



Research at a glance

Examining Gender Differences in Institutional Offences

KEY WORDS: *institutional offences, institutional misconduct, women offenders, gender*

What it means

The current study suggests that maladjustment manifests itself differently and earlier among federally incarcerated women placed in medium security upon admission compared to men. This difference may be indicative of the fact that the institutional environment in medium security differs between men and women. Knowledge in this area, however, is still limited. The impact of additional factors (e.g., mental health, disciplinary practices) should be examined and further research in the area is underway.

What we found

Although gender was not associated with institutional offences among offenders in minimum or maximum security, it was predictive of offending in medium security, with more women committing institutional offences in comparison to men. This difference was especially evident when looking at minor misconduct where women were nearly three times more likely to commit an offence. Women in medium security were also more likely to engage in an offence earlier in their incarceration in comparison to men. Again, differences were more evident for minor offences.

Demographic and incarceration characteristics were assessed as potential predictors related to risk of offending for men and women separately. Age was a consistent predictor for both men and women across security levels, with increases in age relating to decreases in the risk of offending. Dynamic risk level (i.e., criminogenic need) and reintegration potential were the only unique variables predicting risk of institutional offending for women and men, respectively. Low need women showed a decreased risk for offending in comparison to high need women, while the risk of low reintegration potential men was three times higher than the risk of men designated as high reintegration potential.

Qualitative analysis of violent offence reports also highlighted several gender differences. Men were more likely to use a weapon and target staff as victims, whereas women were less likely to use a weapon and targeted offenders as victims primarily

for relational/retaliation reasons. Degree of harm and offence severity ratings were similar for both groups.

Why we did this study

The goal of the current study was to examine gender differences in institutional misconduct within the Canadian federal correctional context. Although one of the strategic priorities of CSC is to ensure the safety of all staff and offenders (with an emphasis on preventing institutional misconduct), the majority of research in this area has been male dominated. As a result, not enough is known about how women offenders behave during incarceration in comparison to their male counterparts. With the rising number of federal women offenders over the past decade in a population that presents a wide range of needs (e.g., substance abuse, adjustment problems, and mental health issues), women's behaviour within the prison environment is an issue that warrants further investigation.

What we did

This study included 951 men and 951 women admitted into federal custody on a new warrant of committal between April 1, 2008 and March 31, 2011. Gender differences in misconduct were assessed by comparing frequency of institutional offences, patterns and predictors of offences over time, and the nature of violent offences. Quantitative analyses were conducted for both offence types (minor and serious) with offenders grouped by security level.

For more information

Harris, A., Blanchette, K., & Brown, S. (2014). *Examining Gender Differences in Institutional Offences* (Research Report R-312). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

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