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A descriptive comparison of demographic and family characteristics of the Canadian and offender populations

by Tim Foran[1]
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The structure of the Canadian family is changing. While the majority of the population continues to live in some form of family setting and married couples still make up the largest proportion of family "types," the Canadian family is becoming increasingly diverse.

Throughout the past several decades, there has been a substantial increase in the number of common-law unions and single-parent families. There has also been a significant increase in the incidence of divorce and remarriage. A wealth of data is available for examining the changing structure of the Canadian family, but relatively little is known about the families, backgrounds and relationships of the offender population.

This article, therefore, provides a descriptive comparison of several demographic and family characteristics of the Canadian and federal offender populations to generate a general picture of how offender demographic and family characteristics differ from those of the general Canadian population.

Methodology

Data on the offender population were taken from the Correctional Service of Canada's *Family Violence Incidence Study.*[2] This study was based on file reviews of 935 offenders admitted to federal institutions between June and November of 1992.

A total of 2,806 offenders were admitted to federal institutions during this period. Therefore, this sample represents approximately one third of all offenders admitted to federal institutions during the study period.

Every attempt was made within the *Family Violence Incidence Study* to meet established criteria for random sampling, but some exceptions were necessary to ensure that the project proceeded in a timely and cost-efficient manner. Institutions from which fewer than seven files were selected were not included in the sample. As well, the unavailability of some files led to the random replacement of files.

However, these departures from random sampling criteria are unlikely to result in major misrepresentations of regional or national admission populations.

Data on the general Canadian population were taken from the 1991 *Census of Population.*[3] The census collected basic demographic information from all usual Canadian residents. Detailed cultural and socio-economic data were collected from approximately two million households. This sample data was then weighted to reflect the total Canadian population.

It is important to note that this article relies on two independent data sources. So, findings should not be generalized beyond the scope of this study. They may not necessarily represent differences or similarities between **all** offenders in federal institutions and members of the general Canadian population.

Two other major data comparability issues must be highlighted. First, all members of the offender sample were men who were 18 or older. Ethnocultural group comparisons were made with the total Canadian population — men and women. Further, marital status and religion comparisons were made with the general Canadian male population aged 15 and older, while age and sex comparisons were made with the general Canadian population aged 18 or older.

> **While the majority of the population continues to live in some form of family setting and married couples still make up the largest proportion of family "types," the Canadian family is becoming increasingly diverse.**

Gender

According to the 1991 census, men accounted for just under half (49.5%) of the Canadian population. We know, however, that men account for far more than half of the federal offender population. In 1993–1994, 97% of admissions to federal institutions were men. In fact, the entire *Family Violence Incidence Study* sample population is male.

Age

In recent years, much discussion has focused on the baby boom generation (those born between 1951 and 1966), particularly the fact that this large population is aging. Clearly, both the general and offender populations are also aging.

The number of adults in the general population between the ages of 20 and 64 increased by 8% between 1986 and 1991. By comparison, the 25 or older federal inmate population increased from 59% in 1984–1985 to 73% in 1992–1993. During the same period, the number of federal inmates between ages 18 and 24 dropped from 35% in 1984–1985 to 27% in 1992–1993.[4]

However, nearly one quarter (24%) of the offender population was between 20 and 24 years of age, while just one tenth of the general adult population was in this age group. Further, 39% of the offender population was between the ages of 30 and 44, as compared with 33.5% of the Canadian adult population.

Ethnocultural group

Criminological research has found that certain segments of society are often overrepresented in offender statistics.[5] Canadian researchers have found the Aboriginal population to be overrepresented in the Canadian prison population. This disparity was evident in the data sources used for this article.

Aboriginal persons accounted for just 3.8% of the general Canadian

population, but 14% of the offender sample identified themselves as Aboriginal. Persons who identified themselves as Black were also overrepresented. Blacks accounted for just 1.9% of the general Canadian population, but 5.4% of the offender sample.

Religion

Both the offender (50.2%) and male Canadian (45.2%) populations were predominantly Roman Catholic. Protestant denominations were the next-largest religious affiliation represented in both groups (22.1% and 34.9%, respectively).

One quarter (25.3%) of the offender population had no religious affiliation (or their religion was not stated), but just 14.2% of the general Canadian male population (15 and older) indicated that they had no religious affiliation.

Family structure

Long-term trends in marriage and divorce have played a major role in changes in overall family structures. During the past few decades, the marriage rate has fallen, while both the age at which Canadian men marry and the divorce rate have risen. There were 7.1 marriages per 1,000 Canadians in 1990, compared with more than 9 marriages per 1,000 Canadians in the early 1970s.

The marital status of the offender population differed considerably from the general male

> **During the past few decades, the marriage rate has fallen, while both the age at which Canadian men marry and the divorce rate have risen.**

Table 1

Marital Status of the General Male Population (15 or older) and the Federal Institutional Population (18 or older)

Marital status	General male population	Offender population*
Single	34.2%	42.4%
Legally "married"	55.6%	44.6%
Common-law relationship	12.4%	32.6%
Married	43.2%	12.0%
Separated	2.6%	6.4%
Widowed	2.3%	1.2%
Divorced	5.3%	5.2%

* Marital status of 0.2% of the offender sample was unknown.

population (see Table 1). The offender population was more likely to be single (42.4% versus 34.2%) or separated (6.4% versus 2.6%), whereas the general male population was more likely to be married or living in a common-law relationship (55.6% versus 44.6%).

Living in a common-law relationship has become more popular in Canada. The number of common-law couples more than doubled between 1981 and 1991, while the number of married couples increased by just 8%. This family structure was even more common in the offender population. The offenders were roughly three times (32.6%) more likely to be living in a common-law relationship than to be married (12%). By comparison, just 12.4% of the general population were living in a common-law relationship, while 43.2% were married.

Many Canadians are also marrying more than once. Approximately one of every five men (21%) and women (20%) who were married in 1990 had been previously married. In 1970, only 8% of men and 7% of women who got married had been previously married. Consistent with the general population, a significant proportion of the offender sample had been married more than once. In fact, 18% of the offender population had three or more previous marriages.

While the marriage rate has fallen, the divorce rate has increased dramatically. In 1971, there

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were just 1.4 divorces per 1,000 Canadians. By 1991, the divorce rate had doubled to 2.8 per 1,000 Canadians. Interestingly, roughly the same proportion of both the general and offender populations were divorced.

As for children, just over half (52%) of husband–wife families in the general population had children living at home. A slightly higher proportion (59.1%) of the offender population indicated that they had children or stepchildren. Nearly two thirds of this offender group were over the age of 30.

A general snapshot...

Based on these key demographic and family variables, it is clear that there are several differences between offender and general Canadian family structures.

A greater proportion of the offender population is single. Further, the offender population was less likely to be married (12% versus 43.2%) and more likely to be living in a common-law relationship (32.6% versus 12.4%). However, a greater overall proportion of the general population was married or living in a common-law relationship.

The two groups had similar divorce rates and a high occurrence of multiple past marriages. However, the offender population was more likely to be currently separated from their partner (6.4% versus 2.6%). ■

1   Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, 19th Floor, R. H. Coats Building, Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0T6.

2   *Family Violence Incidence Study* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1995).

3   Statistics Canada, *A Portrait of Families in Canada* (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1993). See also Statistics Canada, *Basic Facts on Families in Canada: Past and Present* (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1993). And see Statistics Canada, *1991 Census Highlights as released by The Daily* (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1994). And see Statistics Canada,

Fertility (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1993). And see Statistics Canada, *Age, Sex and Marital Status* (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1992).

4   Statistics Canada, *Adult Correctional Services in Canada: 1993–1994* (Ottawa: Industry, Science and Technology Canada, 1994).

5   The likelihood of involvement in criminal events is associated with a variety of social characteristics including age, gender and minority group membership. Please see V. Sacco and L. Kennedy, *The Criminal Event* (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1994).

Does getting married reduce the likelihood of criminality?

Criminologists suggest that a child who grows up in a dysfunctional family may learn antisocial behaviour, may not be taught how to control unacceptable behaviour and may not be supervised enough to prevent association with antisocial peers. As a result, the child (in theory) becomes inadequately socialized and unable to keep his or her behaviour within socially accepted boundaries.

Considering the importance of early family life, it seems logical that later family life might also be associated with the likelihood of adult criminality. Popular belief suggests that marriage and parenthood provide people with a **social investment** in conforming to societal norms and, therefore, act as informal behaviour controls. The role of husband/father or wife/mother are simply viewed as incompatible with a criminal lifestyle.

Recent research has also indicated that people are more concerned about losing their family's respect than about being arrested or imprisoned. It has been suggested, therefore, that family relations may play a more significant role than criminal sanctions in deterring crime. This obviously has great implications for correctional policymakers. If marriage and parenthood reduce the likelihood of criminal offending, family supports may become the preferred strategy for attacking crime and recidivism rates.

This article reviews the research literature that analyzes the possibility that marriage and/or parenthood reduce the likelihood of criminality. The article looks at research on the impact of adult family life on both the onset of criminal offending and subsequent criminality.

Marriage and criminality

Early research in this area tried to determine the impact of marriage on criminality by comparing groups of convicted offenders with non-offenders. Results were, however, inconsistent and mixed.

For example, a 1977 study[1] reported that early marriage did not produce a significant reduction in subsequent criminality. In fact,

> **Further, while marriage did not appear to reduce the likelihood of further criminal or delinquent behaviour, it did reduce some of the habits commonly associated with delinquency (drinking, sexual promiscuity and drug use).**

offenders who were married before age 21 were significantly more likely to have a conviction record.

The study did reveal, however, that delinquent fathers whose wives did not have a criminal record had lower recidivism rates after marriage than similar fathers who married women with a criminal record. Further, while marriage did not appear to reduce the likelihood of further criminal or delinquent behaviour, it did reduce some of the habits commonly associated with delinquency (drinking, sexual promiscuity and drug use).

Other studies were also unable to uncover a definite link between marriage or parenthood and the likelihood of adult crime. For example, one study concluded that the degree of social integration (including marital status) had only limited usefulness in predicting adult criminality, while another found that although dropping out of school and unemployment were related to subsequent criminal behaviour, marital status was not.

Longitudinal research

Few longitudinal (long-term) studies have examined the impact of marriage or parenthood on criminal behaviour. Several studies have, however, attempted to demonstrate that social bonds to adult institutions (including the family) determine criminal behaviour over an individual's life.

For example, a 1982 study[2] found that male offenders were more likely than non-offenders to marry female offenders and it was speculated that the "restraining" effect of marriage would be largely nullified in offender–offender marriages. It was concluded

that marriage has a less frequent (than expected) restraining effect on delinquents because of the tendency of male delinquents to marry women who are also socially delinquent.

However, this and other longitudinal studies were unable to pinpoint a causal relationship between marriage and criminality. Even where results suggested that marriage or parenthood might affect criminality, the connection was ambiguous — marriage increases social stability, but men probably marry as they enter more stable periods of their lives.

A 1989 longitudinal study[3] therefore looked more specifically at the quality of relationships. The study found that male offenders and non-offenders did not differ in the proportion living with a woman. However, about twice as many of the offenders had been divorced or separated (at least once) by age 32. Offenders were also much more likely (than non-offenders) not to get along with their wife or companion and were significantly more likely to have struck their partner.

This suggests that marriage, in and of itself, does not intervene in a criminal lifestyle, but that the ability to sustain marriage may predict abstinence from crime.

Along these lines, a 1990 study[4] began to clarify how marriage might affect an individual's propensity for criminality. Rather than using marital status, the researchers created an "attachment to spouse" measure to gauge the quality of relationships and attitudes about marital responsibility and family cohesion.

The study revealed that attachment to a spouse in young adulthood was associated with a significant and substantial reduction in adult antisocial behaviour. This led to the conclusion that social bonds to adult institutions exert a powerful influence on adult crime.

Family life and recidivism

A number of studies have indicated that strong offender–family relationships are beneficial to

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offenders. This general belief has been instrumental in the development of offender programming such as family visiting, family counselling and early parole.

A 1954 study[5] was one of the first attempts to substantiate this connection. The study used an "index of family interest" to test whether offenders on conditional release with close family ties were more successful than offenders without such ties. The study revealed that 75% of those classified as maintaining "active" family interest while in prison were successful on conditional release, compared with a 34% success rate for those characterized as "loners."

As well, a 1983 study[6] found that offenders tend to become disenchanted with the criminal lifestyles of their youth and develop a desire for fundamental life changes. More than 25% of the study sample indicated that the establishment of a mutually satisfying relationship with a woman was critical to the change process. Still, the study failed to clarify which came first, the move to conformity or the establishment of family ties.

What does it all mean?

So far, no set of findings has clearly confirmed that marriage and parenthood reduce the likelihood of criminality. Most studies have found no significant differences in marital status between offender and non-offender groups.

Research **has** found that offenders, while no less likely to be married (or in a significant relationship) than non-offenders, are more likely to divorce or separate, to not get along with their spouses and to be involved in violent relationships. This suggests that marriage and parenthood do not act as transitional "life change" points. Rather, offenders appear to be attracted to more deviant relationships and spouses just as they are to deviant behaviour.

Research examining the **quality** of marital relationships has, however, uncovered an

association with criminality. Attachment to spouse was found to be associated with a decrease in the likelihood of adult criminality. The maintenance of an active family interest while incarcerated and the establishment of a mutually satisfying relationship after release were also associated with recidivism decreases.

What remains unclear is whether marriage and family life assist offenders and high-risk individuals in making a transition to a more conventional lifestyle or whether, with age, offenders simply make the shift to a conventional lifestyle and gain a greater appreciation for family life.

The research seems to suggest that the relationship may be reciprocal. A good marital relationship may help an ex-offender remain crime free. However, an individual's drift back into a deviant lifestyle tends to create friction within their marriage and reduces any support for a non-criminal lifestyle that may have been available.

Clearly, much remains to be learned about whether adult family life can alter a criminal career and buffer adults from criminogenic influences. But, while far from fully clarifying the causal relationship between family life and criminality, the research suggests a link that may justify action to strengthen families. ■

Adapted from K. N. Wright and K. E. Wright, "Does Getting Married Reduce the Likelihood of Criminality? A Review of the Literature," *Federal Probation*, LVI, 3 (1992): 50–56

[1] B. J. Knight, S. G. Osbourne and D. J. West, "Early Marriage and Criminal Tendency in Males," *British Journal of Criminology*, 17, 4 (1977): 348–360.

[2] D. J. West, *Delinquency: Its Roots, Careers and Prospects* (London: Heinemann, 1982).

[3] D. Farrington, "Later Adult Life Outcomes of Offenders and Non-offenders," *Children at Risk: Assessment, Longitudinal*

Research and Intervention, M. Brambring, F. Losel and H. Skowronek, eds. (New York: Walter deGruyter, 1989): 220–244.

[4] R. J. Sampson and J. H. Laub, "Crime and Deviance Over the Life Course: The Salience of Adult Social Bonds," *American Sociological Review*, 55 (1990): 609–627.

[5] L. Ohlin, *The Stability and Validity of Parole Experience Tables*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1954.

[6] N. Shover, "The Later Stages of Ordinary Property Offender Careers," *Social Problems*, 31, 2 (1983): 208–218.

What is a family?

There are obviously still many Canadians who would choose to define family by reference to marriage or blood relationships. But, people are increasingly adopting a more inclusive definition — focusing more on what families do rather than what they look like.

Adapted from R. Glossop,
"Robert Glossop on the Canadian Family,"
Canadian Social Trends,
35 (Winter, 1994), 2–10.

Parents' experiences when their sons sexually offend: A qualitative analysis

There has been much recent interest in sex offences, sex offenders and their victims. Most of the concern has focused on sexual behaviours, and on offender and victim treatment. Little has been written, however, about another victim group — the parents of sex offenders.

The parents of sex offenders are themselves victims of the abuse. They experience intense guilt, pain, loneliness and despair in response to their child's actions. Yet, almost nothing has been written about parental reaction to the discovery that their adolescent or adult child is a sex offender.

This article is an initial attempt to understand the experiences of parents whose sons have sexually offended. Since little empirical or theoretical literature exists on the subject, a qualitative study was conducted. This approach seemed the most appropriate since the intent was to generate theories, not test them. The goal was simply to learn more about these parents so therapists will have a framework within which to assess, and provide treatment to, this "hidden" group of victims.

Method

The study sample was made up of five individual parents (four women and one man) whose sons were convicted of sex offences. The parents ranged in age from their mid-30s to mid-60s and were interviewed as individuals (rather than couples) to prevent spousal influence on the expression of thoughts and feelings. The parents were referred by local mental health workers and were specifically selected because their sons' offences represented the most common sex crimes.

The sons were adolescents and adults who had committed a variety of sex offences such as incest, homosexual and heterosexual child sexual abuse, and sexual assault. Although they may have been convicted of only one sex offence, it is likely that each committed multiple sex offences.

The study consisted of six distinct stages:

- each parent was individually interviewed in an informal conversational manner for two hours and the parents were then interviewed as a group;

- each interview videotape was reviewed three times to develop initial researcher impressions;

- the parents were presented with the researchers' initial reactions for their comments and clarification;

- tapes of the second interviews were viewed three times to develop a list of themes;

- the developed themes were checked with the parents for accuracy, clarity and representativeness of their experiences; and

- the videotape of the last session was reviewed to see if any changes were required to the themes. The final session was also reviewed by an outside panel of sex offender experts as a reliability check.

Common experiences

All of the parents initially felt a constant sense of burden, almost obsession, about their son and his "troubles." Over time, the parents became more adept at masking these feelings, but the preoccupation did not go away.

The parents also all tried to understand the underlying cause of their son's behaviour. The first response was generally to look for societal causes such as sexual content in movies and on television. However, all the parents eventually blamed themselves and their early parent–child relationship. As one parent said, "one of the things [my son] says, over and over again, is that I just never spent any time with him."

By the time helping systems (such as the mental health and legal systems) became involved, the parents were in great need of personal support and guidance. However, the **parents** believed everyone viewed **them** as pariahs. As such, their crisis was merely compounded by contact with these helping systems. Still, each parent ultimately made a great effort to get help for their son.

The parents also all admitted that prior to the discovery of their son's offence(s), they believed strongly that sex offenders should be

severely punished. Not surprisingly, all now favoured rehabilitation to incarceration.

By the time their sons were incarcerated, the parents were psychologically prepared to talk with their son about the offence (and needed to). However, all had great difficulty in doing so.

Finally, each of the parents reported that they became so involved with their son's problems that they tended to ignore other family members. They also became obsessed with the future and, to some extent, their son's potential for relapse. In the words of one parent, "we feel like there could be a time bomb out there ticking."

Response stages

Parents of sons who have sexually offended, like individuals who grieve over a loss, seem to respond to the ongoing crisis in a series of stages. In fact, many of the parents described the experience as like discovering that their son was terminally ill — you know things will never be the same again.

Four consistent stages of reaction emerged. All the parents first experienced a profound sense of the pervasiveness of the problem. They could focus on little else. Their family and work became secondary to their son's dilemma. The legal system reinforced this feeling by forcing the parents to focus on the problem for extended periods of time, as did therapist urgings to "deal with their feelings."

Next, each parent experienced a sense of helplessness. Each felt completely alone, incompetent and vulnerable. The parents then moved to a third stage where they mobilized their energy and became more involved in their son's problems (such as finding avenues for legal action). In short, the parents all regained a sense of being able to make things better for themselves and their sons.

Finally, the parents reached a stage where they were able to participate in activities unrelated to their sons' problems, such as taking a vacation or becoming reinvolved with friends or other members of their family.

Treatment implications

Therapists working with the parents of sex offenders should, at the beginning of counselling, review the common issues for parents with sons who are sex offenders. The therapist could then role-play varying ways of handling particular issues to help prepare parents for dealing with the actual situations.

It is also important for the therapist to understand that parents in treatment will likely be in one of the four response stages and that each stage should be completed before moving into the next. For example, it would be unwise to force a parent in the pervasiveness stage to become involved with outside activities. Instead, the therapist should recognize the parent's sense of being overwhelmed, offer support, suggest coping strategies and predict that the situation will improve with time.

The next step

There were several limitations to this study. First, the small sample size reduces the generalizability of the results. It is possible that the themes and stages illustrated by the sample may be unique to this group. Along the same lines, it is also possible that examiner bias may have influenced the results.

The study was also retrospective. All the parents were in the last response stage and, therefore, described (for the most part) past experiences and feelings. Future research should examine parents at different phases of the experience.

Further research on parents whose children sexually offend will not only provide information for therapists who work with these parents, it will also generate a better understanding of the family dynamics of this type of offender. Future qualitative and quantitative studies should, therefore, also look at **entire** families to examine both individual experiences and family interaction.

Sons who sexually offend also make their parents victims. These victims, however, get little in the way of support. They suffer extreme feelings of guilt, pain and helplessness. It is hoped that a better understanding of the suffering of these forgotten victims will result in the care and counselling needed to reduce their pain. ■

Family violence in the lives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders

by *Jo-Anne Taylor*[1]
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In 1992, the Correctional Service of Canada initiated an interview-based study to learn more about offenders' experiences as family members. Separate studies were conducted for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders to be sensitive to any cultural differences between the groups.

This article analyzes some of the results, focusing on offender experiences as both a child and an adult within a family, and on any connections between the two experiences.

Methodology

Aboriginal interviewers met with 31 randomly selected Aboriginal male offenders from the Correctional Service of Canada's Prairies region. The interviewers used an interview guide designed in consultation with Aboriginal contractors.

A comparable interview guide was used by non-Aboriginal interviewers with 150 non-Aboriginal male offenders. These offenders were randomly selected, but all regions of the country had roughly equal representation within the sample. The non-Aboriginal sample was divided into three groups:

- the "program" group was made up of 25 offenders who had participated in the Service's Parenting Skills Training or Living Without Violence programs;[2]

- the "matched" group was made up of 18 offenders who had not participated in family-related programming. These offenders were matched with offenders in the program group based on variables such as age and aggregate sentence; and

- the "random" group was made up of the remaining 107 offenders. Like the matched

> When asked to describe their families of origin, many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders spoke of difficult and painful childhood experiences — detailing abuse and neglect that they had witnessed and experienced.

group, these offenders had not participated in family-related programming.

Childhood experiences

When asked to describe their families of origin, many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders spoke of difficult and painful childhood experiences — detailing abuse and neglect that they had witnessed and experienced.

More specifically, 79%[3] of Aboriginal offenders reported that they were hit by parents/caregivers (of which 41% said they were bruised), 58% stated that they were neglected by their parents/caregivers and 27% said they were sexually abused during childhood.

Further, 57% of the Aboriginal sample reported witnessing their father hit their mother (with 72% of these offenders reporting that their mother was bruised).

Many non-Aboriginal offenders also witnessed and/or experienced abuse and neglect during childhood. Approximately 85% of this sample reported being hit by parents/ caregivers (of which 56% said they were bruised), 38% said they were neglected and 24% indicated that they had been sexually abused during childhood.

As for witnessing abuse, 44% of the non-Aboriginal offenders said they had seen their father being "really mean or cruel" to their mother (this phrase was used to identify psychological abuse) and 38% reported witnessing their father hit their mother (75% of these offenders indicated that the assault resulted in bruising).

There were several differences, however, between the groups of non-Aboriginal offenders. Program offenders (38%) were more likely than the matched (22%) and random (21%) offenders to indicate they had been sexually abused during childhood.

Offenders from the program group were also more likely (96%) than the matched (83%) and random offenders (83%) to report being hit by their parents and significantly more likely (83% of those reporting an assault) to say that the assault caused bruising (compared with 47% and 52%, respectively, $p < .05$). Similarly, offenders from the program group (67%) were significantly more likely than offenders from the matched (27%) and random (34%) groups to say they had been neglected by their parents ($p < .01$).

Program offenders were also most likely to report witnessing abuse as a child — 63% of the program group said they saw their father hit their mother, compared with 27% of the matched and 39% of the random groups. These differences were statistically significant ($p<.05$). Similarly, program offenders (72%) were significantly more likely than the matched (40%) and random (40%) offenders to report seeing their father being cruel to their mother ($p < .01$).

These differences between groups may be the result of the program offenders' participation in family violence programming. These offenders were exposed to information about the dynamics of abuse and may, therefore, have been better equipped to **identify** abuse within their own family. Further, their experience may have made them more comfortable with discussing these sensitive issues with an interviewer.

Alternatively, the group differentiation could indicate actual differences between the childhood experiences of program offenders and other offenders. Program offenders may have been selected for family violence programming because they had witnessed and/or experienced abuse as children. Such experience is a potential

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"risk marker"[4] for future family violence, so Service staff would be likely to encourage and facilitate program participation for offenders with that type of background.

Adult families of offenders

The adult family lives of these offenders were also characterized by violence. Approximately 55% of the Aboriginal offenders were married or had a partner (see Table 1). Of these offenders, 90% said they "got along" with their partner. Despite this, 42% said they had hit their partner (of which 56% said they caused a bruise). Also, 52% claimed their partner had hit them (20% of these offenders said they were bruised).

As for non-Aboriginal offenders, 41% said they had a wife or partner and 87% of these offenders said they "got along" with their partner. However, 30% of the "attached" non-Aboriginal offenders reported hitting their partner (56% of these offenders reported causing bruising), while 50% claimed their partner hit them (of these offenders, 36% said they were bruised).

Table 1		
Demographic Characteristics of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Male Offenders		
	Aboriginal offenders (31)	**Non-Aboriginal offenders (150)**
Age		
24 or younger	20.0%	11.5%
25–34	50.0%	43.9%
35–44	23.3%	28.4%
45–54	6.7%	10.8%
55–64	0	4.1%
Older than 64	0	1.4%
Language spoken		
Cree	48.4%	0
Ojibway	16.1%	0
English	35.5%	64.6%
French	0	25.1%
Family situation		
Has a wife/partner	54.8%	41.2%
Has children/stepchildren	67.7%	60.8%

All percentages are based on the number of responses received.

RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Further, 45% of the non-Aboriginal offenders said they were cruel to their partner, while 20% said their partner was cruel to them.

The fact that both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders claim to have been hit by their partner more frequently than they admit to having been abusive raises concerns. The dynamics of family violence clearly indicate that women are far more frequently victims and men are far more frequently abusers. Further, when women do strike their partner, it is often in self-defence.[5] Therefore, we must carefully interpret these findings, recognizing that women were not contacted in this study and were, therefore, unable to contextualize the claims of their partners.

Approximately 68% of the Aboriginal sample said they had children and/or stepchildren and 76% of the offenders who responded to the question reported having some contact with the children. However, 41% of those who responded to the question reported that they and/or their partner had hit their children.

By comparison, 61% of non-Aboriginal offenders said they had children/stepchildren and 62% of these offenders said they had some contact with the children. Approximately 40% of the non-Aboriginal offenders with children indicated that they and/or their partner had hit their children.

Non-Aboriginal offenders in some regions were, however, more likely to report having hit their children. For example, 67% of non-Aboriginal offenders from the Prairies region with children said they (or their partner) had hit their children, compared with 50% in the Atlantic region, 36% in the Pacific region, 25% in the Quebec region and 13% in the Ontario region. The differences between regions were statistically significant ($p < .05$).

This pattern replicates a pattern established in the Service's family violence file review study (see the Robinson article in this issue). In that study, files of offenders in the Prairies region contained the largest proportion of references to child abuse. This proportion gradually decreased across the Atlantic, Pacific, Quebec, and Ontario regions.[6]

What does it all mean?

There are no national data on child abuse in Canada, so we cannot draw comparisons with this study's data on that subject. However, national data are available on the prevalence of violence against women in Canada. The Violence Against Women survey was recently conducted with a sample of more than 12,000 randomly selected women.[7]

This study revealed that 29% of women who had been married (at some time) reported having been abused by a partner. Therefore, our non-Aboriginal offender data mirrors the national results. However, the family violence file review study revealed that 30% of offender **files** contained a reference to abuse of a partner, the majority of which resulted in a criminal conviction. Normally, the incidence of family violence is much greater than that of criminal convictions. Therefore, it is perhaps more realistic to estimate that more than 30% of non-Aboriginal offenders were abusive to their partners.

Further, when we compare both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal data to national data, we must recognize that the lives of federally sentenced offenders are often characterized by violence.[8] As such, these individuals are probably more likely to abuse their partner than are men from the general population.

A final set of findings merit elaboration. The long-term effects of witnessing and/or experiencing abuse in childhood have received considerable attention recently, and some research suggests that those who have witnessed and/or experienced abuse are more likely to become abusers themselves.[9] In fact, evidence of intergenerational transmission of abuse has been identified within the Canadian correctional population.[10]

> **Further, when we compare both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal data to national data, we must recognize that the lives of federally sentenced offenders are often characterized by violence. As such, these individuals are probably more likely to abuse their partner than are men from the general population.**

Several relationships were examined within this study to assess if there was any association between witnessing and/or experiencing abuse and perpetrating abuse. For example, the relationship between non-Aboriginal offenders being hit as a child and hitting their own children was found to be not statistically significant.

However, two dimensions of witnessing abuse were related to the perpetration of abuse as an adult. Non-Aboriginal offenders who stated that their father psychologically abused their mother were more likely to report having been psychologically abusive to their partner (65%) than were offenders who said their father was not abusive (26%, $p<.001$). Similarly, non-Aboriginal offenders who reported that their father physically abused their mother were significantly more likely to admit they physically abused a partner (44%) than were offenders whose father had not been physically abusive (15%, $p<.01$).

These results illustrate the cyclical nature of abuse and violence in families. This, and the other findings discussed in this article, should alert us to the need for intervention with offenders (through family violence programming) to "break the cycle of family violence." ■

[1] This article is based on J. Taylor and C. Alksnis, *Models of Family Among Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Offenders* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1995). For further information, please contact Correctional Research and Development, Correctional Service of Canada, 2nd Floor, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Department of Justice Canada.

[2] These "living skills" programs are intended to provide offenders with basic awareness of family violence and parenting issues.

[3] Please note that all percentages are based on the number of responses received.

[4] D. G. Dutton and S. D. Hart, "Risk Markers for Family Violence in a Federally Incarcerated Population," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 15 (1992): 101–112.

[5] R. P. Dobash, R. E. Dobash, M. Wilson and M. Daly, "The Myth of Sexual Symmetry in Marital Violence," *Social Problems*, 39 (1992): 71–91.

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[8] Dutton and Hart, "Risk Markers for Family Violence in a Federally Incarcerated Population."

[9] C. S. Widom, "Does Violence Beget Violence? A Critical Examination of the Literature," *Psychological Bulletin*, 106 (1989): 3–28.

[10] Dutton and Hart, "Risk Markers for Family Violence in a Federally Incarcerated Population." See also D. Robinson and J. Taylor, *The Incidence of Family Violence Perpetrated by Federal Offenders: A File Review Study*.

Fam-i-ly (n.)

1 a father, mother and their children. 2 the children of a father and mother. 3 one's spouse and children. 4 a group of related people living in the same house. 5 all of a person's relatives. 6 a group of related people. 7 any group of related or similar things.

Gage Canadian Dictionary
(Toronto: Gage Publishing Inc., 1983).

Federal offender family violence: Estimates from a national file review study

by **David Robinson**[1]
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*F**ederal offenders appear to possess many of the characteristics routinely used to describe men who are violent toward their families.*

A recent literature review[2] identified certain demographic (such as male, younger than 30 and unemployed), psychological (such as angry, aggressive and immature), attitudinal (such as externalizes blame and has rigid definitions of male and female roles) and behavioural (such as substance abuse and threatens suicide or homicide) factors as characteristic of abusers. However, the criminal behaviour literature[3] identifies many of these same characteristics as well-established correlates of general criminal behaviour.

Further, federal offenders' histories of generally violent behaviour suggest that this group is likely to be at high risk of perpetrating violence against family members.

This article summarizes a recent Correctional Service of Canada file review study that provides strong empirical support for the argument that offenders tend to be violent toward family members. The study identified a large proportion of randomly sampled federal inmates whose official record contained evidence of their committing some form of family violence.

Methodology

This file review study was conducted as part of the Correctional Service of Canada's family violence initiative and was the first national study aimed at identifying the incidence of family violence among federal offenders.

File reviewers recorded **all** evidence (including criminal charges and unofficial reports) of violence against family members contained in the offender files studied. Evidence as to childhood victimization of the offenders was also collected.

The study sample was composed of men admitted to Service facilities between June and November of 1992. A total of 935 files were randomly sampled and examined by file reviewers. This represents roughly a third of all admissions during this period (there were 2,806 total admissions). The sample was stratified by region to increase the number of files randomly selected from smaller regions.

Demographic and offence characteristics

The basic characteristics of the study sample were very similar to those of all offenders admitted to federal custody during this period. The average age (at the time of admission) of the sample was 31.8, most of the offenders had not completed high school (71.1%), 40.5% of the offenders had previously received a federal sentence, 41.3% were serving a sentence of less than three years and 3.9% were serving a life sentence.

Further, the major admitting offence (the offence for which the offender is currently serving the longest sentence) of 39.4% of the offenders was a violent non-sexual offence (such as murder, manslaughter or assault). Approximately 20.7% of the offenders had been convicted of a property offence, 15.4% of a sex offence, 11.9% of a drug offence and 12.7% of other offences.

At the time of admission, 44.6% of the offenders were married or living in a common-law relationship. Just 16.3% said they had never been married (legally or common law) and 18% had three or more previous marital unions. Approximately 59.1% of the sample had children or stepchildren.

Family violence

File information indicates that about one third (33.7%) of the sample had been violent, at some time, toward one or more members of their family. This estimate includes sexual, physical and psychological abuse. About 1 in 10 (10.6%) files contained indications that the offender had sexually assaulted a family member, 3 in 10 (26.9%) pointed to physical assaults, and about 5 of every 100 files mentioned psychological abuse.

Figure 1

Perpetrators of Family Violence by Region
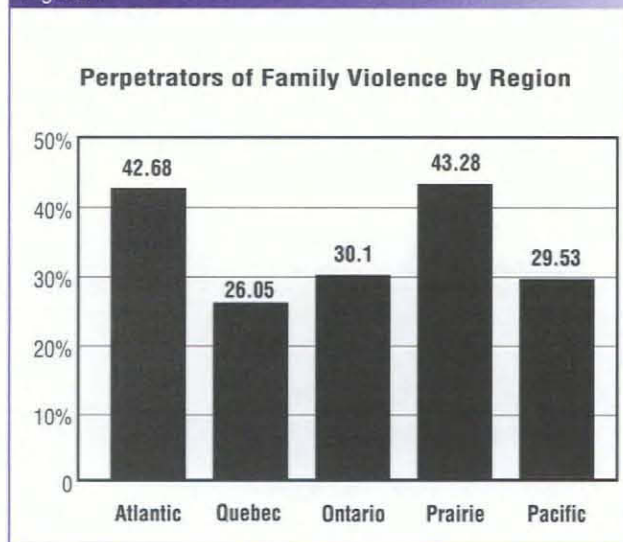
Further, more than half of the files (56.3%) containing evidence of family violence indicated that more than one family member had been victimized and just under half of the "violent" files (47.8%) suggested that the victim required medical assistance.

Further analysis, however, reveals an alarming statistic. Official charges were laid against 80.2% of the offenders whose files contained evidence of family violence. This extremely high charge rate suggests that our estimate of family violence incidence (approximately 33%) falls far short of the actual number of offenders who have been violent toward a family member(s).

Why? Research indicates that only a small proportion of family violence leads to criminal charges. For example, a recent Statistics Canada survey revealed that just 26% of wife assaults were reported to police and only 28% of reported incidents led to official charges.[4] Therefore, it is probable that this file review study greatly underestimates the incidence of family violence among the federal offender population.

Overall, there was a higher proportion of family violence perpetrators identified in the Service's Prairie and Atlantic regions and these differences were statistically significant (see Figure 1). There was also a higher proportion of family violence perpetrators among

Aboriginal offenders. Indications of family violence were found in 51.9% of Aboriginal offender files, compared with just 31.2% of the files of non-Aboriginal offenders.

Spousal violence

The file review data clearly indicate that women were the most frequent victims of the family violence perpetrated by federal offenders. Approximately 91.6% of these violent incidents involved female victims, while just 24.2% involved male victims (some incidents had more than one victim).

Overall, there was evidence of family violence against a female partner in about one quarter of the files. However, almost one third of offenders who had (at some time) been married or involved in a common-law relationship committed some type of abuse against a female partner (see Table 1).

Table 1

Abuse Directed Against Female Partners

Abuse type	All offenders (935)	Offenders involved (at some time) in a marital union (721)	Offenders involved in dating only (153)
Sexual abuse	2.6%	3.1%	1.2%
Physical abuse	22.1%	26.7%	7.4%
Sexual and/or physical abuse	22.9%	27.6%	7.4%
Psychological abuse	4.2%	5.3%	0.5%
Any family violence	24.1%	29.0%	7.9%

Note: Not all files contained enough information to determine whether the offender had ever been involved in a relationship with a female partner.

The most frequent type of abuse reported against a female partner was, by far, physical abuse. References to psychological abuse were much less frequent — only about 4% of the files contained information suggesting that the offender had been psychologically abusive toward a female partner. The file review method is, therefore, probably an unreliable source of information as to the extent of psychological abuse. This type of abuse occurs relatively frequently in the general population.[5]

The large majority (72.7%) of female partner abuse situations resulted in official charges. In

fact, one of every five offenders (21%) who had had a female partner (at some time) had been charged for spousal abuse. Further, resulting injury requiring medical attention was reported in about half of the cases of spousal abuse (46.4%), and about half of the offenders identified as spousal abusers (45.5%) had abused more than one partner.

Violence against children

Child abuse was relatively less frequent than violence against female partners. The file data indicated that about 13.3% of the men who had children or stepchildren had been abusive toward them. Sexual abuse accounted for 83% of all identified instances of child abuse. Similar to spousal abuse, the majority of these abuse cases resulted in official charges (87.3%).

Childhood victimization

About half of the offender files (50.2%) suggested that the offender had been abused by one or more family members as a child. This figure combines instances of physical, sexual or psychological abuse, neglect and witnessing the abuse of other family members (see Table 2).

Figure 2

The Relationship Between Childhood Victimization and Perpetration of Family Violence

Table 2

Evidence of Childhood Victimization of Offenders (935 Offenders)

Abuse type	Offenders abused
Sexual abuse	12.0%
Physical abuse	34.6%
Sexual and/or physical abuse	39.6%
Psychological abuse	8.7%
Neglect	6.8%
Witnessed abuse of another family member	23.8%

About 1 in 10 (12%) offenders had been victimized sexually by a member of their family, while more than a third of the files (34.6%) referred to some form of childhood physical abuse. Witnessing abuse was also very common.

The files also provide considerable detail about the nature of the abuse. In most physical or sexual abuse cases (74.7%), the victimization

began before the age of five and some form of the abuse continued through ages 12 to 16.

Fathers were most often the abusers (75.7%), although perpetration by mothers (42.4%) and other family members (20.2%) was not uncommon. Further, 5.6% of the cases involved abuse by an institutional authority figure outside the family.

Of the offenders who witnessed abuse, the most typical file entries related to the abuse of other family members by their father (84.1% of those who had witnessed abuse). The victim of the abuse was most often a mother or other adult female partner (67.5%). However, 63.5% of these offenders witnessed the abuse of other children in their family. Overall, physical abuse was the type of abuse most frequently witnessed (88.9%).

This victimization data seems to confirm the popular belief that offenders tend to have troubled childhoods characterized by repeated witnessing and experiencing of abuse.

Consistent with current victimization research,[6] childhood victimization was also correlated with the later perpetration of family violence. Offender files containing evidence of childhood family violence (witnessed or experienced) contained evidence of a higher rate of adult perpetration of family violence than files containing no evidence of childhood abuse.

More specifically, offenders victimized as children were almost twice as likely (1.8 times)

as those not victimized to become abusers themselves. Further, this relationship between victimization and perpetration was consistent for both violence against female partners and against children (see Figure 2).

A problem that must be addressed

The results of the file review study were remarkably consistent with a similar British Columbia file review study.[7] Offender files suggest that at least one third of the federal admission population has been involved in some form of violence against family members.

Further, there is ample evidence that this figure underestimates the actual family violence rate for this population.

It is clear, therefore, that federal offenders are at high risk of victimizing members of their families. Such risk must be taken into account in the supervision of offenders on conditional release in the community and in the management of institutional visits with family members. Most important, however, this study provides compelling support for a continued focus on family violence programming for federal offenders. ■

[1] Correctional Research and Development, Correctional Service of Canada, Second Floor, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9. A more detailed report of the results of this study is available.

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[6] C. S. Widom, "The Cycle of Violence," *Science*, 244 (1989): 160–166. See also M. T. Tolman and L. W. Bennett, "A Review of Quantitative Research on Men Who Batter," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 5 (1990): 87–118.

[7] D. G. Dutton and S. D. Hart, "Risk Markers for Family Violence in a Federally Incarcerated Population," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 5, 2 (1993): 26–28. See also D. G. Dutton and S. D. Hart, "Risk Markers for Family Violence in a Federally Incarcerated Population," *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 15 (1992): 101–112.

Balancing work and family

Respondents (in a 1991 study of the Canadian federal public service) perceived that work interfered with their family responsibilities, but were significantly less likely to allow family to interfere with their work.

The researchers offered two possible explanations for this disparity. First, North American work ethics traditionally require that work demands take precedence over family concerns. Further, many workers perceive fewer negative consequences in short-changing their family than in short-changing their work.

Adapted from "The Challenge of Balancing Work and Family," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 4, 1 (1992): 3–5.

Using familial factors to assess offender risk and need

by L. L. Motiuk[1]
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Understanding the nature and level of criminal risk factors can facilitate the construction of practical and effective risk/need assessment instruments. Further, it is commonly believed that properly identified dynamic risk factors (such as an offender's family relations) can provide promising targets for correctional intervention and, when treatment is successful, lead to reduced recidivism.

Factors such as criminality within the family and familial problems (such as low levels of affection/caring/cohesiveness, poor parental supervision and discipline, and outright neglect and abuse) **can** be categorized as major risk/need factors.[2] In other words, offenders with these family background variables are at much greater risk of re-offending than offenders coming from families without these characteristics.

This article highlights several illustrations of the predictive value of familial factors in assessing offender risk and need, and ultimately examines the practical implications for correctional assessment, programming and management.

Predictive value

In exploring the predictive validity of familial variables,[3] assessment information was obtained from the Level of Supervision Inventory, an objective risk/need classification instrument that was administered to 510 consecutive male offenders on admission to the Ontario provincial correctional system.[4]

A series of correlational analyses were conducted between the four family variables assessed and selected prison and post-release adjustment measures. The majority of the family variables were found to be significantly associated with prison misconduct, return to prison and parole violation (see Table 1).

Further, while family predictors may individually have relatively weak relationships with future outcomes, better predictions can be made when they are examined as composites.

A similar study[5] explored variations in family background composites (such as all the family variable scores added together) in relation to post-release behaviour and found significant relationships with halfway house failure ($r = .32$, $p < .01$) and offender re-incarceration ($r = .46$, $p < .001$).

The Community Risk/Needs Management Scale

To comply with its standards for conditional release supervision, the Correctional Service of Canada must systematically assess the needs of offenders, their risk of re-offending and any other factors that might affect their successful reintegration into the community.

As a result, the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale was designed, developed and implemented.

Today, parole officers use the scale to capture case-specific information on criminal history and offender needs to classify federal offenders on conditional release. One of the 12 separate need areas covered by the scale is *marital/family relationships*.

Table 1

The Predictive Validity of Familial Factors Assessed by the Level of Supervision Inventory (510 offenders)

Family variable	Offenders identified	Prison misconduct (510)	Return to prison (510)	Parole violation (170)
Dissatisfaction with marital (or equivalent) situation	48.8%	.10*	.10**	.24**
Non-rewarding relationship with parent(s)	50.8%	.21***	.10*	.18*
Non-rewarding relationship with other(s)	44.1%	.14**	.09*	.18*
Criminal family/spouse	21.6%	.10*	.09*	.09

Note: * = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001.

Table 2

Marital/Family Relationships Rating and Conditional Release Failure

Marital/family relationships rating	Conditional release failure rate
Factor seen as an asset to community adjustment	8.0%
No immediate need for improvement	19.8%
Some need for improvement	35.9%
Considerable need for improvement	40.9%

Each need area is individually rated according to specific guidelines. For *marital/family relationships*, an offender rating of "factor is seen as an asset to community adjustment" means there is evidence of very positive relationships and considerable support from parents, relatives or a spouse.

"No immediate need for improvement" signifies evidence of a satisfying and caring relationship within a marriage and/or family that has resulted in no current supervision difficulties, while "some need for improvement" identifies evidence of lack of care, hostility, arguments, fighting or indifference in the marital/family relationship(s) that results in occasional offender instability.

Finally, a rating of "considerable need for improvement" is given if any of the listed problems have caused a very unstable pattern of marital/family relationships.

Field research conducted on the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale has found that parole officers can easily identify the nature and level of *marital/family relationships* risk/need presented by an offender (33.2% of sample was identified as "needy" in this area) and this assessment was consistently related with suspension ($r = .27$,

$p < .001$) and revocation ($r = .23$, $p < .001$) of conditional release.[6]

In fact, a consistent pattern emerged when looking at the percentage distribution of conditional release failures (suspensions). The greater the offender need rating on this variable, the more likely the offender was to fail on conditional release (see Table 2).

Familial indicators and conditional release failure

During 1992–1993, an Ontario region working group designed, developed and implemented an enhanced approach to assessing an offender's risk and need level while on conditional release.[7] Initial data on this community risk/need assessment process was obtained from a sample of 573 federal male offenders released from federal institutions in the Ontario region over a six-month period.

These offenders showed variability in the *marital/family relations* domain (43.5% of the sample was identified as "needy" in this area) and this assessment was again related to suspension of conditional release.

The percentage distribution of conditional release failures (suspensions) associated with each indicator in the *marital/family relations* domain revealed considerable variation among the familial factors and a number of statistically significant relationships with conditional release failure (see Table 3).

Table 3

Familial Indicators and Conditional Release Failure

Marital/family relations indicators	Offenders identified	Conditional release suspension of identified offenders	r
Physical/sexual abuse as a child	26.8%	26.1%	.07
Problems in common-law relationship/marriage	42.0%	25.0%	.12*
Perpetrator of spousal abuse	13.6%	33.9%	.13*
Victim of spousal abuse	4.4%	27.3%	.04
In trouble as a result of child abuse	7.9%	10.5%	-.07
Ineffective as a parent	11.9%	21.7%	.04
Poor family functioning	34.3%	26.9%	.12*

*Note: r = Pearson Correlation Coefficient; * = p < .01.*

ASSESSMENT AND PROGRAMMING

Widening the sampling domain...

The Service's recent Correctional Strategy Initiative determined that criminogenic needs should be the basis for offender programming and that service delivery should focus primarily on successful offender reintegration into the community. As a result, the Service developed a systematic approach to offender assessment on admission to the federal correctional system. The goal was to standardize an integrated offender risk and need assessment process throughout the Correctional Service of Canada.

The Offender Intake Assessment process is a comprehensive and integrated evaluation of the offender at the time of admission to the federal correctional system. The process involves collection and analysis of information on the offender's criminal and mental health history, social situation, education and other factors relevant to identifying criminal risk and offender need. The results provide a basis for determining the offender's institutional placement and for establishing his or her correctional plan.

The process was piloted in all Service regions in 1992–1993. Data obtained from this trial yielded important information on familial factors. At admission, about two thirds of the pilot sample were identified as "needy" in the area of marital/family relations. As expected, a composite of the familial indicators was significantly associated with level of need ($r = .44$, $p < .0001$). A detailed summary of the distribution of family background variables (offenders were identified on an average of 7.4 of the 31 possible indicators) was obtained for 103 federal offenders (see Table 4).

Table 4

A Breakdown of Familial Indicators as Assessed by the Offender Intake Assessment Process (103 Offenders)

Familial indicators	Offenders identified
Childhood lacked family ties	34.3%
Mother absent during childhood	13.3%
Maternal relations negative as a child	23.5%
Father absent during childhood	36.3%
Paternal relations negative as a child	44.4%
Parents' relationship dysfunctional during childhood	55.6%
Spousal abuse during childhood	38.9%
Sibling relations negative during childhood	15.5%
Other relative(s) relations negative during childhood	15.1%
Family members involved in crime	48.5%
Currently single	64.1%
Has been married/common law in the past	78.2%
Dissatisfied with current relationship	32.9%
• Money problems affect relationship(s) past/present	51.2%
• Sexual problems affect relationship(s) past/present	10.3%
• Communication problems affect the relationship(s)	36.6%
• Has been a victim of spousal abuse	14.3%
• Has been a perpetrator of spousal abuse	21.7%
Has no parenting responsibilities	43.6%
• Unable to handle parenting responsibilities	28.6%
• Unable to control the child's behaviour appropriately	19.5%
• Perceives self as unable to control the child's behaviour	2.6%
• Supervises child improperly	14.6%
• Does not participate in activities with the child	11.9%
• Lacks an understanding of child development	20.0%
• Family is unable to get along as a unit	42.9%
• Has been arrested for child abuse	4.2%
• Has been arrested for incest	3.1%
Prior marital/family assessment(s)	16.9%
Has participated in marital/family therapy	15.6%
Has completed a marital/family intervention program	11.6%

Another step along the road...

Sound risk-management principles require the continual evaluation of correctional activities related to public, staff and offender safety. Among other supports to this type of evaluation, the Service has developed a computerized means of monitoring the nature and level of familial factors identified for the entire institutional and conditional release population through the Offender Management System.

National, regional, institutional and field office overviews of the family background characteristics of the offender population at intake and/or on conditional release can be generated and thereby equip correctional administrators and planners with valuable risk-management information.

The ability to produce a family background profile of an entire offender population can raise awareness about institutional and community supervision populations, provide basic statistics on risk/need levels and aid in estimating resource requirements by identifying the level of service required for particular populations.

This ability to monitor the risk levels of its admission and conditional release population has moved the Service further toward the delivery of an effective and well-integrated risk-management program. ■

[1] Correctional Research and Development, Correctional Service of Canada, Second Floor, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

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Offenders learning to be better parents

by **Michelle Carpentier**[1]
Correctional Research and Development, Correctional Service of Canada

Since 1988, the Correctional Service of Canada has been working to implement a series of cognitively based personal development programs in its institutions and community facilities. The Parenting Skills Training Program was designed to deal with the stress that incarceration places on family relationships.

The 16-session (32 hours) program is aimed at male offenders who want to deal more effectively with family members generally and, in particular, with children. It attempts to help offenders develop and improve the skills needed to relate successfully with their families. The program is based on the cognitive development model and therefore strives to improve offenders' cognitive functioning while, at the same time, teaching parenting skills.

This article briefly describes the program's goals, focus and components, and provides a limited assessment of its effectiveness thus far. It is important to note from the outset, however, that the program is not based on any "typical" family structure. It accommodates a wide range of family structures such as single-parent homes and step-families. This is vital given the changing nature of many offenders' families.

Approach

The Parenting Skills Training Program was implemented in 1991 as part of a federal family violence initiative and is one of six programs that make up the "living skills" programming series. To date, a total of 60 program delivery officers have been trained to deliver the program across all regions of the Correctional Service of Canada.

The program is structured to deal with eight common offender cognitive problems[2] that hurt their ability to relate well with their families:

- impulsiveness;

> In general, the program stresses three main areas: understanding a parent's job within the family, the responsibility that comes with being a parent and the consequences of parental action or inaction.

- putting the blame for their actions on other people and believing that their life is beyond their control;
- lack of concrete reasoning;
  - rigidity and intolerance;
  - shortage of interpersonal problem-solving skills;
- egocentricity;
- underdeveloped values; and
- critical reasoning problems.

These shortcomings contribute to the emergence of a number of key parenting problems such as poor communication, inconsistent, inappropriate or ineffective discipline, and the failure to apply problem-solving skills in family interaction or teach such skills to children. They can also lead to an inability to recognize and teach that actions have consequences, and inadequate role modelling of prosocial behaviour and values.

This program is designed to deal with these key problems — both directly and through the constant "recycling" of useful concepts throughout the course in the form of examples and assignments.

In general, the program stresses three main areas: understanding a parent's job within the family, the responsibility that comes with being a parent and the consequences of parental action or inaction.

Target audience

The Parenting Skills Training Program targets male offenders who have family problems related to poor parenting skills. The problems range from inadequate knowledge of child development to the inability to communicate effectively with children to the use of inappropriate discipline methods.

This type of program is vital. Offenders with inadequate child development information and poor parenting skills (who are, or will be, in a parent or guardian role) potentially place their children at risk. For example, they may use harsh or inappropriate parenting methods that result in the neglect of a child's basic needs, or in emotional or physical abuse. The program attempts to prevent these behaviours by providing offenders with basic parental knowledge and skills.

However, this program is not psychotherapy and is not designed to deal directly with offenders' emotional problems. The program is also not designed for offenders sentenced for child abuse or incest (unless they have already received extensive counselling and therapy), for offenders with extremely volatile family relationships (they should be deferred from the program until their situation stabilizes) or for female offenders.[3] Finally, it is not a treatment program for offenders with family violence problems.

Structure

The program is divided into four major sections[4]: the family, interpersonal skills, caring for your family and developing skills. Each theme is covered during four two-hour training sessions. Within these sessions, offenders are provided with a knowledge base and are taught basic skills for addressing problems related to the theme.

For example, the family sessions provide basic information about a child's food, shelter and safety needs, examine a child's emotional, physical and cognitive development, and look at the roles of empathy, rigidity and caring in a family environment.

The program uses a variety of techniques such as group activities, role-playing, improvisation, thinking games, moral dilemma and problem "solving," and case study examination. All are introduced in the context of learning how to parent, but the objective is to enhance the offenders' creativity and sharpen their generally weak empathic abilities.

Is it working?

A research component within the Parenting Skills Training Program allows for the assessment of pre- to post-programming changes in the knowledge and attitudes of offenders who complete the program.[5] A battery of measures assess changes in specific target areas. While simple pre- to post-programming changes are not direct measures of improved parenting, they are an index of program performance and may be linked to the program's effectiveness in addressing key areas that affect offenders' parenting styles and behaviour.

The results of the most recent program analysis are generally encouraging.[6] Although the ultimate effects of the program will not be seen for some time, preliminary results (based on a sample of 68 offenders) indicate that learning did occur and that participants are now more aware of family and child-care issues.

In short, offenders who participated in the program appear to have learned something about, and to have modified their attitudes toward, parenting. Hopefully, this will have a positive impact on their parenting style and on their relationships with their children.

The Parenting Skills Training Program is one element in a strategy to better equip offenders to deal more constructively with their family relationships. Caring, consistent and disciplined parenting, and exposure to positive role models are key elements in the prevention of future delinquency. Hopefully, this program can help break the criminal cycle that might otherwise pass from parent to child. ■

[1] Correctional Research and Development, Correctional Service of Canada, 2nd Floor, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

[2] R. R. Ross and E. Fabiano, *Time To Think: A Cognitive Model of Delinquency Prevention and Offender Rehabilitation* (Johnson City, Tennessee: Institute of Social Sciences and Arts Inc., 1985).

[3] The Correctional Service of Canada is currently developing guidelines for parenting programs for female offenders, to be implemented in the new Federally Sentenced Women's facilities.

[4] *The Parenting Skills Training Program Manual* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).

[5] J. R. Weekes, W. A. Millson and T. Gee, *The Parenting Skills Program: Evaluation of Intermediate Program Measures* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1994).

[6] Weekes, Millson and Gee, *The Parenting Skills Program: Evaluation of Intermediate Program Measures.*

In the best interest of the child: The mother–child program

by Lisa Watson[1]
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With a sense of excitement, tempered with some prudence and forethought, the Correctional Service of Canada is embarking on a new approach to corrections that will include the option of children living with their mothers in a federal institution.

While this is a new challenge for the Service, it is not an entirely new concept — successful mother–child programs exist in the United States and Europe. Similar programs also operate successfully in several provincial institutions, where incarcerated women may keep their children with them until they reach the age of about two or three.

This article examines the principles behind the Service's mother–child program and describes how the program will be developed and operate, focusing particularly on specific concerns that the program has generated.

The principle behind the program

The 1990 task force report on federally sentenced women[2] recognized that the traditional treatment of women offenders often resulted in the denial of their sense of self-responsibility, accountability and self-respect. Therefore, the Service's new regional facilities[3] for federally sentenced women are premised on treating women as adults who are responsible and accountable for themselves and their behaviour, while providing an appropriate and supportive correctional environment.

As part of this process, the report recommended the development of a mother–child program to respond to the crucial need for mother–child bonding and the devastation caused to both by any separation.

Why?

> **Men generally have a partner or other immediate family members who can care for their children while they are incarcerated. When a mother is incarcerated, it is rare for her partner to remain an active part of her life and a caregiver to her children. This places great emotional strain on the children who lose not only their mother, but perhaps their familiar home and surroundings.**

Men generally have a partner or other immediate family members who can care for their children while they are incarcerated. When a mother is incarcerated, it is rare for her partner to remain an active part of her life and a caregiver to her children. This places great emotional strain on the children who lose not only their mother, but perhaps their familiar home and surroundings. The mother also tends to suffer tremendous guilt at having "abandoned" her children.

A recent survey of federally sentenced women[4] found that about half of the women incarcerated in Kingston's Prison for Women and about two thirds of federally sentenced women incarcerated in provincial institutions have children. Further, about two thirds of the mothers were the primary and sole caregiver.

The women in the provincial facilities were, for the most part, able to maintain close contact with their children through regular (sometimes daily) visits. However, those housed in Prison for Women had the opposite experience. In many cases, it was simply impossible to have regular family visits because of geographical separation. Women whose families lived outside the Kingston area had few visits and contact was maintained primarily by telephone and/or mail.

Implementation and operation

The goal of the mother–child program is to facilitate, maintain and develop the mother–child bond. As in all facilities, regular and private family visiting programs will be

available. If the child is in local foster care (or an alternative placement), visits could occur more regularly, such as every day after school. Weekend and holiday residency could also be available. Finally, full-time on-site residency will be available if both the mother and the child meet established criteria.

The overriding factor and basis for all decision making in the program will be the **best interests of the child**. This will be assessed by comparisons with program eligibility criteria and, when necessary, through partnerships with local child welfare authorities.

Though yet to be finalized, eligibility criteria for the mother (initially developed by the National Implementation Committee) will include considerations such as:

- the existence of a positive, ongoing relationship with her child;

- the mother's physical and mental health (excluding disabilities);

- the consent of court / child welfare authorities, where applicable (the Service will not become involved in custody cases — that is for the mother to work out); and

- the willingness of the mother to facilitate visits between the child and other significant family members, where directed to do so by court or child welfare authorities.

As well, a woman convicted of child abuse and / or neglect will not be eligible to participate in the program until her custody rights are reinstated by the courts, she has received treatment, and / or she has participated in a series of regular visits with her child(ren). Further, any alcohol or non-prescription drug use will result in the termination of eligibility.

If a mother withdraws from the program, re-entry will be denied until the mother has resolved the circumstances that led to her withdrawal. Again, the best interests of the child will be the primary consideration — repeated separations are traumatic.

Contingency plans (such as an emergency caregiver) will be identified by the mother, with the assistance of the program coordinator, in the event that the mother is unable to care for her child.

As for the child, eligibility considerations (in addition to the best interests of the child) may include:

- the child's health;

- the consent of court / child welfare authorities, where applicable;

  - regular physical and mental health assessments;

  - an age limit, which may be determined by a "triggering" event such as starting school;

  - potential disruption to the child's life (as confirmed by appropriate professionals, the mother and other family); and

  - the consent of the child, whenever possible.

The new facilities are currently establishing contacts with various community child-care agencies, such as provincial and municipal social services, daycare authorities and child-care advocates. Parenting skills programs for federally sentenced women are being developed. Toys, clothing and resource material for children will be an ongoing need. Qualified and screened volunteer drivers will also be recruited to facilitate visiting between mothers and children living in the community.

The Service is currently focusing on four areas of development. One area can be generally referred to as legal issues and includes such issues as health care, funding, partnership with provincial child-care authorities and the potential for Service liability arising out of the program.

A second area is the further development of a policy and program framework for the program. The foundation of the framework is the *Regional Facilities Operational Plan* and the work done by the National Implementation Committee, which looked at eligibility criteria, program management, improving understanding of child

> **The overriding factor and basis for all decision making in the program will be the best interests of the child. This will be assessed by comparisons with program eligibility criteria and, when necessary, through partnerships with local child welfare authorities.**

development and the impact on a child of living in an institution.

Finally, the Service is also focusing on the development of day-to-day operational policies and procedures, and on establishing interim protocols for pregnant women who will have their child prior to the opening of the new facilities.

Concerns

The arguments for and against housing children in a correctional facility are too numerous to address in any depth in this article. However, it must be made clear that federally sentenced women are not necessarily unfit mothers. Many are able, caring mothers who can offer emotional security to their child.

As in society, some of these women do need to develop better parenting skills and some may need to work on the factors that led to their incarceration before accepting the responsibility for the full-time care of their child. Raising a child in an institution will not be easy. Being surrounded by "would-be" surrogate mothers who may be quick to critique parenting skills would test the patience of most people, without the added pressure of incarceration itself.

For example, one big concern is cases where a mother is temporarily placed in the enhanced security unit. This would probably obligate the removal of the child to an outside caregiver, thus resulting in the child being "punished." However, if the Service is focused on empowering women, and on helping women take responsibility for themselves and recognize the consequences of their actions, then women must also understand and live with those consequences and conduct themselves appropriately to avoid placing their children in such situations.[5]

Another concern focuses on how the general atmosphere of prison and the potential lack of playmates of a similar age will affect children's social and emotional development. Mechanisms allowing children to participate in community activities with peers without their mothers are one way of compensating for this problem. It must be remembered that the child is not in prison. A study is currently exploring this issue and its results will contribute greatly to the composition of programming for children.

Women offenders who have recently given birth, or who are due to deliver prior to their release and before the regional facilities open, are another concern. At present, no federal facility is equipped to house a newborn infant.

Therefore, every effort has been (and will be) made to enable these mothers to spend considerable time with their children. This may include a temporary transfer to a provincial facility, placement of the child close to the institution so that lengthy daily visits can take place, or allowing mother and child to remain together for a time in the health-care unit of a federal facility.

The mother–child program is an enormous undertaking for the Service and there are certainly concerns to be addressed. However, the importance of such a program to federally sentenced women, their children and their children's future is too great to ignore any longer. ■

1 Federally Sentenced Women Program, Correctional Service of Canada, Second Floor, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

2 *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).

3 These facilities are scheduled to open at various times between late 1995 and mid-1996.

4 M. Shaw et al., *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women: Report to the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1990).

5 The mother–child program at the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women operates out of the Open Living Unit of the prison. A woman was recently transferred back to the secure part of the institution from the Open Living Unit and was no longer permitted to have her child with her. The court found that this policy was not discriminatory as the eligibility criteria for the Open Living Unit were reasonable and achievable.

Narrative therapy with incarcerated teenagers and their families

by *Mishka Lysack*[1]
Young Offenders' Unit, Ottawa–Carleton Detention Centre

Narrative therapy is a recent development in counselling, a "third wave" alternative to the more established problem-centred and problem-solving therapies. Narrative therapy emerged largely from the work of two highly gifted and creative family therapists: Michael White (Australia) and David Epston (New Zealand). This alternative approach focuses on reshaping an individual's perception of self, their relationships and their life.[2]

Narrative therapy has been applied to a variety of problems such as sexual abuse,[3] eating disorders[4] and schizophrenia.[5] It has also been used with a variety of clientele, ranging from children[6] to teenage substance abusers[7] to abusive men.[8]

This article sets out the basic components of narrative therapy and examines its usefulness in working with a family to treat one family member — particularly a family member (in this case, a young offender) in conflict with the justice system.

Narratives

As people attempt to make sense of their day-to-day lives, they construct **their** lives into narrative form. They arrange their experiences into patterns and sequences that make sense of themselves and their lives.

This process of authoring a narrative involves "pruning" away those experiences that do not fit the dominant narrative. These experiences are characterized as things to be forgotten or ignored. Therefore, much of an individual's experience remains unrecognized and, as a result, lacks any power to shape that person's life. These events are viewed simply as "unique outcomes."[9]

For example, if an individual's narrative depicts that individual as an addict, any moments of triumph over the addiction are dismissed as flukes and are quickly forgotten because they do not fit that person's dominant view of himself or herself.

> **It is important to recognize that a narrative not only provides a framework through which a person understands his or her experiences, it also orients that person toward or away from future experiences. The narrative, therefore, is more than a story about life — it actually shapes and constitutes a person's life as it is lived.**

It is important to recognize that a narrative not only provides a framework through which a person understands his or her experiences, it also orients that person toward or away from future experiences. The narrative, therefore, is more than a story about life — it actually shapes and constitutes a person's life as it is lived.

Young offenders and their narratives

Teenagers housed in the Young Offenders' Unit of the Ottawa–Carleton Detention Centre tend to have maladaptive narratives dominated by antisocial actions or beliefs. Prosocial practices are, therefore, regarded as flukes — unique outcomes that have no real impact on their lives. A narrative therapist's task is to help these teenagers re-author their lives according to more prosocial behaviours and beliefs.

Further, the identity of a person as "young offender" or "alcoholic" is not "in" the person, it is something that is developed, negotiated and distributed within the individual's "community of meaning." For teenagers, this community tends to include family, friends, and individuals and institutions that play a significant role in their lives (such as probation officers, police officers or teachers).

Based on this, narrative therapy encourages teenagers to invite any person that is important

to them to an early therapy session. These individuals then witness, or even become part of, the performance of new prosocial behaviours. It is difficult for people to alter their narrative without the help of those who participate in the narrative's formation, and this usually includes and involves family members.

The process — externalizing conversation

The young offenders are first encouraged to name the problem(s) that pushes them around in their life (such as Alcohol, Anger or Crime). Next, the teenager (and family and/or friends) maps out the problem's influence in his or her life.[10] Like a novel, this "landscape of action" consists of a sequence of events, connected by an overall plot.

At this initial stage, teenagers often present a problem-saturated story. Their problem is often internalized to the point that it is viewed as a personal characteristic or an inherent part of their family relationships. Therefore, the therapist uses language that encourages offenders to externalize or even personify the problem outside themselves or their family.

This is one of the keys to narrative therapy. The person or family is not the problem, the problem is the problem. To answer externalizing questions such as "what has Alcohol convinced you to do against your better judgement," individuals must separate themselves from the problem. This begins the deconstruction of the problem narrative that has defined their lives.

Teenagers and their families are also encouraged to map out the problem's influence on the "landscape of meaning" — their beliefs about themselves, others and the problem.[11] Externalizing questions such as "what has Alcohol talked you into believing about your parents/son/daughter" help to undermine feelings of failure, shame or blame

in the family, which act as a form of life support for the problem.

When teenagers and their families engage in this kind of externalizing conversation, they begin to move their lives and relationships in a different and preferred direction and to develop an increasing sense of personal control.

The other side — re-authoring conversations

Finally, teenagers and their families are encouraged to re-author their lives by constructing and living out prosocial narratives.[12] The doorway into this process is any situation where the person or family resisted the problem's influence and did something different. Participants are asked to give meaning to this unique outcome by exploring its history and impact on both the landscape of action (how did you take this step?) and landscape of meaning (how does this change your picture of yourself?).

The teenager and family are then encouraged to connect unique outcomes, "thickening" their alternative narrative. Instead of looking for hidden "tumours" or a lump of pathology, narrative therapists seek out healthy tissue and protective "antibodies."[13]

As the alternative narrative slowly emerges, the teenager and family are encouraged to name it. This allows the teenager and family to sort events and developments during therapy into either the problem narrative (such as Alcohol) or the alternative narrative (such as "being in control of my life").

The teenager and family are also invited to take action that undermines the old narrative and strengthens the new one. The survival of the emerging prosocial narrative is enhanced if there is a growing audience to witness and participate in the new behaviours. So, the teenager and therapist invite expanding circles of family members and friends to these therapy sessions.

> At this initial stage, teenagers often present a problem-saturated story. Their problem is often internalized to the point that it is viewed as a personal characteristic or an inherent part of their family relationships. Therefore, the therapist uses language that encourages offenders to externalize or even personify the problem outside themselves or their family.

Further, certificates and public ceremonies of transition can also be used in renegotiating the identity of a person.[14] These techniques can help amplify the emerging prosocial narrative.

Another trademark of narrative therapy is a more collaborative and accountable therapist–client relationship. Instead of the usual clinical notes (withheld from the teenager and family), the therapist's file often consists of copies of letters sent to the teenager and family summarizing meetings and

pointing ahead to the next one.[15] Consultation groups (involving teenagers and parents who are in or have completed therapy) are also used to advise the therapist on the effects of the therapy and to suggest ways of enhancing the process.[16]

This article is merely an introduction to the concept of narrative therapy. Further reading in this area is suggested to obtain a more complete understanding of this approach to therapy and its components.[17] ■

1 Department of Chaplaincy, Ottawa–Carleton Detention Centre, 2244 Innes Road, Ottawa K1B 4C4. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Ministry of the Solicitor General and Correctional Services of Ontario.

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Coming up in *Forum on Corrections Research...*

The theme of the September issue of FORUM will be "Offender treatability." The January issue will focus on "Employing offenders."

A network of support for offender families

by **Christopher Carr**[1]
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The Canada Committee of the International Year of the Family recently affirmed that the family is still universally recognized as the basic unit in society and continues to be the preferred structure for providing and receiving emotional and material support.[2] Further, despite its problems, the family still generates the greatest degree of personal satisfaction among Canadians.[3]

The permanence of the family is recognized by caregivers everywhere. For example, health-care systems recognize that the family is a primary caregiver in society. A similar understanding must drive our response to criminal activity. The family is a primary delivery point for personal growth and change. Even where family relationships are unhealthy, it is better to see the relationships as dynamic factors to be worked with than as chains to be broken.[4]

This article, therefore, identifies some of the pressures placed on offender families and highlights a network of programs that try to provide some measure of support to this vital component of offender rehabilitation.

Prison — a negative family experience

We seldom think about the family until there is a crisis. Prison is such a crisis and the incarceration of a family member severely affects the rest of the family. Researchers have identified eight areas of primary concern for the families of incarcerated men:

- money;
- raising children alone;
- general loneliness;
- fears related to the offender's release;
- housing;
- hostility from friends;

> **Family members generally experience prison as a hostile and complicated environment. Isolated from others in similar situations, they tend to feel that their difficulties can't be solved. They are in need of, and often open to, support.**

- isolation within the community; and
- fears related to the offender's treatment while incarcerated.[5]

However, the negative impact can be best expressed if personalized. For example, one family member described the correctional system as unresponsive to requests for information, unconcerned about dirty washrooms and gum stuck to the floor, indifferent to worn-out furniture in private family visitation areas, intolerant of criticism and likely to take out anger against a complaining family member on the offender.

Whether the description is accurate or not, it reveals how one family member views the correctional experience. Family members generally experience prison as a hostile and complicated environment. Isolated from others in similar situations, they tend to feel that their difficulties can't be solved. They are in need of, and often open to, support.

Family support areas

There are six potential family support areas:

- increase the resources generally available to families;

- provide assistance to particularly vulnerable families (such as helping pay the phone and / or travel costs of an offender family on welfare);

- help improve the capacity of family members to fulfil their responsibilities;

- provide supplemental services and supports (such as child care);

- assist family members through transition stages (such as when the offender is released into the community); and

- strengthen available community supports.[6]

The Canadian Families and Corrections Network

The Canadian Families and Corrections Network was developed to promote the empowerment of offender families.[7] Empowerment refers to a family taking control of the management of their lives and future.

The network is made up of community-oriented citizens, volunteer groups, private agencies, inmate committees and penitentiary administrations — all committed to improving the well-being of offender families. Alone, these groups have unequal resources and are seldom in contact. Together, they have the opportunity to make a real and long-lasting difference.

Its constitution describes the network as "united to encourage leadership, the sharing of resources and the development of policies, practices and programs that enable inmates and their families to build holistic family and community relations."

The network's basic goal is to promote the recognition of the potential contribution of families within the criminal justice process and to allow their voice to be heard through relevant research, policy and program initiatives. Above all, however, the network strives to promote communication among its members.

Offender family members play an important role within the network. Some are on the network's steering committee and all may participate in the network's meetings and projects. Most decision making is also by consensus.

The network hosted the fourth North American Conference on the Family and Corrections in Québec City in October 1993. Consultation sessions on offender family policy were held in Alberta in February 1995.

The network in action

The enormous energy behind, and potential of, work with offender families is dramatically illustrated by the work of some of the members of the Canadian Families and Corrections Network. For example, Bridge House (Kingston, Ontario) provides a place for out-of-town families to stay while visiting an incarcerated member of their family. Offender family members and former inmates are heavily involved in the operation of the organization, which now manages two residences with an annual budget of $400,000. A similar program is in operation in British Columbia.

The Women in the Shadows program (Fredericton, New Brunswick) allows the wives of inmates to meet weekly for fellowship and support. The meetings vary from "game nights" and picnics to focusing on specific common struggles to spiritual centring. Confidential emergency help (such as money, food and clothes) is also available through local religious organizations.

The Salvation Army Relink program (Ottawa, Ontario) is a series of programs that cover topics such as awareness of the criminal justice system, transportation, family support and parenting, life management (cognitive skills training) and using the library. A reintegration retreat for reunited offender families is also available.

Another example is the Working Group for Families of Prisoners, which was formed in 1990 to give a voice to families of offenders in Kingston-area federal prisons. The group's first project was a workshop for inmates, family members, corrections staff, community

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agencies and the network's steering committee on the specific needs of offender families. As a followup, the group has developed workshops on maintaining positive "couple" relationships.

As well, the John Howard Society (Winnipeg, Manitoba) has organized institutional staff, volunteers, offender families and former inmates to offer support to offender families in Winnipeg. The goal is to heal any damage caused by crime and the prison experience.

A spiritual footnote

If you just scratch the surface of many of the groups working with offender families, you will find many communities that give freely of their time and resources so that these families may experience fullness of life, healing, freedom and growth. Empowering the family and freeing the spirit are comfortable partners, and both are forever. ■

1   Chaplaincy, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

2   A. Ruffo and R. Couchman, *Canadian Families* (Ottawa: The Vanier Institute of the Family, 1994): iii.

3   Ruffo and Couchman, *Canadian Families*: 1.

4   Workshop presentation, North American Conference on the Family and Corrections, Québec City, 1993. Proceeding transcripts may be obtained by sending $10.00 to Canadian Families and Corrections Network, 333 Kingscourt, Kingston, Ontario K7K 4R4.

5   A. A. Estrin, "Family Support and Criminal Justice," *Putting Families First*, S. L. Kagan and B. Wessbourd, eds. (San Franciso: Joey-Bass Publishers, 1994): 166.

6   Ruffo and Couchman, *Canadian Families*: 17–19.

7   The Canadian Environmental Network was an early model for the Canadian Families and Corrections Network.

Why is the family important?

Despite the diversity in patterns of family formation and function, it is possible to define the common needs and obligations of Canadian families. It doesn't take long when you get a group of people from different circumstances in a room, for them to understand that what is at issue for them as individuals is at issue for most others.

We are increasingly going to have to acknowledge diversity and understand it better. But equally, we need to understand the common elements that cut across the different patterns of family formation and function, if we are going to learn to deal constructively with that diversity.

Adapted from R.Glossop, "Robert Glossop on the Canadian Family," *Canadian Social Trends*, 35 (Winter, 1994): 2–10.

Incarcerated fathers: A research agenda

by **Charles S. Lanier**[1]

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Recent estimates suggest that approximately two thirds of state and three quarters of federal inmates in the United States are fathers. In fact, 1991 U.S. Department of Justice figures confirm that approximately 500,000 men in state and federal prisons are fathers.

Clearly, it is important to identify issues of particular concern to this significant offender population to provide meaningful programming and intervention that will assist these offenders in the navigation of their prison and post-release environments.

Most of the research in the area of incarceration and family relationships focuses on mothers and the problems they confront as parents in prison. Further, studies that do look at incarcerated men typically focus on the offender's relationship with his family as a unit and how that association is linked with institutional adjustment or eventual rehabilitation. Fatherhood, in and of itself, is rarely examined specifically.

Fortunately, a handful of research efforts have examined the incarcerated father. These studies focused on father–child interaction,[2] family characteristics and parenting experiences,[3] affective states[4] and parenting programs for incarcerated fathers.[5]

This article summarizes the findings of these studies and describes several U.S. programming efforts directed specifically at this offender group. Perhaps most important, the article sets out a research agenda for further study in this area.

Legal issues

Many incarcerated fathers are concerned about maintaining their legal parenting rights while incarcerated. However, these fathers must confront two basic problems: finding competent legal representation and the perception that contact with an incarcerated parent is not in the child's best interest.

Still, incarcerated fathers do engage in legal visitation disputes, challenge adoption proceedings and litigate foster care issues, especially when their parental partner is deceased or also incarcerated. Incarcerated fathers are also often forced to confront legal challenges such as their parental partner moving out of state or attempts to legally terminate their paternal rights.

Economic issues

Incarcerated fathers are generally dependent on friends and family outside prison for economic support. Offenders usually cannot provide for the daily needs of their family, much less provide financial assistance for other needs (such as travelling to the prison for visits or long-distance telephone calls). Some families are forced to turn to public assistance for survival.

Environmental issues

One of the most difficult tasks for incarcerated fathers is explaining their incarceration to their children. This tends to be embarrassing for the father and the situation is often worsened by misguided attempts (by other family members) to protect the children from knowledge about their father's criminality.

Visiting conditions are also frustrating for fathers who want to have meaningful relationships with their children. Visiting rooms are uncomfortable, they lack activities to engage children and security concerns often lead to seemingly oppressive practices (such as no sitting on an offender's lap). The overall environment is simply inhospitable to children.

These concerns relate to incarcerated fathers who are able to keep in contact with their children. However, incarcerated fathers often have no communication with their children either because of the wishes of the children's caregiver or because their whereabouts are unknown to the father.

Emotional issues

Many incarcerated fathers have high levels of depression and anxiety, and little self-esteem. Feelings of loss, powerlessness and sadness afflict many men who are separated from their

children by the walls of a prison. Fathers are also often concerned about their children being at home with someone who is emotionally unstable and about the potential for physical or emotional abuse in their absence.

Some fathers also feel guilty about the disruption they have caused in their children's lives. Many feel responsible for their children's problems at home, in the community and at school. Incarcerated fathers also tend to feel guilty about not having spent enough quality time with their children before their incarceration and about generally not fulfilling their parental role.

Incarcerated fathers are also often confused about their seemingly contradictory roles as parent and offender. Many never see themselves as parents and accept instead more familiar roles such as addict or criminal. Other fathers long to be parents, but believe that prison keeps them from performing their parental responsibilities.

Relationship issues

Some incarcerated fathers are concerned about being forgotten by their children, or about being replaced by another person (such as a stepfather). Some worry that their children will stop coming to see them and will be alienated from them by the time they are released, while others fear that their children will think their father abandoned them and worry about losing their children's respect.

As fathers near release, some worry about re-entering a home where their children and parental partner are fully independent and accustomed to living without them. Others are concerned about losing their relationship with their parental partner and, as a result, becoming isolated from their children.

Programming for incarcerated fathers

It appears that prison officials generally take a "laissez-faire" approach to designing and

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implementing programs for incarcerated fathers. Many feel that parental issues are covered by other, more generic, programming.

Notwithstanding this decentralized approach, several parenting programs are currently in operation for male offenders (see the Carpentier article in this issue for a Canadian example). For example, the Tennessee State Prison's Parents in Prison program attempts to reduce offender child abuse and neglect. Program leadership is shared by offenders, community members and institutional personnel.

Similarly, Project Helping Incarcerated Parents in the state of Maine and Parents and Children Together at the federal correctional institution in Fort Worth, Texas are also collaborative efforts that target reduced offender child abuse and recidivism.

Offenders have also developed parenting programs for men. The Eastern Fathers' Group in New York was designed to assist all offenders, regardless of sentence length, by providing information and coping strategies to help them deal with the loss of family relationships. New York State's Parent Occupational Program was also designed by offenders and strives to strengthen relationships between incarcerated fathers and their children.

Although never implemented, the proposal for a Prisoners' Parenting Centre in New York was one of the most comprehensive and ambitious program models ever developed for incarcerated fathers. The program was developed by offenders and was designed to assist in the voluntary socialization and moral development of incarcerated fathers, as well as to improve the quality of life of children whose fathers are in prison.

A research agenda

An important first step in future investigation would be to accurately assess the number of incarcerated fathers. Additional research could

compare incarcerated mothers and fathers, and examine any differences among parents of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Future study should also explore the importance placed by incarcerated fathers on their parental role. This research should assess the incarcerated parent's current and pre-incarceration relationships, as well as looking at the impact of varying lengths of separation on the father–child relationship — focusing particularly on the effects of long-term imprisonment.

Other questions remain unanswered. Incarcerated fathers should be tracked during and after their incarceration to examine any connection between the status of the father–child relationship and institutional adjustment and recidivism. Another study should focus on how (or if) parents jointly deal with child-care issues while the father is incarcerated, as well as looking specifically at the family's perceptions about maintaining a relationship with the incarcerated parent.

The nature and scope of available offender parenting programs for men should also be assessed. This study could ultimately establish a directory of available programs that identifies key components such as program goals, activities, length and participation criteria, as well as the address and contact person for each program.

Finally, the attitudes of correctional officials and personnel should be examined. The perspectives of these individuals on the problems confronting incarcerated fathers is a critical component in the development and implementation of viable programs for this offender population.

So many positives...

A comprehensive and thorough research (and, ultimately, programming) agenda would help correctional personnel better manage their institutions and facilities by meeting the special needs of this large offender population. Further, focusing on parental roles and obligations should help in the management of increasingly diverse offender populations by capitalizing on a common concern for a large number of offenders.

As well, many parental programs are offered by community agencies and could be provided to offenders at relatively little effort and expense to the correctional system. These programs could help all family members — incarcerated fathers could receive the support they need, their children would benefit from improved relationships with their father, and mothers (by association) would benefit as well.

Encouraging incarcerated fathers to focus on their parental roles may also increase their potential for personal, reflective decision making. They may begin to consider the ramifications of their actions not only on their own lives, but on their children's lives as well. An institutional focus on, and approval of, the parental role of offenders may therefore help to foster socially constructive values in incarcerated fathers who may then pass them on to a future generation. ■

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Behavioural problems in the children of incarcerated parents

by *Stewart Gabel, M.D.* [1]
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There were more than 948,000 individuals in U.S. state and federal prisons at the end of 1993[2] and roughly 343,000 people housed in local jails as of 1988.[3] While the average number of children per inmate is unknown, these figures suggest that millions of children have a parent who either is, or has been, incarcerated.

Relatively little is known about the psychological reactions and behaviour of children of incarcerated parents. Several researchers suggest that children may experience a wide variety of problems due to separation from the parent, the stigma associated with incarceration and the deception that tends to occur as to their parent's whereabouts and circumstances.

It has been further argued that antisocial behaviour in boys may follow directly from paternal incarceration.[4] It is clear that boys are overrepresented in mental health facilities and that boys are more likely than girls to demonstrate aggressive and antisocial behaviour.[5] Men are also more than 10 times as likely as women to be incarcerated.[6]

For these reasons and because most research into the effects of parental incarceration focuses on incarcerated fathers, this article synthesizes the current knowledge and understanding of the behavioural and emotional reactions of children during paternal incarceration, emphasizing the effects on boys.

Literature review

One of the earliest research efforts in this area examined the effects of incarceration on male inmates and their families in England.[7] Overall, the behaviour of about 20% of the children studied was felt to have deteriorated after their father's imprisonment.

Soon after, a California study focused on teachers' ratings of children whose father had

> **A 1978 study assessed the changes that occurred in the families of 93 incarcerated Black men. The social stigma of incarceration was generally found not to be a problem for these families because they tended to view incarceration as the result of prejudice against minority groups.**

been incarcerated.[8] The study revealed that children with an incarcerated father were rated below average in various social and psychological areas more often than other children. However, the study's control group was not comparable to the experimental group because the experimental group contained significantly more Mexican–American children.

The next link in the chain was a 1966 descriptive report that examined the effects of deceiving children about the imprisonment of their father.[9] This report argued that disobedience, temper tantrums and destructive or delinquent behaviour were often responses to this deception.

Other reports have since corroborated the harm caused by such deception.[10] It has been argued that this practice may make it impossible for children to work through their feelings about their parent's incarceration.[11]

A 1978 study assessed the changes that occurred in the families of 93 incarcerated Black men.[12] The social stigma of incarceration was generally found not to be a problem for these families because they tended to view incarceration as the result of prejudice against minority groups.

Still, approximately two thirds of the these inmates' wives thought the incarceration had negative effects on the family.

An interesting 1981 research effort examined both male and female inmates' impressions of their children's behavioural response to parental incarceration.[13] Two thirds of these

inmates felt that their child(ren) developed behavioural problems after their incarceration. The incarcerated men reported problems such as truancy, discipline and delinquency, while the women reported fearfulness, poor school performance and nightmares.

Around the same time, another project focused on families of 192 Black male inmates in Alabama and Tennessee.[14] Imprisonment was found to have had little or slight effect on about one half of the children, while having a major impact on about 30%. Further, approximately 11% of the children were said to have been greatly upset by the stigmatizing remarks of other children in the community.

Finally, an examination of 118 first-time male Jewish offenders in Israel reported that, according to their mothers, the majority of children's problems were school- or health-related.[15] Relationships, discipline, aggressive behaviour and withdrawal also tended to be problem areas. The mother and family's coping resources were viewed as crucial to responding to these difficulties.

It was also argued that the stigma of incarceration was particularly difficult to bear for children whose father had been convicted of a white-collar crime or sexual offence because most of these families had had no prior contact with the criminal justice system.

The studies noted thus far relied mostly on parental reports about their children's behavioural reactions. Many of the children involved were quite young. Therefore, since boys of fathers with criminal backgrounds are at high risk of juvenile delinquency and/or adult criminality,[16] a 1977 clinical report examined the rapid emergence of antisocial behaviour in boys between the ages of 6 and 13 whose fathers had recently been incarcerated.[17]

The study focused on six lower- and middle-class White Boston families. Of 24 children, 12 boys displayed aggressive or antisocial behaviour within two months of their father's incarceration. Male children between the ages

of 11 and 13 seemed the most vulnerable to the effects of paternal separation, although younger children sometimes displayed temporary separation anxiety.

Three of the six families were further disrupted by divorce, which was seemingly precipitated by the incarceration, and the boys in these families caused many disturbances during the next two years. These families, however, had histories of separations, marital discord and physical abuse.

The boys in the three families that remained intact were somewhat younger and did not display the same degree of antisocial behaviour as the first group. They also seemed to do much better during the next two years. It is not clear, however, whether this less severe response was related to the fact they were younger when their father was incarcerated or to their less chaotic home environments.

The author subsequently studied other children whose parents were incarcerated, but his findings as to antisocial behaviour were not as striking.[18]

He did, however, find that inmates' wives generally saw their children as having become more disruptive and aggressive and less obedient after their father's incarceration, while the incarcerated father tended to characterize his children's problems as mild or non-existent.

Major themes

A number of major themes have emerged from research into the impact of parental incarceration on children. First, separation from a parent is likely to be traumatic, disrupt personal and family bonds, and worsen the family's social and financial situation. Behavioural problems also tend to emerge in a sizeable minority of children, with problems usually relating to family supports and coping mechanisms.

The stigma of incarceration is also an important problem for many children, although the level of difficulty experienced may reflect the

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family's view of incarceration. It was argued, for example, that some Black families feel that incarceration is often the result of social prejudice and does not, therefore, reflect negatively on the incarcerated individual. Consequently, children within these families may feel less stigma when a parent is incarcerated.

Children are also often deceived about incarceration. Some children are never told that their father is, or has been, in prison. Such deception has been universally condemned by authors as harmful to children and as perhaps the cause of behavioural difficulties.

It has also been found that most children do not commit severe

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antisocial behaviour at the time of their parent's incarceration, although boys in their early teens may be at greater risk of conduct problems. This type of behaviour appears more likely to emerge in existing dysfunctional family situations.

Finally, it is important to note that maternal incarceration may place even greater burdens on children if the children lose their primary caretaker (temporarily or permanently). The children of incarcerated fathers typically continue to be cared for by their mother, but the children of incarcerated mothers are rarely cared for by their father.[19] ■

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FEATURE ARTICLES

The impact of working rotating shifts on the family life of correctional staff

by **Brian A. Grant** [1]
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Prisons, by their nature, must be staffed 24 hours a day. Therefore, many of the people who work in prisons must work around the clock on either fixed or rotating shifts. In the Correctional Service of Canada, the majority of prison employees work rotating shifts. Correctional officers work eight-hour shifts, while those in health support, maintenance and other areas may work eight- or 12-hour shifts.

Most correctional officers work rotating shifts, with the most common rotation being the 7-3/7-4 rotation, which requires an officer to work 7 days on one shift, take 3 days off and then work 7 days on another shift, followed by 4 days off. Start times for shifts vary, but the most common start times are 7:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. The order of the shift varies by institution and officer level, with more senior officers working fewer late-night shifts.

Most shift work research has thus far focused on work productivity and safety issues, although some studies have examined the effects of shift work on non-work activities such as family life. This article does not, however, review this research in detail. It instead attempts to provide an overall perspective on how working rotating shifts affects the family life of workers in general, and correctional officers in particular.

The research results in this article were obtained as part of a study into possible changes in the hours of work for correctional officers. However, the results are equally applicable to the many other Service staff who work rotating shifts.

A starting point

An important point to keep in mind is that our society is organized around a working day between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. — evenings and weekends are spent away from work. Although a great many people do not work within this schedule, businesses, offices, schools and social activities are organized around it.

An example of the ingrained nature of this routine is that even people who work continuous night shifts usually switch to a "social cycle" of being awake during the day and sleeping at night on their days off, requiring readjustment to the late-night schedule on their return to work.

The physiological impact of shift work

One of the most consistent effects of shift work is sleep loss resulting from being awake at unusual hours. For people working late-night shifts, sleep loss can be as much as two hours a day, with fatigue accumulating during the work week. Those working day shifts (starting before 8:00 a.m.) often suffer a lesser degree of loss, while those working evening shifts experience the least sleep loss.

In addition to sleep loss problems, shift workers experience disruptions to their circadian rhythm. The circadian rhythm is the biological clock within each of us that controls sleep, wake and arousal periods. If people are placed in an environment with no external clues about time, the circadian rhythm operates on a 25- to 26-hour cycle. However, it adapts easily to society's 24-hour clock.

Researchers who study the circadian rhythm and the effects of its disruption use body temperature to track it over the course of a day. Higher body temperature indicates higher levels of arousal, while lower body temperature indicates periods of lower arousal. With consistent working hours, people maintain a consistent pattern of temperature change throughout each day. Shift work disrupts this pattern by constantly changing the hours for wakefulness and sleep.

> One of the most consistent effects of shift work is sleep loss resulting from being awake at unusual hours. For people working late-night shifts, sleep loss can be as much as two hours a day, with fatigue accumulating during the work week.

Disruptions to the circadian rhythm lead to feelings such as tiredness, irritability, mild nausea and loss of appetite until the body adapts to the changing sleep/wake cycle required for different shifts. These ill effects are similar to the jet lag experienced after flying across time zones.

Meal times and the quality of food consumed are also affected by changing work hours. Often, people working evening and night shifts do not have access to nutritious meals at their worksite and their eating patterns at, and away from, work are disrupted. Poor diet and inappropriate meal times result in digestive problems.

The combination of sleep loss, disrupted circadian rhythm, and eating and digestive problems tends to result in irritability and depression, which may have a negative impact on family interaction.

The social effects of shift work on the family

Working rotating shifts also affects family life. It limits personal contact because of irregular working hours and days off. For example, school-aged children do not see parents who are working the evening shift (3:00 to 11:00 p.m.) during the week and the parent(s) may have to work on weekends when children are home from school.

When a parent is working the late-night shift, the activity of children must be restricted to provide a quiet day-time sleeping environment. Many children's social and sporting activities also require the presence of a parent, so the fact that a parent is working "odd" hours may limit participation in these events.

Further, in our society, weekends are prime periods for major social events. Shift workers are frequently prevented from attending these events because they have to work. Regularly scheduled (weekly, biweekly or monthly) activities, such as organized sports, clubs, upgrading courses and community meetings, are also difficult to commit to because shift schedules make regular attendance impossible.

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Maintaining contact with extended family is also problematic. Large family gatherings are usually organized for weekends and special holidays, but again, shift workers often have to work on these days. In addition, extended family members often find it difficult to understand the schedule of shift workers and fail to consider the worker's days off when planning activities.

Taken together, these factors greatly reduce the time shift workers have to spend with family members. This may lead to feelings of isolation and guilt from being unable to fully participate in family activities and activities with their children.

Research with correctional officers

A national examination of the working hours of correctional officers within the Correctional Service of Canada led to two recent research projects. The first involved interviews with a small sample of correctional officers to determine what they liked and disliked about the current shift system.

The interviews were conducted with correctional officers at their work sites using an informal semi-structured format. Although the interviews were not specifically designed to obtain information on the effect of shift work on the family, many of the responses focused on the subject. Some staff concerns were:

- their lack of time with school-aged children when working the evening shift (3:00 to 11:00 p.m.);

- their limited time with young children (who are in bed by 7:00 p.m.) when working the day shift;

- their lack of time with family when working weekends;

- their restricted ability to participate in extended family activities, which are usually on weekends and not planned with consideration for the shift worker;

- a lack of understanding by extended family members of the limited flexibility of shift work;
- problems providing care for elderly parents;
- problems scheduling time with children in separated or divorced families; and
- problems having time alone with their spouse because of differences in days off.

The second research project analyzed responses to a series of shift-work–related questions from the 1994 national staff survey. The survey was distributed to all Service staff. About 60% of staff members returned the survey, including about 2,000 correctional officers.

There are two classifications for correctional officers: CO1 and CO2. CO1s are generally younger and less experienced, and CO2s also have case management responsibilities for offenders.

Close to 70% of CO1s and 80% of CO2s indicated that shift work has a "somewhat" or "very negative" impact on relations with their families (see Figure 1). More specifically, 20% of CO1s and 18% of CO2s indicated that shift work has a "very negative" effect on relations with their families. The negative impact of shift work on relations with friends was slightly higher than for families.
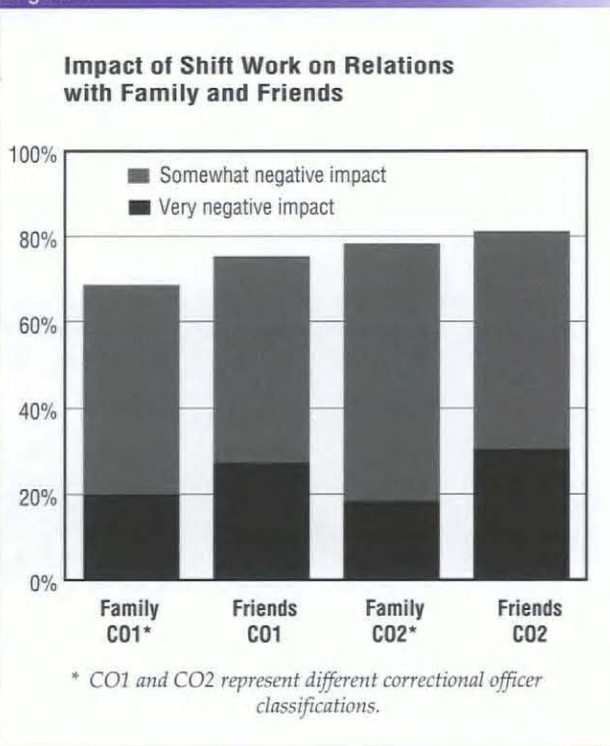
The staff survey also asked about job satisfaction and job stress. Results indicate that, while there was no difference in the level of job stress and job satisfaction between CO1s and CO2s, job satisfaction was lower and job stress was higher for those reporting negative effects of shift work on relations with both family and friends.

In short, the negative effects of shift work on relationships with family and friends may lead to greater work-related stress and a decrease in job satisfaction. Additional research is needed to verify this hypothesis.

What can be done to reduce the impact?

Given that working rotating shifts has a negative effect on relations between workers and their families and friends, what can be done to reduce the effects? Training programs are available to assist workers in developing healthy lifestyles that are compatible with shift work. These programs stress the need for proper sleep and nutrition.

Properly designed shift schedules can also reduce the effect of rotating shift work. In some instances, changing the shift rotation or the number of consecutive workdays may help.

Longer shifts (10 and 12 hours) would also reduce the number of days employees have to report to work. More days away from work provides more time for contact with families. However, longer shifts are not necessarily the best solution and are only appropriate for certain types of work.

The Correctional Service of Canada is currently reviewing the shift schedules worked by all correctional officers to determine if there are better alternatives. If alternatives are identified, they will be tested at selected prisons to determine if they can improve relations between workers and their families and friends. ■

Figure 1

Impact of Shift Work on Relations with Family and Friends

Legend:
- Somewhat negative impact
- Very negative impact

X-axis: Family CO1*, Friends CO1, Family CO2*, Friends CO2

* CO1 and CO2 represent different correctional officer classifications.

INTERNATIONAL CORNER

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