

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Pandemic Era Impacts on the Federal Custody Population Profile: Women

There were considerable pandemic era shifts among women in the federal custody residual population.

Why we are doing this study

Over the course of two fiscal years, marked by the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) experienced a substantial decline (-86 or 12.8 %) in the federal women in-custody population from 674 at mid-year in 2019-20 to 588 at year-end in 2021-22. It is noteworthy that there were successive declines in women over the pandemic period, -56 (or 8.3%) in the first year and -30 (or 4.9%) in the second.

What we did

Federal institutional population counts and individualized case characteristics are recorded as standardized reports in CSC's Offender Management System (OMS). Data were extracted (April 14, 2022) to establish a three-year trend (Mid-year 2019-20 to Year-end 2021-22) of the in-custody counts for federally sentenced (two years or more) women and for selected characteristics: age, diversity, sentence length, major offence, criminal risk (index), dynamic factors (rating at intake).

What we found

Because of the decline, the residual women in custody population (see Table 1) has become the following;

- 1) slightly older;
- 2) the proportion of the women offender profile that are Indigenous increased from 42% to 49.5% over the time period, even though the count for women inmates overall declined the number of Indigenous women increased during the pandemic period.
- 3) the high proportion of women serving a sentence of less than 4 years sustained over the period;
- 4) there was a substantial increase in the proportion of women serving a sentence for a Schedule I violent offence (38.9% to 46.9%);
- 5) the proportion of women with poor or very poor criminal risk ratings grew; and
- 6) the proportion of women assessed with high criminogenic need increased substantially (from 67.9% to 76.7%).

Table 1. Federal Custody Population: Women

Characteristic	2019-20 N=674 % (n)	2020-21 N=618 % (n)	2021-22 N=588 % (n)
Age			
< 35	50.7 (342)	51.5 (318)	46.6 (274)
35 to 64	47.5 (320)	46.6 (288)	51.0 (300)
65+	1.8 (12)	1.9 (12)	2.4 (14)
Diversity			
White	43.2 (291)	42.9 (265)	38.3 (225)
Indigenous	42.1 (284)	43.2 (267)	49.5 (291)
Black	4.9 (33)	3.9 (24)	3.4 (20)
Other	9.8 (66)	10.0 (62)	8.8 (52)
Sentence Length			
< 4 years	49.9 (336)	46.9 (290)	48.6 (286)
4 years+	29.7 (200)	32.7 (202)	30.6 (180)
Indeterminate	20.5 (138)	20.4 (126)	20.7 (122)
Major Offence			
Murder (I or II)	19.6 (132)	19.6 (121)	19.7 (116)
Violent (Schedule I)	38.9 (262)	44.3 (274)	46.9 (276)
Drug (Schedule II)	28.0 (189)	23.5 (145)	21.6 (127)
Non-Violent (Others)	13.5 (91)	12.6 (78)	11.7 (69)
Criminal Risk Index			
Very Good (1-4)	32.1 (193)	30.8 (189)	27.5 (147)
Good (5-8)	12.6 (76)	10.3 (63)	10.5 (56)
Fair (9-13)	22.8 (137)	23.8 (146)	22.2 (119)
Poor (14-18)	16.4 (99)	18.6 (114)	21.3 (114)
Very Poor (19+)	16.1 (97)	16.5 (101)	18.5 (99)
Dynamic Factors Rating			
Low	7.0 (43)	2.8 (16)	3.8 (20)
Moderate	25.1 (154)	22.3 (128)	19.5 (102)
High	67.9 (416)	74.9 (429)	76.7 (401)

What it means

It is noticeable there has been a dramatic shift in the custody profile of women over the pandemic era into a relatively short sentenced population with increased potential for violence. Shifts like this are unprecedented and will have profound effects on issues such as population management, infrastructure and programming.

For more information

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

Prepared by: Larry Motiuk and Leslie Anne Keown