

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

What is the Impact of Duration of Service for Veteran Men Offenders?

Duration of service has an association with veteran offender characteristics, institutional behaviour, and post-release success.

Why we did this study

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has a partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) to support veterans involved with the federal correctional system. Recent research has confirmed that veteran offenders are older at admission to federal custody and are more likely to commit a violent offence, particularly a sex-related offence, and have greater mental health needs than non-veterans.¹ In addition, veteran offenders have more stable institutional behaviour and better post-release outcomes than non-veterans.² Little is known, however, about how veteran offenders differ based on the duration of their service.

What we did

Offenders assessed by the CSC's Computerized Mental Health Intake Screening System (CoMHIS) between August 2014 and March 2018 were included in this study. Men offenders who self-reported former service in the Canadian Forces were identified as veterans ($N = 374$).³ Veteran offenders reported duration of service in one of three categories: less than one year, one to five years, and more than five years. Additional information from CSC's Offender Management System (OMS) was extracted.

What we found

In total, 350 men veterans reported their duration of service.⁴ One-quarter (25%) of veterans indicated less than one year of service, followed by over one-third (36%) indicating one to five years, and almost two-fifths (39%) indicating more than five years. These offenders were similar in a number of areas examined: age at admission, offence type committed, initial security classification, reintegration potential, Criminal Risk Index level, and static and dynamic factor ratings. A greater proportion of Indigenous veterans had shorter service periods than non-Indigenous veterans (33% versus 21%).

Additional examination of their criminogenic needs areas, however, identified specific differences.⁵ For instance, veteran offenders who served for less than one year were more likely than veterans who had served longer to have a

moderate to high issues with community functioning (22%), marital/family relations (31%), and personal/emotional orientation (81%). For offenders serving more than five years, 7% had a moderate to high problem with community functioning, 25% had a marital/family relation issue, and 70% had personal/emotional orientation issues. For mental health indicators, this pattern continued. Veterans with the shortest duration of service were more likely than those in the over five years group to have a self-reported current mental illness (40% versus 27%, respectively), history of intentional self-harm (24% versus 11%), and to have higher depression, anxiety, hostility, and general distress scores.

Examination of institutional behaviour indicators further emphasized these differences. Veteran offenders with less than a year of service had higher rates than those more than five years of disciplinary charges (41% versus 32%), and institutional incidents (56% versus 41%) – particularly behavioural incidents (27% versus 11%). Among veteran offenders released, examination of post-release indicators demonstrated that those with the shortest service duration were more likely than those with more than five years to have a release suspension (34% versus 27%) or return to custody (27% versus 17%). Veterans with less than a year of service were also less likely to have community employment (46% versus 68%).

What it means

Veteran offenders with shorter periods of service have unique characteristics, institutional behaviour, and post-release outcomes, indicating that this sub-group may need additional supports among veterans.

For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

Prepared by: Shanna Farrell MacDonald & Sarah Cram

¹ Farrell MacDonald, S., & Cram, S. *Characteristics of offenders who self-reported veteran status* (RIB-20-01). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

² Farrell MacDonald, S., & Cram, S. *Institutional behavior and post-release outcomes for veteran offenders* (R-435). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

³ Only 11 women reported veteran status, therefore women were excluded from this study.

⁴ The 24 offenders who did not indicate duration of service were excluded from the analyses.

⁵ Although not reported due to space limitations, veteran offenders with one to five years of service had rates for all indicators examined that were between those reported for veterans with less than one year and veterans with more than five years.

