



# Research at a glance

## A Comparative Review of the Suicide and Self-Injury Investigative Reports in a Canadian Federal Correctional Population

**KEY WORDS:** *offender self-injurious behaviour; offender suicide.*

### Why we did this study

The reduction of self-injurious behaviour (SIB) and suicide among federal offenders is a priority for the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Within incarcerated populations, SIB and suicides threaten the safety of offenders and staff and consume a large amount of resources. This study was undertaken to provide more information on offenders who engage in SIB and suicide and the circumstances that precede such behaviours in order to allow CSC to respond to these incidents as effectively as possible.

### What we did

The study reviewed all reports pertaining to national level investigations into suicide or self-injury incidents that occurred in the institutions or the community between April 1, 2003 and March 31, 2008. In all, 51 self-injury incidents and 66 suicide incidents were included. The self-injury incidents involved 17 men and 3 women. The suicide incidents involved 63 men and 3 women. Information on each offender and incident was extracted from the investigation reports and the Offender Management System.

### What we found

The proportion of Aboriginal offenders in the population was comparable to the proportion in the overall federal offender population, suggesting that while under CSC custody, Aboriginal offenders do not have higher rates of suicide and serious SIB than non-Aboriginals. Offenders in the suicide group were more likely to have longer sentences and histories of violence than those in the self-injury group.

The proportion of the self-injury events that occurred in the Prairie and Quebec regions was low relative to the population of these regions, while the number of self-injury events that occurred in the Atlantic and Pacific regions was high relative to their populations.

Ligature use was by far the most common method used by offenders in both the suicide and SIB groups.

SIB was mostly likely to occur in Segregation while suicide was most likely to occur in cells in the general population. Suicide and self-injury were more likely to occur during the weekends than during the week.

In the majority of incidents, there were precipitating events that could be identified in retrospect. However, these precipitating events were typically not interpreted as significant at the time because they were events that are not uncommon among the offender population.

The majority of offenders in both the suicide and self-injury groups had a history of depression and/or hopelessness as well as self-injury. Offenders in the self-injury group were significantly more likely to have concurrent psychological disorders than those in the suicide group.

### What it means

Further research on SIB and suicide in federally sentenced offenders is required. Ongoing research conducted by the Research Branch will examine environmental and psychological factors associated with these behaviours in men and women offenders.

### For more information

Power, J. & Riley, D. L. (2010). *A Comparative Review of Suicide and Self-Injury Investigative Reports in a Canadian Federal Correctional Population*. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

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