

**CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA**

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# Women Who Sexually Offend: A Profile and Program Outcome Study

*Women sex offenders have high needs in the personal/emotional and family/marital domains. Completing the women's sex offender program increases offender skills.*

## Why we did this study

Although women sex offenders (WSOs) make up a small proportion of the federally sentenced offender population, understanding their characteristics is important for the design and implementation of appropriate interventions and case management strategies. In the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) the Women Sex Offender Program (WSOP), offered as part of CSC's continuum of care, consists of several modules that target past negative behaviour, beliefs and personal standards, management of emotions, communication, goal attainment, community functioning, relationships, and sexuality. The study aimed to: (1) examine the profile of WSOs, including demographic information, background history, offence and sentence characteristics, and risk/need information, and outcomes on release, and (2) assess the treatment gains and outcomes on release for those completing the WSOP.

## What we did

All WSOs under the supervision of CSC between January 2000 and December 2017 were included in the analyses pertaining to the profile of WSOs ( $n = 117$ ). For the portion of the research examining the impact of the sex offender program, the results of a subsample of WSOs who completed the WSOP as well as the results of the assessment battery completed between 2010 and 2017, were examined ( $n = 33$ ). To identify treatment gains, repeated measures t-tests analyses were conducted comparing mean scores on pre- and post-assessment measures.

## What we found

Results indicated that WSOs were typically in their 30s, White, and had less than a high school diploma. The average sentence length was just over three and half years. Victim information indicated that over a quarter of women offenders committed a sexual offence against a family member. Approximately 86% of victims were children. Over half of the sample had more than one victim most of whom were female children. The majority of WSOs were assessed as high-risk and demonstrated high-need in the personal/emotional and the family/marital domain, significantly higher than non sexual offenders.

For all WSOs released ( $n = 87$ ), 15% returned to custody prior to warrant expiry (mean follow-up = 12 months), one for a new offence. Post-warrant expiry, 18% of 72 women had at least one new reconviction based on CPIC files (mean follow-up = 57 months), two reconvictions were for sexual offences, six for violent offences, and seven were for non-violent offences.

## Outcome on the WSOP

Completion rate for the WSOP was 82%. Those who completed the WSOP demonstrated increased emotional regulation, goal-oriented behaviour, self-efficacy, and problem-solving skills, and evidenced reduced loneliness, and fewer cognitive distortions and impulse control difficulties. Participants reported they were highly satisfied with the WSOP. Rate of return to custody prior to warrant expiry for those who completed the program and were released ( $n = 28$ ; average follow-up 12.5 months) was 10.7%; none returned for a new offence. Post warrant expiry ( $n = 21$ ) one woman returned to custody; this was for a sexual offence (average follow-up 22 months).

## What it means

This research highlighted the characteristics of federal WSOs. Results demonstrated that participation in the WSOP was associated with treatment gains. Further research using a larger sample size would allow more definite evidence as to the effectiveness of the WSOP intervention in reducing recidivism.

## For more information

Wanamaker, K. A., Derksen, D., De Moor, C., & Wardrop, K. (2018). *Women Who Sexually Offend: An Updated Profile and Program Outcome Study* (Research Report R-416). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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