

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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Understanding the Profile Characteristics and Correctional Experiences of Indigenous Federal Offenders: A Review of Research Results

Research indicates Indigenous offenders have key differences from non-Indigenous offenders with respect to profile characteristics, institutional experiences and release outcomes.

Why we did this study

Recognizing the overrepresentation of Indigenous persons in the federal correctional system, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has incorporated a model of Indigenous corrections. This model includes specialized interventions and services at all sentence stages and ongoing knowledge-building efforts to understand the profile and needs of Indigenous offenders. In light of a robust knowledge base of empirical findings, the current analysis synthesized CSC research findings to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of federally-sentenced Indigenous offenders.

What we did

CSC research studies published between January of 2014 and January of 2023 with results for Indigenous offenders were analyzed. Findings were organized into four themes: profile characteristics (e.g., demographics, sentence information, risk/need information); institutional experiences (e.g., program completion; involvement in incidents), release types and outcomes (e.g., discretionary release rates, return to custody); and Indigenous initiatives (e.g., residency in Healing Lodges, participation in Section 84 release plans). Results were considered with comparative analysis by race/ethnic group (e.g., Indigenous versus non-Indigenous offenders) where applicable.

What we found

Compared to offender comparison groups, Indigenous offenders tend to be younger in age. Though often serving shorter sentences, Indigenous offenders tend to have more violent and extensive criminal histories and are more likely to have a Security Threat Group (STG) affiliation. Additionally, Indigenous offenders are more likely to have identified mental health concerns, substance use issues and indicators of high risk and need. Indigenous offenders therefore enter the federal correctional system with unique challenges that require consideration during correctional planning.

The institutional experiences of Indigenous offenders are also marked by differences relative to comparison groups. For example, Indigenous offenders are more likely to have a higher security rating, be involved in institutional incidents and incur institutional charges. In terms of interventions, Indigenous offenders are more likely to be eligible for and

commence correctional programming. They have higher rates of completion when it comes to educational and vocational programming, and non-administrative and non-medical escorted temporary absences. This highlights the efforts undertaken by CSC to support rehabilitation and reintegration.

While improvements over time have been noted regarding the successful community reintegration of all offenders, Indigenous offenders continue to experience outcome gaps in release measures relative to comparison groups. Indigenous offenders are less likely to be granted discretionary release and are more likely to be detained past statutory release. They are also more likely to incur suspensions and revocations on conditional release.

Studies examining Indigenous-focused interventions and services (Healing Lodge residency, Section 84 release plans, Indigenous Intervention Centres) generally highlight the value of integrating culturally responsive approaches into federal corrections, as evidenced by participation rates and outcomes.

What it means

Indigenous offenders have unique profile characteristics and experiences that shape their trajectories in the federal correctional system. CSC has a suite of culturally-informed interventions and services which appear to have positive impacts for Indigenous offenders. However, gaps persist between Indigenous offenders and non-Indigenous offenders on key outcomes (e.g., institutional and release outcomes), suggesting continued efforts are needed to enhance the efficacy of interventions for Indigenous offenders.

For more information

Taylor, J., McKendy, L., & Biro, S. *Understanding the Profile Characteristics and Correctional Experiences of Indigenous Federal Offenders: A Review of Research Results* (Research Report R-469). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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