



Research at a glance

A Descriptive Profile of Older Women Offenders

KEY WORDS: *women offenders, older women offenders*
Why we did this study

The number of older offenders (defined those over 50 years of age) has nearly doubled in little more than a decade. Aging offenders are a special sub-population that often has needs which differ from those of the average, younger offender population.

Previous research in the area of older offenders has typically focussed on older *male* offenders. While this research has identified issues and needs pertinent to older offenders, it is important to understand these matters as they relate specifically to older *women* offenders.

What we did

To examine the needs and issues relevant to older women offenders, we analyzed all women who, as of February 2008, were currently serving federal sentences and were over the age of 50. For comparison purposes, a random sample of younger women offenders was identified and matched on location (community vs. institution).

Data were collected on a total of 160 older women from the Offender Management System (OMS). Older and younger offenders were compared on levels of risk and need, as well as other issues that were identified as being pertinent for older offenders. Lastly, older women were assessed according to a typology that has previously been used to categorize older male offenders.

What we found

Results show that older women had lower overall risk, lower overall need and higher reintegration potential when compared to younger women; older women also had lower needs in the domains of employment, substance abuse, and attitude. Table 1 displays the seven needs domains and the number of women found to either have some or considerable need in each of these areas. The domain which emerged most prominently in older women was personal/emotional; associates and family/marital needs also emerged prominently, but to a lesser extent.

Table 1. *Criminogenic needs of older and younger women offenders*

Needs Domain	Older women (%)	Younger women (%)
Employment	41.1	71.3
Family / marital	43.9	58.3
Associates	50.7	70.4
Substance abuse	37.0	70.4
Community functioning	30.1	32.2
Personal / emotional	74.0	80.8
Attitudes	21.9	33.9

Note. Older women $N = 73$; younger women $N = 116$).

Percentages reflect proportion of women who endorse some or considerable need in each domain.

Institutional adjustment was examined by analyzing offenders' involvement in institutional misconduct. Older women were less likely to be both victims and perpetrators of institutional incidents. When looking at program involvement, older women were *more* likely to enroll in 'other' programs, and were more likely to complete women-specific programs. They were *less* likely to enroll in educational, substance abuse or psychology programs and less likely to complete educational programs than younger women.

A typology revealed that most older women were incarcerated for their first offence. The largest proportion of women was convicted of their first offence when they were 50 years or older (38%). Repeat older women offenders made up about 20% of the sample.

What it means

Overall, older women offenders typically presented with low risk and needs. However, given that nearly three-quarters demonstrated elevated personal/emotional needs, it could be beneficial to consider programs or interventions specific for older women offenders that target these needs.

For more information

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