



Research Results Women Offenders

QUICK FACTS

Federally sentenced women offenders comprise a small and unique subset of the total federal offender population. To meet the unique needs of this population, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has developed a Program Strategy for Women Offenders that is gender-informed, reflects their unique needs and pathways to crime, the importance of relationships and of mothering in their lives, and the higher rates of abuse and trauma they have experienced, among other issues.

OFFENDER PROFILE

- As of April 13, 2014, there were a total of 1,098 federally sentenced women offenders – 628 in custody (57%) and 470 under supervision in the community (43%). Women offenders comprise approximately five per cent of the total population of Canadian federal offenders.¹
- From 2003-04 to 2012-13, the number of women offenders admitted to federal jurisdiction grew by 14 per cent, although the number of admissions vary significantly from year-to-year.²
- In 2012-13, Aboriginal women represented 33 per cent of all incarcerated women under federal jurisdiction, an increase of 77 per cent within the last ten years.³
- Just over half (56%) of women offenders are serving time for a violent offence, and one-quarter (26%) are serving a sentence for a serious drug offence.⁴
- As of April 14, 2013, three per cent of women offenders were serving a life or indeterminate

sentence.⁵ Between 1998 and 2009, there was a 37-per-cent increase in the numbers of women serving a life sentence.⁶

IN CUSTODY

- Approximately one-third of recently-admitted women offenders are sentenced to 25 months or less; however, these women are likely to present with high levels of risk and need, similar to their counterparts serving longer sentences.⁷
- Gang-involved women offenders have serious criminal histories and are disruptive in an institution.⁸
- In 2012-13, the population of women offenders aged 50 or older doubled from five per cent to 10 per cent since 2002-03. Approximately half of these women (48%) received their first federal sentence after the age of 50. Older women tended to have low overall risk and need.⁹
- Almost all women offenders (93%) report usually getting along with staff in their institution.¹⁰ Additionally, women perceive the rapport with their psychologists, program facilitators, and primary workers/older sisters as the most positive.¹¹

IN THE COMMUNITY

⁵ Public Safety Canada (2014) [Corrections and conditional release statistical overview: Annual report 2013](#)

⁶ Young, Broom & Ruddell (2010). [Offenders serving life and indeterminate sentences: Snapshot \(2009\) and changing profile \(1998 to 2008\)](#). Research Report R-231, Ottawa, ON: CSC

⁷ Lutfy & Forrester (2014). *Shorter sentences among federally-sentenced women offenders*. Research Snippet RS 14-11, Ottawa, ON: CSC

⁸ Scott (2012). [Women gang inmates: A profile](#). Research Report R-272, Ottawa, ON: CSC

⁹ Gobeil (2014). *Older women offenders*. Research Snippet RS 14-3, Ottawa, ON: CSC

¹⁰ Booth, Taylor & Allenby (2011). [Spotlight on results of "Twenty years later: Revisiting the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women"](#). Research Report R-222b, Ottawa, ON: CSC

¹¹ Harris, Taylor, Brown & Booth (2013). *Therapeutic alliance and offender-staff relations in women's corrections*. Research Report R-305, Ottawa, ON: CSC

¹ Offender Management System (April 13, 2014)

² Public Safety Canada (2014) [Corrections and conditional release statistical overview: Annual report 2013](#)

³ Public Safety Canada (2014) [Corrections and conditional release statistical overview: Annual report 2013](#)

⁴ Public Safety Canada (2014) [Corrections and conditional release statistical overview: Annual report 2013](#)





Research Results Women Offenders

QUICK FACTS

- Although women were more likely to be granted conditional release, both women and men served approximately 40 per cent of their sentences before their first federal day parole.¹²
- Most community-supervised women were serving a determinate sentence, most commonly of less than three years. They generally demonstrated considerable need in the personal and emotional domain as well as with substance abuse, and had limited previous educational and employment attainment. Almost two-thirds of women who were seeking work were employed.¹³
- Parole officers reported that many of the women experience challenges to successful reintegration, especially with regard to finances and housing.¹⁴
- After release, women offenders re-offend at lower rates than men offenders. When women do return to custody, it is typically due to breaching a parole condition rather than a new offence.¹⁵
- The rates of HIV, hepatitis C, and sexually-transmitted infections for women offenders were greater than rates in the general Canadian population, and were especially high among Aboriginal women offenders.^{18,19}

REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

- Research has consistently found that participation in correctional programs is associated with improvements in areas such as motivation, self-esteem, and problem-solving skills, and is linked to reduced rates of reoffending after release.^{20,21,22,23}
- The Women's Modular Intervention (WMI) program for women offenders placed in secure units demonstrated reduction in institutional offences and higher levels of motivation post-WMI.²⁴
- Women who participated in Dialectical Behaviour Therapy improved on a wide variety of measures of psychological symptoms and well-being.²⁵
- About 10 per cent of women participated in the Methadone Maintenance Treatment Program. These

HEALTH CARE

- Common health conditions identified by women offenders at admission included back pain, head injury, hepatitis C, and asthma.¹⁶ Most older women offenders (50 years or older) identified having two or more physical health problems. Commonly reported physical health problems in older women offenders were arthritis, high cholesterol, hypertension, and osteoporosis.¹⁷

¹² Public Safety Canada (2014). [Corrections and conditional release statistical overview: Annual report 2013](#)

¹³ McConnell, Rubinfeld, Thompson & Gobeil (2014). *A profile of women under community supervision*. Research Report R-287, Ottawa, ON: CSC

¹⁴ Lutfy & Thompson (2014). *Reintegration challenges facing women offenders*. Research Snippet RS 14-8, Ottawa, ON: CSC

¹⁵ [Performance monitoring report 2011-2012](#)

¹⁶ Nolan & Stewart (2014). *Self reported physical health status of incoming federally-sentenced women offenders: Comparison to men offenders*. Emerging Research Results ERR 14-5, Ottawa, ON: CSC

¹⁷ Michel, Gobeil & McConnell (2012). [Older incarcerated women offenders: Social support and health needs](#). Research report R-275, Ottawa, ON: CSC

¹⁸ Thompson, Zakaria & Grant (2011). [Summary of the 2007 National Inmate Infectious Diseases and Risk-Behaviours Survey for women](#). Research Report R-238, Ottawa, ON: CSC

¹⁹ Zakaria, Thompson & Borgatta (2010). [Rates of reported sexually transmitted infections since admission to Canadian federal prison and associated incarceration characteristics and sexual risk-behaviours](#). Research Report R-196, Ottawa, ON: CSC

²⁰ Matheson, Doherty & Grant (2009). [Women Offender Substance Abuse Programming & community reintegration](#). Research Report R-202, Ottawa, ON: CSC

²¹ Grant, Furlong, Hume, White & Doherty (2008). [The Women Offender Substance Abuse Programming: Interim research report](#). Research Report R-171, Ottawa, ON: CSC

²² Derkzen & Allenby (2012). [Assessment of the Aboriginal Women's Maintenance Program](#). Research Brief B-51, Ottawa, ON: CSC

²³ Matheson, Doherty & Grant (2009). [Women Offender Substance Abuse Programming & community reintegration](#). Research Report R-202, Ottawa

²⁴ Harris (2014). *Preliminary assessment of the Women's Modular Intervention Program*. Emerging Research Results ERR 14-6, Ottawa, ON: CSC

²⁵ Blanchette, Flight, Verbrugge, Gobeil & Taylor (2011). [Dialectical Behaviour Therapy within a Women's Structured Living Environment](#). Research Report R-241, Ottawa, ON: CSC



Research Results

Women Offenders

QUICK FACTS

women were a very high risk and need group with a high prevalence of mental health issues and trauma.²⁶

November 2014

²⁶ MacSwain, Cheverie, Farrell MacDonald & Johnson (2014). [Characteristics of women participants in the Methadone Maintenance Treatment Program \(MMTP\)](#). Research Report R-307, Ottawa, ON: CSC