



# Research at a glance

## Profile of Federally Sentenced Women Drug Offenders

**KEY WORDS:** *women offenders, women drug offenders*

### Why we did this study

Over the past 25 years, there has been a notable increase in the number of Canadian women serving federal sentences for drug related offences. Between 1981 and 2006 the proportion of federal women offenders incarcerated for drug-related offences increased from 16% to nearly 28%. Despite this evident increase, limited research has been conducted on this group.

The objective of the current study was to develop a profile of federal women offenders whose most serious offence was drug-related.

### What we did

A sample of all women convicted of drug offences between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2004 was identified ( $N = 373$ ). All women admitted to federal custody on non-drug offences during that time period were identified as a comparison sample ( $N = 666$ ). Additionally, in order to examine potential differences within the drug offender sample, the women were categorized according to their most serious drug offence, either importing/exporting ( $n = 132$ ) or trafficking/possession for the purposes of trafficking ( $n = 224$ ). Other drug offence types were not considered due to low base rates.

Archival data for all women were retrieved from the Correctional Service of Canada's automated offender data base, the Offender Management System.

### What we found

Results demonstrated that women convicted of drug offences had less extensive criminal histories, lower levels of risk and need, and higher levels of motivation than those convicted of non-drug offences. When analyzing results based on drug offender categories, it was found that the women convicted of trafficking demonstrated higher levels of difficulty in these areas when compared to the importing/exporting subgroup (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Risk, need and motivation by most serious drug offence

Variable	Rating		
	Low	Moderate	High
Risk*			
Import/Export	92.4%	7.6%	--
Trafficking	54.9%	36.2%	8.9%
Need*			
Import/Export	72.7%	23.5%	3.8%
Trafficking	18.3%	58.5%	23.2%
Motivation*			
Import/Export	2.3%	16.7%	81.1%
Trafficking	4.5%	50.0%	45.5%

*Note.* Import/export:  $N = 132$ . Trafficking:  $N = 224$ . \*  $p < .0001$ .

Release and post-release outcomes analyses were conducted. Results revealed that drug offending women were significantly more likely to be released on day or full parole than their non-drug offending counterparts who were more likely to be released on statutory release or warrant expiry.

Furthermore, post-release outcomes demonstrated that non-drug offending women were more likely to return to custody than those in the drug-offending group. However, this difference disappeared after accounting for time at risk. Considering only women in the drug-offending group, those convicted of trafficking offences returned to custody more frequently and more rapidly than those convicted of importing/exporting. This difference remained after accounting for the affect of risk.

### What it means

Results demonstrate that significant differences exist between women convicted of drug offences and those convicted of non-drug offences. Moreover, results reveal the heterogeneity of the female drug offending population. Being aware of these differences can assist in tailoring programs, thereby increasing their ability to promote change.

**For more information:** Gobeil, R. (in press). *Profile of federally sentenced women drug offenders*. Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, contact the following address: [research@csc-scc.gc.ca](mailto:research@csc-scc.gc.ca)

**Prepared by:** Kim Allenby

**Contact:** Research Branch  
(613) 996-3287  
[research@csc-scc.gc.ca](mailto:research@csc-scc.gc.ca)