

# Men Offenders' Trajectories to Security Threat Group (STG) Affiliation

*Marginalization factors were most likely to be recorded for STG affiliated men, followed by childhood adversity and social network information.*

## Why we did this study

A brief literature review identified social networks, marginalization, and childhood adversity as three primary trajectories<sup>1</sup> to Security Threat Group (STG) affiliation.<sup>2,3,4</sup> This study was conducted to explore available information related to federal men offenders' STG affiliation trajectories.

## What we did

In total, 5% ( $n = 200$ ) of STG affiliated offenders were selected for coding; STG members or key players were selected for all coding cases.<sup>5,6</sup> Using a detailed coding manual, case management documentation was analyzed from the Offender Management System (OMS) to identify indicators related to the three primary trajectory domains. The relevant coded information was not available for all offenders in OMS. Therefore, when more than 5% of offenders had missing information for a specific indicator, the proportion with available information was identified.

## What we found

Most men<sup>7</sup> (86%) were STG involved prior to federal incarceration and 83% indicated playing a central role in their STG pre-incarceration. These findings were consistent across ethnocultural groups, carceral status (in-custody or in the community), and STG subgroups.<sup>8</sup> Motivational factors for STG affiliation were provided for 29% of men. Among those identified, money, a sense of belonging/community and family/community norms, were indicated.

**Social networks.** Over half of men reported having a STG social network connection; 17% with STG involved family members, typically siblings or cousins, and 2% with a STG involved partner. Fifty percent of men had STG affiliated friends, although this information was not recorded for almost one-quarter of men. Comparisons across ethnocultural groups showed that Indigenous (57%) and Black (63%) men were more likely to have STG affiliated friends and family affiliations was highest for Indigenous men (30%).

**Marginalization.** Eighty-seven percent of men had at least one of these factors: unemployment, homelessness, street life,<sup>9</sup> or substance use history. Most prominent was a history of unemployment (82%), followed by 54% involved in street life, 53% with a substance use history, and 13% who experienced homelessness. Higher proportions of Indigenous and Black men had these indicators.

**Childhood adversity.** Childhood adversity factors were reported for 59% of men and included abuse, family fragmentation, and foster care history. Overall, 31% of men reported abuse histories. Among these men, physical (79%), sexual (48%), and psychological (34%) abuse were most prevalent. Also, 44% of men reported experiencing family fragmentation and 27% had a history of foster care. All of these indicators were more prevalent for Indigenous men as well as for men in-custody during the study period.

## What it means

These results provide a preliminary examination of trajectories to STG affiliation for federal men offenders; however, gaps in the reporting of these indicators was evident. Enhancing the Correctional Service of Canada's ability to track and utilize STG information would require a standardized reporting process. Understanding trajectories to STG affiliation may inform intervention strategies and identify additional need areas, particularly with respect to initiatives targeting STG disengagement. Future qualitative research may also further expand our knowledge of men's trajectories to STG affiliation.

## For more information

For more information, please email the [Research Branch](#).

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<sup>1</sup> A trajectory refers to the various factors that would lead someone to STG involvement.

<sup>2</sup> STGs: formal or informal ongoing offender group, gang, organization with three or more members that are categorized as: street gangs, Indigenous gangs, prison gangs, outlaw motorcycle gangs, traditional organized crime, white supremacy groups, Asian gangs, subversive groups, terrorist groups, or hate groups (CSC, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) is currently reviewing and updating the STG definition.

<sup>4</sup> Cram, S. & Farrell MacDonald, S. Pathways to security threat groups: a review of the literature (RR-21-01). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

<sup>5</sup> Overall, 4,138 federal men offenders were identified as STG affiliated between FY2013-2014 to FY2018-2019. Coding cases were sampled randomly and were proportionate to the overall men

offender STG population based on: STG affiliation subgroup, region of admission, offender ethnicity, and carceral status (in-custody or the community). Key players and members were selected to maximize the potential for available data related to STG trajectories.

<sup>6</sup> Ethnocultural groups: 42% were Indigenous ( $n = 84$ ), 26% ( $n = 52$ ) White, 12% Black ( $n = 24$ ), 8% Asian ( $n = 15$ ), and 12% ( $n = 25$ ) all other ethnocultural offenders.

<sup>7</sup> STG affiliated men offenders in the study will be referred to as men.

<sup>8</sup> Sub-analysis findings are presented for social networks, marginalization, and childhood adversity factors only when there is variation across STG subgroup, ethnocultural group, or carceral status.

<sup>9</sup> The offender technically has a home (i.e. family home, group home or foster care) but spends most of their time hanging out on the streets.