

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Escapes from Federal Custody, 2017-2018 to 2020-2021

Escapes from federal custody most often occurred in the Prairie region and generally from minimum security settings. Most incidents were not pre-planned, were not violent, and were motivated by an immediate stressor.

Why we did this study

Escapes from federal institutions are relatively uncommon events, yet generate considerable public attention, particularly when public safety is perceived to be at risk. The study of escape incidents can shed light on the circumstances surrounding such incidents. Moreover, underlying gaps within correctional operations can be revealed through a systematic examination of this topic.

What we did

Cases were drawn from an escape incident tracking list maintained by the Special Projects and Data Management (SPDM) team. Incidents included were those in which an individual housed in a federal institution unlawfully departed institutional boundaries. Incidents in which escape efforts were not successful (i.e., there was no breach of institutional boundaries) were excluded. Information pertaining to the escape incident and the characteristics of the individual involved was collected from Incident Reports, Warden Situation Reports, and case documents located in the Offender Management System (OMS).

What we found

Between 2017/2018 and 2020/2021, there was a total of 56 escapes from federal custody. The number of incidents declined over this period, from a high of 17 in 2017-2018 to a low of 11 in 2020-2021. A majority of incidents occurred in the Prairie region.

With exceptions, escapes were mostly non-violent, often unplanned, and typically motivated by an immediate stressor. Time spent at large was generally three days or less, concluding with police apprehension. Most incidents occurred in minimum security environments, although a small number occurred at higher security institutions (i.e., medium or maximum).

Escapes often occurred in close proximity to arrival at the institution of escape, suggesting the transition period may be a time of enhanced escape risk. Individuals involved in escapes often had prior histories of escape and/or going unlawfully at large. In almost half of cases, the individual's security level represented an override from risk assessment results (i.e., the recommended security level

in these cases was higher than the level determined by final decision-makers).

The percentage of escape incidents involving Indigenous persons and women was considerably higher in the present study compared to prior research (i.e., McKendy & Keown, 2017). Indigenous persons accounted for 70% of escapes in the current analysis, compared to 43% previously, while escapes from women's institutions accounted for 20% of incidents, compared to 3% previously. A majority of incidents involving Indigenous persons and women occurred at Healing Lodge facilities.

What it means

Minimum security environments serve a valuable purpose in the structured reintegration process, preparing individuals for release by way of conditions and opportunities marked by closer connections to the outside world. During the period under analysis, policy changes occurred that mandated an additional layer of approval for minimum security placements in cases where public safety risk may be higher (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). While the vast majority of individuals in minimum security environments will not engage in escape-related behaviours, escape incidents can have negative repercussions not only for institutional and public safety, but confidence and trust in correctional organizations. Ongoing monitoring of escapes remains necessary so as to identify and respond to operational vulnerabilities.

References

- Correctional Service of Canada. (2019). *Security classifications*. <https://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/security/001003-1000-eng.shtml>
- McKendy, L. and Keown, L.A. (2018). *Profiling Escapes from Federal Custody 2011/2012 - 2016/2017* (Research Report R-407). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

For more information

Special Projects and Data Management Team (2023). *Escapes from Federal Custody, 2017-2018 to 2020-2021* (Research Report R-455). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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