

## CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

## A Profile of Young Adult Federal Offenders

*Young adult offenders (18-21) have similar need profiles to those aged 22 to 30. Relative to their older counter-parts, those aged 30 and under have greater needs in the areas of education/employment and associates, but less need in the marital/family domain. Such differences are likely tied to distinct stages of life course development.*

### Why we did this study

Recent research suggests that younger adult offenders have profiles that differ from their older counter-parts, resulting in calls for age-specific services and interventions (e.g. Correctional Investigator of Canada, 2017; Cesaroni & Peterson-Badali, 2017). The current research builds on a previous age-based analysis of federal offenders (Keown & Gobeil, 2014), providing further insight regarding the profiles of younger adult offenders.

### What we did

An age-based analysis of federal offenders was undertaken by drawing on the following sources of data: (1) An in-custody snapshot of the federal custodial population on September 29th 2019 ( $N = 13,935$ ); (2) An admission cohort dataset containing all offenders admitted on a new sentence in 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 ( $N = 9,639$ ); and (3) A release cohort dataset containing all federal releases with a Dynamic Factor Identification and Analysis-Revised in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 ( $N = 9,124$ ).

### What we found

Those aged 18 to 21 accounted for 2% of the in-custody snapshot, 6% of the admissions group, and 3% of the release group. In general, we found that offenders aged 18 to 21 had similar profiles to those in the 22 to 30 age group, suggesting that the age of 30 is the point around which age-related factors shift.

Results were similar to those identified in the previous study (Keown & Gobeil, 2014). Specifically, differences between younger and older offenders related to dynamic needs within the domains of education/employment (e.g. job skills and experience) and associates (e.g. criminal friends and acquaintances); those aged 30 and under demonstrated a higher level of need relative to those over 30. On select items within the personal/emotional domain (e.g. impulsivity, thrill-seeking behavior), those aged 30 and under were more likely to demonstrate need. In contrast, those aged 30 and under had fewer needs identified in the marital/family domain, particularly tied to relationship and parenting factors.

### What it means

As noted by Keown & Gobeil, 2014, greater needs among those 30 and under tied to education/employment and

associates may relate to the social circumstances of younger persons (e.g. limited time in the work force, stronger role of peer associates) rather than neurological development. Certain differences may also reflect age-based stages of maturation; for example, younger offenders' greater display of impulsivity and thrill seeking behaviour may lend weight to psycho-social development accounts of offending behaviour (Cesaroni & Peterson-Badali, 2017).

Currently, age-based differences are reflected in need identification and corresponding correctional planning through the Dynamic Factor Identification and Analysis-Revised (DFIA-R), which identifies areas of criminogenic need among offenders and contributing factors to the crime cycle (e.g., high need in the education and employment domain may prompt recommendation for educational upgrading). An enhanced understanding of the characteristics of offenders, including age-based differences, can help ensure that correctional programs and institutional services are responsive to offender risks and needs, thereby supporting CSC's goal of contributing to public safety by encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens.

### References

- Cesaroni, C., & Peterson-Badali, M. (2017). Ashley Smith and Incarcerated Young Women: Marginalized at Any Age. *Canadian Journal of Law & Society/La Revue Canadienne Droit et Société*, 32(2), 249-267.
- Correctional Investigator of Canada. (2017). *Missed opportunities: The experience of young adults incarcerated in federal penitentiaries*. Ottawa, ON: Office of the Correctional Investigator.
- Keown, L.A. & Gobeil, R. (2014). *Risk and need among young adult offenders*. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

### For more information

McKendy, L., Biro, S., Taylor, J., & Gamwell, L. (2020). *A Profile of Young Adult Federal Offenders* (Research Report R-434). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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