEY POINTS

- Prisoners selected for Grendon tended to be high-risk offenders, when compared with similar prisoners from the general prison population. This could be due to the fact that Grendon selects prisoners with personality disorders.

- Lower rates of reconviction were found for prisoners who went to Grendon than for prisoners selected for Grendon but who did not go there.

- Time spent at Grendon was strongly related to reconviction – reconviction rates were lower for prisoners who stayed for at least 18 months.

- There was evidence of the effect of treatment on reconviction rates for Grendon life sentence prisoners – probably due to a longer time in treatment.

- There appeared to be some reduction in the reconviction rate for violent offences among the treatment group and for sexual and violent offences among repeat sexual offenders.

HMP Grendon, near Aylesbury, is a specialist prison for males, run on the lines of a therapeutic community for those with a personality disorder. No one is transferred against their will. Motivation to change and willingness to participate in group work are important selection criteria (Genders and Player, 1995). Inmates can return to the general prison system if they wish or can be sent back without consent.

Marshall (1997) assessed the effectiveness of the Grendon regime by examining four years of reconviction data on all prisoners who were selected for Grendon in the years 1984 to 1989. The Marshall study also compared the reconviction rates of those inmates selected to Grendon against a small group of offenders who had been selected to Grendon but did not actually go there. This group – known as the Waiting List Control Group – was similar in all important characteristics to those admitted to Grendon. The Grendon and the Waiting List Control Group were also compared with a group of prisoners from the general prison population who matched them in terms of offence type, age and sentence length. The present study aimed to assess whether the findings reported by Marshall in his four-year reconviction study held true after seven years.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the same sample and method as that used by Marshall. The sample of just over 700 prisoners who had been admitted to Grendon in the period 1984 to 1989 is called the Admitted Group. Life sentence prisoners and some others serving long sentences were excluded from the Marshall study, either because they had not yet been released from prison, or had not been released for long enough to be included in a reconviction study. A separate analysis of lifers is included in this study.

The two comparison groups were:

- The Waiting List Control Group – 142 prisoners who were selected for Grendon between 1984 and 1989 but did not actually go there. This was probably because no place became available soon enough, or because they were released on parole earlier than...
expected. Neither reason would be expected to substantially affect reconviction rates (Marshall, 1997).

**The General Prisoner Group** – created by selecting those prisoners with similar characteristics, in terms of age, offence type and sentence length, to those admitted to Grendon.

**COMPARING GENERAL PRISON AND WAITING LIST GROUPS**

Figure 1 shows that substantially more men from the Waiting List Group were found to be reconvicted than from the matched prison group.

Offenders from the Waiting List Group were also more likely to receive a new custodial sentence, and more likely to be reconvicted for violence. Despite the small number in the waiting list, these findings were all statistically significant. This replicates the finding of Marshall on a four-year follow-up. Grendon selects high-risk offenders, who are of long term risk of reconviction. This could be due to the fact that Grendon selects prisoners with personality disorders.

**COMPARING WAITING LIST AND ADMITTED GROUPS**

For any standard list offence, the reconviction rate of the Admitted Group was less than that of the Waiting List Group (statistically significant at the level of a one in ten probability that the finding occurred by chance – 0.1 level). Admitted prisoners were also less likely to be reconvicted, and this was significant at the 0.1 level. Admitted prisoners were also less likely to be re-imprisoned, though this difference was not statistically significant.

However, there were some small differences in criminal history between those admitted to Grendon and those on the waiting list. Those in the Waiting List Group, on average, slightly more previous convictions, more previous custodial sentences and were slightly younger at the time of their first conviction. These characteristics are known to increase the risk of reconviction (Taylor, 1999). When adjusted for these, the difference in reconviction rates between the two groups is small.
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was reduced to a level outside the 10% confidence interval. However, the differences remained in favour of treatment at Grendon. Again, this replicates the finding of Marshall in his four-year reconviction study.

EFFECTS OF TRANSFER, RELEASE AND TIME AT GRENDON

The effect of being released directly from Grendon to the community rather than being transferred back to the general prison estate and released later was examined. Generally people leaving Grendon directly tended to do slightly better in terms of reconviction than those transferred back to other prisons. However, those who were transferred tended to be ‘higher’ risk offenders.

After controlling for risk and mode of leaving, length of stay was found to be associated with reconviction rates (as in the four-year study). Figure 2 shows that general reconviction rates fall by the length of time spent at Grendon, from 71% for those staying for under six months to 62% for those staying over 18 months. There was also a significant reduction in levels of re-imprisonment and violent offences for those staying for over 18 months (p<0.05). For shorter time periods, such as under 12 months, the reduction in reconviction rates, compared with the control group, produced only a slight reduction. The reconviction rate for sex offences does not appear to change with length of treatment.

EFFECTS FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF OFFENDER

Marshall’s four-year reconviction follow-up study found little or no difference between the Waiting List and Admitted Groups in terms of reconviction for sexual and violent offences. This seven-year study found a difference between the reconviction rate for violent offences after seven years (a one in ten probability that the result occurred by chance).

EFFECTS FOR DIFFERENT TYPES OF OFFENDER

Prisoners with a history of sexual or violent offending were analysed in detail. Figure 3 shows that there were some reductions in violent offender’s reconviction rates for violent and violent and sexual offences by length of stay. However, the smaller numbers in these groups demand caution in interpretation, particularly for the sex offender groups.

The study by Marshall reported that there was some evidence to suggest that Grendon may have an impact on specific groups of sexual or violent offenders, in particular repeat sexual offenders and older violent offenders (see Tables 1 and 2).

Sexual offenders

The Waiting List Group prisoners who had convictions on two or more occasions for sexual offences were much more likely to be reconvicted of a sexual offence, or of a sexual or violent offence than prisoners admitted to Grendon with a similar history. There was no such difference for sexual offenders who had only one conviction for a sexual offence. In fact there was a trend towards once-only sexual offenders who went to Grendon being more likely to be reconvicted than those who remained on the waiting list.

Table 1  Reconviction within seven years of sexual offenders for sexual and sexual/violent offences, by number of convictions for sexual offences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Condescension</th>
<th>No. of Sexual Convictions</th>
<th>No. of Sexual/Offences Violent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waiting List Group</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2% 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admitted Group</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>3% 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>3% 35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P<0.05. Difference between waiting list and admitted group.
Violent offenders

The four-year reconviction study suggested a treatment effect for older offenders with a history of violence (two or more convictions). The present study found that, among repeat violent offenders over 30 years, there was a difference in the reconviction rate. 40% of repeat violent offenders aged over 30 years in the Admitted Group were reconvicted. This compares with 49% in the Waiting List Group. This effect though was not statistically significant.

Life sentence prisoners

In the original Grendon sample 104 prisoners were serving a life sentence. Of those released on life licence and who could be followed up for a full four-year period (n=73), 8% were reconvicted for a further standard list offence. This compares with 12% for all life licensees discharged in 1987 (n=572) in England and Wales. The criminal and demographic characteristics of Grendon lifers differ from lifers generally. Grendon lifers on average tend to be younger on their first conviction, have more previous court appearances and are considerably younger on release. These factors would be expected to increase the probability of reconviction. Lifers who match those at Grendon in terms of these characteristics have an expected reconviction rate of 24% at four years, three times higher than the actual reconviction rate for Grendon lifers. This difference is statistically significant (p <0.01).

Only 44 of those released on life licence could be followed up for a full seven-year period. 11% were reconvicted for a further standard list offence during this time. The expected reconviction rate for this group was 28% but this did not reach the level of statistical significance.

The apparent treatment effect for Grendon lifers may be attributable to the fact that Grendon lifers spend a longer period of time in treatment. The average length of stay for Grendon lifers is around 22 months, almost double the length of stay for non-lifers (12 months).

CONCLUSION

Grendon appears to select offenders who have a high risk of reconviction. This may be due to the fact that the prison selects offenders with personality disorders. There is also some evidence of a treatment effect particularly for those who stayed for at least 18 months, life sentence prisoners and repeat sexual offenders. These findings are broadly similar to those reported in an earlier four-year reconviction study.

REFERENCES

