

English Summary

On October 1st 2001, a trial project was initiated using so-called electronic monitoring (EM) for inmates serving a prison term of at least two years. These inmates were given the opportunity to serve the final part – between one and four months – of their sentence outside prison under intensive supervision by means of electronic monitoring, also known as an EM release programme. The objective is to reduce criminal recidivism by facilitating the inmates' readjustment to life in the community. By means of the EM release programme, the inmates are given the opportunity to spend time in the community under conditions involving a greater level of supervision and support than they will receive following their final conditional discharge from the prison system.

The Government has assigned the task of evaluating this trial project to the National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) in consultation with the National Prison and Probation Administration (*Kriminalvårdsstyrelsen*). This, the second progress report from this evaluation, describes the inmates' social situation following their participation in the EM release programme. The report is based on questionnaire data, collected from the probation service, relating to inmates who have participated in the EM release project. The information collected relates to the inmates' background and social situation prior to their entering the EM release programme, the measures introduced during their time within the programme, and their social situation six months subsequent to their conditional discharge from the prison system. Additional interviews have been conducted with inmates themselves and with members of their families.

Throughout the course of the evaluation, a continuous dialogue has been maintained with probation officers, prison staff and representatives for the National Prison and Probation Administration.

THE PRISON SERVICE ASSISTED HALF OF THE INMATES TO ENTER THE EM RELEASE PROGRAMME

One of the conditions for being accepted into the EM release programme is that the inmate fulfils the requirements included in a risk and security assessment. This means that an inmate cannot be granted an EM release if it is deemed that there is a risk that he or she may abscond, reoffend or abuse alcohol or other drugs. A further condition for inclusion in the EM release programme is that the inmate has access to a place to live, a telephone, electricity and some form of organised occupation. If an income cannot be arranged by other means, such as through paid work, for example, then the prison service may provide the inmate with benefit payments. According to the relevant directives, the prison service is to assist the inmate in fulfilling the requirements needed for inclusion in the EM release programme. The inmate must also, to the best of his abilities, work actively to fulfil these requirements.

Of the 278 inmates who started on the EM release programme, over half (55 per cent) received assistance from the prison service in sorting out a

place to live, an occupation and an income. In the majority of cases, this assistance was occupation- and income-related. Some of them were provided with an occupation similar to community service and received an income from the prison service. Others were given places on labour market schemes.

Forty-five per cent of the inmates did not require any form of assistance. They either had a place to live and a job or some other form of occupation from the time prior to their incarceration, or they were able to organise these things themselves.

Those given assistance by the prison service were more likely to have previous convictions or drug abuse problems prior to their admission to prison than were those who did not need assistance in fulfilling the requirements for inclusion in the EM release programme. The “self-sufficient” group nonetheless also included individuals from less favourable backgrounds as regards their levels of prior involvement in crime.

AT THE TIME OF THE FOLLOW-UP, THE PROPORTION WITH A PLACE TO LIVE AND A “REAL” JOB HAD UNDERGONE A MARKED INCREASE

To date it has been possible to follow 203 inmates for as long as six months subsequent to their conditional discharge from the prison system. When they left prison to begin their time in the EM release programme, just over half of these had a home of their own in which to live. The remainder lived either with their partner or with their parents. Six months subsequent to their conditional discharge from prison, the proportion with their own home had increased to almost three in four, 72 per cent. The housing situation of very few of those included in the EM release programme appeared to have deteriorated, and only one of the inmates was homeless.

There were also corresponding improvements in relation to the inmates’ employment and income situation. At the beginning of their time on the EM release programme, slightly under one-third of the inmates were in paid employment. This proportion had increased to 56 per cent six months subsequent to their conditional discharge from prison. In addition, just under one-fifth were studying or participating in some form of labour market scheme.

There was also a small group of inmates whose work and income situation had deteriorated. One-fifth were living on welfare or unemployment benefit.

RELATIVELY LITTLE ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE PROBATION SERVICE DURING THE INMATES’ TIME IN THE EM RELEASE PROGRAMME

The probation service was asked to complete a questionnaire relating to each inmate at the end of their time in the EM release programme. One of the questionnaire items related to what efforts had been made either by the probation service, or by the inmate himself, to improve the inmate’s work, housing and income situation. The responses show that relatively few initiatives of this kind were taken. According to the probation service, approximately one-tenth of the inmates had themselves made efforts during their time in the EM release programme to improve their situation in these

three areas. It was approximately as common for the probation service, either on their own or together with the inmate, to have taken the initiative to improve the inmate's situation. The probation service was almost never involved in improving the inmate's housing situation. The probation service's assessment as to the reason so little was done in these respects during the inmates' time in the EM release programme, was that in the vast majority of cases no assistance was required.

THE INMATES FELT THAT THE COMBINATION OF EMPLOYMENT AND CONTROL HAD WORKED WELL

In order to arrive at a better understanding of the positive findings produced by the questionnaire survey of the inmates' social situation, interviews were also conducted with the inmates themselves. Of the 76 inmates originally included in the sample for the interview study, 55 agreed to be interviewed. Among those interviewed, slightly over half had lived together with a family member, mostly with a partner and in some cases with a parent, during their time in the EM release programme. The remainder had lived alone.

The inmates interviewed were on the whole positive towards EM releases. Like the inmates interviewed prior to the publication of the first progress report from the evaluation project, these interviewees were also pleased about the opportunity that the EM release programme provided them with to return to their families. As regards their social readjustment, they pointed to the importance both of having some form of organised occupation waiting for them when they left prison, and of the fact that the intensive supervision with electronic monitoring involved a kind of "corset" of control that had assisted them in staying on the straight and narrow.

THE FAMILY MEMBERS INTERVIEWED WERE PREDOMINANTLY POSITIVE ABOUT THE EM RELEASE PROGRAMME

In order to examine how family members living together with the inmates viewed the time the inmates had spent at home under electronic monitoring, 28 family members were interviewed. Quite a large number of those originally selected for interview did not want to participate or could not be reached for various reasons, however; in all, the level of attrition stood at 40 per cent. It cannot be ruled out that those who did not participate in the interviews may have had a more negative view of the situation in the family during the inmates' time in the EM release programme than those who chose to participate. The interview findings should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Those who were interviewed were generally positive about the inmate having been given the opportunity to participate in the EM release programme, but they also reported that it hadn't always been very easy for the family. Several felt that life became easier when the inmate returned home by comparison with the situation experienced during the inmate's time in prison, and those with children emphasised the importance of once again being able to share the work between two parents. Others felt that it also served to reduce their own freedom. *"I had less freedom because I*

didn't want him to have to sit by himself." All those who had children, however, perceived that they had benefited from the reduction in the length of time the inmate had spent in prison. In some cases, the relationship between the inmate and the child had also been affected positively by the restrictions associated with EM release programme. *"Without the EM release programme, there wouldn't have been the same gentle start for father and son. They were able to spend time together here and had each other."*

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL'S ASSESSMENT

The question the Government wished to have answered in this report is that of the effect the EM release programme has had on the inmates' social situation. The National Council's follow up shows that the social situation of the vast majority of those who have participated in the EM release programme has been in order six months subsequent to their final conditional discharge from prison. Only one individual had been readmitted to prison by this time. If this is compared with the situation when they first left prison on EM release, there is a clear improvement. The proportion in paid work had increased from 31 to 56 per cent and the proportion with a home of their own had increased from 52 to 72 per cent. All the inmates except one had somewhere to live. Almost 90 per cent had an income of some kind either in the form of paid work, labour market benefits, study grants, unemployment benefit or some form of sickness benefit.

Two things should be born in mind when evaluating this positive image. Firstly, it only relates to the situation as it was at the time the probation service completed the inmate questionnaire. Thus it is not known how permanent the situation described in the questionnaire data might be; it is possible for example that the jobs referred to were of a temporary nature and were to be terminated the following week. Secondly, the follow-up period is relatively short; the National Council for Crime Prevention has followed the inmates until six months after they completed their time in the EM release programme.

Even given these considerations, however, the image presented is to be regarded as relatively positive by comparison with the findings of other studies examining the situation of inmates following their release from prison. Amongst others, the National Council's study *Efter muck* (From prison to a life at liberty – on the outside, BRÅ Report 2001:2), showed that the period of transition from prison to life in the community is a critical one. Of the 73 inmates conditionally discharged from prison in the study in question, half had been suspected or convicted of further offences within six months of this conditional release. Nor had their social situation undergone a general improvement, but had rather deteriorated. A study by the State Audit Institution (*Riksrevisionen*) shows that of those conditionally released from prison in the year 2000, only fourteen per cent were in paid employment according to the register maintained by Statistics Sweden (*Återfall i brott eller anpassning i samhället; Reoffending or adjustment to life in the community* RiR 2004:5).

In the absence of a control group, however, it is impossible to state with certainty whether the improvements noted in the present instance are a result of the fact that the inmates were included in the EM release programme rather than serving the final months of their sentence leading up to their conditional release in prison. It would be reasonable to assume that to some extent, the positive results reflect a selection effect related to the considerable demands that inmates are required to meet before being given the opportunity to participate in the EM release programme. The inmates whose social situation tends to be the most disadvantaged following their release from prison – i.e. those with a large number of previous convictions and with substance abuse problems – are rare within the group given places in the EM release programme. The relatively high levels of control, as well as the other restrictions associated with EM releases, have also reduced the attractiveness of this form of pre-release programme. This is particularly so among those who are less motivated to take control of their lives. Those whose applications for EM releases were granted may thus comprise a group of well-motivated inmates, who are intent on improving their situation and who would have done so even if they had not been included in the EM release programme.

It is reasonable to assume, however, that even if the inmates included in this group are well-motivated, they may nonetheless require assistance from society at large in order to cope. The EM release programme has provided them with this kind of assistance. The help they have received takes two forms. On the one hand they are provided with assistance to sort out some form of organised occupation and income prior to their release within the programme. If required, the probation service has been able to organise employment in a form similar to community service and has provided income benefit from the prison service. The other form of assistance relates to the “corset” of electronic and drug controls associated with the EM release programme.

It is difficult to say which of these two “ingredients” has been most significant. Several of the inmates interviewed emphasise that it is the two in combination that produce the effect. Others focus primarily on the importance of the help they have been given to find their feet on the labour market via the period of employment associated with their participation in the EM release programme. For many, this initial period of employment has functioned as something of a springboard.

Within the context of the general crime policy debate, the issue has been raised of introducing a more individualised means of determining the date for a conditional release from prison than is the case today. It is therefore worth reflecting over the role that the EM release programme might play in the context of such a possibility. It is possible that among those who are today accepted into the EM release programme, there is a group who might instead be given an earlier conditional release from custody in combination with intensified support to adjust to life in the community. They might be given assistance in sorting out their social situation, but without requiring the strict controls that are associated with an EM release programme. There is also likely to be a group, however, who need both increased levels of

support in connection with their release into the community, and also the kind of supervision that is provided by an EM release programme.

In the context of the sample of inmates that have to date been given the opportunity to participate in the EM release programme, the reform has lived up to expectations. Few inmates have breached the terms of the programme in a way that would necessitate their EM release being terminated, and the inmates' social situation has undergone improvement in a considerable number of cases.

The National Council's assessment is that against this background, there is good reason, as the Government now proposes, to broaden the group that may be given the chance to participate in the EM release programme. There is naturally no guarantee that the programme will work as well for inmates serving shorter prison terms. Follow-up work must be conducted in the same way as was the case in connection with the initial reform. The positive findings confirm the assessment already made by the National Council in the previous report, namely that the expansion of the group included in the EM release programme is warranted.