



Research at a glance

A Review of Use of Force in Three Types of Correctional Facilities

KEY WORDS: *Use of force, health care, correctional institutions, correctional treatment centres*

Why we did this study

The *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (CCRA) specifies that if force is required in a security incident, the least restrictive alternative should be chosen. This study was conducted to profile a sample of use of force incidents and the offenders involved and to examine compliance with CSC and Health Care procedures related to the use of force.

What we did

This study selected 185 files from a pool of National Investigation Branch's reports into use of force incidents from 2003 to 2007. This pool comprised a selection of reviews of use of force incidents conducted at a national level. Given the criteria for a national level review these reports will tend to focus on the more serious use of force incidents and higher needs offenders. The review was subdivided into three categories based on type of institution where the incident occurred: (1) treatment centres, (2) non treatment centre institutions, and (3) institutions for women.

A coding manual developed for the study was used to review the files on the selected investigation reports. Profiles of the offenders were developed through data extracted from the Offender Management System. The study includes a description of the offenders involved in the incidents, the circumstances of the incidents, as well as staff compliance with policies and guidelines related to the post incident health care assessment, the reporting requirements, and the review process of each incident.

What we found

Results show that the most common reasons for the use of force involved inmates refusing direct orders or becoming aggressive/threatening. In the women's institutions use of force was also commonly used to stop self-injurious behaviour. The most frequent types of force used by CSC staff were verbal orders, followed by physical handling and escort, and then

the use of restraint equipment (handcuffs, leg irons, or body belts). Offenders involved in use of force incidents are largely rated as high risk and high needs and have substantial histories of psychiatric disorders and self injury.

The majority of inmates and staff involved in the incidents received no injuries. If injuries were sustained, they were minor scratches, bruises, or eye irritations. Fourteen offenders in this sample made allegations of excessive use of force; however, upon review, these allegations were not upheld. An analysis of the reviews of each use of force incident demonstrated that the violations of health care guidelines or use of force procedures were largely administrative in nature, often involving issues related to incomplete documentation or problems with the recording of the incident or post incident assessment.

What it means

Results indicate that in CSC use of force is applied judiciously following a pattern of escalation that matches the use of force required. Most of the problems related to adherence to guidelines for use of force were minor. Given that many use of force incidents are spontaneous, arising quickly, staff involved in the incidents and post incident follow up need to be made aware of requirements related to procedures and protocols.

For more information

Varrette, S. K., & Archambault, K. (2011). *A review of use of force in three types of correctional facilities*. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

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