

\_\_\_\_\_ **Research Report** \_\_\_\_\_

**A Descriptive Profile of Older  
Women Offenders**

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**A Descriptive Profile of Older  
Women Offenders**

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## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Executive Summary**

Aging prisoners represent a special population that require addressing specific needs, particularly elements concerning adjustment, rehabilitation, programming, and parole (Aday, 1994). Most of the existing literature examining the needs of the aging prison population originates in the United States, and typically limits its sample to male offenders. Consequently, there is a need to examine the different characteristics and needs of older women offenders in Canada, in both a correctional and community setting.

The purpose of this study was to: 1) to provide a comprehensive profile of older women offenders; 2) to compare the assessed levels of risk and need of older women and younger women offenders; and 3) to assess the relevance/use of a typology to classify older women offenders.

For the current study, the age criterion for older women offenders was 50 years or older. CSC's Offender Management System (OMS) was used to retrieve data on the study group (older women) and the comparison group (younger women). Both groups were composed of 160 women, of which 54 were in custody and 106 were under community supervision.

Results suggest that, older women were rated as having lower overall needs, lower overall risk, and a higher reintegration potential when compared to women offenders under the age of 50. Compared to younger women, older women were found to have lower needs in the domains of employment, associates, substance abuse, and attitude.

Looking at institutional misconduct, results suggest that older women are less likely to be victims or perpetrators of minor or major institutional incidents than their younger counterparts. With regard to programming, it was found that older women were significantly less likely to enrol in, or complete educational programs. They were also less likely than younger women to enrol in substance abuse programs, or psychology programs. However, they were significantly more likely to enrol in and complete 'other' programs (e.g., chaplaincy, personal development) than their younger counterparts.

In order to examine a potential typology for older women offenders, criminal histories were examined. It was found that the majority of older women (80%) were serving time for their first federal sentence. Additionally, 50% of the older women offenders were serving a sentence for homicide. Ultimately, in attempts to delineate older women into a typology based on older male offenders, results revealed that older women did not fit flawlessly into the male typology. A more appropriate typology, specific to older women offenders may therefore exist.





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## **Introduction**

As the average age of Canada's population continues to rise as a result of the aging baby boom generation, so too will the average age of Canada's offender population. Indeed, the population of older offenders in Canadian prisons is on the rise. It has been shown that the number of offenders aged 50 and older (largely male population) in federal institutions rose from 8.4% in 1993 to 9.3% in 1996 in Canada (Uzoaba, 1998) and has increased as much as 50% in the USA (Lemieux, Dyeson, & Castiglione, 2002). It is expected that the average age of those in federal penitentiaries is likely to continue to grow. According to Statistics Canada (2007), baby boomers ranged from 41 to 60 years of age in 2006 and accounted for approximately one in three Canadians. If this overrepresentation of older citizens begins to develop within Canadian correctional institutions, modifications will be necessary to both the service delivery and care of this unique subgroup of offenders.

Aging prisoners have particular needs in the areas of institutional adjustment, rehabilitation, programming, and parole (Aday, 1994). Most research examining the needs of the aging prison population originates in the United States, and typically limits its sample to male offenders. Consequently, there is a need to examine the differentiating characteristics and needs of older women offenders in Canada, in both a correctional and community setting.

## **Definition of the Older Offender**

There is a lack of consistency in defining 'older' when examining offender populations. The common criterion used in broader society has arbitrarily been placed at 65 years of age. This standard of old age has served many purposes; however, a chronological number is not necessarily a good indicator of a person's physiological age (Aday, 2003). For example, environmental, physical, and social factors may influence the rate of aging for someone with an extended stay in an institution and these effects must be taken into account when selecting an appropriate age to define 'older' in the context of offender populations.



It has been argued that offenders age more rapidly than non-offenders due to their health deteriorating at a much younger age (Aday, 1999, as cited in Aday, 2003). Furthermore, as a result of the difficult criminal lifestyle, coupled with the stress experienced in an institutional setting, it has been suggested that a 50 year old serving time in an institution is comparable to a 60 year old in the general population (Gallagher, 2001). Some claim that aging women offenders have typically not received adequate health care over the course of their lives and the added stress of the prison environment only aggravates any pre-existing health conditions (Codd, 1998). In short, there seems to be a consensus in the literature that offenders age at a faster rate than non-offenders.

A review of the health-related research on older offenders (Loeb and AbuDagga, 2006) found that the most commonly used minimum age criterion was age 50. Comparably, a review of the literature examining older offenders in the United States found that older offenders were typically classified as either 55 and older (7 studies), or 50 and older (9 studies) (Lemieux, Dyeson, & Castiglione, 2002). A national survey of state correctional departments in the United States also found that age 50 and above was the most common criterion of older age utilized by correctional officials (Aday, 1999, as cited in Wahidin, 2004). Despite the consistency of the age criterion found among the aforementioned studies, other researchers have used an age criterion of 40 years old (Codd, 1998), 45 years old (Williams & Rikard, 2004), 55 years old (Ellsworth & Helle, 1994) and 60 years old (Harris, Hek, & Condon, 2006). Notably, researchers also use the terms ‘aging’, ‘older’ and ‘elderly’ interchangeably when referring to older offenders (Potter, Cashin, Chenoweth, & Jeon, 2007). Using a common age criterion will allow for comparisons across studies, which in turn will lead to a better understanding of the older woman offender. Accordingly, given that most of the previous studies have used a cut-off point of 50 years to identify older offenders, the criterion used to select older offenders in the current profile will also be 50 years or older.

Although the needs of older male offenders have been adequately addressed (e.g., Goetting, 1984; Uzoaba, 1998), there is a dearth of research on older women offenders. Given this gap in the literature, and the unique needs that are likely to be presented by the population of older women offenders, further attention by the criminal justice system is

warranted as older women will present with specific challenges for correctional staff and in program development and implementation.

### **Needs of the Older Woman Offender**

There are several needs that may be unique to the older woman offender. Although the older women offender population is relatively small in comparison to their older male counterparts, (e.g., Uzoaba, 1998), it is important to develop a clear picture of this special population, as they present a unique set of challenges in their assessment and care within institutions and communities.

#### **Risk/need domains**

The principles of risk, need and responsivity (i.e., RNR model) have been well established within Canadian corrections as essential in the assessment and treatment of offenders. Simply put, the three principles are as follows: 1) the risk principle asserts that the level of intervention or service provided to an offender must match their level of assessed risk; 2) the need principle states that criminogenic needs (e.g., criminal attitudes, antisocial personality) must be assessed and targeted in treatment; and 3) the responsivity principle outlines the need to match the treatment provided to the aptitude and learning style of the offender (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). Stemming from a general personality and social learning model of criminal behaviour, interventions based on these three principles have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2006).

The general personality and social learning model of criminal behaviour postulates that criminal behaviour is learned and is influenced by a variety of factors, some playing a larger role than others (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). This theory outlines four dominant risk factors (i.e., “The Big Four”) that influence an individual’s involvement in criminal behaviour including antisocial attitudes, antisocial peers, history of antisocial behaviour, and antisocial personality. In addition to these four risk factors, problems at home with family/marital relationships, problems at school/work, substance abuse, and the ineffective use of leisure time are also associated with a higher likelihood of criminal recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). According to this theory, these eight domains form the “foundation for effective intervention by directing services to those risk factors linked to criminal behaviour” (Bonta & Andrews, 2007, p. 13).

Evidence in support of the RNR model is robust. Gendreau, Little, and Goggin (1996, as cited in Andrews & Bonta, 2006) conducted a meta-analysis of 131 studies looking at predictors of recidivism for adult males and found that the best predictors of recidivism were the “big four”. Hubbard and Pratt (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of predictors of recidivism for female delinquents and found that the “big four”, originally identified in the male centered literature, were all strong predictors of delinquency for youthful female offenders. A meta-analysis of studies examining the RNR model for women offenders revealed that the principles of risk, need and responsivity were equally important for women offenders (Dowden & Andrews, 1999). This is particularly germane for the current profile as it demonstrates that these risk/needs are relevant for women offenders. However, how these risk/need factors manifest within the *older* woman offender has yet to be examined.

As part of the RNR model, the ongoing assessment of offenders within the Correctional Service of Canada involves the continuous monitoring of these risk/need domains. As such, the risk/needs that are outlined in this model and that will be examined in the present profile will include: employment; family/marital; associates (i.e., peers); substance abuse; community; emotional/personal issues; attitudes; and, criminal history.

Furthermore, there were three additional issues that were selected to be summarized including: 1) institutional adjustment; 2) networks of social support; and, 3) programming issues. Each of these areas has emerged in the literature as being particularly important to older offenders (e.g., Kratcoski & Babb, 1990; Lemieux et al., 2002). A comprehensive overview of what is known thus far with regard to the specific needs of the older female offender in these domains is presented.

### **Institutional adjustment**

Institutional adjustment refers to the functioning of an offender within the prison population. Generally, it is defined as the frequency of institutional misconduct or infractions, and may be measured via numbers of verbal warnings, institutional charges, and/or days spent in segregation. In order to better understand what leads to this misconduct, some of the underlying variables responsible for institutional maladjustment should be considered.

For the most part, studies that have looked at adaptation to prison tend to concentrate on males. However, a noteworthy study by Kratcoski and Babb (1990) looked at gender as a mediating factor in the institutional adjustment of older inmates in three state institutions. Their results indicated that, in comparison to older male offenders, older women were less likely to become involved in recreational activities and exercise programs, less likely to participate in self-help groups, and more likely to view other inmates as aggressive or violent. Needless to say, many similar concerns were expressed by both male and female older offenders. Specifically, older inmates in general were unhappy with their living conditions. For example, many complained that their accommodations were too noisy and that they were being bunked too far from the bathrooms. While recognizing the relevance of this research, these conclusions are difficult to generalize due to the differences between Canadian and American penal institutions, and further research is needed to look at the institutional adjustment of incarcerated aging women offenders in Canada.

### **Social support**

One factor that may play an influential role in the institutional adjustment of an older woman offender is the quality and quantity of relationships they are able to maintain while in the institution. The extent to which they are isolated from their families and friends may play a significant role in their adjustment to the prison environment (Aday, 2003; Kratcoski & Babb, 1990). As there are six (multi-level security) women's institutions within Canada, this necessitates that many women (particularly northern residents) will leave their communities to serve their sentence at one of these institutions. As a result, they are often at a distance from their home, family, and friends. By coming into contact with the criminal justice system, their social networks are disrupted and they consequently become vulnerable to loneliness (Beal, 2006). Moreover, it has been shown that older females suffer a more significant amount of loneliness than males (Beal, 2006).

Some researchers have found that older women offenders have little interaction with other offenders, and were less likely to have visitors than older male offenders (Kratcoski & Babb, 1990). It has been speculated that one possible consequence of this is that older women offenders feel a greater sense of isolation than men, due to the lack of a

support system both within and outside the institution (Kratcoski & Babb, 1990). Relational theory postulates that women tend to define themselves in accordance with their relationships with others (Miller, 1986). Based upon this theory, and as a result of the isolation and loneliness suffered by older women offenders, it is expected that they will have higher assessed relational needs than their younger counterparts. Additionally, as it has been postulated that having social support results in better institutional adjustment (Kratcoski & Babb, 1990), it is hypothesized that older women offenders demonstrating a high level of relational needs will be involved in a significant number of institutional misconducts.

In contrast to researchers who claim that older women feel isolated within the institutions, other scholars argue that the environment of a women's prison "fosters the development of interpersonal relationships between offenders" (Williams & Rikard, 2004, p. 132). Additionally, it has been speculated that adult female offenders have higher levels of social support than do adult male offenders (Jiang & Winfree, 2006). Although the importance of a support system both inside and outside the institution is evident, whether or not older women offenders are lacking this social support is still unclear. The current study will provide some insight as to these women's social support system outside of the institution by examining whether or not they have received any visitors within their last year of incarceration.

### **Accessibility and use of programs**

Program utilization has been shown to improve the chances of successful institutional adjustment and help in the effective reintegration of offenders into the community (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Whitney-Gildea, 2001). However, "what works" with older offenders in terms of program and treatment success has yet to be examined. A necessary first step, and one that this profile will examine, is determining what programs are in fact being used by older female offenders, and how many older women successfully complete the programs in which they enrol. It is hoped that future research will expand upon this first step and examine to what extent these programs are accessible to older female offenders, what additional programs are needed, and what sorts of barriers are keeping them from enrolling in or completing those that are offered.

## Evidence for a Typology

The development of a classification system is valuable as it has been postulated that differences in terms of institutional adjustment, program needs, and decisions regarding release may be found between each group (Aday, 1994; Morton, 1992). Previously, studies have shown that older male offenders can be categorized into a typology comprised of three groups based upon their offence history (Aday, 1994; Uzoaba, 1998). These include: 1) *Old offenders* (i.e., offenders who committed their first offence late in life); 2) *Recidivists* (i.e., offenders who are habitual offenders or who are career criminals); and 3) *Lifers*<sup>1</sup> (i.e., those serving a long term sentence who were incarcerated at a young age). Unfortunately there is a great deal of ambiguity in these categories (i.e., ‘lifer’/long term, or ‘old’/late in life) when defining where each offender rightfully falls. Other researchers have used a fourth category to distinguish those offenders who were convicted of their first offence before they were older (i.e., prior to 55 when the criterion for older was 55) and were serving short term sentences, therefore they were not considered to be “lifers” (Goetting, 1984). This fourth category is useful in classifying those offenders that fall between being an ‘old offender’ and a ‘long term offender’. However, deciding upon a cut-off remains a challenge. Goetting (1984) defines old-timers (i.e., those with a long term sentence) as those who had been incarcerated before the age of 55, and had already served at least 20 years on their most recent sentence. In referring to the literature within the Correctional Service of Canada, a long-term offender is classified as an offender serving a sentence of 10 years or more (Federally Sentenced Women Program, 1994; Perron & Hastings, 1990). Consequently, this criterion will be utilized in the present study to define a long term offender. A fourth category, *middle age first-time offenders*, will also be used in order to classify those offenders who were not an old offender at the time of their index offence (i.e., they committed their crime prior to 50 years of age) or who are not a long term offender (as they received a sentence of less than 10 years).

To summarize, the categories of the typology used to assess the sample of older women in the current study consist of 1) *older first-time offenders* (those who committed

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<sup>1</sup> While this category has been called “Lifers” in previous literature, it is not used to exclusively identify those offenders serving life sentences; rather, this category identifies older offenders who were incarcerated when they were younger and who have been serving long-term sentences.

their first offence after 50 years of age); 2) *middle age first-time offenders* (those who committed their first offence prior to 50 years of age and received a sentence of less than 10 years); 3) *recidivists* (those who have served more than one federal sentence); and, 4) *long term first-time offenders*<sup>2</sup> (those who committed their first offence prior to the age of 50 and received a sentence of 10 years or more). While this typology has been examined for older male offenders, it has yet to be examined for older women offenders. Therefore, in order to assess the heterogeneity of this specific population, the present study will also examine if older women offenders fit into a unique classification scheme based upon their offence history.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The current study is largely exploratory, looking to examine and better understand the needs of older women serving federal sentences in Canada. Given this exploratory nature, the primary purpose of this study was to provide a profile of the aging woman offender serving a federal sentence. It is hoped that this profile will be a first step in drawing attention to some of the unique issues faced by older women offenders within institutions and communities, and provide some guidance on how best to address their specific needs within CSC.

A second purpose of this profile was to compare the assessed levels of risk and need of older women (over 50 years of age) and younger women (under 50 years of age) offenders. This will assist in clarifying the unique needs of older women offenders in contrast to the more general needs applicable to women of all ages.

As several additional issues were identified as being particularly important to the older female offender, comparisons between older and younger offenders in these domains are also presented. The needs that were examined include institutional adjustment, networks of social support, and the accessibility and use of programs.

Comparisons between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal women were intended as part of the study; however, due to the small number of Aboriginal women over the age of 50 ( $n = 17$ ), and an even smaller number with identified criminogenic

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<sup>2</sup> This title is distinct from offenders who are serving an LTSO (long-term supervision order) and the two titles should not be confused. Long-term offenders are not necessarily serving LTSOs and therefore should not be mistaken with these offenders.

needs ( $n = 5$ ), separating this subgroup of offenders for comparative analyses may have been detrimental to the confidentiality and anonymity of these women. Therefore, Aboriginal women were incorporated in the overall sample of older women offenders throughout this report.

Lastly, the current study was concerned with seeing whether or not older women offenders could fit into a similar classification scheme as identified in the literature on older male offenders.



## Methodology

### Sample

The Offender Management System (OMS), the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC)'s automated offender database, was used to identify all women who were over 50 years of age as of February 2008 ( $N = 160$ ) including women within federal institutions ( $n = 54$ ) and in the community ( $n = 106$ ). A sample of randomly selected younger offenders ( $n = 160$ ; under 50 years of age) was matched based upon the offenders' location (i.e., community vs. institution) and used as a comparison group for each of the areas examined. This comparison group shall be referred to as 'younger women offenders' throughout this report.

Although there was a total of 160 women over the age of 50 within the OMS database, the sample size fluctuates throughout the analyses as a result of missing data. Where there is missing data, the sample size is indicated. Additionally, the sample size fluctuates depending on the timeframe of the analyses being conducted. In order to examine issues as they affect *older women*, women were only included in given analyses when they were 50 years or older at the time of the data being examined. Where these instances occur, the appropriate sample size is indicated.

### Measures and Analyses

All data used in the study were extracted from OMS. To facilitate the reading of this report, similar variables are grouped together, examined and results are presented within four different areas. The first provides a descriptive analysis of the demographic variables (i.e., age distributions, race, and marital status) of both older female offenders and those in the comparison group (i.e., younger offenders). Additionally, offence types were examined for both women in the community and in the institutions and release types were contrasted between older (only those released after 50 years of age) and younger women. Next, the second section provides information pertaining to risk, criminogenic needs and motivation and presents comparisons between older and younger offenders. In the third section other issues deemed important to older offenders are examined (institutional adjustment, social support and programming), results are presented and

again comparisons are drawn between older and younger offenders. The final section to this report presents the results of the exploratory typology analyses.

### **Risk, needs and motivation**

The Correctional Plan Progress Report (CPPR) is used to review progress made against the offender's correctional plan and assess changes in levels of risk to re-offend, criminogenic need (i.e., the seven need domains, as listed below), motivation (i.e., willingness and drive to work towards change), and reintegration potential (i.e., risk offender poses to the community) over the course of their sentence (CSC, 2007a). These data were extracted from the CPPR most proximal to the study date (i.e., February 2008) in order to reflect the women's most current level of risk and needs. The specific criminogenic needs (i.e., those needs that, when targeted through intervention can reduce the risk to re-offend) that were examined were employment, family/marital, associates (i.e., peers), substance abuse, community functioning, emotional/personal, and attitude. As many of the older women offenders in this population only began their current sentence within the last year (17.5%) and subsequently had no CPPRs completed, or were released before CPPR administration became common practice, data were limited to 73 older women in terms of ratings for overall risk, need, motivation, and reintegration potential. Additionally, only older women who were over 50 years of age at the time of the CPPR assessment were included in the analyses to ensure that the needs of the older woman were exclusively identified.

To determine if older women offenders have unique needs in comparison to their younger counterparts, the results were laid out by age categories, namely, younger offenders and older offenders. A number of chi-square analyses were used to examine the levels of risk and need of older women offenders in contrast to younger offenders.

### **Institutional misconduct**

In order to determine how well older women were adjusting to the institutional lifestyle, offenders' involvement in institutional misconduct was examined. Both major and minor incidents were examined in relation to the role that the offender played in the act, whether it was victim or perpetrator. Major disciplinary offences or misconduct included: homicide, assault, sexual assault, fighting, threatening behaviour, hostage

taking, inciting to riot/ strike, possession of drugs, possession of weapons, and escape/ attempt. Minor incidents included remaining offences not classified as a major misconduct above (e.g., being in a restricted area, damaging/destroying property). Records of institutional misconduct were retrieved for all offenders in the *last year of incarceration* most proximal to this study's end date. Only those offenders who were 50 years or older during their last year of incarceration were included in the analyses. Additionally, there was a broad range in the number of institutional incidents an offender had over the course of a year resulting in a distribution that was extremely skewed and kurtotic. To remedy this, the variables were dichotomized (minor and major misconduct were considered separately) to allow for statistical analyses (i.e., categorized as yes or no). A chi-square analysis was used to compare the number of incidents committed by older women offenders to their younger counterparts.

### **Visitation**

To examine the existence of a social support system from outside the institution, visitations received while incarcerated was used as a proxy. For this, the number of visits for each woman in her last year of incarceration most proximal to the current study was examined. In addition to regular visits, private family visits (PFVs) were also considered. This type of visitation provides the opportunity for offenders to meet privately with family in order to maintain or re-establish familial relationships (CSC, 2008).

There was a broad range in the number of visitors an offender had over the last year of their incarceration, resulting in a skewed distribution. Therefore, these data were examined in two ways. Data were first dichotomized to examine those offenders who had received any visits or PFVs (i.e., at least one visitor/ no visitors). Additionally, data were truncated at 12 for visits and four for PFVs to appropriately analyze the distribution of number of visits<sup>3</sup>. To examine the differences between older and younger women offenders, only those women over the age of 50 upon release, and those currently incarcerated were included in a chi-square analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> To correct for positively skewed data, this method has been previously employed by other studies which have examined visitation data (e.g., Derkzen, Gobeil & Gileno, 2009).

### **Program participation**

The programs that older women participated in over the course of their most current sentence were examined. Both the number of women enrolled in each program, and the completion rate of those enrolled were considered. It should be noted that there were numerous reasons for non-completion including: program failure, suspension, withdrawal, parole, transfer, release, or simply, they had not completed the program at the time of this snapshot. Due to this wide array of reasons for non-completion, only tentative conclusions can be made with regard to success rates. A number of chi-squares were conducted to look at differences between older and younger offenders in both their enrolment and completion of each type of program. However, due to the small cell size of women participating in certain programs (i.e., sex offender, health, and violence programs), statistical analyses were not possible for every program.

### **Operationalization of Key Terms**

The following section provides definitions of some of the key terminology and concepts that are used by the CSC and in reporting the results of the current study.

#### **Index Offence**

For the purposes of the current report, the term *index offence* will be used to refer to the offence which was committed and resulted in an offender's current conviction and term of incarceration.

#### **Release Types**

##### ***Day parole***

Day parole is a form of conditional release that can typically be granted to an offender six months prior to his or her full parole eligibility. Day parole is granted to permit offenders to be in the community to work or volunteer during the day, but requires that they return to a federal correctional institution or community-based residential facility at night (CCRA, 1992).

### ***Full parole***

Full parole can be granted to an offender after one-third of his or her sentence has been served. This type of conditional release allows an offender to be in the community during his or her sentence (CCRA, 1992).

### ***Statutory release***

Statutory release is an offender's entitled release to a period of community supervision after he or she has served two-thirds of his or her sentence (CCRA, 1992).

## **Offender assessment: Risk, need, motivation and reintegration potential**

### ***Overall risk***

Determining an overall risk level is essential as it is used to establish the level of service required for each offender. A rating of low, medium, or high risk is given to offenders based on an assessment of static factors concerning criminal history, offence severity and sex offence history (CSC, 2007b).

### ***Overall criminogenic need***

An overall criminogenic need rating is also used to determine the level of service intervention an offender requires. A rating of low, medium or high need is given to an offender based on the severity and number of criminogenic need domains he or she presents with (CSC, 2007b).

### ***Criminogenic need domains***

The seven criminogenic need domains are individually assessed and assigned a rating of one of the following options: considerable need for improvement; some need for improvement; no need for improvement; or, factor seen as an asset<sup>4</sup> (CSC, 2007b). As per correctional planning and criminal profile guidelines (CSC, 2007b), the seven domains are defined as follows:

*Employment* assesses the value an individual places on education and work and the role these have in one's life;

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<sup>4</sup> Since the time of data collection for this report, indicators which assess criminogenic needs have changed. The original tool, the Dynamic Factor Intake Assessment (DFIA), which was employed at the time data were collected for this report, has since been revised and an updated tool, the DFIA-R, has been implemented.

*Marital/family* assesses the value one puts on being with family and the support derived from them;

*Associates* assesses the value one puts on associating with non-criminal peers and an individual's opportunity for pro-social interpersonal interactions;

*Substance abuse* assesses the value an individual puts on living a life free from the use of drugs or alcohol;

*Community functioning* assesses the value of an individual's knowledge of, and ability to use skills necessary for daily living;

*Personal/emotional* assesses the amount of control one exerts over his or her own life; and,

*Attitude* assesses an individual's ability to live in a law-abiding and prosocial manner.

### ***Motivation***

An offender's level of motivation is assessed as being either low, medium or high based on the individual's drive and willingness to complete his or her correctional plan (CSC, 2007b).

### ***Reintegration potential***

Reintegration potential is used to assess the risk an offender poses to the community when making decisions regarding his or her required level of intervention or when being considered for conditional release (CSC, 2003). For women offenders, this rating is based on an assessment of the Custody Rating Scale, and both the Dynamic (i.e., overall needs) and Static (i.e., overall risk) Factor Ratings (CSC, 2007b).

## Results

### Descriptive Profile

The average age of the older women was 57.8 years ( $SD = 7.66$ ) with an age range of 50 to 97 years. Despite this wide range of ages, nearly half of the population were between the ages of 50 and 54 years old (46.9%), while another quarter were between the ages of 55 and 59 (26.3%). The average age of the younger women offenders was 34.3 years ( $SD = 7.75$ ) and ranged from 19.7 to 49.9 years of age. See Table 1 for a complete distribution of ages for both older and younger women.

Of the 153 older women for whom ethnicity was available as a descriptor in OMS, nearly three-quarters were Caucasian (70.6%), with Aboriginal women (10.6%) comprising the next largest ethnic group (Table 2). While most of the younger women were also Caucasian (56.3%), the proportion of Aboriginal women was higher than that of the older women sample, representing over a quarter of the younger women (28.1%).

At intake, a considerable number of older women were involved in a relationship, either common-law or married (39.4%) or had been in a relationship that ended in divorce or separation (21.9%; Table 2). Interestingly, although many of the younger women were single (51.3%), a similar proportion of younger females (32.9%) identified as being married or having a common-law partner.

Table 1

*Age distributions*

Older women	<i>n</i> (%)
50-54	75 (46.9)
55-59	42 (26.3)
60-64	19 (11.9)
65-69	13 (8.1)
70 +	11 (6.9)
Younger women	<i>n</i> (%)
<29	54 (33.8)
30-34	32 (20.0)
35-39	28 (17.5)
40-44	32 (20.0)
45-49	14 (8.8)

*Note.* *n* = 160 for each sample.



Table 2

*Demographic characteristics of the population*

	N (%)	
	Older women ( <i>n</i> = 153)	Younger women ( <i>n</i> = 157)
<b>Race</b>		
White/Caucasian	113 (70.6)	90 (56.3)
Black	8 (5.0)	13 (8.1)
Aboriginal <sup>1</sup>	17 (10.6)	45 (28.1)
Asian <sup>2</sup>	8 (5.0)	5 (3.1)
Other/unknown <sup>3</sup>	7 (4.4)	4 (2.5)
	N (%)	
	Older women ( <i>n</i> = 160)	Younger women ( <i>n</i> = 160)
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married/Common-law	63 (39.4)	53 (32.9)
Divorced/Separated	35 (21.9)	21 (13.0)
Single	35 (21.9)	82 (51.3)
Widowed	22 (13.8)	2 (1.3)
Unknown/Other	5 (3.1)	2 (1.3)

*Note.* <sup>1</sup> Includes Métis, North American Indians and Inuit people; <sup>2</sup> Includes South Asians, South-east Asians, Chinese, West Asian/Arab, Asiatic and Filipinos; <sup>3</sup> Includes Latin Americans, other, and unknown.

### Older women offenders in the institutions

At the time the snapshot was taken for this profile, 54 older women were incarcerated. Incarcerated older women had a mean age of 56.36 years ( $SD = 6.02$ ), ranging from 50 to 70.

Most of the older women currently in the institutions were serving sentences for homicide (53.7%; Table 5). Interestingly, while a third of the younger women offenders were also serving sentences for homicide convictions (33.3%), they had higher rates for other violent offences (i.e., robbery, assault, other) than older women (61.1% vs. 20.4%).

Table 3

#### *Index offences of women offenders in the institutions*

Offence Type	Older women <i>n</i> (%)	Younger women <i>n</i> (%)
Homicide	29 (53.7)	18 (33.3)
Attempted murder	3 (5.6)	0 (0)
Sex offence	2 (3.7)	1 (1.9)
Robbery	2 (3.7)	12 (22.2)
Assault	5 (9.3)	15 (27.8)
Other violent	4 (7.4)	6 (11.1)
Impaired driving	0 (0)	5 (9.3)
Property offence <sup>1</sup>	9 (16.7)	18 (33.3)
Drug offence	10 (18.5)	7 (13.0)
Other <sup>2</sup>	18 (33.3)	29 (53.7)

*Note.*  $n = 54$  for each sample; a number of women were charged with more than one offence; <sup>1</sup> This includes break and enter offences, as well as other property-related offences. <sup>2</sup> Throughout this report, the term 'other' offence refers to crimes that could not be categorized into one of the previous offence categories (e.g., failure to comply, breach of probation, disguise with intent).

### Older women offenders under community supervision

At the time of data collection, 106 of the 160 older offenders were serving the remainder of their sentence in the community. Their mean age at the time of data extraction was 58.59 ( $SD = 8.29$ ), and ranged from 50 to 97 years of age.

Most of the older women in the community (82.1%) were serving their first federal sentence. Nearly half had an index offence of homicide (48.1%; Table 4), while a quarter were convicted of a drug offence (24.5%). Less younger women in the community were convicted of homicide offences (19.8%), while more were convicted of drug offences (37.7%). Compared to their older counterparts, more younger women had been convicted for other violent offences (32.0% vs. 9.5%) and property offences (i.e., break and enter, other; 33.0% vs. 20.7%).

Table 4

#### *Index offences of women offenders under community supervision*

	Older women	Younger women
Offence Type	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Homicide	51 (48.1)	21 (19.8)
Attempted murder	2 (1.9)	2 (1.9)
Sex offence	1 (0.9)	2 (1.9)
Robbery	2 (1.9)	14 (13.2)
Assault	4 (3.8)	12 (11.3)
Other violent	4 (3.8)	8 (7.5)
Impaired driving	1 (0.9)	0 (0)
Property offence <sup>1</sup>	22 (20.8)	35 (33.0)
Drug offence	26 (24.5)	40 (37.7)
Other	25 (23.6)	57 (53.8)

*Note.*  $n = 106$  for each sample; a number of women were charged with more than one offence. <sup>1</sup> This includes break and enter offences, as well as other property-related offences.

### Release types of women under community supervision

In order to examine differences in release types of the older women offenders, only those who were 50 years or older at the time of their release were included in the analyses ( $n = 59$ ). The majority of older women were released on full parole (67.8%) or day parole (20.3%; see Table 4). Further analyses were conducted to examine potential differences between older and younger women on day parole, full parole, and statutory release. When compared to younger offenders, older women were significantly less likely to be released on statutory release and were more likely to be granted full parole ( $\chi^2(2) = 7.61, p < .05$ ).

Table 5

#### *Release types of women under community supervision*

Type of Release	Older women <i>n</i> (%)	Younger women <i>n</i> (%)
Day parole	12 (20.3)	25 (24.5)
Full parole	40 (67.8)	49 (48.0)
Statutory release	6 (10.2)	26 (25.5)
Long Term Supervision	1 (1.7)	2 (2.0)
Total <i>n</i>	59	102

*Note.* While data pertaining to homicide-related offences were not disaggregated to analyze for those women serving sentences for murder or manslaughter, the proportion of older women who received full parole is likely greater as a result of the number of older women serving sentences for homicide-related convictions. Of the 59 older women included in these analyses, 51 were convicted of homicide offences, as compared to the 21 younger women who were. This will influence the proportion of women receiving full parole versus statutory release as offenders convicted of murder cannot receive statutory release.

## Risk, Need, and Motivation of Older Women Offenders

Only women over 50 years of age at the time of the assessment were included in these analyses ( $n = 73$ ). Each risk or need rating was presented alongside a comparison group of 116 younger offenders for total ratings of risk, need, motivation and reintegration potential.

### Criminogenic needs

When looking at the overall needs ratings, only 13.7% of the older women were found as presenting with a 'high' level of needs (see Table 6). Older women were significantly more likely to have a lower overall needs rating in contrast to younger women (45.2% vs. 15.5%;  $\chi^2(2) = 26.84, p < .001$ ). Accordingly, older women were also less likely to be identified as having a high rating in overall needs in comparison to their younger counterparts.

Table 6

#### *Overall needs*

	Older women	Younger women
Needs	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Low	33 (45.2)	18 (15.5)
Moderate	30 (41.1)	48 (41.4)
High	10 (13.7)	50 (43.1)
Total <i>n</i>	73	116

### **Criminogenic need domains**

Table 7 presents a summary of the need domains and the frequency of women who exhibited either ‘some need’ or ‘considerable need’ in each of these areas. Nearly three-quarters of the older women (74.0%) exhibit some or considerable need in the personal/emotional domain, while half the sample (50.9%) have high needs in the associates domain. It appears that younger women exhibit higher needs across all domains than older women; this is especially so for the domains of employment, associates and substance abuse.

For a detailed analysis of each need domain, including chi-square tests comparing older and younger women, see Appendix 1.

Table 7

#### *Proportion of Women Exhibiting ‘Some’ or ‘Considerable’ Needs*

	Older women	Younger women
Needs	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Employment	30 (41.1)	79 (71.3)
Family/Marital	32 (43.9)	67 (58.3)
Associates	37 (50.7)	81 (70.4)
Substance Abuse	27 (37.0)	81 (70.4)
Community Functioning	22 (30.1)	37 (32.2)
Personal/Emotional	54 (74.0)	93 (80.8)
Attitudes	16 (21.9)	39 (33.9)

*Note.* Totals do not sum to 100% as the each domain was considered separately amongst the sample groups. Older women: *N* = 73. Younger women: *N* = 116.

### Overall risk

Results indicate that most of the older women were scored as being either low, or moderate risk (89.9%; Table 8).

Compared to older women, younger women were significantly more likely to be classified as having either a moderate (35.1% vs. 43.1%) or high (9.6% vs. 19.8%) level of overall risk ( $\chi^2(2) = 6.79, p < .05$ ).

Table 8

#### *Overall risk*

	Older women	Younger women
Risk	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Low	40 (54.8)	43 (37.1)
Moderate	26 (35.1)	50 (43.1)
High	7 (9.6)	23 (19.8)
Total <i>n</i>	73	116

### Motivation

Motivation is determined by assessing an offender's drive and willingness to complete their correctional plan. Motivation levels as assessed by the CPPR indicate that overall, older women offenders were scored as having a high level of motivation (64.4%; Table 9). Very few older women were scored as having low motivation (4.1%).

Given that younger women were found to have similar levels of motivation, no significant difference in scores for overall motivation was found between the two age groups.

Table 9

*Motivation*

	Older women	Younger women
Motivation	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Low	3 (4.1)	5 (4.3)
Moderate	23 (31.5)	29 (25.0)
High	47 (64.4)	82 (70.7)
Total <i>n</i>	73	116

**Reintegration potential**

When examining the differences between older and younger women's reintegration potential (Table 10), it was found that older women were significantly more likely to be scored as having high reintegration potential (68.5%) when compared to their younger counterparts (49.1%;  $\chi^2(2) = 11.18, p < .01$ ).

Table 10

*Reintegration potential*

	Older women	Younger women
Reintegration potential	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Low	1 (1.4)	15 (12.9)
Moderate	22 (30.1)	44 (37.9)
High	50 (68.5)	57 (49.1)
Total <i>n</i>	73	116



## Other Issues Pertinent to Older Women Offenders

### **Institutional adjustment: Institutional misconduct (within a one year period of incarceration)**

Only three of the older offenders were found to have been victims of a major institutional misconduct and none were found to have been victims to any minor institutional misconduct (Table 11). Due to these low base rates statistical analyses could not be conducted to compare older and younger women's victimization in institutional misconduct. This is an important finding given that previous research, though often focussing on male offenders, has argued that older offenders are often victimized in correctional institutions (e.g., Kratcoski & Babb, 1990).

With regard to offenders' perpetration of institutional misconduct, younger women were significantly more likely to perpetrate minor misconduct within the last year of incarceration than older women (33.8% vs. 8.8%;  $\chi^2(1) = 35.70, p < .001$ ), but no significant differences were found with regard to major misconduct.

Table 11

#### *Institutional misconduct within a one year period of incarceration*

	Older women	Younger women
Role	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Victim		
Major	3 (2.6)	6 (3.8)
Minor	0 (0)	9 (5.6)
Perpetrator		
Major	8 (7.0)	15 (9.4)
Minor	10 (8.8)	54 (33.8)
Total <i>n</i>	114	160

*Note.* Age was determined by calculating the women's age at the time of their most recent year of incarceration proximal to the study date.

### **Social support: Visitation (within a one year period of incarceration)**

Overall, 50 of the older women (43.9%) received at least one visitor within their last year of incarceration. Of these visitors, 14 (12.3%) were private family visits (Table 12). Older women received an average of 3.3 ( $SD = 4.7$ ) visits and an average of 0.3 ( $SD = 0.9$ ) PFVs, while younger women received similar averages of 3.7 ( $SD = 4.8$ ) visits and 0.2 ( $SD = 0.6$ ) PFVs.

No significant differences were found between older and younger women with regard to visitation.

Table 12

*Number of visits within a one year period of incarceration*

	Older women	Younger women
Visits	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Received any visitors	50 (43.9)	85 (53.1)
Distribution of # of visits received		
1-4	17 (14.9)	35 (21.9)
4-9	12 (10.5)	15 (9.4)
10+	21 (18.4)	35 (21.9)
Received any private family visitors	14 (12.3)	15 (9.4)
Distribution of # of pfvs received		
1	6 (5.3)	8 (5.0)
2	2 (1.8)	4 (2.5)
3	0 (0.0)	2 (1.3)
4+	6 (5.3)	1 (0.6)
Total <i>n</i>	114	160

*Note.* Age was determined by calculating the women's age at the time of their most recent year of incarceration proximal to the study date.

### **Program participation**

In terms of older women's involvement in correctional programs, it appears that 'other' programs (e.g., chaplaincy, special needs, ethno-cultural, personal development, and visit programs) were most commonly used (75.0%; Table 13). Older women were significantly more likely to enrol ( $\chi^2(1) = 30.00, p < .001$ ) and complete ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.54, p < .05$ ) these non-criminogenic programs, as compared to their younger counterparts.

Younger women were more likely to enrol in educational programs ( $\chi^2(1) = 33.82, p < .001$ ), substance abuse programs ( $\chi^2(1) = 31.92, p < .001$ ), psychology programs ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.45, p < .05$ ) and living skills programs ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.98, p < .05$ ). When comparing program completion rates between the samples of older and younger offenders, older offenders had a significantly higher completion rate for women specific programs ( $\chi^2(1) = 9.60, p < .01$ ), while younger offenders had a significantly higher completion rate for educational programs ( $\chi^2(1) = 10.32, p < .01$ ).

Table 13

*Programs: Enrolled and proportion completed on current sentence*

Program Type	Enrolled			Completed <sup>1</sup>		
	<i>n</i> (% of total sample)		$\chi^2$	<i>n</i> (% of those enrolled)		$\chi^2$
	Older women	Younger women		Older women	Younger women	
Violence	11 (6.9)	13 (8.1)	<i>ns</i>	11 (100.0)	11 (84.6)	--
Education	52 (32.5)	104 (65.0)	***	25 (48.1)	77 (74.0)	**
Sex offender	1 (0.6)	2 (1.3)	--	0 (0.0)	2 (100.0)	--
Substance abuse	31 (19.4)	79 (49.4)	***	21 (67.7)	56 (70.9)	<i>ns</i>
Women specific	31 (19.4)	54 (33.8)	<i>ns</i>	29 (93.5)	34 (63.0)	**
Psychology	21 (13.1)	39 (24.4)	**	14 (66.7)	27 (69.2)	<i>ns</i>
Health	10 (6.3)	16 (10.0)	<i>ns</i>	10 (100.0)	16 (100.0)	--
Family violence	7 (4.4)	7 (4.4)	<i>ns</i>	7 (100.0)	3 (42.9)	--
Living skills	46 (28.8)	65 (40.6)	*	43 (93.5)	61 (93.8)	--
Employment	38 (23.8)	45 (28.1)	<i>ns</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A
Aboriginal specific	10 (6.3)	14 (8.8)	<i>ns</i>	8 (80.0)	13 (86.7)	--
Non-criminogenic <sup>2</sup>	120 (75.0)	72 (45.0)	***	98 (82.0)	47 (65.3)	*

*Note*<sup>1</sup> Only includes those who enrolled in the program. <sup>2</sup>Non-criminogenic programs refers to those programs that could not be categorized in one of the previous categories (e.g., chaplaincy, personal development). As there is no determined end date for employment, only enrolment can be examined; when a cell had an expected value of less than 5, chi-square was not calculated (indicated by --).

\*p < .05. \*\* p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001. *ns* = not significant.

## **Criminal History**

Adult criminal history was examined to see how well older women fit into the typologies created for older male offenders. These included: 1) *first-time offenders* (i.e., offenders who committed their first offence after the age of 50); 2) *recidivists* (offenders over the age of 50 who are habitual offenders or who have committed more than one offence); and 3) *long term first-time offenders* (i.e., those offenders over the age of 50 who are serving a long term sentence for a crime committed early in life) (Aday, 1994; Uzoaba, 1998). A fourth category, *middle age offenders*, will also be used in order to classify those offenders who are not deemed an old first-time offender (as they committed their crime prior to 50 years of age) or a long term offender (as they received a sentence of less than 10 years).

The average age of first federal sentence for older women offenders was approximately 45 years of age ( $M = 45.98$ ,  $SD = 11.4$ ). Interestingly, of the 161 older women in this profile, 129 (80.1%) were serving a sentence for their first federal sentence and 76 (47.2%) women were over the age of 50 when they committed the current offence. Of the 76 women who committed the index offence after the age of 50, 66 (87%) were serving time for their first federal sentence and 13 (17.1%) were repeat offenders (i.e., serving time for at least their second federal sentence). Comparably, 76.4% ( $n = 123$ ) of the younger women in the comparison sample were also serving time for their first federal sentence.

The offence type was broken down by age at the time of the index offence to examine the nature of crimes being committed by older women. This was done to assist in determining the appropriate typology category by establishing whether a woman's index offence was committed before or after the age of 50 (Table 14). Interestingly, the most common crime across all age categories was homicide, with half of the women (50.0%) serving a sentence for a crime of this nature.

Table 14

*Older women: Current offence by age at time of offence*

	Younger than 50	50 or older	Total <sup>1</sup>
	( <i>n</i> = 85)	( <i>n</i> = 75)	( <i>n</i> = 160)
Offence type	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Homicide	56 (65.9)	24 (32.0)	80 (50.0)
Attempt. murder	4 (4.7)	1 (1.3)	5 (3.1)
Sexual offence	1 (1.2)	2 (2.7)	3 (1.9)
Robbery	2 (2.4)	2 (2.7)	4 (2.5)
Assault	3 (3.5)	6 (8.0)	9 (5.6)
Other violent	5 (5.9)	3 (4.0)	8 (5.0)
Impaired driving	1 (1.2)	0 (0)	1 (0.6)
Break and enter	2 (2.4)	0 (0)	2 (1.3)
Other property	15 (17.6)	14 (18.7)	29 (18.1)
Drug-related	12 (14.1)	24 (32.0)	36 (22.5)
Other <sup>2</sup>	21 (24.7)	23 (29.3)	44 (26.9)

*Note.* <sup>1</sup>A number of women charged with more than one offence therefore total *n* ≠ 160; <sup>2</sup>Other offences refers to those crimes that could not be categorized in one of the previous categories; all percentages were based upon their respective sample of offenders.

### Examination of a potential typology

Overall, it was found that a small proportion of female offenders, regardless of age, were repeat offenders. Table 15 demonstrates how this sample of older women offenders fit into the typology discussed earlier in this report. Over a third of the women were found to be *older first-time offenders* (37.9%) while nearly another third were *long term first-time offenders* (29.8%). It appears that women were less likely to be *middle age first-time offenders* (12.4%) or *recidivists* (19.9%).

Table 15

*Examination of a typology for older women offenders*

Classification	Incarcerated <i>n</i> (%)	In community <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i> (%)
<i>Older first-time offenders</i>			
First offence after 50 years of age	22 (40.7)	39 (36.4)	61 (37.9)
<i>Middle age first-time offenders</i>			
First offence prior to 50 years of age <sup>1</sup>	5 (9.3)	15 (14.0)	20 (12.4)
<i>Recidivists</i>			
Repeat federal offenders	13 (24.1)	19 (17.8)	32 (19.9)
<i>Long term first-time offenders</i>			
Serving a sentence of 10+ years <sup>2</sup>	14 (25.9)	34 (31.8)	48 (29.8)

*Note.* <sup>1</sup> Sentence length less than 10 years; <sup>2</sup> only includes those under 50 at the time of the current offence.  
*n* = 160.

### Current offence by typology category

Table 16 outlines women's index offences according to typology category. In order to determine how these groups vary, offence types were examined in greater detail. Results revealed that there is a significant difference in the types of crime being committed by each type of offender, including both violent offences ( $\chi^2(3) = 46.26, p < .001$ ), and non-violent offences ( $\chi^2(2) = 34.62, p < .001$ ). Specifically, it was found that *older first-time offenders* committed primarily homicide (33.3%) or drug offences (35.0%), *recidivists* committed primarily non-violent offences (i.e., impaired driving, property and drug offences; 56.3%) but also a large number of homicides (47.0%), *long term first-time offenders* committed largely violent offences (91.7% homicide offences), and *middle age first-time offenders* committed primarily non-violent offences (70.0%).

Table 16

#### Offence type by typology classification

	<i>Older first-time offenders</i>	<i>Recidivists</i>	<i>Long term first- time offenders</i>	<i>Middle Age first- time offenders</i>
Offence Type	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>n (%)</i>
Homicide	20 (33.3)	15 (46.9)	44 (91.7)	1 (5.0)
Attempted murder	1 (1.7)	0 (0.0)	4 (8.3)	0 (0.0)
Sex offence	2 (3.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.1)	0 (0.0)
Robbery	1 (1.7)	1 (3.1)	2 (4.2)	0 (0.0)
Assault	4 (6.7)	3 (9.4)	0 (0.0)	2 (10.0)
Other violent	2 (3.3)	2 (6.3)	3 (6.3)	1 (5.0)
Impaired driving	0 (0.0)	1 (3.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Other property <sup>1</sup>	8 (13.3)	12 (37.5)	6 (12.5)	5 (25.0)
Drug offence	21 (35.0)	5 (15.6)	1 (2.1)	9 (45.0)
Other <sup>2</sup>	15 (25.0)	13 (40.6)	7 (14.6)	8 (40.0)

*Note.* Sample sizes for each typology category are as follows: older first-time offenders  $n=60$ ; recidivists  $n=32$ ; long term first-time offenders  $n=48$ ; and, middle age first-time offenders  $n=20$ . A number of women were charged with more than one offence therefore total  $n \neq 160$ .

*Note 2.* Percentages represent the proportion of women from the specific typology categories who were convicted of that offence type.

<sup>1</sup>Includes break and enter offences, as well as other property-related offences. <sup>2</sup>Other offences refers to those crimes that could not be categorized in one of the previous categories.



## **Discussion**

This profile has highlighted several issues unique to older women offenders that set them apart from the remainder of the women offender population. There were three primary objectives of this study: 1) to provide a comprehensive profile of older women offenders; 2) to examine comparisons between older and younger offenders in levels of risk, criminogenic needs, and additional factors identified as being pertinent to older offenders; and, 3) to assess the relevance/use of a typology to classify older women offenders. Each of these questions was addressed throughout this report; however, there are a number of areas that could be explored in more depth in subsequent research.

In terms of the specific criminogenic needs, the personal/emotional domain emerged as being the most prominent, with three-quarters of the sample demonstrating some or considerable need in this area. The associates and family/marital domains emerged as the next most prominent needs domains in older women. This finding, in line with relational theory (Miller, 1986), supports the hypothesis that older women offenders will have more relational needs due to the disruption of their social networks as a result of incarceration (Beal, 2006); this was particularly evident in the domains of family and associates. Furthermore, given the number of women with identified personal and emotional needs, it could be beneficial to consider programming and intervention options that address these areas specifically within the older women offender population.

When compared to their younger counterparts, results demonstrate that older women offenders were found to have lower overall needs, lower overall risk, and a higher reintegration potential. Although older women were found to have some or considerable need in a number of domains, when compared to younger women, the only significant differences found between the groups were in the domains of employment, substance abuse, associates, and attitudes; older women offenders were rated lower than younger women offenders in all of these realms. Interestingly, results from a recent CSC report profiling the needs of older male offenders demonstrates that the same four domains were significantly different for older and younger male offenders (Greiner & Allenby, in press). Specifically, it was found that younger male offenders (under 50 years old) were more likely to score higher than older male offenders in these same areas of need. This

provides preliminary evidence to suggest that there were some similarities in assessed differences of criminogenic needs between older and younger male, and older and younger female offenders.

Aside from differences found in criminogenic needs between older and younger women, there were emerging similarities and differences in more general needs as well. Using the number of visits received by older women offenders as a proxy for their social support system, it appears that older and younger woman do not differ in this regard, at least in terms of support from outside of the institution. Nonetheless, only tentative conclusions can be made. A study by Aday and Nation (2001, as cited in Aday, 2003) found that although 93% of the elderly women offenders remained in contact with members of their family, only 10% actually came to visit them at the institution. Given this finding, other methods, in addition to examining the number of visits, could provide more in-depth details concerning the support received by older women. For example, it could be interesting to look at women's networks of support within the institution. It has been suggested that women form friendships while incarcerated in order to minimize the loss of the social roles they held prior to institutionalization (Aday, 2003). Several studies have shown that within the institution, women form family-like structures (Aday, 2003; Jiang & Winfree, 2006) and that older women typically assume the role of the mother within these family units (Owen, 1998, as cited in Hensley & Tewksbury, 2002).

As older women's institutional adjustment can be impacted by their levels of social support (Aday, 2003; Kratcoski & Babb, 1990), it was hypothesized that older women would have significant adjustment difficulties resulting in the involvement in more institutional misconduct. Interestingly, this was not the case as it was found that older women typically were not involved in institutional misconduct as either a victim or a perpetrator. This supports previous research conducted in the United States which demonstrated that older women self-reported fewer rule violations than younger women offenders (Jiang & Winfree, 2006). However, these results were contrary to the male centered research that suggests that older offenders were more likely to be victims within the institution (Kratcoski & Babb, 1990). Additionally, it was interesting to find that younger women's results were rather similar to the older women's in this area. Specifically, it was found that while younger women's involvement in misconducts was

slightly higher than the older women, relatively few younger women were found to be victims of institutional misconducts (both major and minor) and few were found to be perpetrators of major misconducts. The only percentage that seemed to be elevated slightly was the number of younger women who were found to be perpetrators of minor incidents (33.8%).

Results of this profile indicate that there were differences in the rates of program completion and non-completion between older and younger women offenders. In general, program enrolment was lower for older women, specifically in education, living skills, substance abuse, and psychology programs. What remains unclear is whether older women fail to enrol in these programs as a result of being assessed to have low needs in these areas, or if there were other barriers in place limiting access to the programs being offered. Additionally, upon enrolment, older women were more likely to complete women specific programs, and were less likely to complete educational programs than younger women offenders. It would be beneficial to develop a dialogue with these older women in order to investigate the reasons behind such low base rates of enrolment and completion in these programs. This is particularly important as previous research suggests that women offenders who view participation in these activities as a source of support were more likely to be optimistic of their future (Whitney-Gildea, 2001). Moreover, involvement in prison activities and programs results in better emotional adjustment for women offenders (i.e., less suppressed anger or acting out; Whitney-Gildea, 2001).

In order to assess the adequacy of the typology for older women offenders, criminal history was examined and contrasted with a typology found to be relevant for older male offenders. Generally, older women offenders fell into one of four categories based upon their offence history: 1) *Older first-time offenders* ( $n = 61$ ), who had committed their first offence after 50 years of age; 2) *Long term first-time offenders* ( $n = 48$ ) who had committed their first offence prior to 50 years of age and were serving a long term sentence; 3) *Middle age first-time offenders* ( $n = 20$ ) who had committed their first offence in middle age (yet prior to 50 years of age) and received a sentence of less than 10 years; and lastly, 4) *Recidivists* ( $n = 32$ ) who had sentenced to more than one federal sentence. Goetting (1984), who employed a similar typology for older male

offenders, found that the distribution of offence types were not significantly different among each of the four inmate types. Contrary to these findings, the current results suggest that the types of crime committed by older women varied significantly by inmate type. Specifically, among the older women offenders in this profile, as one would anticipate, *long term first-time offenders* were more likely than any other group of offenders to have committed a violent offence. Additionally, *middle age first-time offenders* were more likely to have committed a non-violent offence in comparison to all the other groups.

Comparable to Uzoaba's (1998) results (17.1%), only 19.9% of the older women in the present profile were classified as recidivists (served more than one federal sentence). This is consistent with Canadian statistics that indicate that approximately 15% of the federal female offender population in 2006 were repeat offenders (Kong & AuCoin, 2008). Uzoaba also found that the majority of older male offenders were incarcerated for their first offence, either committing their first offence late in life (72.8%), or were serving a long sentence for their first offence committed while they were young (10.2%).

In the present study, the majority of older women were incarcerated for their first federal sentence (80.1%), consistent with Uzoaba's findings. However, only half of the sample of older women committed their first offence late in life (i.e., includes *older first-time offenders* or *middle age first-time offenders*). This finding deviates slightly from the male typology which found that 72.8% of older male offenders were incarcerated for their first offence late in life. This disparity could be a result of the definitions employed in this study. As women who committed their index offence prior to 50 years of age were delineated into two groups: 1) those serving a sentence of 10 years or more (*long-term first-time offenders*); and, 2) those serving a sentence of less than 10 years (*middle age first-time offenders*), there may be women who fall into the category of *long-term first-time offenders*, even if they committed their crime at 45 years of age. Although no formal definitions were given in Uzoaba's report, it appears that these offenders would have been deemed older first-time offenders. If, hypothetically speaking, one were to define "late in life" as after 40 years of age in the current study, a larger proportion of the older women would be classified as *older first-time offenders* ( $n = 102$ ; 63.4%), thereby

becoming more consistent with Uzoaba's findings. However, if a woman commits a crime at 45 years of age and receives a 15 year sentence, they will likely have different risk/needs and a very different offence history than a 45 year old woman who receives a 5 year sentence. For that reason, the groups were more concretely defined than done in previous studies.

Overall, based upon these findings, it appears that older women offenders do not fit flawlessly into a male typology. In general, based on the current study and previous research on older male offenders (e.g., Uzoaba, 1998) it appears that more men than women are being incarcerated late in life (using a criterion of 50 years of age) and that there are a larger number of older women, in comparison to men, serving a long term sentence for an offence committed early on in life. Additionally, the types of crimes committed by older men are different than that of older women. Specifically, crimes committed by older men are typically of a sexual nature (e.g., Uzoaba, 1998), whereas crimes committed by older women, as seen in this profile, are generally non-sexual, violent crimes. Specifically, almost half of the women in this profile were serving a sentence for homicide. This is in line with previous research conducted in the UK that found that the most common offences for older female offenders (over 50 years old) were violence against the person and drug offences (Wahidin, 2006).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Results of this profile were limited by the information available from the OMS. In order to look at institutional adjustment, only misconducts were considered in this report. Although older women were found to be unlikely victims or perpetrators of institutional misconducts when compared to younger women offenders, it is recommended that further research looks at other indicators of institutional adjustment to gain a better understanding of the older woman offender's experiences within Canadian federal institutions. Other measures that may be used as a proxy for institutional adjustment include relationships with other inmates and staff, participation in institutional activities, and both physical and mental health (Kratcoski & Babb, 1990).

Social support was another area which was limited by the information available on the OMS. Specifically, only visits received during a woman's final year of

incarceration were examined in this report and therefore may not reveal the full extent of social support that is received. During incarceration, social support is not only received as visits to the institution, but also includes phone calls and written correspondence, neither of which were reflected in this profile given that these data were not available through OMS. In addition, prosocial networks can be formed within the institution and these should also be considered.

As many of the older women in this profile were first-time offenders who were convicted of their first offence after the age of 50 (i.e., *middle age first-time offenders* or *older first-time offenders*), it would be of value to look at why they turned to crime at such a late age. There are several theories that attempt to explain why older individuals become involved in criminal conduct at such a late age (e.g., Strain theory; Broidy & Agnew, 1997); however, whether or not these theories can be used to explain the older woman offender's involvement in crime has yet to be determined.

In conclusion, it is apparent that the needs of older women offenders were unique in many ways, and this report was able to touch on some of these issues. This profile was a first step in understanding this special population. In an attempt to better understand the population of older women offenders, a qualitative follow-up study was completed by Michel and Gobeil (in press). This research involved interviewing older women to gain knowledge concerning their views and experiences about social support and health.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Detailed analyses of criminogenic need domains

<b>Need domain</b>	<b>Older women <i>n</i> (%)</b>	<b>Younger women <i>n</i> (%)</b>	<b>df</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math> ***</b>
Employment			3	21.89***
Factor seen as an asset	12 (16.4)	3 (2.6)		
No needs	31 (42.5)	30 (26.1)		
Some needs	26 (35.6)	65 (56.5)		
Considerable needs	4 (5.5)	17 (14.8)		
Family / marital			--	--
Factor seen as an asset	6 (8.2)	8 (7.0)		
No needs	35 (47.9)	40 (34.8)		
Some needs	21 (28.8)	41 (35.7)		
Considerable needs	11 (15.1)	26 (22.6)		
Associates			3	30.17***
Factor seen as an asset	16 (21.9)	3 (2.6)		
No needs	20 (27.4)	31 (27.0)		
Some needs	33 (45.2)	46 (40.0)		
Considerable needs	4 (5.5)	35 (30.4)		
Substance abuse			2	28.99***
No needs	46 (63.0)	34 (29.6)		
Some needs	18 (24.7)	25 (21.7)		
Considerable needs	9 (12.3)	56 (48.7)		
Community functioning			--	--
Factor seen as an asset	9 (12.3)	4 (3.5)		
No needs	42 (57.5)	74 (64.3)		
Some needs	19 (26.0)	27 (23.5)		
Considerable needs	3 (4.1)	10 (8.7)		
Personal / emotional			--	--
No needs	19 (26.0)	22 (19.1)		
Some needs	37 (50.7)	51 (44.3)		
Considerable needs	17 (23.3)	42 (36.5)		
Attitudes			--	--
Factor seen as an asset	22 (30.1)	18 (15.7)		
No needs	36 (47.9)	58 (50.4)		
Some needs	12 (16.4)	25 (21.7)		
Considerable needs	4 (5.5)	14 (12.2)		

*Note.* Older women: *n* = 73. Younger women: *n* = 115.

\*\*\* *p* < .001