

# FORUM

on Corrections Research

May 1997, Volume 9, Number 2

## Featured issues

### Violent Offenders

Trends

Profiling

Assessment

Treatment



Correctional Service  
Canada

Service correctionnel  
Canada

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**Assistant Editor:** Ellie Caparelli  
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Correctional Service of Canada  
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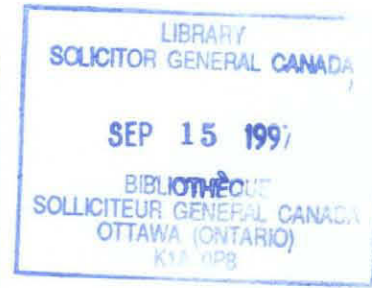
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# FORUM

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# Violent crime trends in Canada since 1983

by Holly Johnson and Roger Boe<sup>1</sup>

The federal correction community has a natural interest in violent crime trends, since inmates convicted of violent crimes (especially homicide, sexual assault, non-sexual assault and robbery) constitute the major proportion of the federal offender population.<sup>2</sup> Violent crime trends, therefore, speak directly to the probable workload of the Correctional Service of Canada. In addition, public fears concerning violent crime have often foreshadowed major legislative initiatives, which can significantly affect the Service.

Many Canadians are concerned about the threat violent crime poses to their security, and are more concerned about violent crime than about any other type of crime.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is often suggested that the fear of violent crime tends to exceed greatly the actual threat or experience of violent crime. This raises the questions of how much violent crime there is and whether it is increasing.

## Major trends

- The violent crime rate recorded by the police has increased significantly since 1983. However, the rate has dropped each of the last three years.
- Minor (level 1) assaults account for 60% of all violent crimes and most of the increase in the overall violent crime rate over the last decade.
- The rate of level 1 sexual assaults reported to the police has grown the most rapidly since 1983, although these offences account for a much smaller fraction of all violent crimes.
- Sharp increases in both assault and sexual assault follow major legal changes to these offences in 1983 and changes to the way police respond to cases of spousal assault.
- The more serious (level 3) assaults, sexual assaults and robbery incidents have shown more modest or no increases, while homicide rates have declined since 1983. The 1995 homicide rate is the lowest recorded in 25 years.

## Factors affecting violent crime rates

It is difficult to say whether the steady increase in the violent crime rate recorded by police up to 1992 is a reflection of actual increases in the levels of violence in society, artifacts of other factors or both. Nor can it be established with certainty whether the more recent declines reflect a real reduction in levels of violence.

## Changing societal values

Changes to the law and reduced societal tolerance toward certain types of violence, such as schoolyard violence and spousal assault, no doubt have changed the way police respond to and record these types of incidents. About 60% of violent crime is classified as level 1 assaults where the physical injury to the victim is relatively minor, and much of the increase in total violent crime rates is attributable directly to changing rates of level 1 assaults.

## Changes to criminal law

Major changes to criminal law can have a great effect on violent crime rates. In 1983, the offences relating to rape and indecent assault were removed from the Criminal Code and replaced with three levels of sexual assault. Under the new law, both men and women can be victims of sexual assault, and charges can be brought in cases of sexual assault involving spouses.

## Changes in police practices

Three parallel classifications of assault offences came into effect at that same time. Under the new assault law, police officers can lay a charge if they have "reasonable and probable cause" to believe an assault has occurred. Before 1983, police had difficulty proceeding with charges unless there was independent evidence, apart from the complainant's testimony, to corroborate the complaint. Throughout the 1980s, policy directives in police departments across the



country made it mandatory for police officers to lay charges in cases of wife assault where probable grounds existed. This removed a significant amount of discretion in the decision to lay charges and shifted domestic violence from a private to a public affair. The elevated rates of assault are at least partly due to these changes in police procedures.<sup>4</sup>

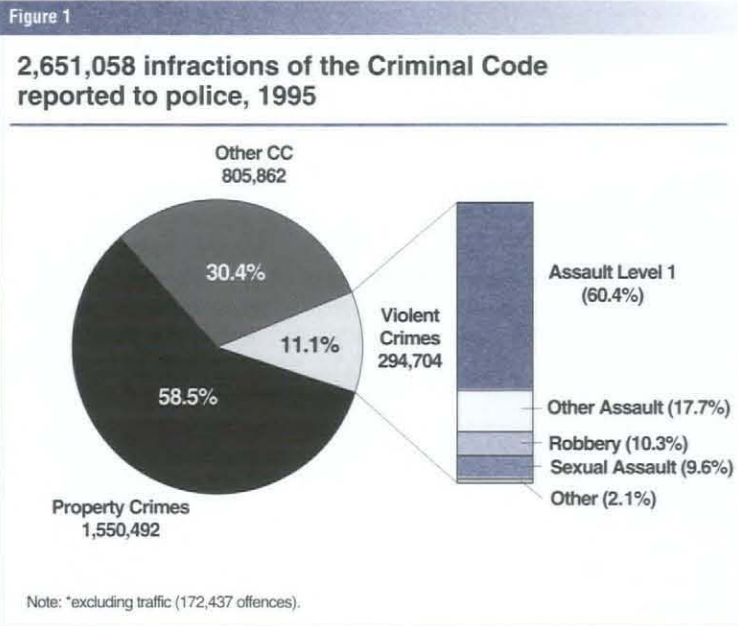
### General trends in violent crime

Violent crimes account for a relatively small proportion of all criminal incidents recorded by the police each year. As Figure 1 indicates, there were almost 2.7 million incidents involving violations of the Criminal Code known or reported to the police in 1995. Approximately 11% of these were violent crimes. Fifty-eight percent were property offences, and 30% were other offences under the Criminal Code such as mischief, prostitution and disturbing the peace.

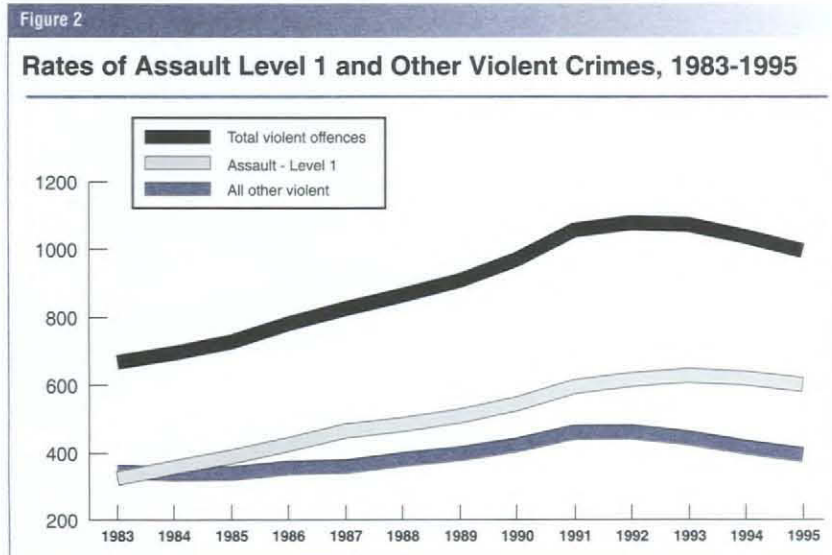
The violent crime rate increased significantly over the last 15 years, but recently has declined – in some cases quite significantly (Figure 2). While the 1995 violent crime rate was 47% higher than in 1983, common assault (level 1, which increased by 85%) accounted for most of this increase (Table 1). If the relatively minor assaults were factored out, the rate for more serious types of violent assaults increased about 19%.<sup>5</sup>

However, in the period from 1983 to 1992, the most rapidly increasing rate (nearly 160%) was for sexual assault. It has since declined considerably (Figure 3).

The violent crime rate peaked in 1992 and has declined each year since. The rate in 1995 was 995 incidents per 100,000 population, 4% lower than the rate in 1994, which itself was 3% lower than the rate in 1993.



Most categories of violent crime declined between 1994 and 1995. Five of the seven categories showed large decreases: sexual assaults declined by 12%, other sexual offences declined by 10%, abductions by 9%, assaults by 4%, homicides by 3%. Of the remaining categories, attempted murder showed no change in rate between 1994 and 1995, while robbery increased by 3%. As Figure 3 indicates, by 1995, each of the major components of the violent crime rate had declined from a peak reached three to four years earlier, with the greatest decline in the sexual assault rate.



### Assault

Non-sexual assaults account for about three quarters (78%) of all violent crimes reported to the police and so have a major



Table 1

## Violent Crime Trends – 1983 to 1995

Reporting Year	1983		1991		1995	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
All Criminal Code (excl. traffic)	2,148,635	8,440	2,898,988	10,309	2,651,058	8,954
Violent offences	170,036	668	296,962	1,056	294,704	995
Homicide	676	3	753	3	586	2
Attempted murder	880	3	1,044	4	932	3
All assaults	141,266	555	256,903	914	258,383	873
Sexual assault	11,932	47	30,351	108	28,216	95
Sexual assault 3 (aggravated)	550	2	464	2	300	1
Sexual assault 2 (with weapon)	840	3	971	3	658	2
Sexual assault 1 (other)	10,542	41	28,916	103	27,257	92
Assault (non-sexual)	129,334	508	226,552	806	230,167	777
Assault – level 1	82,460	324	167,227	595	178,064	601
Assault – level 2	24,274	95	37,796	134	35,854	121
Assault – level 3	3,506	14	3,884	14	2,771	9
Assault – other	19,094	75	17,645	63	13,496	46
Sex offences (non-assault)	2,940	12	3,931	14	3,490	12
Abduction	701	3	1,095	4	1,040	4
Robbery	24,274	95	33,236	118	30,273	102
Robbery with firearm	7,505	29	9,006	32	8,692	29
Robbery with other weapon	5,789	23	9,436	34	10,136	34
Robbery – no weapon	10,980	43	14,794	53	13,445	45
Property offences	1,422,703	5,589	1,726,769	6,141	1,555,492	5,237
Other CC total	536,312	2,107	843,594	3,000	805,862	2,722
July 1 Population and Estimate	25,456,300		28,120,300		29,606,100	

Note: from "Violent Crime in Canada," *Juristat*, 16, 6 (June 1995) and Statistics Canada, *Canadian Crime Statistics, 1995* (85-002/XPE).

influence on the overall violent crime rate. The three levels of assault established in 1983 include common (level 1) assault, assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2)

### Sexual offences

An estimated 22% of incarcerated federal offenders have a sexual offence conviction.

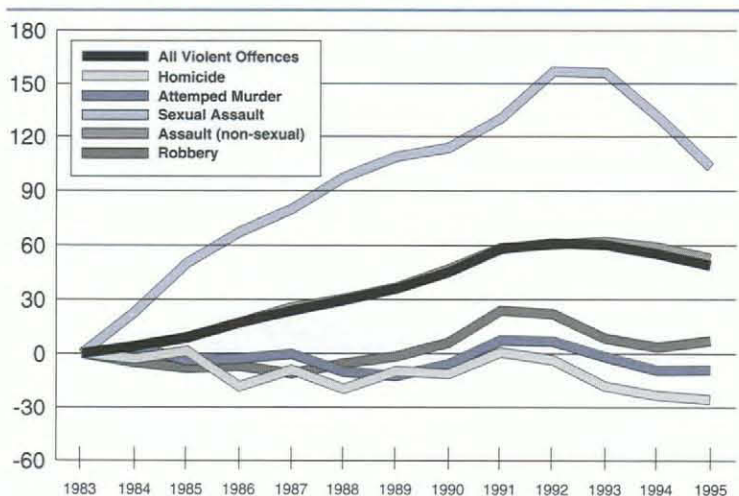
Over a two-year period, this population has increased by about 10%.

The law surrounding sexual offences was also transformed in the 1980s. Legislation in 1983 abolished the offences of rape, attempted rape and indecent assault and replaced them with three levels of sexual assault parallel with the three levels of non-sexual assault as described above. As with assaults, the three levels of sexual assault correspond to the degree of injury and the presence of a weapon.

In addition, three child sexual abuse offences came into effect in 1988: sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching and sexual exploitation. These offences, together with incest, are included in the category of "other sexual offences."

Figure 3

### Cumulative Change in the Crime Rate for the Major Violent Offences Since 1983 (Percentage)



Note: taken from Statistics Canada, *Canadian Crime Statistics, 1995* (85-002-XPE) and *Violent Crime in Canada* (85-002-XPB).



The rate at which these offences were reported to police since 1988 has remained constant, at between 12 and 14 per 100,000 population.

As Figure 3 illustrates, there was a dramatic increase in the rate of sexual assaults recorded by the police since 1983, due almost entirely to level 1 offences. A total of 27,257 level 1 offences was reported in 1995 (92 per 100,000 population), and this is more than twice the 1983 rate of 41 per 100,000 (10,542 incidents). Levels 2 and 3 sexual assaults have remained constant at between 1 and 4 per 100,000.

## Robbery

Robbery offenders constitute about 36% of the total federal incarcerated population, an increase of about 1.6% in the last two years.

Historical trends in police-recorded robbery rates do not indicate a consistent increase but show fluctuations, with the highest rates occurring in the early 1990s (see Figure 4). The rate dipped in the intervening years.

Robberies committed with firearms follow the general trend shown for total robberies (see Figure 4). Overall, rates of robbery increased slightly in 1995 from a dip in the previous years and following a high in 1991. In all years, robberies were more likely to be committed through the use of physical force than with firearms. According to the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, the most popular target for robbers is commercial establishments, such as

banks, gas stations and convenience stores. In 1994, 51% of robberies fell into this category while 40% took place on streets and other outdoor spaces.

## Homicides

Homicide offenders comprise more than one fifth (22%) of the federal incarcerated population, and this population has increased by 7.1% over the last two years.

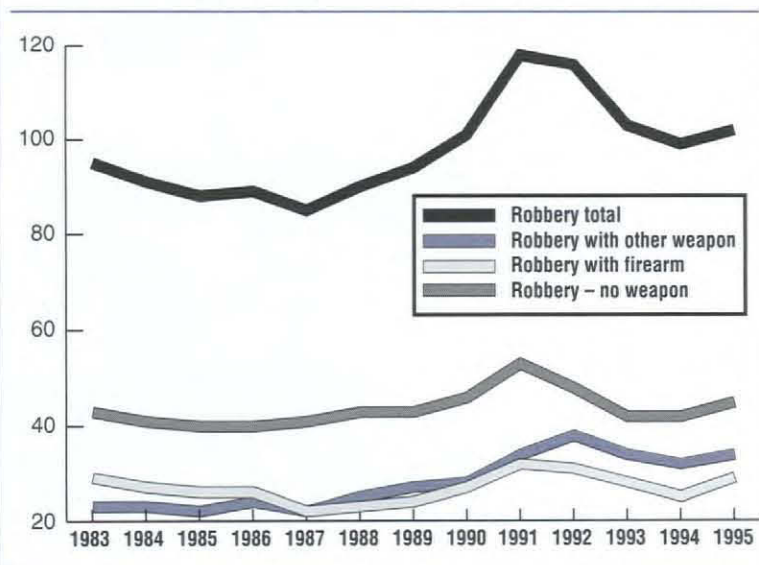
Measures of homicide are generally considered the most reliable of the violent crime statistics because homicide is not as susceptible to subtle changes in public willingness to report, or to changes in police policy or recording practices. Almost all homicides become known to the police and are recorded in police statistics.

Homicides understandably receive much media attention, particularly those involving very vulnerable victims or heinous acts of violence. This may give the impression that very serious violence is on the rise. Notwithstanding extensive media coverage of particularly brutal killings and the trials of the accused, the homicide rate has generally declined and, in 1995, reached its lowest level in 25 years. There were 586 homicides in Canada in 1995, 10 fewer than in 1994, which was 44 fewer than in 1993. The 1995 rate of 1.98 per 100,000 population was 3% lower than the 1994 rate of 2.04, which was itself 51% lower than the 1975 high of 3.02.

Since 1961, when collection of national homicide statistics began, there have been two distinct trends. Between 1961 and 1975, the homicide rate increased steadily from 1.28 per 100,000 to peak at 3.02, an increase of 136%. From 1975, despite yearly fluctuations, the homicide rate has declined gradually to 1.98 per 100,000 in 1995.

During the latter period, two significant pieces of legislation were enacted: the first abolished the death penalty in 1976, and the second (in 1978) controlled the proliferation and ownership of guns. By restricting access to deadly weapons, legislators intended to reduce the availability of deadly weapons during violent interactions.

Figure 4  
Rates of Robbery by Type of Weapon Used, 1983–1995





Typically, about one third of all homicides are committed with firearms, averaging about 214 annually. These figures are relatively small, and there has been a general decline in the rate of firearm use in homicides from 38% in 1978 to 30% in 1995.<sup>6</sup>

### International homicide patterns

The homicide rate is considered the most reliable measure in comparing crime levels among nations. The United States, which has a reputation for being more violent than Canada, generally reports a homicide rate three to four times higher. In 1994, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported 23,305 homicides or nine per 100,000 Americans.

In the United States, where approximately four in every ten households contain a firearm, about 70% of all homicides in 1994 were committed with firearms.<sup>7</sup> In Canada, where gun control laws are generally much stricter, the proportion of homicides committed with firearms (33%) is less than half that. When homicides committed with a firearm are factored out, the difference in the 1994 rates between these two countries is less dramatic – 1.4 per 100,000 population in Canada versus 2.5 in the United States. In other words, much of the difference in the homicide rates between the two countries can be explained by a much higher use of firearms in the United States.

A comparison to other western countries, however, shows that Canada's homicide rate was at the higher end in the mid 1990s. Of the countries surveyed, the United States (8.5), Northern Ireland (6.5), France (2.4) and Scotland (2.1) had higher homicide rates. The other European countries showed lower rates: Switzerland (1.1), Sweden (1.8), England and Wales (1.4), Germany (1.7), Italy (1.7) and Norway (1.0).<sup>8</sup> However, there is no clear pattern between homicide rates and the rates for other violent crimes among these countries (see Table 2).

### Patterns of victimization

There are identifiable patterns to the way in which violence is committed, with certain segments of the population reporting higher rates. In 1994, of all violent crimes with an identified suspect, 88% of those suspects were male. Half of all incidents involved a male perpetrator and a female victim, and 39%

Table 2

Victimization Rates for Selected Violent Crimes

	Rate per 100,000			
	Homicide	Assault	Sexual Assault	Robbery
United States (1995)	8.5	50	15	17
Northern Ireland (1994)	6.5	18	4	5
Italy (1994)	1.7	8	10	13
Canada (1995)	2.0	44	18	11
France (1994)	2.4	20	6	4
Switzerland (1994)	1.1	12	0	5
Sweden (1994)	1.8	27	8	3
England and Wales (1995)	1.4	28	3	9
Germany (1994)	1.7	31	17	8
Scotland (1994)	2.1	18	8	5
Norway (1989)	1.0	30	6	5

Note: from "Understanding Crime: Experiences of Crime and Crime Control," United Nations Interregional Criminal Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), Rome, August, 1993.

involved a male perpetrator and a male victim. The remaining 12% were committed by female offenders, who had an equal number of male and female victims.

Women have higher rates of violent victimization than do men. According to the 1993 General Social Survey, the national rate for three violent crimes (assault, sexual assault and robbery) was 93 per 1,000 people aged 15 years and older. For women, the rate was 100 per 1,000 females and for men it was 84 per 1,000 males.

The circumstances of violent events involving men and women also differ in important ways. Women report much higher rates of sexual assault (29 incidents per 1,000 females compared to a very small number of men), while men report robbery rates twice those of women (12 per 1,000 males compared to 6 per 1,000 females). The sexes report very similar rates of assault (68 and 66 per 1,000). ■



1. Holly Johnson can be reached at the Integration and Analysis Section, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS), Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0T6; this article is adapted from an earlier version of "Violent Crime in Canada," *Juristat*, 16, 6, (1995). Roger Boe is at the Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.
2. For example, as of December 31, 1996, more than one fifth (22%) of the federal incarcerated population had a conviction for homicide, another one fifth (22%) for a sexual offence and one third (32.8%) for robbery. These numbers include offenders who have convictions for several violent crimes. For more detailed statistics on federal offenders with violent convictions, see L.L. Motiuk and R.L. Belcourt, *Homicide, Sex, Robbery and Drug Offenders in Federal Corrections: An End-of-1996 Review*, Research Brief No. B-16 (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1997).
3. Almost half (46%) of Canadians polled in the 1993 General Social Survey (Statistics Canada) felt that the level of violent crime in their own neighbourhoods had recently increased. In the 1988 survey, 43% of those polled said an attack or threats of violence were the types of crimes of greatest concern to them. In 1993, 12% of Canadians stated that they felt very unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhoods after dark, and an additional 15% felt somewhat unsafe. Twenty-five percent of Canadians also felt very or somewhat worried when alone in their homes at night. Worry is higher for women, urban dwellers and recent victims of crime.
4. B. Kingsley, "Assault" in *Crime Counts: A Criminal Event Analysis*, L. Kennedy and V. Sacco (eds.) (Scarborough, Ont.: Nelson, 1996): 101.
5. D. Hendrick, "Canadian Crime Statistics, 1995," *Juristat*, 16, 10, 1996.
6. O. Federowycz, "Homicide in Canada - 1995," *Juristat*, 16, 11, 1996.
7. *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics - 1994*, (Washington: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, 1995): 318.
8. "Understanding Crime: Experiences of Crime and Crime Control," Report No. 49, (Rome: United Nations Interregional Criminal Justice Research Institute), August, 1993.

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# Profiling federal offenders with violent offences

by *Larry Motiuk and Ray Belcourt*<sup>1</sup>  
*Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada*

The Correctional Service of Canada's Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process produces a comprehensive and integrated evaluation of each offender as he or she enters the federal correctional system.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale systematically assesses and reassesses the risks and needs of offenders on conditional release.<sup>3</sup> While these case-based assessments are used to determine each offender's correctional plan, the information can also be used to produce descriptive profiles of the federal offender population with histories of violent offences.

*This article provides an analysis of violent offences committed by type, the institutional and conditional release status of offenders who have committed these offences, numbers of admissions and releases, sentence lengths, recidivism rates, criminal histories and needs of violent offenders on conditional release. Comparisons are made between violent and non-violent offenders on selected case characteristics.*

## The current situation

A December 31, 1996, review<sup>4</sup> of the Correctional Service of Canada's Offender Management System (OMS) files identified 4,553 homicide offenders (20.1%), 4,041 sex offenders (17.9%) and 7,418 robbery offenders (32.8%) under federal jurisdiction. It is important to note that one offender can be listed for more than one offence. For example, an offender who committed homicide may have also committed robbery. Despite this, these figures still understate the actual number of violent offenders because current computer systems do not identify all previous convictions for a violent offence (such as provincial sentences). Additionally, anyone who has a history of violent offending which predates the Service's automated information systems would not be accounted for in this review.

To check the accuracy of current computer systems in reflecting major offence categories of homicide, sex and robbery crimes, a comparison was made between the OMS offence base and the criminal records

maintained by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Using a 1992-93 release group of 6,419 federal offenders, we found additional homicide (0.3%), sex (2.6%) and robbery offenders (5.6%) under federal jurisdiction. We note that past history of these major offences is now being identified and listed in the Offence Severity Record section of the Criminal Risk Assessment component of the OIA.

## Institutional population (stock)

This end-of-1996 review also determined that there were 3,002 homicide offenders, 2,974 sex offenders and 4,902 robbery offenders incarcerated in federal institutions. Homicide offenders accounted for about 22% of the federal incarcerated population, robbery offenders for 36% and sex offenders for 22%.

Roughly one quarter of these violent offenders were in maximum security institutions, close to two thirds were in medium security institutions, and the remainder were in minimum security institutions.

## Conditional release population (stock)

This review found 1,551 homicide, 1,067 sex and 2,516 robbery offenders on conditional release, comprising about 17%, 12% and 28%, respectively, of the federal conditional release population.

About four fifths of federal homicide offenders were on full parole, whereas one third of sex offenders were on full parole. Among the sex and robbery offenders on conditional release, about one half were on statutory release.

## Regional distribution

The Service's Ontario and Quebec regions account for the most homicide offenders, with each region responsible for about one quarter (just over 50% combined) of the homicide offender population. However, when you compare each region's proportion of all federal



offenders, the Ontario region has the most homicide offenders.

The Prairie and Ontario regions have the most sex offenders, with one third and one quarter of the sex offender population respectively. The Atlantic and Prairie regions, however, have a somewhat larger proportion of sex offenders relative to their proportion of federal offenders.

The majority of robbery offenders under federal jurisdiction were located in the Quebec region, with this region having the most robbery offenders relative to its proportion of federal offenders.

### Number of violent offenders admitted (flow)

Table 1 shows an increase in the absolute number of homicide (7.8%), sex (7.5%) and robbery (6.4%) offenders in federal institutions over the 1996 calendar year.

The Atlantic region experienced the largest growth in the absolute number of robbery offender inmates (17.7%), while the Quebec and Pacific regions experienced the most growth in homicide offenders (11% each); the Prairie region had the largest increase in sex offenders (16.5%).

When you compare regional "flow-to-stock ratios" (admissions to institutional population), the Pacific region retained the greatest number of homicide offenders in federal custody relative to admissions. Both the Ontario and Prairie regions retained the most sex offenders relative to the other regions. Across all regions, robbery offenders are turning over at the greatest flow rate in federal institutions.

### Violent offender releases (flow)

Table 2 shows that while the number of homicide offenders released under some form of supervision increased by 1.1% over the 1996

calendar year, the number of sex and robbery offenders on conditional release decreased. Any offender who was at the end of a sentence at the time of this study was not included in the release figures. As a result, nearly one quarter of sex offender releases were omitted from these figures.

Regionally, the Atlantic and Prairie regions experienced the most growth in the number of sex offenders under community supervision, with increases of 13.5% and 13.3% respectively. An examination of the regional flow-to-stock ratios, however, reveals that the Quebec region experienced the greatest retention in

Table 1

#### Regional Distribution of the Federal Violent Offender Institutional Population and Admissions (1995-1996)

Region		Institutional population 1995 (stock)	Admissions 1996 (flow)	Institutional population 1996 (stock)	Flow-to-stock ratio	Growth
Atlantic	Homicide	196	16	215	1:13.4	+9.7
	Sex	321	89	308	1:3.5	-4.0
	Robbery	334	189	393	1:2.1	+17.7
Quebec	Homicide	648	48	720	1:15.0	+11.1
	Sex	493	163	521	1:3.2	+5.7
	Robbery	1,633	650	1,731	1:2.7	+6.0
Ontario	Homicide	858	64	918	1:14.3	+7.0
	Sex	716	178	761	1:4.3	+6.3
	Robbery	1,083	421	1,142	1:2.7	+5.4
Prairie	Homicide	567	72	577	1:8.0	+1.8
	Sex	819	339	954	1:2.8	+16.5
	Robbery	911	483	960	1:2.0	+5.4
Pacific	Homicide	515	28	572	1:20.4	+11.1
	Sex	417	102	430	1:4.2	+3.1
	Robbery	645	268	676	1:2.5	+4.8
Total	Homicide	2,784	228	3,002	1:13.2	+7.8
	Sex	2,766	871	2,974	1:3.4	+7.5
	Robbery	4,606	2,011	4,902	1:2.4	+6.4



Table 2

### Regional Distribution of the Federal Violent Offender Conditional Release Population and Releases (1995-1996)

Region		Cond. Rel. population 1995 (stock)	Releases 1996 (flow)	Cond. Rel. population 1996 (stock)	Flow-to- stock ratio	Growth
Atlantic	Homicide	95	21	100	1:4.76	+5.3
	Sex	161	85	152	1:1.79	-5.6
	Robbery	133	167	151	1:0.90	+13.5
Quebec	Homicide	525	62	504	1:8.13	+4.0
	Sex	253	174	247	1:1.42	-2.3
	Robbery	1,103	790	1,007	1:1.27	-8.7
Ontario	Homicide	423	72	427	1:5.93	+0.9
	Sex	242	144	229	1:1.59	-5.4
	Robbery	625	485	242	1:1.27	-1.1
Prairie	Homicide	238	66	259	1:3.92	+8.8
	Sex	285	198	285	1:1.44	0.0
	Robbery	399	416	452	1:1.09	+13.3
Pacific	Homicide	253	40	261	1:6.52	+3.2
	Sex	168	90	154	1:1.71	+8.3
	Robbery	333	298	288	1:0.97	-13.5
Total	Homicide	1,534	261	1,551	1:5.94	+1.1
	Sex	1,109	691	1,067	1:1.54	-3.8
	Robbery	2,593	2,156	2,516	1:1.17	-3.0

homicide offenders under community supervision during 1996 relative to the number of community supervision releases. Again, robbery offenders on conditional release re-enter the correctional system at the greatest rate.

### Sentence length

In 1996, the average sentence length for federal offenders admitted with a homicide offence (manslaughter only) was almost seven years (excluding lifers and revoked cases). Table 3

Table 3

### Average Sentence Lengths (Years) and Violent Offender Types

Population	Homicide (manslaughter)	Sex	Robbery
Admissions	6.89	3.67	3.74
Releases	7.06	3.55	3.70
Institutional	9.32	6.43	8.32
Conditional release	9.62	5.21	7.64

shows that this figure was almost double the average sentence length of offenders convicted for sex and robbery offences.

As expected, the average sentence length in 1996 for all violent offence categories released under supervision was lower than for their counterparts at admission.

It is not surprising that the average sentence length of incarcerated homicide, sex and robbery offenders was higher than for either the admission or conditional release populations. Similarly, the average sentence lengths of sex and robbery offenders were higher

than for those same offenders on conditional release. Interestingly, the average sentence length of incarcerated homicide offenders was slightly lower than homicide offenders on conditional release.

### Recidivism rates

A three-year follow-up study<sup>5</sup> of federal offenders (6,419) released in 1992-93, revealed that, of the 4,445 violent offenders (70%) released, about two fifths were convicted of a new criminal offence and nearly one fifth were convicted for violent crimes.

Offenders with violent offence histories are significantly more likely than non-violent offenders to have returned to the federal system (whether for new offences or for violations of conditional release). Violent offenders are no more likely than non-violent offenders to return to federal custody with a new offence. Violent offenders, however, are significantly more likely than non-violent offenders to return with a new violent offence.



Similar results are found with respect to the type of new convictions. Although the base rates of new convictions for homicide (0.7%), sex (1.5%) and robbery offences (9.5%) were low, a consistent pattern emerges. Released offenders with violent offence histories are significantly more likely than non-violent offenders to be convicted for homicide, sex crimes and robbery offences. These findings support previous work indicating that a history of violent offending is a good predictor of violent reoffending.

### Profiling the types of violent offences among male offenders

Using the OIA process, staff collect and analyze information on each offender's criminal and mental health background, social situation and education, criminal risk (such as number/variety of convictions and previous exposure/response to youth and adult corrections) and offender needs (such as employment history, family backgrounds, criminal associations, addictions, attitudes). While the results help to determine institutional placement and correctional plans, a distribution of selected variables can result in a comprehensive profile of the offender population.

In November 1994, the OIA process was implemented across the Correctional Service of Canada. Two years later, we extracted case-specific information on available offender intake assessments contained in OMS. To facilitate comparative analyses we focused on male offenders who had full offender intake assessments. (A comparable examination of female offenders is available.<sup>6</sup>) These results were generalized to a recent admission population (within the last two years).

Slightly more than four fifths of the 6,403 federal male offenders studied had a violent offence history (past and/or current). Just over two thirds (68.2%) of federal admissions had a violent offence listed as current, while another one ninth had a violent offence listed only in their past. Interestingly, one quarter of federal admissions had a violent offence listed both in the past and currently.

The average age of violent offenders at admission was about 34. The oldest offender

with a violent offence was 80, while the youngest was 17.

The majority of violent offenders (70%) were Caucasian. However, there was a somewhat larger proportion of Aboriginal violent offenders (18%) relative to this group's proportion of all federal offenders.

### Criminal history

As mentioned, the OIA process collects extensive information on each offender's criminal history record (youth and adult court involvements), offence severity record (victimization patterns) and sex offence history. Table 4 presents comparative statistics on selected criminal history background variables for male offenders with current (at time of admission) violent and non-violent offences. For previous youth court involvements, we found no significant difference between violent and non-violent offenders. As adults, however, non-violent offenders are significantly more likely than violent offenders to have been exposed to the criminal justice system. As expected, offenders admitted with a violent offence are significantly more likely to have records of previous violent offending.

To examine differences in criminal history background across violent offender type, we collapsed the OIA sample of federal male offenders with a violent offence history into

Table 4

#### Criminal Histories of Violent and Non-violent Male Offenders

Variable	Violent (4,311)	Non-violent (1,703)
	%	%
<b>Young offender history</b>		
Previous offences	43.2	41.5
Community supervision	31.2	29.8
Open custody	22.5	24.1
Secure custody	24.7	26.0
<b>Adult offender history</b>		
Previous offences***	81.9	87.8
Community supervision***	67.9	74.7
Provincial term(s)***	67.6	76.8
Federal term(s)***	27.1	33.9
<b>Violent offence history</b>		
Previous offence(s)***	62.1	40.0

Note: indicator numbers may vary slightly; \*\*\* p < .001.



Table 5

Criminal Histories and Violent Offender Types					
Variable	Homicide (520)	Attempted murder (116)	Sex offence (1,341)	Robbery/ assault (2,879)	Other violent (1,469)
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Young offender history</b>					
Previous offences	37.7	35.7	26.7	50.8	49.8
Community supervision	28.3	25.7	17.8	38.2	35.2
Open custody	19.9	16.8	11.2	27.9	26.7
Secure custody	18.1	22.8	12.7	30.7	30.2
<b>Adult offender history</b>					
Previous offences	73.3	78.4	75.9	85.5	83.1
Community supervision	57.0	63.8	60.3	72.7	69.6
Provincial term(s)	54.4	55.2	57.4	73.6	68.6
Federal term(s)	21.3	21.6	18.8	31.0	30.2
<b>Violent offence history</b>					
Previous offence(s)	7.5	1.8	21.2	55.5	25.9

five groupings: homicide, attempted murder, sex offence(s), robbery/assault and other violent offences (see Table 5).

We can see from Table 5 that federal male offenders in the robbery/assault and other violent offences categories had extensive criminal histories which were similar to that of the non-violent offender population. While offenders in the homicide and attempted murder groupings also had previous criminal histories, particularly as adults, they had the least number of violent offences.

### Needs of offenders on conditional release

The Service has an automated method of monitoring offender risk/needs levels in the community. The OMS currently contains the overall risk/need and identified need levels gathered since the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale was implemented. This information can be retrieved at any time to provide case-load snapshots.

Table 6 shows a national overview of 12 separate identified needs (ratings of "some need for improvement" or "considerable need for improvement") in the conditional release population. Considerable variation exists across these need areas between violent offenders and non-violent offenders.

We can see that violent offenders are more likely to be needy in the areas of marital/family, behavioural/emotional, mental ability and health, while non-violent offenders

experience problems in the areas of academic/vocational skills, employment pattern, financial management, companions and drug use. There appear to be no statistically meaningful differences between violent offenders and non-violent offenders in the areas of accommodation, alcohol use and attitude.

### Discussion

The Service's capacity to produce meaningful and accurate profiles of the federal offender population with (or without) violent offence histories can be used to raise awareness about the composition of this population. Clearly, we are managing more violent federal offenders than before.

Among federal violent offenders, those with robbery crimes are turning over at the greatest rate in institutions and on conditional release,

Table 6

### Needs of Violent and Non-violent Male Offenders on Conditional Release

Type of need	Violent offenders (3,860)	Non-violent offenders (3,114)
	%	%
Academic/Vocational**	39.0	42.2
Employment pattern*	46.2	48.8
Financial management***	38.2	46.6
<b>Marital/Family***</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>27.8</b>
Companions***	27.0	38.4
Accommodation ns	11.7	12.2
<b>Behavioural/Emotional***</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>38.3</b>
Alcohol use ns	17.4	16.9
Drug use***	17.3	20.9
<b>Mental ability***</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Health***</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>16.1</b>
Attitude ns	10.6	11.5

Notes : \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001; ns = not significant.



have more criminal history (as youth and adults) and are highly recidivistic. These findings suggest that specialized programs and services be offered to these individuals.

The homicide offender population turns over in federal institutions at a considerably slower rate than offenders in other major offence categories (mainly because of longer sentences). As a group, they are more successful than other violent offenders after release. Nevertheless, homicide offenders are accumulating at a significant rate in federal institutions and pose a different challenge to corrections officials relative to their shorter term counterparts.

Sex offenders continue to accumulate in federal institutions and decline in the community supervision population. From their criminal histories and recidivism rates, it appears that federal sex offenders, as a group, may be more criminally versatile than perhaps thought in the past. Careful attention should be paid to these individuals during the reintegration process.

In summary, case-specific information being derived from our automated assessment systems is helping to direct available resources and controls to particular segments of the federal offender population to manage risk better. ■

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

*The September 1997 issue of FORUM will be a special issue highlighting over 50 reports produced by the Research Branch.*



# Comparing violent and non-violent female offenders on risk and need

by Kelley Blanchette<sup>1</sup>

Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada

**V**iolent crime has traditionally been viewed as a uniquely male phenomenon. In 1989, however, it was estimated that women were committing about 10% of serious (violent) crime in Canada,<sup>2</sup> and more recent research shows a steady increase in the rate of female offending in general.<sup>3</sup> These findings indicate the need to understand better violent offending by women.

**T**he advent of the Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process in Canadian corrections allows for a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of each offender at the time of admission to federal custody.<sup>4</sup> Briefly, the OIA process collects case-specific information to determine criminal risk and need areas that may be unique to each offender. Since its implementation in 1994, over 200 full OIAs have been completed for women serving sentences of two years or more. Partial intake assessment data are available for approximately 100 additional federal female offenders. This article compares violent and non-violent federally sentenced women on risk and need dimensions derived from the OIA.

## Procedure

Since its implementation, all data derived from the OIA process have been entered into the Correctional Service of Canada's Offender Management System (OMS), an automated database. For this study, all available OIA data for federal female offenders were extracted from the OMS. Then, based on their most serious admitting offence, offenders were divided into two groups, violent and non-violent. The violent group consisted of offenders convicted of homicide, attempted homicide, assault, sex offences, robbery, kidnapping/forcible confinement and arson. The non-violent group consisted mostly of women serving sentences for property and drug-related offences.

Statistical analyses were used to test for differences between the two groups in the following categories: basic demographic information, criminal history (risk) indicators, overall ratings on criminogenic need areas

(employment, marital/family, associates, substance abuse, community functioning, personal/emotional orientation and attitude) and various indicators of suicide potential. Subsequently, more detailed analyses compared violent and non-violent offenders on all indicators within each specific need area. Results of this study are presented in sections that follow.

## Demographic data

Complete information about offender age, race and region was available on the OMS for 182 federal female offenders. Classified by their most serious admitting offence, 106 (58%) females were designated as violent, and 76 (42%) were designated as non-violent.

Violent and non-violent offenders were scattered across the regions of the country, with no between-group differences in location by offence category. The largest proportion (40%) of offenders in this study was incarcerated in Ontario, followed by the Prairies (34%), Quebec (16%) and the Atlantic (10%). Although there are federal female offenders incarcerated in the Pacific region, offender intake data were not available for this region at the time of this study.

The average age for the entire sample of female offenders under study was 33.8 years. For violent offenders, the average age was 32.4 years, while for non-violent offenders, the average age was slightly older at 34.5 years. Statistical analyses revealed no significant differences between the two groups based on age.

To simplify a comparison on race, the two groups were compared on the basis of Native status. In total, 40 (22%) of the 182 female offenders were Aboriginal, with the majority of the remaining non-Native offenders being Caucasian. Although there were no significant differences between violent and non-violent offenders based on race, Aboriginal offenders were more likely to be serving sentences for violent offences. More specifically, while 68% of



Aboriginal offenders were classified as violent, only 56% of their non-Native counterparts were similarly classified.

### Criminal history

The Criminal Risk Assessment is a main component of the OIA process. It is based primarily on the offender's criminal record and provides specific information about past and current offences. Moreover, any other details relevant to specific risk factors are included in the criminal profile report.

By design, there are significant and expected differences between violent and non-violent female offenders on variables related to their current offences. Very few differences are noted, however, when looking at previous experiences with youth court, adult court and other selected criminal history indicators. While there is a small tendency for violent offenders to have had more experience with the criminal justice system, statistical analyses showed that the majority of these differences were negligible. Only two specific background indicators yielded significant differences between the two groups, and both of those were associated with youth court sentencing. Percentage distributions for selected criminal history indicators are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

#### Comparing Criminal History Indicators of Violent and Non-violent Female Offenders

Criminal History Indicators	Violent	Non-violent
	(n=106)	(n=71)
	%	%
<b>Previous Youth Court</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>21</b>
Community supervision*	14	4
Open custody*	21	7
Secure custody	19	9
<b>Previous Adult Court</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>56</b>
Community supervision	52	44
Provincial terms	47	39
Federal terms	20	13
<b>Previous:</b>		
Segregation (disciplinary)	22	15
Escape/UAL	15	11
Failure on conditional release	26	18
< 6 Mo. since last incarceration	14	10

Notes: \*p< .05; UAL = unlawfully at large.

### Case need levels

The other core component of the OIA process involves the identification of the offender's criminogenic needs. The Case Needs Identification and Analysis (CNIA) considers specific aspects of the offender's personality and life situation. Data for CNIA are clustered into seven target domains, with multiple indicators for each: employment (35 indicators), marital/family (31 indicators), associates/social interaction (11 indicators), substance abuse (29 indicators), community functioning (21 indicators), personal/emotional orientation (46 indicators) and attitude (24 indicators). Based on the number of indicators endorsed, the completed CNIA classifies offenders on each target domain along a four-point continuum. Classifications reflect the degree of offender need, ranging from "asset to community adjustment" – meaning that the offender would not likely have trouble in that need area once released from prison – to "significant need for improvement." (Asset to community adjustment is not applicable to substance abuse and personal/emotional orientation.)

Percentage distributions for each domain need level, by group, are presented in Table 2. Violent offenders exhibited more difficulty than their non-violent counterparts in five of seven areas. The two exceptions were associates/social interaction and community functioning. This difference was especially marked in the area of substance abuse, where about 74% of violent female offenders exhibited at least some difficulty, compared to about 46% of non-violent women.

Table 2

#### Identified Needs of Violent and Non-violent Female Offenders at Admission

Type of Need	Violent	Non-violent
	(n=106)	(n=127)
	%	%
<b>Employment*</b>	80.2	70.1
<b>Marital/Family***</b>	87.8	68.5
<b>Associates</b>	73.5	76.4
<b>Substance abuse***</b>	73.6	45.7
<b>Community functioning</b>	75.5	68.5
<b>Personal/Emotional***</b>	97.2	82.7
<b>Attitude**</b>	35.8	20.5

Notes: \*p< .05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001.



Perhaps the most noteworthy factor revealed by the CNIA's of federally sentenced women is the fact that a large percentage of these offenders showed difficulty across all need areas. This reinforces the necessity to address these issues in correctional management and in programming for female offenders.

### Case need indicators

To explore the nature of the differences between the two groups of female offenders in target need domains further, multiple analyses were performed to compare violent and non-violent offenders for each domain. Results showed that, across all target domains, almost all differences between the two groups of offenders indicated a higher degree of need for violent female offenders.

Of the 35 indicators targetting employment needs, five significant between-group differences were found. The most critical difference ( $p < .001$ ) was in employment history, where 34% of violent women had no employment history, compared to only 11% of non-violent women. Other significant indicators were unemployed at the time of arrest, unstable job history, lack of initiative and difficulty with supervisors.

In the marital/family target domain, six of the 31 indicators were found to distinguish significantly between groups. In this area, the most striking differences were in childhood family functioning, where over 30% of violent female offenders lacked family ties during childhood. This was true for only 12% of non-violent women offenders. Significant differences were also noted in childhood relations, where violent women were more likely to have experienced negative relationships with their mothers, siblings and other relatives. Between-group differences were also noted in parenting responsibilities: about half the violent women had no parenting responsibilities (before incarceration) compared to about one third of non-violent offenders. Finally, violent offenders were more likely to have had prior family/marital assessments (15%) than non-violent offenders (4%), although no differences were noted in

participation in marital/family therapy or intervention.

As mentioned, there were no discernible differences between violent and non-violent offenders on overall level of need in the area of associates/social interaction. However, between-group comparisons for each of the 11 indicators within the specified need area (associated/social interaction) revealed significant differences on two indicators. First (and not surprising) violent offenders were more likely to associate with substance abusers (68%) than non-violent offenders (51%). A second and unexpected finding, however, showed that almost 70% of non-violent offenders had many criminal acquaintances, compared to 54% of violent offenders: this difference was also statistically significant.

In the target domain of substance abuse, almost all the indicators differentiated violent women from their non-violent counterparts, with the former showing more deficits. Results of these analyses are found in Table 3. Interestingly, differences are more marked for indicators pertaining to alcohol abuse than

Table 3

#### Selected Substance Abuse Indicators Assessed by OIA: Violent and Non-violent Female Offenders

Significant Domain Indicators	Violent %	Non-violent %
<b>Substance Abuse</b>		
Abuses alcohol ***	57.1	29.7
Began drinking at an early age ***	50.5	20.3
Drinks on a regular basis **	37.3	18.3
Has a history of drinking binges ***	47.1	21.1
Has combined the use of alcohol and drugs **	44.2	23.3
Drinks to excess during leisure time ***	45.1	18.2
Drinks to excess in social situations **	43.7	21.1
Drinks to relieve stress ***	46.1	21.1
Drinking interferes with employment *	28.9	13.9
Drinking interferes with marital/family relations **	42.3	19.4
Drinking interferes with social relations ***	35.9	11.1
Drinking has resulted in law violations ***	50.5	20.6
Abuses drugs **	67.6	44.6
Began using drugs at an early age **	47.6	25.7
Has gone on drug-taking sprees *	48.1	30.1
Has combined the use of different drugs **	46.2	23.6
Uses drugs during leisure time **	51.4	29.7
Uses drugs in social situations**	51.0	31.5
Drugs to relieve stress *	30.1	20.8
Drug use interferes with marital/family relations *	48.1	32.9
Drug use has resulted in law violations *	52.9	36.5
Drug use interferes with health *	39.8	24.7
Has participated in substance abuse treatment **	50.0	28.4
Has completed substance abuse treatment *	37.6	21.6

Notes: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; indicator numbers may vary slightly.



those pertaining to drug abuse: violent women were almost twice as likely to be alcohol abusers than non-violent women.

Few indicators in the area of community functioning were found to differentiate between groups. The most notable finding in this domain ( $p < .001$ ) was that over half the violent women had unstable living arrangements (before incarceration) compared to only 26% of non-violent women. There were also small but statistically significant differences in monetary issues, where non-violent female offenders were less likely to have a bank account and more likely to have outstanding debts.

Twenty-eight of the personal/emotional orientation indicators were significantly associated with violence. Not surprisingly, all but one of these indicators suggest that violent women have more personal and emotional problems than their non-violent counterparts.

Table 4 reveals that cognition is the principal component underlying many of the observed differences. More specifically, violent female offenders were more likely to be unable to recognize problem areas and make informed choices, have unrealistic goals, be narrow and rigid thinkers, show disregard for others and be unable to understand the feelings of others. Violent offenders also showed more difficulty in mental health and intervention issues. For instance, they were more than twice as likely to have been diagnosed as disordered, and the majority had received medication and/or a personal/emotional assessment at some point.

Comparisons across indicators of attitude yielded significant results for half of the 24 items. Again, each significant difference presented the violent group as higher need than the non-violent group. Violent women were much more likely to have negative attitudes toward the law, the police, the courts, corrections, community supervision and rehabilitation. They were also significantly more likely to value substance abuse, and to view employment and basic life skills as useless. Given the nature of their offences, it was not surprising to find that over 20% were supportive of instrumental violence, compared to none of their non-violent counterparts.

### Suicide potential

One component of the initial OIA evaluates each offender for suicide potential at admission. Nine specific indicators are used to determine the potential for suicide. Violent women were compared to non-violent women across all indicators of suicide potential, and the results are listed in Table 5.

Violent women were assessed as being at higher risk for suicide by most indicators. What is most striking about the data contained in Table 5 is the fact that 53% of female offenders convicted of a violent offence have attempted suicide in the past. This figure is more than double that of female offenders serving sentences for non-violent crimes. These results support an earlier investigation<sup>5</sup> involving a sample of federally sentenced women which

Table 4

#### Selected Personal/Emotional Indicators Assessed by OIA: Violent and Non-violent Female Offenders

Significant Domain Indicators	Violent %	Non-violent %
<b>Personal/Emotional Orientation</b>		
Physical prowess problematic *	5.7	0.0
Family ties are problematic *	57.7	38.4
Has difficulties solving interpersonal problems ***	64.8	34.3
Unable to generate choices *	67.6	50.7
Goal setting is unrealistic ***	21.6	2.8
Has disregard for others *	26.0	11.0
Incapable of understanding the feelings of others **	18.3	4.2
Narrow and rigid thinking **	25.2	6.9
Aggressive ***	40.4	13.9
Copes with stress poorly **	71.4	52.1
Poor conflict resolution ***	78.9	38.4
Manages time poorly *	20.0	6.9
Has low frustration tolerance ***	46.6	20.6
Hostile **	34.3	13.9
Takes risks inappropriately **	51.0	72.2
Thrill seeking *	28.2	14.1
Non-reflective **	39.4	20.6
Manipulative *	34.0	17.1
Sexual attitudes are problematic *	11.0	2.7
Diagnosed as disordered in the past **	31.0	12.7
Diagnosed as disordered currently *	20.8	8.2
Prior personal/emotional assessments ***	55.0	18.6
Prescribed medication in the past ***	64.1	37.5
Prescribed medication currently *	41.2	26.4
Past hospitalization ***	41.6	17.4
Received outpatient services in the past **	40.8	19.7
Received outpatient services prior to admission **	22.2	5.6
Past program participation *	36.9	20.8
Current program participation *	30.4	16.4

Notes: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; indicator numbers may vary slightly.



Table 5

### Suicide Risk Potential Assessed by OIA: Violent and Non-violent Female Offenders

Suicide Risk Indicators	Violent %	Non-violent %
May be suicidal	11.8	11.4
Previous suicide attempt(s) ***	53.0	24.3
Expressed suicide intent	10.8	4.2
Has plan for suicide	3.9	0.0
Has had recent psychological/psychiatric intervention *	37.4	21.1
Recent loss of relationship/death of close relative	18.6	12.7
Excessively worried about problems re: legal situation **	21.0	5.8
Under influence of alcohol or drugs/signs of withdrawal	5.0	8.8
Showing signs of depression	17.8	17.1

Notes: \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; indicator numbers may vary slightly.

showed that a history of attempted suicide was a potent predictor of violent recidivism.

## Conclusions

This study has revealed results that are both expected and surprising. Although there were some differences between violent and non-violent female offenders on variables related to criminal history, sentencing experience and institutional adjustment, very few were statistically significant. Moreover, aside from current offence data, the observed differences were relegated to youth court experiences.

Results clearly indicate that violent female offenders present higher need levels than their non-violent counterparts. This difference was noted across five of the seven target domains. The exceptions were the associates/social interaction and community functioning domains. Micro-level analyses (indicators), however, revealed a trend for non-violent offenders to

have more criminal associates. This was somewhat surprising, considering that other research with federally sentenced women<sup>6</sup> suggests that criminal associates are predictive of violent recidivism. It is hoped that future research will explore this contradiction.

In a close examination of each individual indicator for each target domain, it was found that those associated with substance abuse exhibited the most (and strongest) between-group differences. More specifically, violent female offenders showed a higher tendency to problematic substance

use. This was evidenced in the fact that 24 of the 29 substance abuse indicators yielded statistically significant between-group differences. This finding is not surprising, as most researchers posit an unequivocal association between substance abuse and violent behaviour. Moreover, the need for ongoing, intensive substance abuse programming is highlighted – especially for those women convicted of violent offences.

Finally, the results demonstrate significant associations between suicide potential and violent offending, with the strongest indicator being previous attempts at suicide. It was suggested elsewhere<sup>7</sup> that more consideration be given to suicide risk and self-injury in the assessment of women offenders. It merits reiteration here, as results from the present investigation imply again that suicide potential could be paramount in risk prediction, particularly for female federal offenders. ■

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# Detention: Is it meeting its goal?

by **Brian A. Grant**<sup>1</sup>

Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada

**A**t their statutory release date, federal inmates in Canada who are not released on full parole are generally released to serve the final one third of their sentence under supervision in the community. Some offenders, however, are deemed too dangerous for release and are detained in custody (known as detention) for a period of time beyond their statutory release date.

A provision of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (1992) authorizes the detention<sup>2</sup> until the end of their sentence of inmates who are likely to commit a new violent offence or a serious drug offence. The main purpose of this provision is to increase the protection of society by maintaining the most dangerous offenders in custody. Detention cannot, however, extend past the end of an inmate's sentence. Since evidence suggests that longer sentences do not decrease recidivism,<sup>3</sup> the main benefit of detention is to keep the offender incarcerated until the end of the sentence.

## Who's referred?

**P**redicting, with a high degree of accuracy, who is likely to commit a violent offence is an extremely difficult task. However, case management officers and the National Parole Board have been required, by law, to make such predictions for the purpose of detention. These predictions must be made from the information they have available before the statutory release (SR) date of the offender.

The *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* (1992) contains very specific procedures which must be followed when an offender is detained in custody beyond the statutory release date. These procedures suggest that lawmakers wanted to ensure that detention was reserved only for the most serious offenders, as detention increases the limits on freedom imposed by the courts.

The Correctional Service of Canada refers offenders to the National Parole Board for detention consideration. The cases of inmates who have committed violent offences or drug offences are automatically reviewed to determine if detention should be considered.<sup>4</sup> Other offenders, who may represent a threat to

society on release, may also be reviewed. Referrals to the National Parole Board are made if it is determined that an offender, if released, is likely to commit another violent or serious drug offence before the end of their sentence. The National Parole Board decides whether or not to detain an inmate, after which annual reviews are held to determine if the offender should be released.

This article reviews the results of a recent study<sup>5</sup> which addresses two fundamental questions: are the highest risk offenders referred and detained, and are the offenders who are referred and detained the most likely to recidivate?

To answer the first question, the study investigated criminal history factors. Time to readmission and time to a new offence determined if the detained offenders were the most likely to recidivate.

For offenders under supervision, readmission is a very useful measure of recidivism since an offender can be readmitted for a new offence and/or for failing to meet the conditions of the release. Additionally, the readmission can occur very quickly, making it a much more sensitive measure of recidivism than a new offence. However, as there is a considerable time lag associated with court proceedings, the readmission rates for offenders under supervision cannot be compared to those for offenders who have completed their sentences. Therefore, a second measure of recidivism was used: time to new offence or sentence. Since all offenders, whether under supervision or past the end of their sentence, are processed by the court in the same manner, the time to a new sentence is comparable for offenders being supervised and offenders who have completed their sentence.

Comparisons in the study are made between the following groups:

- offenders referred for detention but released without being detained (referred but released);



- offenders detained for a period of time but released before the end of their sentence (detained then released);
- offenders detained to the end of their sentence (detained to end of sentence);
- offenders released at the statutory release date with no previous releases (SR only);
- offenders released at the statutory release date, but who had a previous release (SR and other); and
- offenders released on full parole (FP).

two-year follow-up cases are those for which readmission and reconviction data are available.

It is interesting to note that the number of offenders referred for detention has been increasing from year to year. Since only offenders who are held in custody until their statutory release date are considered for detention, this increase was calculated as a

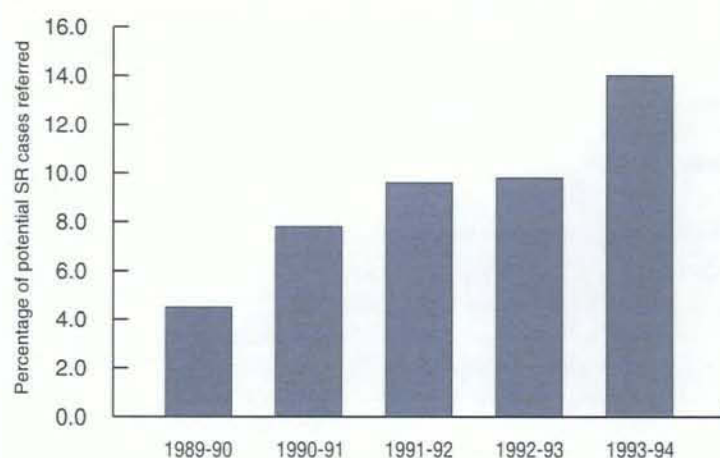
### Number of referrals

The study used all releases from custody and all referrals for detention from fiscal years 1989-90 to 1993-94. During this period, there were 1,115 referrals for detention and 917 offenders (82%) were detained for some period after the statutory release date. Follow-up data were available for 862 of the referred offenders who reached the end of their sentence within the period of the study. Of these, 62% were detained to the end of their sentence, 15% were detained and then released, and 23% were not detained.

Table 1 shows the eventual outcome for all the referrals and the percentage of cases with a two-year follow-up. Detention cases in which the sentence was not complete (column D) are not included in the analyses which follow. The

Figure 1

### Statutory Release Cases Referred for Detention



percentage of the total number of statutory release cases for each year. The results, presented in Figure 1, show a steady increase in the percentage of referrals, from 4% in 1989-90 to 14% in 1993-94.

### Risk factors for referred offenders

To determine if the offenders being referred for detention were the highest risk offenders, three factors normally associated with higher risk behaviour were studied: the level of criminal activity, the type of offence committed and the length of the sentence. The results for referral cases are then compared with those for other types of releases. In addition, the referrals are compared across three possible outcomes: released, detained

Table 1

### Release Outcome for Referral Cases

	A Referred but released	B Detained then released	C Detained to end of sentence	D Detained, but sentence incomplete*	Total
Total cases	198	131	533	253	1,115
With two-year follow-up	164	92	235	2	493
Percentage with two-year follow-up	83	70	44	1	44

Note: \*Includes those cases still detained at the conclusion of the study period and a few released and subsequently detained.



and then released, and detained to end of sentence.

Of the offenders released at the SR date, over 50% had six or more offences for which they served time in a federal prison. However, only 35% of the referrals were offenders who had six or more offences (see Table 2).

Offenders referred for detention were more likely to be serving longer sentences than offenders not referred (see Table 3). More specifically, 37% of referred offenders were serving sentences of more than six years; only 20% of offenders released on full parole or statutory release were serving sentences of this length. Of all offenders detained to the end of their sentence, 27% were serving sentences of six years or more, while almost half (49%) were serving sentences of four years or less.

The types of offences for which offenders were serving sentences are presented in Table 4. Referred offenders were more likely to be serving a sentence that included a sex offence (59%) than the offenders not referred (19% or less).

Offenders referred but released were less likely to have committed a sexual offence than offenders who were detained (44% versus 60%).

Approximately 25% of the offenders released at their statutory release date had committed an assault. This compares with 42% of offenders referred for detention and 42% of detained offenders.

Table 2

**Level of Criminal Activity (Number of Offences) by Type of Release (Percentage)**

Type of release Number of previous federal offences	FP	SR and other	SR only	Referral	Distribution of referral cases			
					Referred but released	Detained then released	Detained to end of sentence	Detained but sentence incomplete*
One or two	41	16	22	31	31	30	32	30
Three to five	27	26	28	34	30	33	36	34
Six or more	32	58	49	35	38	37	33	36
Number of cases	10,624	6,207	5,654	1,115	198	131	533	253

Notes: FP – full parole; SR and other – statutory release, but with previous day parole or full parole; SR only – statutory release without a previous release on the current sentence; Referral – referred for detention; \*includes those cases still detained at the conclusion of the study period and a few released and subsequently detained.

Offenders charged with robbery and drug offences were less likely to be referred, given the large proportion of offenders with these convictions. Approximately 40% of offenders released at their statutory release date were convicted of robbery while only 22% of offenders referred for detention had been convicted of robbery. Finally, while about 12% of offenders released at their statutory release date were

serving sentences for drug offences, only 3% of the referrals were serving sentences for a similar offence. However, it must be remembered that only offenders likely to commit a serious drug offence after release may be detained, and many of the offenders charged with drug offences would not meet this criteria.

Table 3

**Length of Sentence by Type of Release (Percentage)**

Type of release Sentence Length	FP	SR and other	SR only	Referral	Distribution of referral cases			
					Referred but released	Detained then released	Detained to end of sentence	Detained but sentence incomplete*
Four years or less	58	58	60	38	43	25	49	20
More than four years to six years	21	18	20	25	21	30	24	27
More than six years	22	24	20	37	36	45	27	53
Number of cases	10,624	6,207	5,654	1,115	198	131	533	253

Notes: FP – full parole; SR and other – statutory release, but with previous day parole or full parole; SR only – statutory release without a previous release on the current sentence; Referral – referred for detention; \*includes those cases still detained at the conclusion of the study period and a few released and subsequently detained.



Table 4

**Offenders with at Least One Previous Conviction (Percentage)**

Type of release	FP	SR and other	SR only	Referral	Distribution of referral cases			
					Referred but released	Detained then released	Detained to end of sentence	Detained but sentence incomplete*
<b>Type of offence</b>								
<b>Scheduled</b>								
Sex	10	10	19	59	44	60	62	64
Assault	13	24	28	42	45	38	42	41
Robbery	24	42	38	22	25	24	18	24
Manslaughter	5	3	3	9	8	12	9	7
Other	9	12	10	6	9	5	5	4
Drug	28	13	11	3	4	5	1	4
Number of cases	10,624	6,207	5,654	1,115	198	131	533	253

Notes: FP – full parole; SR and other – statutory release, but with previous day parole or full parole; SR only – statutory release without a previous release on the current sentence; Referral – referred for detention; \*includes those cases still detained at the conclusion of the study period and a few released and subsequently detained, period and a few released and subsequently detained.

**Aboriginal offenders**

During the five years included in the study, approximately 25% of offenders referred for detention were Aboriginal offenders. Since Aboriginal offenders account for about 11% of the offender population, they seem to be overrepresented in the referral group. Additional analyses

are needed to determine the reason for this difference.

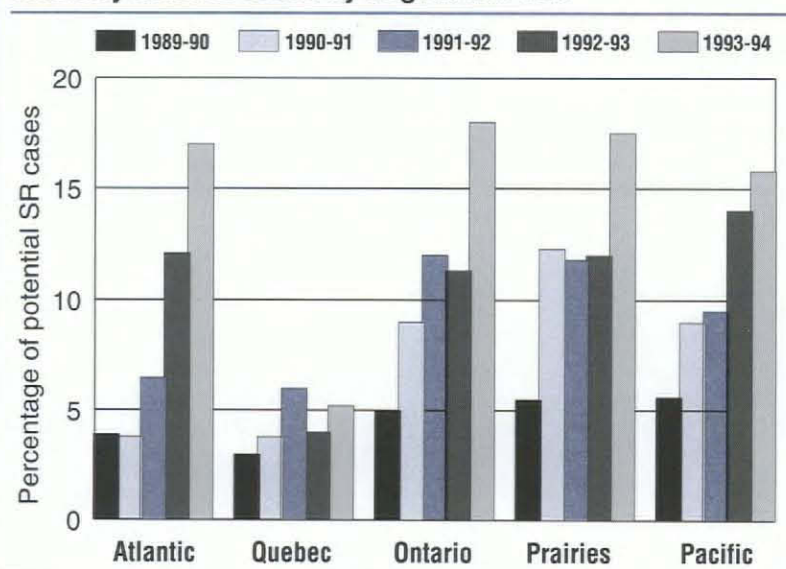
**Regional differences**

Figure 2 compares the number of referrals to the number of offenders who would have been released at their statutory release date in each region. The results indicate that this percentage has been increasing in all regions. The smallest increase has been in Quebec where only about 6% of offenders to be released on statutory release were referred. However, in most other regions, the percentage has risen from approximately 5% in 1989-90 to over 15% in 1993-94.

**Gender differences**

Only 10 female offenders were referred for detention during the five years of the study. This represents about 1.6% of female offender releases during the period, which is considerably below the 4.8% of males referred for detention. Five of the 10 referrals were detained to the end of their sentence. Frequencies in the other referral categories are too low to report.

Figure 2

**Statutory Release Cases by Region and Year****Readmission**

Readmission occurs either as a result of a revocation of a conditional release, commission of a new offence or a combination of the two. Revocation of a conditional release can only occur during a period of supervision, before the end of the sentence.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of offenders readmitted within two years of release. Three groups (the referred but released, detained then released and statutory release groups) have readmission rates which are relatively similar, between 43% and 49%. The parole group has a significantly lower readmission rate of about 24%.



These results suggest that offenders referred for detention but released, and offenders detained then released, are as likely to be returned to federal custody as are offenders released at their statutory release date. If referred offenders were truly the most serious offenders, it would be expected that they would return at a higher rate than those released at the statutory release date.

### New offence

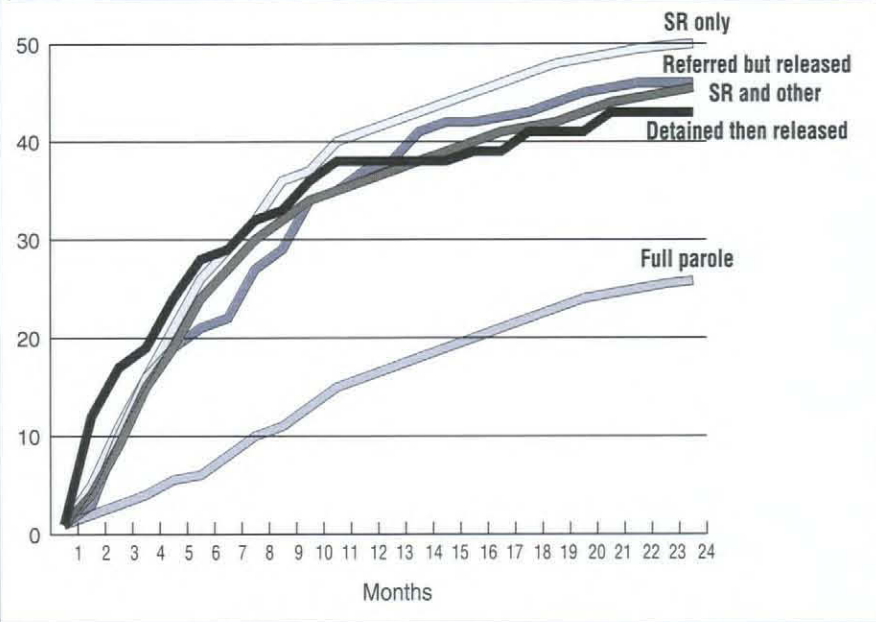
New convictions that resulted in federal prison sentences were also used to measure recidivism.

Offenders were followed for 24 months after their release from prison to determine if they had been convicted of a new offence.

Figure 4 shows the time to a new conviction<sup>6</sup> for the six study groups within two years of release. Of the offenders released at their statutory release date, about 35% were sentenced for a new offence. Approximately 28% of offenders who were

Figure 3

### Offenders Readmitted within Two Years of Release

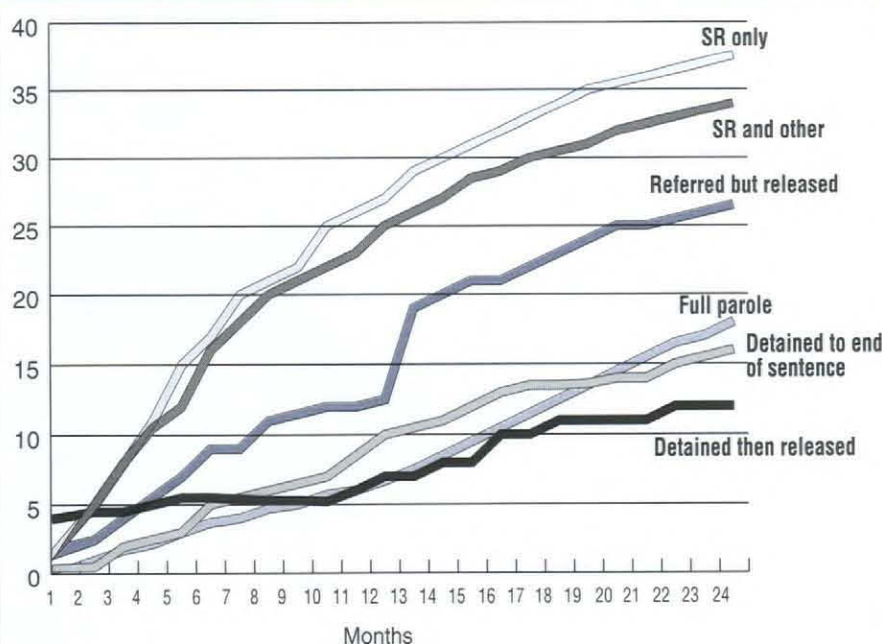


referred but released were convicted of a new offence within two years of their release. Of the offenders who were detained (either detained to the end of their sentence, or detained and then released), less than 20% were convicted of a new offence within the two-year period after their release. This rate was lower than for offenders released on full parole.

Overall, the offenders most likely to be convicted of a new offence within two years of their release were those released at their statutory release date without a referral for detention. Offenders who were detained were about as likely, or less likely, to be sentenced for a new offence as offenders released on full parole.

Figure 4

### Offenders with a New Offence within Two Years of Release



### Discussion

While the number and rate of referrals and detained offenders have been increasing, it is not clear whether the highest risk offenders, those most likely to commit a new offence, are being identified by the current selection process.



The results indicate that offenders referred for detention are more likely to have longer sentences, but less criminal activity in their past. Referred offenders are more likely to have been convicted of a sexual offence or an assault. Offenders who are detained to the end of their sentence have a lower number of previous federal sentences, are more likely to be serving a sentence of four years or less and are most likely to have been convicted of a sexual offence or an assault when compared to offenders released at their statutory release date.

The recidivism results seem to support the observation that the offenders who are detained are not the highest risk. In terms of readmission, those referred for detention seem to be returned to prison at almost the same rate as offenders released at their statutory release date.

Results for new offences indicate that offenders released at their statutory release date are more likely to be convicted of a new offence than are offenders who were referred. In fact, detained offenders seem to be committing new offences at about the same rate as those released on full parole. While it is tempting to conclude that the increased incarceration associated with the detention was responsible for the reduction in recidivism, other research<sup>7</sup> has shown this to be false.

The purpose of the detention provision of the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* was to increase public safety by keeping a small number of high risk offenders in prison longer. It could be argued that this goal is being achieved: some offenders are kept in prison longer, on average 415 days, and 16% of these offenders would likely have committed a new offence within two years of being released if they had been in the community. However, approximately 35% of offenders released at their statutory release date commit a new offence within two years of release, and 18% commit a violent or drug offence. Therefore, it would appear that the selection process for detention has not resulted in the highest risk offenders being detained.

It is obvious that, in exceptional cases, offenders should be detained in custody after their statutory release date to ensure public safety. However, more work is needed to identify these offenders successfully and ensure that only a small number are detained. Alternatively, it might be argued that it is impossible to predict who is most likely to commit a serious offence beyond what we are currently capable of, given the high risk characteristics of offenders held in custody until their statutory release date. If this is the case, then detention, for all but the most serious cases, may not achieve its intended goal. ■

1. 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.

2. Detention was first introduced in 1986.

3. L.L. Motiuk, R.L. Belcourt and J. Bonta, *Managing High Risk Offenders: A Post-detention Follow-up*, Research Report R-39 (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1995).

4. Violent offences are specified in Schedule 1 of the Act and drug offences are specified in Schedule 2. These schedules are like appendices to the Act and simply contain lists of offences.

5. Additional details and analyses may be found in the report by B.A. Grant, *Inmates Referred for Detention (1989-90 to 1993-94): A Comparative Analysis*, Research Report R-45 (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1996).

6. The date of sentencing was used as an approximation of the date of conviction since the conviction date was not available in the database.

7. Motiuk, Belcourt and Bonta, *Managing High Risk Offenders: A Post-detention Follow-up*.

## Don't be shy...

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# Women who have committed homicide

by *Brigitte Lavigne, Lana Hoffman and Ida Dickie*<sup>1</sup>

**H**omicide is the killing of one person by another. In Canada, homicide is classified as first degree murder, second degree murder, manslaughter or infanticide.

*In 1991, men were 10 times more likely to be accused in a homicide incident than women.<sup>2</sup> On average in 1992, for each man who was killed by his wife, more than three women were killed by their husbands.<sup>3</sup>*

*Generally, while research examining homicide trends observes them across genders, very little research has specifically looked at homicide committed by women in Canada. Public perception is that most women convicted of homicide have killed their husbands to put an end to years of abuse. While this may be true for some women, it does not appear to represent the majority of homicides committed by female offenders.*

*The Women Offenders Sector of the Correctional Service of Canada is conducting a study of federally sentenced<sup>4</sup> women convicted of homicide who were under the purview of the Correctional Service of Canada (incarcerated or on conditional release) as of December 1996. The goal is a more accurate profile of female homicide offenders in Canada. In this article, we present some preliminary results of this research.*

## Methodology

**A** literature review was conducted on women convicted of homicide to identify what variables should be included in the study. Homicide was defined as first degree murder, second degree, non-capital murder or manslaughter in this study.<sup>5</sup> Data were collected using the Offender Management System (OMS) as well as a questionnaire designed to collect any missing information that could not be gathered through the OMS. (When variables had missing data, percentages were calculated on the basis of available information.)

## The sample

The study reviewed the cases of 170 female offenders incarcerated or on conditional release

for a homicide offence as of December 1996. These offenders accounted for just over one quarter (28%) of all federal women offenders.<sup>6</sup> Of the sample cases, 53% were incarcerated, 45% were under supervision in the community, 1% were unlawfully at large and 1% had been deported.

## Demographics

Homicides occurred most frequently in the Ontario and Prairie regions, accounting for 35% and 23%, respectively, of the homicides committed by the sample. This is consistent with results found in 1992 with the exception that, in 1996, the Prairie Region had a lower percentage of homicides than it did in 1992.<sup>7</sup> In the sample of women, 69% were Caucasian, 22% were Aboriginal, 6% were Black and 3% were Asiatic. East Indian women accounted for less than 1% of the sample. Aboriginal women are overrepresented in this sample as they only account for 2% of the total Canadian population.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of women offenders convicted of homicide were convicted of second degree murder or manslaughter. Of the non-Aboriginal women (78% of the sample), 11% were convicted of first degree murder, 50% of second degree murder, 34% of manslaughter and 5% of non-capital murder. Of the Aboriginal women (22% of the sample), 3% were convicted of first degree murder, 32% for second degree murder, 60% for manslaughter and 5% for non-capital murder. This overrepresentation of Aboriginal women convicted of manslaughter is supported by previous findings.<sup>9</sup>

The average age at the time of the offence was 31 years, while for Aboriginal women alone it was 28 years. Overall, however, the ages varied from 16 to 63 years, with the majority of women offenders falling within the range of 20 to 40 years.



## Offender's life at the time of the homicide

At the time of the homicide, 28% of the women had achieved a Grade 8 education or less, while 72% had completed a Grade 9 education or higher. Eighteen percent had a postsecondary education.

The majority of the women (54%) were unemployed at the time of the offence, while 22% had stable employment, 12% were employed by the sex-trade industry, 5% had unstable or sporadic employment and 2% were students. Their main source of income at the time of the homicide included social assistance (41%), stable employment (30%), help from others (12%), illegal activities (8%) and other sources of income such as pension (2%). Seven percent had no source of income at the time of the offence.

At the time of the homicide, almost two thirds of the offenders were living with their marital husband, common-law husband or male/female partner.<sup>10</sup> Single women accounted for one third of the sample. Sixteen percent were divorced or separated and 1% were widowed. Approximately 70% of the women had children, with one third of the women with children being single mothers.

## The offender's social history

More than two thirds of the women (69%) had a history of past substance abuse, whether it was alcohol, drugs or both alcohol and drugs.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the women (63%) did not have a history of mental health problems. Of the 37% who did, it was difficult to determine the type of mental health problem because a substantial amount of data was missing.

The vast majority of the women (84%) had a history of being abused, physically, sexually or emotionally. The most frequent types of abusers were parents, step parents and common-law/marital husbands. They represented the source of abuse in 45% of the sample.

## The offender's criminal history

Almost half of the women convicted of homicide (48%) did not have a record of any previous convictions. Of the balance, 17% had one or two previous convictions, 17% had three to seven, 7% had eight to ten and 11% had

more than ten previous convictions. Most convictions were for offences other than homicide. Of those with previous convictions, approximately 66% had been convicted for theft-related crimes, 60% for disturbing the peace, 58% for disrupting the process of justice, 46% for harm/threatening to cause harm and 30% for drug- and alcohol-related offences. Only 6 of the 170 offenders had previously been convicted for homicide.

Research indicates that women convicted of homicide are more likely to be rated lower risk and lower need than other federally sentenced women.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, they are generally considered to be at lower risk for violent recidivism.<sup>13</sup> Studies have shown, however, that it was the women previously convicted of manslaughter who tended to reoffend. In addition, it is noteworthy that these women had higher rates of recidivism when on mandatory supervision (now called statutory release) compared to when they were released on full parole.<sup>14</sup>

## Victim's characteristics

Seventy-nine percent of the victims were Caucasian, 12% were Aboriginal, 4% were Asiatic, 3% were Black, 2% were East Indian and less than 1% were of Arabic decent.

About three quarters of the victims were male, with an average age of 37 years.

While the victims ranged in age from newborn to 83 years old, the most frequently occurring age range was 25 to 42 years. Interestingly, 15% of the victims were 8 years old or younger.

In the vast majority of the homicides (97%) there was one victim. Five offenders had two victims.

Two thirds of the women did not live with their victims at the time of the homicide.

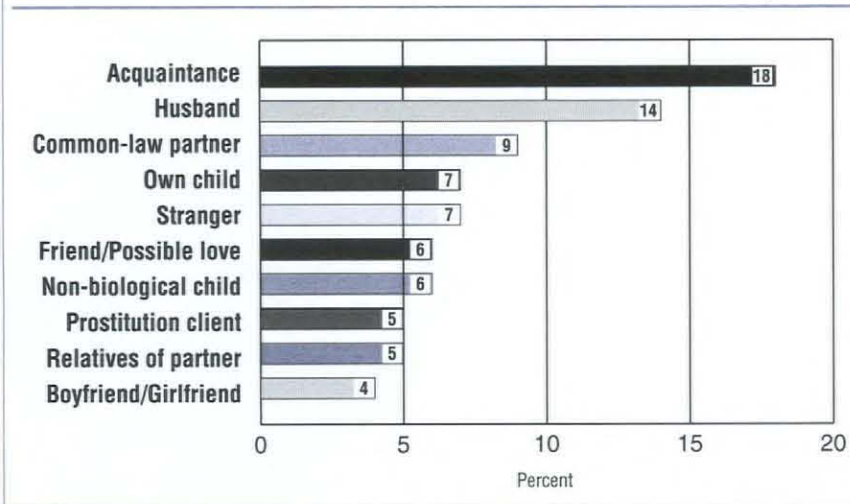
The relationship of the victims to the offenders in these homicides is shown in Figure 1. Contrary to public perception, the offender's intimate partner accounted for only about one quarter (27%) of the victims; about three quarters of victims (73%) were not an intimate partner of the offender.

The extent to which the offender and victim in the homicides knew each other is as follows: 36% of victims and offenders were relatives (including both female and male partners in



Figure 1

### Relationship of Victim to Offender



some cases), 46% were acquaintances and 17% were strangers.

Fifty-three percent of the victims did not have a history of conflict with the offender.

### Circumstances of the homicide

As shown in Figure 2, the most frequent context in which a homicide occurred was during the commission of another offence, specifically robbery. This was the context for 16% of the homicides. The second most common circumstance related to relationship problems, which was the context for 15% of the homicides.

Most of the homicides (63%) were unplanned.

About one third occurred in the home of the victim, and one quarter took place in the home shared by the victim and the offender.

The most frequent activity the victim was engaged in at the time of the homicide was sleeping, being passed out or lying down, which was the case in about one quarter of the homicides. In 18% of the cases, the victim was arguing with the offender at the time of the homicide.

The most frequently used weapon in the homicides was a knife, representing the weapon of choice in one third of the cases. This was followed by a gun, used by 21% of the sample. Accordingly, the principal causes of death were stab wounds and gunshot wounds. Both bodily force and a weapon were used by 14% of the women, and bodily force only was used by 10%.

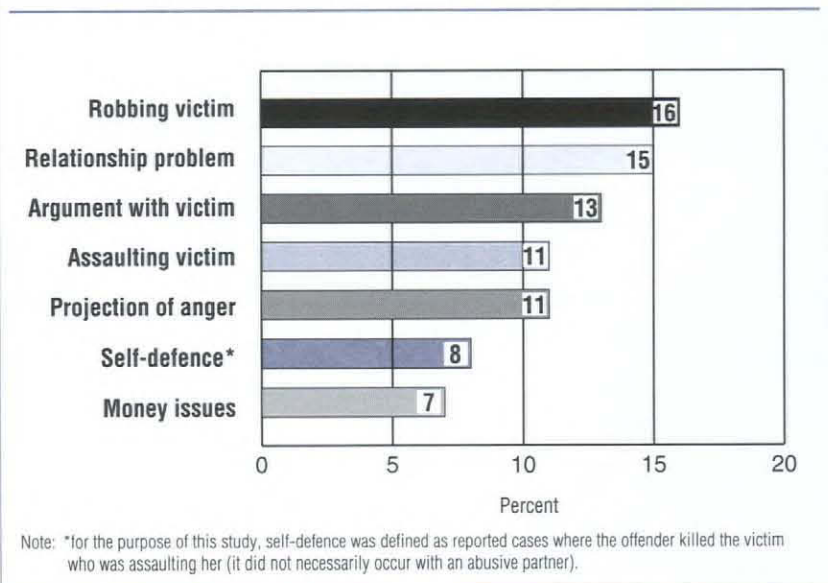
Forty-two percent of the women had one co-accused or more, the majority of whom were male. It seems the co-accused was most frequently a friend or acquaintance, but a

great portion of data concerning this variable was missing.

Fifty-four percent of the offenders and 53% of the victims had used alcohol at the time of the offence, while 38% of offenders and 29% of victims had used drugs. Taking into account that about two thirds of the women had a history of substance abuse and most used alcohol at the time of the homicide, substance abuse would seem to be a target area for intervention.

Figure 2

### Circumstances of Homicide





## Summary

Women convicted of homicide are generally Caucasian, married, unemployed and mothers. Aboriginal women are overrepresented among women convicted of homicide, accounting for 22% of the sample.

On average, the women are 31 years of age, have achieved a Grade 9 education or higher and are first-time offenders. Often they have a history of physical, sexual or emotional abuse as well as a history of substance abuse. Contrary to the popular myth that many of these women kill their spouse to end years of abuse, homicides were more likely to have occurred during the course of a robbery.

The most common conviction for a homicide offence was second degree murder or manslaughter.

The victim was usually a Caucasian male, 37 years of age, known by the offender as a friend or an acquaintance. At the same time, however, 15% of the homicides involved the death of a child in the care of the offender.

The most commonly used weapon was a knife.

Almost half of the homicides (48%) occurred while both the offender and the victim were under the influence of alcohol.

While these results are preliminary, further examination of this data will permit development of a more accurate profile. Note: for the purpose of this study, self-defence was defined as reported cases where the offender killed the victim who was assaulting her (it did not necessarily occur with an abusive partner). ■

1. Women Offender Sector, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.
2. M. Wilson and M. Daly, "Spousal Homicide," *Juristat*, 14, 8 (1994): 1.
3. Wilson and Daly, "Spousal Homicide."
4. "Federally sentenced" is defined as having received a sentence of more than two years which will be served in a federal institution.
5. There were no reported cases of infanticide in the sample.
6. Federally Sentenced Women's Program, *The November 21, 1996 Census of Federally Sentenced Women* (Correctional Service of Canada, Ottawa, 1996).
7. Federally Sentenced Women's Program, *Census*.
8. Statistics Canada. *Census of Population 1991: Projection of Persons with Aboriginal Ancestry, Canada, Provinces/Regions and Territories*. (Ottawa, 1991): 20 16, 12 and 44.
9. T. Nouwens, *A Profile of Women Who Commit Murder and Manslaughter*, Master's thesis (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1991).
10. Risk of spousal homicide is far greater in common-law marriages than in registered marriages, for both men and women. See Wilson and Daly, "Spousal Homicide."
11. The use of drugs includes the use of illicit drugs such as marijuana and heroin, the abuse of prescription drugs such as valium and the use of solvents such as gasoline and glue.
12. Federally Sentenced Women's Program. *Proceedings: National Workshop to Develop a Community Strategy for Federally Sentenced Women, March 5-7, 1996, Toronto, Ontario* (Ottawa: Correctional Research and Development, Correctional Service of Canada, 1996).
13. K. Blanchette, "The Relationship between Criminal History, Mental Disorder, and Recidivism among Federally Sentenced Women," Master's thesis (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1996).
14. R. Belcourt, T. Nouwens and L. Lefebvre, "Examining the Unexamined: Recidivism among Female Offenders," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 5, 3 (1993): 10-14. See also Research and Statistics Branch, "Recidivism Among Homicide Offenders," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 4, 2 (1992): 7-9.



# Women offenders convicted of robbery and assault

by *Ida Dickie and Leanne Ward*<sup>1</sup>

*There is a common misperception that most federally sentenced women incarcerated for homicide pose a high criminal risk to society. In actual fact, women convicted of robbery are among those with the highest risk for recidivism.<sup>2</sup>*

*Over one third of all federally sentenced women are incarcerated for assault or robbery convictions.<sup>3</sup> To date, however, there has been very little research examining this group of offenders. This is, in part, because women represent a small percentage, about 2%, of the entire federal inmate population.*

*Considering these two facts – women who commit robbery are at higher risk for recidivism than other types of female offenders and little research exists on female offenders convicted of robbery and assault – there is a need to profile these women. This article reports the results of a study completed by the Federally Sentenced Women's Program of the Correctional Service of Canada examining the profile of all women convicted of assault and robbery who were incarcerated for federal sentences<sup>4</sup> as of September 1, 1996.*

## Study sample

**O**n September 1, 1996, 17% of women offenders were incarcerated for assault, and 16% were incarcerated for robbery (an increase from 13% in 1995).<sup>5</sup> The study sample consisted of 86 female offenders incarcerated for robbery or assault, or 27% of incarcerated women offenders.

The sample distribution included 56 female offenders representing 108 assault convictions and 51 female offenders with 81 robbery convictions. About one quarter had both robbery and assault convictions. The average number of convictions per woman was 1.5 for robbery and 1.9 for assault.

The female offenders in the sample had, on average, 4.4 convictions for offences other than robbery or assault, most commonly for theft.

## Methodology

Data were collected using the Offender Management System. Missing information was collected from file reviews completed by case management officers in respective institutions.

## Robbery offenders

Female offenders convicted of robbery are most likely to be single; about half of all the female offenders incarcerated for robbery were single. About one quarter were in a common-law relationship and 10% were married.

At the time of their offence, female offenders with robbery convictions ranged from 18 to 43 years of age. The average age was 29.

Two thirds of female offenders from the study sample with robbery convictions were Caucasian. Aboriginal women comprised 24% of the female offenders convicted of robbery. Among the total federal female offender incarcerated population, 19% are Aboriginal women incarcerated for robbery.

Two thirds of the female offenders convicted of robbery were incarcerated in the Ontario and Prairie regions. This is a change from 1995 when the higher proportions were in the Quebec and Prairie regions.<sup>6</sup>

Most female offenders with robbery convictions (56%) had education levels ranging from Grade 8 to Grade 10. Nearly half (48%) were unemployed at the time of their offence. Most female offenders who were working were employed by the sex-trade industry. Of all women incarcerated for robbery, 22% were supported through their work in sex trade, followed by 16% who relied on social assistance. Research in the United States indicates that a prior history of prostitution is an important contributing factor in robberies committed by women.<sup>7</sup>

The types of robbery conviction were as follows: robbery alone (95%), armed robbery (2%),



robbery with threats of violence (1%) and robbery with violence (1%). The average aggregate sentence length for women convicted of robbery was five years. Thirty-seven percent of female offenders incarcerated for robbery were serving their first federal sentence, and 15% were serving their second.

Most female offenders convicted of robbery (56%) did not have a history of violence against others. Of the 44% who did, 12% showed an increase in their level of violence. Two thirds of female offenders used a weapon during their robbery offence. The most common weapon was a knife, used 39% of the time, followed by a gun, used 16% of the time.

Most female offenders with robbery convictions (58%) were considered a medium criminal risk, while 28% were considered a high criminal risk and only 8% were considered to be a low criminal risk. Female offenders convicted of robbery were considered to be at higher risk for reoffending and more of a multineed group than any other subgroup of female offenders.<sup>8</sup> Most female offenders convicted of robbery (56%) were classified as high need, followed by 35% as medium need and 4% as low. The more salient areas of need for women with robbery convictions included their attitudes, companions and substance abuse problems.

More than two thirds of female offenders convicted of robbery (69%) had a peer group or friends who had a negative influence on their behaviour at the time of their offence. Thirty percent had both positive- and negative-influence friends. Peer association has been identified as an important area of intervention with women who have robbery convictions. The likelihood that a woman will reoffend is increased dramatically if she associates with a negative peer-group on release.

Another important target for intervention is substance abuse. The vast majority of female offenders convicted of robbery (93%) had a history of substance abuse problems involving alcohol, drugs or both. Of these women, 44% had a history of abusing both alcohol and drugs, 44% of abusing drugs alone and 5% had a history of abusing alcohol alone. Only 31% of robbery offenders were not intoxicated at the time of their offence. On the other hand, 18% were intoxicated due to both alcohol and drugs at the time of their offence, another 12% due to alcohol alone and a further 37% due to drugs

alone. This is consistent with research indicating that incarcerated women abuse drugs more frequently than alcohol.<sup>9</sup>

### Assault offenders

The female offenders convicted of assault had similar characteristics to those convicted of robbery. Slightly more were single (59% versus 49%) and slightly fewer were living common-law and married (22% and 8%, respectively, versus 24% and 10%).

Female offenders with assault convictions ranged in age from 18 to 48 years at the time of their offence. This range included slightly older women than the age range for women with robbery convictions. The average age at the time of the current offence was the same, however, at 29 years.

There were some notable differences in the race demographics between female offenders with assault convictions and those with robbery convictions. Among the assault offenders, there was a smaller percentage of Caucasians (55% versus 67%) and a higher percentage of Aboriginal offenders (36% versus 24%). Among the total incarcerated federal female offender population, 32% were Aboriginal women incarcerated for assault.

There were similarities in the geographical distribution of female offenders with assault and robbery convictions. As with the women incarcerated for robbery, most female offenders with assault convictions were incarcerated in the Ontario and Prairie regions.

Female offenders with assault convictions were most likely to have an education level between Grade 9 and Grade 10 (48%). (This compares with a Grade 8 to Grade 10 education for women with robbery convictions.) However, a higher percentage had a Grade 12 education level – 21% compared to only 12% of female offenders with robbery convictions. Employment patterns were similar among both female offenders convicted of assault and those convicted of robbery: most were unemployed at the time of their offence and the women who were working were mostly employed by the sex-trade industry. There was a slight difference between the two groups, however, in that 14% of female offenders convicted of assault were on social assistance at the time of their offence, compared to 16% of those convicted of robbery.



As shown in the figure, female offenders' assault convictions most commonly resulted from assaulting a peace officer (25% of the sample). This was followed by aggravated assault (22%) and assault with a weapon (21%). Similar to the robbery offenders, the mean aggregate sentence length was five years for the assault offenders. The most frequently occurring sentence length was four years. Almost two thirds of female offenders convicted of assault (64%) were serving their first federal term, while 27% were serving their second. It is important to keep in mind that the number of sentences served by federally sentenced women does not necessarily represent the number of convictions or offences they have committed.

Most female offenders convicted of assault (58%) had a history of violence, with 20% of them escalating in their violence. Almost two thirds (64%) used a weapon during their assault, most frequently a knife which was used 45% of the time. This is similar to female offenders convicted of robbery.

Forty-three percent of female offenders convicted of assault were considered to be a medium criminal risk. Notably, however, 41% were considered a high criminal risk. Only 11% were considered a low criminal risk. Most (55%) were classified as having high needs, while 34% were classified as having medium needs and 5% as low needs.

Almost three quarters of the female offenders convicted of assault (72%) had negative peers

or friends, increasing the woman's chance to recidivate. Twenty-eight percent had both positive and negative associations. This clearly indicates that the need area of "associations" should be targetted for intervention when planning to reintegrate these women into the community.

Another need area that should be targetted for intervention is substance abuse. Ninety-one percent of women convicted of assault had a substance abuse problem. Within this 91%, 42% had both alcohol and drug problems, 33% had drug problems and 16% had alcohol problems. At the time of their assault, 35% of the female offenders were intoxicated from alcohol, 22% from drugs and 11% from both alcohol and drugs. In other words, two thirds of female offenders convicted of assault were intoxicated at the time of their offence and only one third were not. This trend is very similar to the one found among female offenders convicted of robbery.

## Discussion

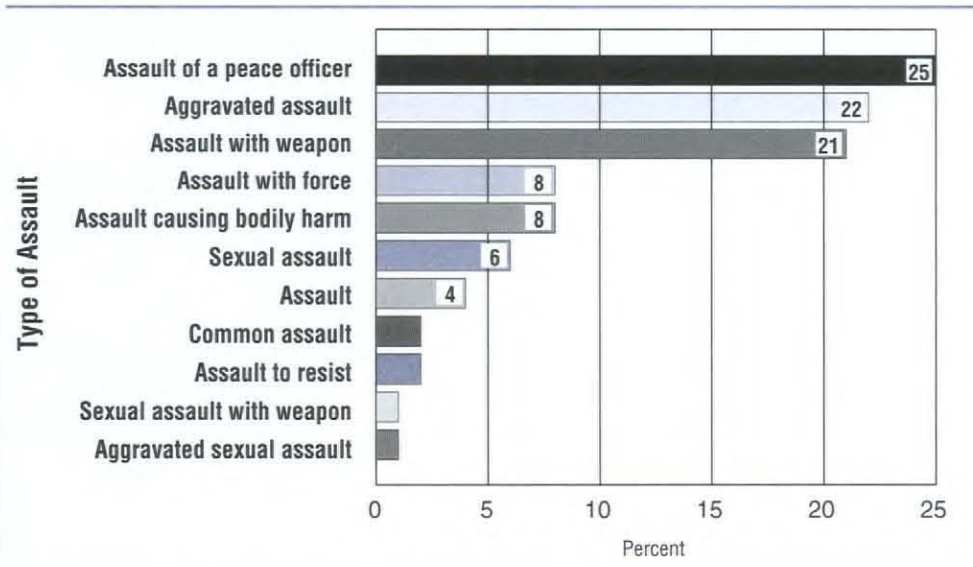
Female offenders convicted of assault and robbery have a similar profile. They are usually Caucasian, single and 29 years old, at the time of their first federal offence. There was a notable difference between the two groups, however, in that there was a higher percentage of Aboriginal female offenders convicted of assault than robbery in the total female incarcerated population (32% versus 19%).

Aboriginal women were disproportionately represented in both categories of offenders, however, given that they only represent 2% of the total Canadian population.<sup>10</sup>

Over three quarters of the female offenders convicted of robbery compared to half of those convicted of assault were either unemployed, working in the sex-trade industry or

Figure

### Assault Type





on social assistance at the time of their offence. Female offenders in both groups were most likely to have been unemployed at the time of their offence.

Female offenders with assault and robbery convictions had similar education levels, although female offenders convicted of assault had a slightly higher level of education than those convicted of robbery.

The vast majority of both groups had a substance abuse problem, and most had negative peers or friends/associations at the time of their offences.

Female offenders convicted of robbery and assault receive relatively short sentences. The average aggregate sentence length was five years for both robbery and assault.

There were some differences between the two groups on criminal-risk ratings. Female offenders convicted of assault received a high criminal-risk classification more often than those convicted of robbery, at 41% versus 28%. Most female offenders with robbery convictions were considered a medium criminal risk

whereas those convicted of assault were evenly distributed between high and medium criminal-risk ratings. More than half, 56%, of the female offenders convicted of robbery did not have a history of violence. This is opposite to female offenders convicted of assault, among whom 58% did have a history of violence. In spite of these differences, female offenders convicted of assault and robbery were both classified as high-needs cases more than half the time.

These findings have implications for the type and timing of interventions used with these female offenders. Intervention should target the areas of need identified as most salient for female offenders: education levels, employment, substance abuse and companions. Intervention should be provided rather quickly after female offenders are admitted to a federal institution because of the shorter sentences these women receive which do not allow much time for intervention. As well, female offenders convicted of robbery and assault are considered to be at high risk for recidivism, with women convicted of assault slightly more at risk than those convicted of robbery. ■

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# Evaluating the Computerized Item Management System (CIMS) with violent offenders

by Daryl G. Kroner, James E. Muirhead and Jeremy F. Mills<sup>1</sup>  
Millhaven Institution

When offenders enter the federal correctional system, the Psychology Department of the Millhaven Assessment Unit (MAU) provides psychological assessments on offenders who meet certain referral criteria. Traditionally, offenders serving sentences for assault and other violent offences receive a psychological assessment to address criminogenic risk factors and to recommend appropriate programming and treatment options.

An important part of the assessment process is the collection of information, conducted primarily through self-report instruments. These instruments cover a broad range of psychological domains such as anger, psychopathology, attribution, aggression and offender response style, to name only a few.

This article reviews the preliminary results of conducting psychological assessments using the Computerized Item Management System (CIMS). The CIMS presents offenders with psychological test items, and scores the results.

Offender assessment issues are crucial to the way in which an offender is managed. It follows, then, that greater confidence in the validity of our assessment procedures translates into better decisions regarding offender incarceration, treatment and release. These procedures, however, must still remain cost effective. Computerizing psychological testing is one method that may help meet both these goals.

## Early use of the CIMS

As part of a larger validation and reliability study, responses to the Novaco Anger Scale<sup>2</sup> (NAS) were recorded using both the CIMS and paper and pencil methods, and then compared. The NAS, a self-report anger measure, was developed in the 1990s to overcome some of the poor theoretical and scale qualities of other anger inventories. One component of this measure (Part B), which assesses situations that can result in anger, has been fruitful in the long-term prediction of violence.<sup>3</sup> This component

has 25 items which present offenders with situations where, for example, they are being criticized in front of others or overcharged for a repair.

A sample of 102 consecutive male federal admissions completed a paper and pencil presentation of this self-report anger measure within two weeks of arrival at the Millhaven Assessment Unit. One month later, offenders were retested, half by paper and pencil and half by CIMS presentation. As seen in Table 1, the means, standard deviations and one-month test-retest stability were similar between the two types of administrations. The coefficient alphas<sup>4</sup> were slightly stronger for the CIMS administration. As a result of these and other findings comparing computer and paper and pencil techniques,<sup>5</sup> a more in-depth evaluation was conducted with violent offenders.

Table 1

CIMS (n = 51) versus Paper and Pencil (n = 51) Administration of the NAS (Part B)				
Administration	Mean	Standard Deviation	One-month Test-retest	Coefficient Alpha
CIMS	48.3	15.1	.86	.95
Paper and Pencil	50.3	15.0	.84	.88

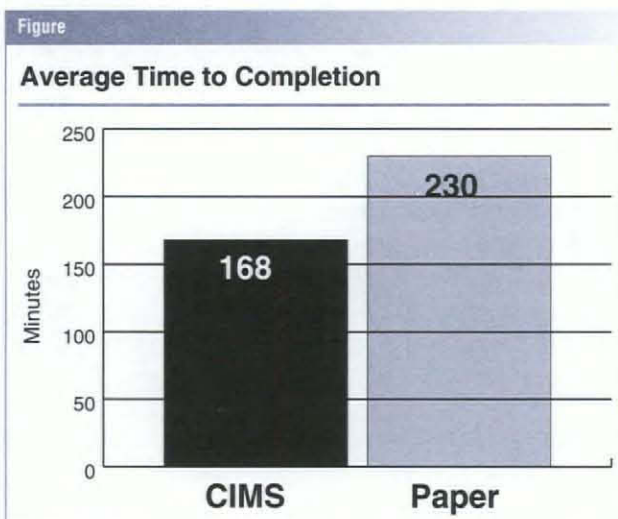
## Evaluation study with violent offenders

The evaluation study compared the time it took to complete the same test battery using the paper and pencil method and the CIMS method. In addition, the validity of the computer-administered Stimulus Seeking and Callousness scales from the Dimensional Assessment of Personality Problems<sup>6</sup> (DAPP) was compared to the paper and pencil versions of the scale.

This study involved 28 consecutive violent offender admissions alternately assigned to one of two groups. The MAU psychological test battery was divided in half to be presented



in two sessions. There were approximately 550 items administered in each of the two sessions. Group 1 was administered the first half of the test battery by CIMS presentation and the second half by traditional paper and pencil method. Group 2 received the first half of the test battery by paper and pencil method and the second half by CIMS. As shown in the figure, less time is required to complete the test battery using the CIMS method. On average, the time saved was approximately half an hour per offender tested. This represents a 30% time saving in test administration. In addition, the automated scoring programs of the CIMS dramatically reduce the time required for scoring each test and eliminate the potential for clerical error.



The assessment process included an interview with each of the 28 offenders. Clinical ratings were gathered on stimulus seeking and callousness that targeted the Stimulus Seeking and Callousness scales of the DAPP. The correlations between the self-report scales and the clinical ratings are presented in Table 2. The scales administered with the CIMS ( $n = 14$ ) had

Table 2

### Validity Comparisons between CIMS and Paper and Pencil Presentations

Clinical Rating	Method of Self-report	
	CIMS (n=14)	Paper and Pencil (n=14)
Stimulus seeking	.53	.11
Callousness	.59	.06

a stronger relationship with their respective clinical ratings than did the paper and pencil group.

### Conclusion

Using the CIMS to assess violent offenders has several benefits. For the more situationally based anger items, the results of this study suggest the potential for stronger reliability with computerized administration. With the CIMS, items are presented consecutively and require a response before one can proceed to the next item. This prevents both revisiting items and looking ahead, which in turn results in a more standardized presentation. This gain is not only important for reliability, but for practicality, as it allows for the increased prediction of targeted behaviours.

In terms of time efficiency, computer administered items are completed more quickly and without a loss of scale properties. Furthermore, the automatic scoring programs of the CIMS reduce scale scoring time and eliminate the potential for clerical error.

This study suggests that there is greater validity for some violence-related content areas with CIMS compared to paper and pencil procedures.

Computerized psychological testing with a program like the CIMS may provide more confidence in our assessment procedures, resulting in better decisions in a time efficient and cost effective manner. ■

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3. R.W. Novaco, personal communication, July, 1996.

4. Coefficient alpha is a measure of reliability and refers to how well a test holds together, with 0.15 being very weak and 0.95 being very strong.
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# Treatment programs for offenders with violent histories: A national survey

by *Ralph Serin<sup>1</sup> and Shelley Brown,*  
Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada

Efforts to develop assessment strategies to identify offenders' risks and needs have evolved considerably over the last decade.<sup>2</sup> These initiatives have led to the provision of specific treatment programs intended to target the criminogenic needs of offenders. To meet these needs, the Correctional Programs Branch has created core (Cognitive Living Skills, Anger and Emotions Management, Living Without Violence, Parenting) and supplemental (Offender Substance Abuse Pre-release Program) programs. Preliminary results on the utility of some of these interventions are now available.<sup>3</sup> Other programs, such as those for sex offenders, are also being evaluated, as the Correctional Service of Canada moves to address concerns expressed by the Auditor<sup>4</sup> regarding the provision of correctional treatment programs.

While the evaluation of program efficacy is critical to good correctional and fiscal management, other considerations also have merit. This article highlights findings from a recently completed national survey of treatment programs for offenders with violent histories.<sup>5</sup> Prior reviews of published programs for violent offenders have been disappointing,<sup>6</sup> yet discussions with field staff suggested there were many programs in existence. A major purpose of this review was to delineate the nature and quantity of these programs provided in the Service. This review is deliberately qualitative and descriptive, as the goal was to provide information to consumers, rather than formal program evaluation. It was our belief that the review of all programs presently being delivered to violent offenders would yield important information for those interested in the integration of programs for violent offenders. For this survey, Anger and Emotions Management (AEM) and Living Without Violence (LWV) represented 31.1% and 17.6% of the programs,

respectively. Interestingly, approximately half (51.4%) of the programs reviewed were other programs. Apparently, specific sites developed them to meet their particular needs. These data, then, should inform the Service about a range of issues related to meeting the treatment needs of violent offenders. Also, as a compilation of existing treatment programs, the data represent a compendium for staff to review when making recommendations for transfer and release of violent offenders for whom treatment needs remain.

## Types of programs

Those surveys completed in January 1997, were coded and entered into the present review. Overall, the national completion rate (number of returns divided by the number of sites) was 37.7% (52 responses from 138 sites). Regionally, the completion rates were Atlantic, 28.1%; Quebec, 51.6%; Ontario, 34.2%; Prairies, 38.5% and Pacific, 33.3%. Similarly, the completion rates by security level were minimum, 53.9%; medium, 72.2%; maximum, 66.7% and community 22.5%. Given the limited time frame, the completion rate was fairly good. An additional 16 surveys received after the deadline for data entry were not included. Further, several sites, particularly community sites, not offering programs may

Table 1

### Program Type by Region

	Atlantic		Quebec		Ontario		Prairies		Pacific		National	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
AEM	37.5	(3)	18.2	(4)	42.9	(9)	20.0	(3)	50.0	(4)	31.1	(23)
LWV	25.0	(2)	18.2	(4)	9.5	(2)	13.3	(2)	37.5	(3)	17.6	(13)
Other	37.5	(3)	63.6	(14)	47.6	(10)	66.7	(10)	12.5	(1)	51.4	(38)
Total	10.8	(8)	29.7	(22)	28.4	(21)	20.3	(15)	10.8	(8)	100.0	(74)

Notes: AEM = Anger and Emotions Management; LWV = Living Without Violence.



simply have failed to provide a nil response. See Table 1 for a breakdown of program type by region.

Another consideration is the security level at which the majority of programs for violent offenders is provided (see Table 2). Minimum security includes healing lodges, and maximum security includes the treatment centres and multilevel institutions. As can be seen, programs for violent offenders are provided equally at all security levels.

Table 2

### Program Type by Security Level

	Minimum		Medium		Maximum		Community	
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)
AEM	25.0	(3)	37.0	(10)	46.7	(7)	15.0	(3)
LWV	16.7	(2)	18.5	(5)	9.5	(2)	13.3	(4)
Other	58.3	(7)	44.4	(12)	40.0	(6)	65.0	(13)
Total	16.2	(12)	36.5	(27)	20.3	(15)	27.0	(20)

Notes: AEM = Anger and Emotions Management; LWV = Living Without Violence.

### Targetted groups

The survey listed a number of potential target groups, or types of offenders, for whom the program was intended. These target groups were: persistently violent, criminal violence, anger, institutional violence, domestic violence and domestic exclusive. This was principally to determine whether programs were restrictive in their selection of offenders. Many programs reported using several of the targets, potentially leading to quite heterogeneous groups regarding treatment needs. Other targets such as suicidal, mentally disordered, victims of domestic abuse and lifers were also reported, but accounted for less than 7% of the total targets. These data allow us to consider whether existing programs are targetting those offenders for whom the program was originally intended and where additional programming efforts might be required in light of the prevalence of these "types" of offenders.

### Selection and exclusion criteria

The survey also asked respondents to indicate specific selection criteria used to accept offenders into their program. Staff can review these results

to confirm that the specific treatment needs of offenders selected to their programs are addressed in the program content. There appears to be considerable regional variation in selection criteria. On average, most programs consider current offences, but relatively few consider prior assaults or incorporate pretreatment test results into selection. Similar breakdowns are available by security level, on request.

With respect to exclusion, over 75% of the programs exclude offenders with active psychotic symptoms. Similarly, 30% exclude offenders with low motivation, 12% exclude those who deny they require treatment, and 18% exclude offenders because of low intelligence. This latter decision makes intuitive sense given the emphasis on cognitive treatment strategies in these programs. It is also understandable that poorly motivated and resistant offenders will be disruptive in groups. However, with nearly 40% of programs excluding such offenders, this identifies an emerging new treatment target group. Breakdowns by region, security level and setting are available and will be detailed in the final report.

### Waiting lists

One measure of treatment needs is the number of offenders who have been referred for a particular program, but who have been placed on a waiting list until space permits their participation. Nationally, 78.9% of those programs surveyed maintain a waiting list. The average number of offenders waiting for admission to a violent offender program is 40, although the range is from 3 to 169. Regional breakdowns of offenders on waiting lists are Atlantic (8), Quebec (17), Ontario (61), Prairies (33) and Pacific (54). Further, the number of offenders waiting differs according to security level: minimum (14), medium (64), maximum (36). Setting is also important regarding waiting lists: community (11), institutional (45).

### Group versus individual programs

Consistent with direction over the last decade to provide treatment in group format, 72.6% of programs are exclusively group. Since the survey only sampled programs, individual therapy was not included, but 27.4% of the programs surveyed augment group programming with individual sessions. There are regional and setting differences, with the



Pacific region only reporting group sessions, whereas the Prairies offer individual sessions in 57.1% of their programs. The other regions offer individual sessions in 13% to 32% of their programs. There are no major differences among security levels, nor community versus institution-based programs.

### Program orientation and components

Not surprisingly, 85% of the programs surveyed nationally provide a cognitive behavioural model of intervention. Psychotherapeutic approaches are reported in 20.5% of the programs, suggesting that these approaches are integrated into a complementary model. Similarly, 20.5% of the programs reported their theoretical orientation as psychoeducational. Program components indicate the content presented in the various treatment programs. As with the issue of target groups, it is important for program deliverers to confirm that the content of their program addresses the needs of those offenders selected.

### Treatment targets

Respondants were asked to indicate whether specific treatment targets reflected in the literature were included in their program. For these data, the "other" category includes symptom management, dealing with remorse, confronting denial, dealing with stress, self-esteem, relationships or social reintegration. The percentage of programs addressing these targets in treatment are presented in Table 3.

### Program length

The average program length, combined with waiting list information, should help staff review resources and plan strategies for best meeting the treatment needs of violent offenders. On average, programs included 22 sessions, averaging 2.5 hours each over the course of 13 weeks. This means that a maximum of three programs could be delivered at a site if a program deliverer was dedicated to only one program. Nationally, it appears that, on average, these programs have been in place for 36 months, with only minor variation across the regions and security levels.

### Changes to programs

Unfortunately, most respondents (70%) were unable to comment on the degree of change their program has undergone. However, the remaining 30% reported changes regarding program content (72.1%) and report format (34.3%). Few programs (7.2%) reported changes to admission criteria. Other changes such as procedures and scheduling were also reported (37.5%).

### Methodology

Many of the programs reported maintaining a control group (37%) and database (73.2%). Similarly, 67.1% reported having an advisory committee. Interestingly, only 17% reported a formal evaluation, with 30% reporting published findings (10.8 formal, 18.5 informal), yet most (53.8%) indicated that evaluations were in progress. The majority of programs (87.7%) have treatment manuals which reflect content (100%), rules (92%), admission criteria (94%), expulsion criteria (88%), report format (86%), homework assignments (84%) and a test battery (78%). Additional information contained in the treatment manuals, such as participant contracts, session goals, session summaries and guidelines for staff, were also reported, albeit infrequently.

### Assessment of treatment needs

Various strategies for the assessment of treatment needs were recorded by program deliverers. The endorsement frequency of these methods is presented in Table 4.

Table 3

#### Treatment Target by Location

Treatment Target	Institutional		Community		National	
	%	n/52	%	n/20	%	n/72
Arousal reduction	63.5	(33)	35.0	(7)	55.6	(40)
Problem solving	80.8	(42)	90.0	(18)	83.3	(60)
Communication skills	88.5	(46)	85.0	(17)	87.5	(63)
Assertiveness	78.8	(41)	75.0	(15)	77.8	(56)
Insight	92.3	(48)	90.0	(18)	91.7	(66)
Cognitive distortions	88.5	(46)	80.0	(16)	86.1	(62)
Relapse prevention	63.5	(44)	60.0	(12)	62.5	(45)
Other	13.5	(7)	20.0	(4)	15.3	(11)

Note: percentages do not sum to 100 given that the response categories were not mutually exclusive.



Table 4

**Assessment Method by Location**

Assessment Method	Institutional Community		National
	% n/53	% n/19	
Interview	96.2 (51)	100.0 (19)	97.2 (70)
File review	77.4 (41)	68.4 (13)	75.0 (54)
CTP	58.5 (31)	68.4 (13)	61.1 (44)
Collateral information	30.2 (16)	47.4 (9)	34.7 (35)
Testing	62.3 (33)	47.4 (9)	58.3 (42)

Notes: CTP = correctional treatment plan; percentages do not sum to 100 given that the response categories were not mutually exclusive.

These data provide evidence that program staff use multimethod assessment in identifying treatment needs. It is disappointing, however, that these data suggest that correctional treatment plans appear to be only modestly linked to the identification of treatment needs for violent offenders.

### Assessment of treatment gain

Respondents were provided with eight choices for assessing treatment gain. In order of most frequently to least frequently endorsed, these were: offender satisfaction, role plays, knowledge questionnaire, test battery interactions with staff, behavioural rating, institutional performance and institutional charges. By combining these categories into a composite score, we can conclude that, on average, programs use four different methods for the assessment of treatment gain.

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5. We would like to acknowledge those program staff who completed the survey. Their support and comments were greatly appreciated.
6. R.C. Serin, *Treating Violent Offenders: A Review of Current Practices*, Research Report R-38 (Ottawa: Correctional Services of Canada, 1994). And see R.C. Serin and S.L. Brown, "Strategies for Enhancing the Treatment of Violent Offenders," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 8, 3 (1996): 45-48.
7. One program reported 520 sessions. This was five times the next highest number, so was deleted for these analyses.

### Risk assessment

Incorporation of risk considerations into programs for violent offenders was reviewed in several ways. First, respondents were asked to indicate whether a risk assessment is conducted; 83.6% reported it was. Fewer respondents (63.3%), however, indicated a risk assessment was part of the initial assessment. Risk was rarely considered as part of the admission criteria for the program (16.7%). Further, assessments of risk were often (53.3%) not considered in post-treatment reports.

### Summary

The findings of this survey are informative and encouraging. First, even allowing for modest completion rates because of time constraints, there are a significant number and variety of programs offered to violent offenders. Second, the majority of programs report relevant treatment targets, multimethod assessments of treatment need and treatment gain. Surprisingly, almost half of the programs surveyed were not core programs, indicating considerable initiative in the field to meet treatment needs. Offenders admitted to these surveyed programs are likely heterogeneous regarding type of offences. However, program content and treatment targets are diverse, optimally providing responsive intervention. For most of the questions considered, there were minor regional variations. Since offender profiles also vary among the regions, this is not necessarily problematic. Finally, these results suggest the need for improved integration with correctional treatment plans and greater emphasis on risk assessments by program staff. ■



# Motivating treatment-resistant clients in therapy

by Denise L. Preston and Stafford Murphy<sup>1</sup>

**T**he effectiveness of psychotherapy in non-correctional settings has been actively debated over the last 40 years. The earliest reviews of treatment outcome studies suggested no difference in recovery rates between treated and untreated patients, regardless of type of patient under study, outcome measure used or method of therapy employed.<sup>2</sup> More recent reviews have indicated that, on average, patients undergoing psychotherapy improve more quickly and to a greater degree than untreated patients with no advantage for any particular type of therapy.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent studies have attempted to identify specific variables relating to positive therapeutic outcome, including an examination of client, therapist and therapy variables. Some of the numerous methodological problems inherent in this research are the selection of convenient populations of study, variability in the training and experience of clinicians and difficulties in operationally defining treatment outcome measures and in monitoring outcome at varying times after treatment. Even in the face of inherent problems, these studies point to important client and therapist variables that potentially have an impact on the efficacy of treatment with treatment-resistant clients.

## Effectiveness of psychotherapy

**T**wo client variables that seem to be moderately related to treatment outcome are client openness, or non-defensiveness, and motivation for treatment. Clients who are more open and less defensive tend to demonstrate more favourable treatment outcomes than those who are not. In addition, while motivation for treatment is inconsistently related to treatment outcome, it appears that motivation developed during treatment is more predictive of positive treatment outcome than motivation a client may have before treatment. However, motivation for treatment is difficult both to define and measure. Given its apparent significance to treatment gain, the development of theoretically relevant, empirically sound and clinically useful measures of motivation would be a useful endeavour. These measures would enable an examination of issues, such as the importance of the degree of change in motivation during treatment as compared to a minimum

“threshold” level of motivation, either before or during treatment.

Three therapist variables that appear to relate to treatment outcome are therapist experience, competence and emotional well-being, all three being related in the expected direction.

The most important therapy variable relating to treatment outcome is a therapeutic alliance (a positive interpersonal relationship) between clinician and client. Therapeutic alliance accounts for most of the variance in treatment outcome research and seems to be more important than the specific intervention used.<sup>4</sup> Of course, therapeutic alliance is contingent on the therapist qualities noted above as well as others such as warmth, genuineness and empathy,<sup>5</sup> but more important, it is contingent on the client’s ability to establish positive interpersonal relationships.

## Effectiveness of correctional treatment

A similar debate exists concerning the effectiveness of correctional treatment.<sup>6</sup> Although early reviews concluded that “nothing works,” more recent studies have been more positive and have identified some principles of effective correctional programming. Andrews and Bonta<sup>7</sup> conclude that treatment should be delivered to higher risk offenders, target criminogenic needs, be based on cognitive-behavioural or social learning theories, and consider the principles of risk, need and responsivity. They also conclude that treatment must entail consideration of therapist and therapy variables such as the relationship and contingency principles. The relationship principle posits that a positive therapeutic alliance between clinicians and offenders has the potential to facilitate learning. Therapist qualities that contribute to this alliance include being open, enthusiastic, flexible, attentive and understanding, and demonstrating acceptance, respect and caring for offenders. The contingency principle holds that clinicians must set and enforce agreed-on



limits to physical and emotional intimacy, as well as clear anticriminal contingencies such as effective reinforcement for prosocial behaviour and disapproval for antisocial behaviour.

It appears, then, that the development of a therapeutic alliance is of primary importance to the effectiveness of both non-correctional and correctional treatment. As already mentioned, however, the development of this alliance depends most notably on the client's capacity to establish and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships. This is a major impediment for those whose lives have revolved around mistrust and fear of, or indifference to, others.<sup>8</sup> Some of the diagnoses applied to such individuals are schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy. A common label applied to these clients is "treatment resistant."

A review of Correctional Service of Canada offender files would reveal that these diagnoses and labels abound. Reviews of treatment efforts with such offenders indicate that they tend to: 1) be less motivated for treatment, 2) be more resistant or non-compliant while in treatment, 3) have higher attrition rates, 4) demonstrate fewer positive behavioural changes while in treatment and 5) possibly demonstrate higher recidivism rates after participating in treatment.<sup>9</sup> Given the substantial risk that these offenders may commit further violent offences, it is imperative that clinicians make every effort to motivate clients to commit themselves to treatment and to deliver this treatment in ways that maximize the likelihood that clients will make important behavioural changes.

### The process of change

Clinicians have traditionally viewed motivation as a relatively fixed personality trait and so have had a tendency to become demoralized when working with treatment-resistant clients. A more effective way to conceptualize motivation is as a state of readiness to change. Following from this, the purpose of treatment is to help clients progress from one state to another. Evidently, what clinicians do to facilitate

movement between states depends on the client's state of readiness. Similarly, the amount of progress demonstrated in moving from one state to another depends on the client's state when treatment begins.

Some<sup>10</sup> have written extensively about the process of therapeutic change, identifying four stages of change. In the precontemplation stage, people do not recognize that they have any

**The development of a therapeutic alliance is of primary importance to the effectiveness of both non-correctional and correctional treatment.**

problems that require attention or, if they do, have no immediate intention of making changes. People in this stage typically enter treatment under duress, are less open, put forth little effort and are typically quick to relapse to maladaptive behaviours. In the second stage, contemplation, people are aware that they have problems that require attention, but waver between taking no immediate action and expressing or demonstrating some commitment to change. In the action stage, having made a commitment to change, people actively begin modifying their behaviour, experiences and environments. Finally, in maintenance, people have made significant behavioural changes and are actively working to prevent relapse.

This four-stage model implies that it is important for clinicians to expend both time and effort prior to and early in treatment, motivating clients to move from precontemplation to contemplation to action, if necessary. To facilitate this, clinicians must attempt to develop a therapeutic alliance with clients to engage them effectively in treatment.

### Therapeutic engagement of treatment-resistant clients

Many authors<sup>11</sup> have identified therapist qualities that promote the development of a therapeutic alliance. Some authors,<sup>12</sup> however, have suggested specific strategies for the engagement of treatment-resistant clients. While the list is not exhaustive, these authors suggest that clinicians should acknowledge that ambivalence and resistance on the part of clients are natural and understandable. How they handle their clients' resistance determines, in large part, the outcome of subsequent treatment



efforts. Clinicians should take an active role in helping resistant clients by, for example, attempting to remove practical and attitudinal obstacles to change. They should, however, maintain a balance between actively helping and having clients assume responsibility for behavioural change. To work with, rather than against, client resistance, clinicians should not attempt to force clients to accept their opinions about the nature of their problems or the appropriate changes to make. Rather, they should invite the client to consider alternative perspectives and information.

Clinicians should provide information and feedback about clients' current situations and the consequences of maintaining their current behaviour. They should also provide information about the likely advantages of changing. In doing so, clinicians can clarify for clients, the discrepancy between current behaviour and important personal goals. Clients may then shift their "motivational balance" in favour of the pros of change versus those of the status quo.

Wherever possible, clinicians should provide clients with choices regarding the type of treatment undertaken and its goals. The agreed-on goals must be reasonable, attainable and prosocial, and clinicians should provide regular feedback concerning clients' attempts to achieve these goals.

Finally, in dealing with resistant clients, clinicians should be empathic. They should seek to understand clients' feelings and perspectives by reflecting and reframing what clients reveal. They should also support and promote clients' feelings of, and efforts toward, self-efficacy. While being empathic toward clients does not necessarily entail condoning their behaviour, it does preclude a number of counter-therapeutic approaches. Clinicians working with any clients, particularly those considered treatment resistant, should avoid judging, denigrating, labelling or otherwise blaming them. Clinicians can encourage clients to take responsibility for their behaviour without attributing blame. They should avoid

playing the role of the "expert" with special capabilities to "fix" them.

Most important, clinicians should avoid argumentation or strong confrontation with treatment-resistant clients. Aggressive confrontation typically results in increased defensiveness on the part of clients and forces them into a position of arguing more strongly in favour of their perhaps misguided opinions. It exemplifies clinicians taking responsibility for bringing about behavioural change in clients.<sup>13</sup>

**Clinicians should provide information and feedback about clients' current situations and the consequences of maintaining their current behaviour.**

### **Therapeutic engagement of psychopaths**

Some of the techniques for therapeutic engagement of treatment-resistant clients may be contraindicated when applied to psychopaths, perhaps the most resistant of clients. As noted by several researchers and clinicians, psychopaths possess a unique cluster of personality characteristics.<sup>14</sup> Most notably, they have a diminished capacity to form meaningful interpersonal relationships although they can effectively mimic such a capacity. This suggests that treatments placing heavy emphasis on the development of a therapeutic alliance between clinicians and clients are likely to fail with psychopathic clients. Moreover, such treatments may be risky to clinicians because they may perceive

a false sense of personal safety with psychopathic clients. Psychopaths are grandiose and may demand to see the most senior available staff member. For example, during police investigations they may request to be interviewed by the most senior investigating officer and, in treatment, they may expect to be treated by the most senior clinician.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that they may respond most favourably to characteristics other than the interpersonal qualities of clinicians. Psychopathic clients are also manipulative, and clinicians must be persistent in setting and enforcing limits on their relationships with psychopaths. Clinicians must not protect them from the legal and social consequences of their behaviour<sup>16</sup> and must



repeatedly reinforce that, when assessing changes in behaviour, they will be convinced by actions rather than words. Clinicians must be wary of giving psychopathic clients the benefit of the doubt even in seemingly innocuous situations. Psychopaths will perceive clinicians as gullible and, thus, as legitimate targets for future manipulation.

### Applying therapeutic engagement techniques with treatment-resistant offenders

The Persistently Violent Offender (PVO) Treatment Program is a demonstration project developed and funded by the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada. It is a multiyear, multisite, non-residential treatment program currently being piloted at Collins Bay Institution in Ontario. The program targets persistently violent offenders, defined as those having at least three convictions for violent offences. It is based on a social problem-solving theoretical framework and is delivered according to cognitive behavioural principles. It involves 18 weeks of half-time participation.

Given the population in question, most are expected to be treatment resistant. For this reason, the first two weeks of the program constitute a motivational module designed to facilitate participant interaction, commitment and trust. Among other specific topics, participants and therapists generate group rules and complete a cost-benefit analysis of completing the program. The group rules emphasize the positive or negative impact of various behaviours on others. Similarly, the cost-benefit analysis comprehensively examines the short-term and long-term advantages and disadvantages of completing versus not completing the program. This analysis includes the perspectives of participants, their families and significant others, friends, victims and society in general. The module also includes consideration of various obstacles to change, including aggressive non-verbal and verbal communication, aggressive beliefs, substance abuse and

impulsivity. Each of these is discussed with an emphasis on how they promote violent behaviour and, conversely, inhibit non-violent behaviour.

Preliminary observations of the first group support the expectation that the PVO program is targeting primarily treatment-resistant offenders. The majority consented to treatment only after many protests about the duration, content and title of the program. Many offenders also argued that they are not persistently violent and that the criterion for program eligibility ought to be five convictions for violent

offences instead of the requisite three. The majority have had at least one unsuccessful prior attempt at some form of treatment, and most have received numerous institutional charges for failing to comply with various aspects of their correctional plans. Finally, most of them are extremely confrontational with other members of the group, but primarily with the therapists.

The impact of the motivational module was considerable. No one was discharged from the program in the first two weeks, perhaps because, after the first week, the therapists removed a major practical obstacle to treatment: they changed the time of the group from the morning to the afternoon. This minor concession resulted in a reduction in tardiness, absenteeism and complaints, and in a significant increase in attention and participation. It was clear that it

was the first time that some group members had ever considered some of the issues presented. For example, when discussing communication strategies, some were oblivious to the concept of non-verbal communication or its impact on others. In completing the cost-benefit analysis, most participants failed to consider the impact of violence on anyone other than themselves, and most expressed scepticism about the impact on victims in particular.

Many entered the program claiming that most violent behaviour is spontaneous or even inevitable. By the end of the module, most conceded that distorted thinking plays a role in

**The Persistently Violent Offender (PVO) Treatment Program is a demonstration project developed and funded by the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada.**



motivating violent behaviour and that, in most situations, there may be at least one non-violent alternative for problem resolution. Even more encouraging is that some group members

expressed enthusiasm about learning new solutions.

These are no small accomplishments for such a resistant group. ■

1. Denise L. Preston is the Director of the Persistently Violent Offender Program (PVO) at Collins Bay Institution, 455 Bath Road, P.O. Box 190, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 4V9. Stafford Murphy is a therapist in the PVO program.
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# Treatment and violent offenders: Reducing the risk to offend

by W. Carson Smiley, Rachel Mulloy and Cheryl A. Brown<sup>1</sup>

*The overriding mission of the Correctional Service of Canada is to protect the public. As most offenders under the auspices of the Service will be released to the community at some point in their sentences, it is imperative that we find effective ways of reducing the risk to reoffend. Treatment programs designed to reduce the risk of reoffence are the most common rehabilitation technique used, but we should not simply assume that they are effective without verification. Ongoing follow-up work must be done on all such treatment programs to ensure that these programs are indeed reducing recidivism rates. These programs should also be aimed at those most in need: inmates who are seen as being at high risk to reoffend. The Correctional Service of Canada's Regional Health Centre in Abbotsford, British Columbia, runs a treatment program for high-risk violent offenders. Previous research indicates the program is effective in reducing violent recidivism. This article explores the treatment methods used in this program and further examines the recidivism rates of program participants.*

## Introduction

There has been a recent focus within the Correctional Service of Canada on assessing the dangerousness of offenders. From this comes a natural concern with the treatment programs being used to reduce the risk of reoffence. Most of this concern has centred on sex offenders, perhaps because of the devastation caused to the victims of sex crimes. It is also important, however, to address the treatment needs of violent offenders. Violent crimes cause a great deal of harm to victims and have a large cost for society. Violent offenders who score high on such risk assessment instruments as the General Statistical Information on Recidivism (GSIR) Scale and the Violent Risk Assessment Guide (V-RAG) tend to be among those most at risk to reoffend. Despite this, there are few institutional treatment programs aimed specifically at reducing violent offenders' risk to reoffend. As a result, there is little research on the effects of such treatment on these offenders.

The Regional Health Centre in Abbotsford, British Columbia, offers the Intensive Treatment

Program for Violent Offenders, a program specifically for federal inmates who are seen as being at a very high risk to reoffend. This program has been running in its current form since November 1990. Sixteen participants spend eight months in the program and are expected to attend on a full-time basis. The program is multimodal, with an emphasis on cognitive-behavioural therapy and relapse prevention. There is also a focus on ameliorating skill deficits associated with offenders, such as communication and anger management problems. The setting of prosocial group norms by participants is encouraged through daily group psychotherapy and community living. All treatment providers are trained professionals and remain with the program for its full duration, ensuring continuity of care. Staff involved in the program include a psychologist, a social worker and nurses who provide much of the treatment. Staff from other disciplines are involved as needed. The treatment team model is used, with all staff involved in treatment being consulted on treatment decisions.

Generally, the completion rate of participants in the program is fairly good, averaging 80%. Of those who do not complete, some drop out voluntarily, and others are asked to leave because of disciplinary concerns or severe problems in treatment. For example, a condition of admittance to the program is that the offender admits to the crime. An offender who subsequently recants on this and refuses to work on the relevant issues may be asked to leave the program.

Treatment progress is determined through the ongoing assessment of participants by staff, using objectives for each offender within specific program components. These "report cards" are used in the final report on each individual at the end of treatment. Since 1995, this report has included a full risk assessment, using the Hare Psychopathy Checklist – Revised<sup>2</sup> and the V-RAG.<sup>3</sup> Individual treatment-



component assessments are also used to examine the effectiveness of treatment. For example, if none of the participants was able to meet an objective within a module, staff will discuss the reasons for this and make changes to the treatment format if necessary.

The Intensive Treatment Program for Violent Offenders was developed using research on the most effective treatment methods currently known for this population.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, an essential component of such a treatment program is outcome assessment and, so, research data were collected on offenders who had participated in the program in the early 1990s.

## Method

We studied 132 male, adult, federal offenders who entered the Intensive Treatment Program for Violent Offenders between November 1990 and January 1994. The average age of program participants at the time of treatment was 34 years. Three quarters (77%) were Caucasian, 15% were from First Nations and 8% were of other ethnic backgrounds. About half (52%) were serving life sentences, and the average determinate sentence length was 11 years. Depending on when offenders took part in the program, the follow-up time varied between three-and-a-half years and six months. Of the 132 participants, 10 had taken the program more than once.

Most (105) program participants completed treatment, while 27 did not. Demographically, offenders who completed the program were significantly older at the time of taking the program than those who did not. No other significant differences between the two groups were found in terms of demographics.

Program completers (PC) were also compared with non-completers (NC) in terms of their institutional security classifications since taking the program. This provided a rough measure of offenders' institutional behaviour post-treatment. Generally, there was little difference between the PC and NC groups. At the time of follow-up, the institutional security

level did not differ between the two groups. During the first year after treatment, however, the NC group was at a significantly higher security level than the PC group.

## Procedure

The National Parole Board files for these offenders were examined between February and April 1995 by trained research assistants. Data were collected on institutional and community performance after treatment.

## Results

**Release rates:** About 41% of the program non-completers (11 of 27) were granted some form of community release after the program, compared to one third of the program completers (35 of 105). It is unclear why the release rate for the non-completers was higher than for the program completers. Those in the NC group who were released on statutory release had served a significantly shorter time on their sentence before this release than had those in the PC group. Statutory release is automatically granted except where the case management team recommends detention. This indicates that those in the NC group may have been serving shorter sentences than those in the PC group. However, there was no significant difference between the PC and NC groups in

terms of sentence length, so this assumption could not be supported in the data.

**Recidivism:** The program completers and non-completers who were released were compared in terms of their recidivism. The results are shown in the table. Among the non-completers, 91% recidivated in some way (suspension, revocation, new charges), whereas only 49% of the program completers recidivated. Program non-completers were significantly more likely to perform poorly on all recidivism variables than the program completers. More specifically, 37% of the PC group had their release revoked and 23% incurred new charges. By comparison, 82% of the NC group had their release revoked and 82% incurred new charges.

The Intensive Treatment Program for Violent Offenders was developed using research on the most effective treatment methods currently known for this population.



Table

**Comparison of Program Completers with Non-completers on Recidivism Variables**

Type of Recidivism among Released Offenders	Program Completers (n=35) %	Program Non-completers (n=11) %
Release revoked	37.1	81.8
New charges	22.9	81.8
Total recidivism	48.6	90.9

Clearly, completion of the Intensive Treatment Program for Violent Offenders was associated with better performance in the community.

As data collection on this sample continues, further analysis will be done on the length of time offenders managed to remain offence-free in the community. Such an analysis is not possible at this time, partially because of the small number of offenders who have been released since taking treatment and partially because of the large variation in the length of time offenders have been on release and, therefore, at risk for reoffending.

These findings further support a previous study on this sample,<sup>5</sup> which found that participants were less likely to reoffend violently than those in a comparison group of offenders matched on the basis of age at release, sentence length and release dates. The overall recidivism rate of program participants, however, did not differ significantly from that of the comparison group. It was also found that offenders who had taken part in this program had committed more serious crimes on average before treatment participation than offenders in the comparison group. Although the two-year follow-up period for this study was relatively short, the finding that the program had an impact on the incidence of violent recidivism is encouraging and provides validity for the program's treatment methodology.

### Discussion

Clearly, offenders who completed the Intensive Treatment Program for Violent Offenders performed significantly better on release than those who did not complete treatment. This finding suggests that the program may indeed be successful at reducing the risk of reoffence

for those who complete it. This is particularly encouraging given the fact that the offenders selected to take part in this program had been assessed as being at a very high risk to reoffend.

Completion of treatment is also a useful indicator of success on community release. It appears that those offenders who do not complete the program are also those who will not behave well while on release in the community. This suggests that an offender's ability to complete treatment programming should be taken into account when release recommendations are made.

Scores on the Hare Psychopathy Checklist - Revised were assessed on a subset of this sample. The scores indicate that approximately one third of this sample are psychopaths.<sup>6</sup> The research to date<sup>7</sup> has suggested that psychopaths may be untreatable. Other research on a subset of this sample<sup>8</sup> shows that psychopaths are more likely to drop out of treatment and show less improvement from treatment than non-psychopaths. In our group, however, most of the psychopaths did manage to complete treatment and showed some improvement on factors related to treatment success. This indicates that while psychopaths may be more difficult to treat than non-psychopaths, treatment is not impossible. It also suggests that psychopaths may be overrepresented in the non-completer group in this study. This may account for some of the disparity in reoffence rates between the completers and the non-completers. Nevertheless, the fact that some reduction in recidivism appears to have been accomplished with this population, which has a high proportion of psychopaths, is particularly encouraging.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study must still be considered preliminary, due to the lack of a formal control group and to the short follow-up time. They do, however, indicate that this population of offenders may be treatable. The findings also point to the importance of examining treatment completion when assessing risk of reoffence. Given the high danger that this population of violent offenders poses to the public, any progress made in understanding and predicting the risk of reoffence is encouraging. ■



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## Just released...

*The Correctional Research and Development Sector of the Correctional Service of Canada recently released the following publications:*

- R-53 *Maximum-security Male and Female Federal Offenders: A Comparison*
- R-52 *Day Parole Program Review: Case Management Predictors of Outcome*
- R-51 *Temporary Absence Program Participation and the Release of Federal Offenders*



# Follow-up of offenders from the Vancouver District Violent Offender Program

by Roger Boe, Ray Belcourt, Khajak Ishak and Sylvie Bsilis<sup>1</sup>

In early 1996, the Research Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada conducted a follow-up study of offenders from the Vancouver District Violent Offender Unit, a pilot program for managing violent offenders under supervision in the community. The Violent Offender Unit (VOU) was established in early 1994 to provide an intensive community supervision program for persistently violent offenders.

## Methods and data

### Study parameters

Our follow-up period was restricted to the first six months following program admission (as determined by the date of data capture) as this was the minimum time we could examine while still including all the offenders. However, some of the earliest program entrants had been under supervision for nearly two years by this point.

While most conditional release failures occur within six months of release, previous research has found that a significant proportion of offenders fail after a longer interval.<sup>2</sup>

The study considered all offenders (73) who entered the program from January 1994, the start of the program: 34 entered in calendar year 1994, 38 during 1995, one joined originally in 1994 and returned after an initial failure for a second chance, and three entered early in January 1996 but have been counted with the 1995 group. The list of participants was cut in January 1996 to allow for a minimum six-

month follow-up period. The breakdown by program entry period is shown in Table 1.

The readmission data for the follow-up analysis were collected in August 1996. By this date, at least six months had passed for all offenders since their release date, and 46% of participants had also reached their one-year release anniversary date.

### Data collection

The list of program participants was provided by Pacific region staff and was used to assemble offender profile and recidivism information from the Correctional Service of Canada's Offender Management System (OMS), as well as criminal history information from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) criminal history system.<sup>3</sup>

Program failures were defined to include revocations and suspensions during the program participation period. All failures were dated and classified. Readmission dates were verified as having all occurred after the initial entry into the VOU program. Failures were also classified as to type (both with and without a conviction for a new offence).

This study examined failures within six months (and, for a subsample, within one year) after release. Comparisons are made with other benchmark populations (offenders released after participating in a Pacific region high risk, violent offender, institutional program and a matching control group of non-treated offenders).

## Profile of offenders in the VOU

The VOU program was designed to provide intensive community supervision (at least two therapeutic sessions per week) for high risk, violent offenders.

The Correctional Service of Canada should target intensive correctional programming (whether institution- or community-based)

Table 1

### Breakdown of Program Entry Period

Program Entry Period	Total Program Entries	Distribution of Program Entries (%)
1994	34	46
1995	40	54
Total to date	74*	100

Note: \*the 74 entries include one offender who was admitted into the program twice, in successive years.



toward offenders who are identified as having the highest risk/needs. High risk, violent offenders can be identified by several criteria, such as the current "major offence"; the offender's criminal history, where it involves numerous convictions or convictions for serious violent offences; and actuarial risk assessment tools (for example, the Statistical Information on Recidivism, or SIR, Scale scores).

### Convictions for violent offences

In a parallel study of an institutional treatment program for violent offenders, Motiuk and his colleagues examined the current offence and SIR Scale scores for their program's high risk participants (the violent offence categories used were homicide, sex offence, robbery and assault crimes).<sup>4</sup> We show a comparable breakdown for the VOU participants by violent crime type and risk level, as determined by their SIR Scale score in Table 2.

**Table 2**

**Vancouver Violent Offender Program Participants**

	Risk Level* (%)				
	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
Offence type (n)	20	13	7	0	60
Murder (15)	0	22	33	22	22
Manslaughter (9)	38	29	25	4	4
Robbery (23)	38	29	25	4	4
Assault (19)	42	5	26	11	16
Other offences (3)	33	0	0	33	33

Note: \*risk is derived from the offender's SIR Scale score.

Offender records show that one third of offenders (34%) were serving a sentence for a current major offence of homicide (21% for murder, 13% for manslaughter), about one third for robbery (34%), about one quarter for assault (27%) and the remaining 4% for a non-violent offence. Overall, about 95% of the offenders were currently serving a sentence for a violent offence, typically homicide or robbery. Moreover, almost half of the VOU participants (47%) were classified as "poor" or "very poor" risk.

This pattern was reinforced when we examined the participants' criminal history. As shown in Table 3, we found that, collectively, these offenders had accumulated over 1,300 convictions, of which 222 were for violent offences.

**Table 3**

**Criminal History of Participants**

Cumulative Totals of Convictions for all Participants*	Number
Homicide	30
Murder	18
Manslaughter	12
Robbery	103
Sexual offences	2
Assault	87
Total convictions for violence	222
Total all violent and non-violent convictions	1,363
Offenders with any violent conviction	67

Note: \*criminal history records were available for 70 of 73 offenders.

Over 95% of offenders (67 offenders out of 70 for whom we found records) in the VOU program had at least one conviction for a violent crime. RCMP criminal conviction files also show that VOU participants had convictions for 30 homicides, and had a total of 103 robbery and 87 assault convictions.

In addition, there is considerable evidence of previous supervision, bail or other failures. Two thirds of participants (46) had convictions for previous misconduct, including breach of condition or bail (29), failure to appear (22), unlawfully at large (20) or escape (18). Collectively, they had amassed a total of 190 such convictions.

These data provide strong evidence that participants in the VOU program are offenders with extensive history of violent and/or other high risk behaviour.

### Current federal term

The number of convictions for previous misconduct reflects a population with extensive prior involvement with the courts and with corrections. The inmates in this study were serving anywhere from their first to seventh federal term, with the great majority (93%) on their first to third federal term. Almost half (47.9%) were serving a first federal term, and another third (33.8%) were on their second federal term.

### Postrelease outcomes

As shown in Table 4, just 13 (18%) of the participants in the VOU program had experienced a failure within one year following



Table 4

**Total Failures within One Year of Release**

	Frequency	(%)
Not failed	61	82.5
Failed	13	17.5
Total*	74	100

Note: \*includes one participant who entered twice.

their release. This rate does not control for the different lengths of time that participants had been under supervision.

**Failure rates during first six months**

When the potential time spent in the community is equalized to a standard first six months while under supervision (see Table 5), we find that the failure rate was about 15% (11 failures). Looking at each program group separately, according to when they entered the program, we find that the failure rate for each program entry period varied from a high of 30% to a low of 5%, and there were no failures for the three participants who entered in January 1996.

Table 5

**Failures during First Six-month Period (as of August 1996)**

Program Entry Period	Number Entering	Proportion Entering (%)	Number of Failures	Proportion of Failures (%)
January-June 1994	24	32	4	17
July-December 1994	10	14	3	30
January-June 1995	21	28	3	14
July-December 1995	19	26	1	5
Total to date	74*	100	11	15

Note: \*includes one participant who entered twice.

The Offender Management System records for the 11 readmissions indicate that 10 were revocations of release and 1 was an interruption of release. All 10 of the revocations are indicated as occurring **without the commission of a new offence**.

**Comparative failure rates**

Using an appropriate benchmark makes an evaluation of these failure rates more meaningful. A recent study<sup>5</sup> examined failure rates for offenders who completed an intensive treatment

program for violent male offenders at the Regional Health Centre (RHC-Pacific region), 60 of whom had been released and were followed up. This study also had a control population (a matched sample of male, non-treatment releases).<sup>6</sup>

Within the follow-up period of six months after release, the failure rates for the VOU, community, high risk, violent offenders and the male, matched, non-treatment releases were identical (15%). The failure rate for the RHC-Pacific treatment group was only slightly higher (17%). These results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

**Offenders Readmitted within Six Months – Three High Risk Populations**

Program	Eligible Number	Failures	Proportion of Failures (%)
VOU (Pacific) intensive community supervision group	74	11	15
RHC-Pacific intensive institutional treatment group	44	9	17
Pacific male, matched, non-treatment, release group	45	8	15

**Low risk and outcome**

This study reconfirms that risk assessments (based mainly on criminal history) can predict postrelease recidivism. There were no failures among the participants who had been assessed (as based on the SIR Scale score) as "good" or "very good" risks, within the six-month period following release. Of the 11 failures, 7 (64%) had been rated as either "very poor" or "poor" risk, and the other 4 (36%) were rated as "fair" risks. The fact that no failures were indicated which involved a new offence suggests that intensive supervision and community programming can provide an effective means for reducing public risk in the community.

**Summary**

First, both the RHC-Pacific, high intensity, institutional program and the VOU, high intensity, community-supervision program are being targeted, in the main, to high risk offenders (as stipulated by the risk principle).<sup>7</sup>



Second, both high intensity treatment programs (albeit one institutional and the other community) are achieving some measurable success. The failure rates for the two high risk treatment groups are comparable to that of the non-treated release group. Among RHC-Pacific group members, there were no revocations for a new offence, and no VOU participants were readmitted with a new offence.

Finally, this investigation points out potential avenues for further research. The relationship between high intensity programs in institutions

and programs in the community needs to be more closely examined, to see how benefits from specialized institutional programs can be reinforced in the community. In this study, only six of the RHC-Pacific participants were found to have also participated in the VOU community program. Additionally, the implementation of the Correctional Service of Canada's new intake assessment system will assist in relating offenders' needs to correctional programming. We anticipate this should produce significant gains in offender risk management. ■

1. Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.
2. T. Nouwens, L.L. Motiuk and R. Boe, "So You Want To Know the Recidivism Rate?" *Forum on Corrections Research*, 5, 3 (1993). From our other research, it appears that about 60% of release failures occur within six months of the release date and 90% of failures occur within one year.
3. This latter information is particularly important since it shows violent criminal convictions that may have been served under provincial or youth jurisdiction.
4. L. Motiuk, C. Smiley and K. Blanchette, "Intensive Programming for Violent Offenders: A Comparative Investigation," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 8, 3 (1996).
5. Motiuk, Smiley and Blanchette, "Intensive Programming for Violent Offenders."
6. Motiuk, Smiley and Blanchette, "Intensive Programming for Violent Offenders." This specialized program emphasizes a cognitive-behavioural and psychosocial approach to changing the antisocial behaviour of offenders. The program lasts for about eight months. The control group was a similarly situated group of male offenders matched on release date, age at release date and sentence length. One of the authors, Kelley Blanchette, was able to provide a special run for us to make these comparisons at the six-month release point.
7. D.A. Andrews, "Recidivism Is Predictable and Can Be Influenced: Using Risk Assessments to Reduce Recidivism," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 1, 2 (1989). As Andrews notes, "...the risk principle suggests that higher levels of service should be allocated to higher risk cases."

## Also released...

*B-17 The 1996 Correctional Service of Canada Staff Survey: A Synopsis*

*B-16 Homicide, Sex, Robbery and Drug Offenders in Federal Corrections: An End-of-1996 Review*



# An inmate survey: A profile of violent and non-violent offenders

by David Robinson, Michael Muirhead and Pamela Lefaive<sup>1</sup>  
Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada

The Correctional Service of Canada conducted its first National Inmate Survey in the fall of 1995.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 4,300 inmates participated in the survey, providing information about their criminal history, prison experiences and perceptions of a variety of correctional issues. This comprehensive survey included questions concerning the institutional environment, safety of inmates, program experiences, views on staff and health issues, including mental health and risky behaviours associated with HIV. The survey produced a rich research database for exploring a variety of correctional issues which have never been empirically examined by the Correctional Service of Canada.

Inmates supplied information about their current federal incarcerations including both offence and sentence characteristics. The data provided a unique opportunity to compare offenders who had committed different offences on a number of personal characteristics and attitudinal variables. The data were particularly suited to compare violent and non-violent offenders.

## Methodology

The survey was based on a random sample of 4,285 inmates who were administered questionnaires, in groups, in their respective institutions. The sample was designed to provide statistical confidence in the results for each institution within the Correctional Service of Canada. About two thirds of inmates who were randomly selected (65.4%) agreed to participate in the survey. Random techniques were also used to select replacements for inmates who refused to participate in the survey. Overall, the sample represented 97% of the quota established for the survey.

The random procedures, the administration of the questionnaires and the data entry of the results of the questionnaires were conducted by an external consulting firm to assure inmates that the information they were providing would be anonymous.

## Distribution of offences

A total of 3,972 inmates (93%) provided information about the offences related to their current federal prison sentences. Table 1 shows the distribution of offence types for the sample. In total, 41.8% reported offences from more than one of the offence categories included in the questionnaire. Four out of five inmates (80.6%) reported at least one violent offence including homicide, attempted homicide, manslaughter, assault, weapons offences, robbery and sex offences. This figure is comparable to the violent offender rate obtained using the Offender Management System, which categorizes the types of offences committed by federal offenders.

Robbery offences were reported by 39% of the offenders who fell within the violent offence

Table 1

### Distribution of Current Offences

Current Offence Type (n=3,972)	Number	%
All violent offences (including all homicide/manslaughter/attempts, assaults, weapons robbery, sex offences)	3,202	80.6
Non-violent offences only (drug, break and enter, fraud/other)	770	20.4
Any non-violent offences (drug, break and enter, fraud/other)	1,616	40.7
Selected violent offences (homicides, assaults, weapons only – excluding robbery and sex offences)	2,050	51.6
Any robbery	1,248	31.4
Any sex offences	730	18.3
Any homicide/manslaughter/attempted homicides	1,092	27.5
Any weapons offences	763	19.2
Any assaults	753	18.9
Any drug offences	887	22.3
Any break and enter	976	24.5
Any fraud/other	506	12.7



category, while 27.5% reported homicide, manslaughter or attempted homicide, 23.8% reported weapons offences, 23.5% reported assaults and 22.8% reported sex offences.

Among the violent offenders, about one quarter reported at least one non-violent offence (26.4%), including break and enter (18.4%), drug (13.6%) and fraud/other offences (8.4%). In total, two fifths of the entire sample (40.7%) reported at least one non-violent offence on their current sentence (break and enter, drugs, fraud/other). Of the non-violent offences, break and enter was the most frequently reported offence (24.5%), followed by drug offences (22.3%).

### Demographic and criminal history variables

Violent offenders differed from non-violent offenders on most of the characteristics examined in the survey. Table 2 compares the demographic and criminal history variables of non-violent and violent offenders. Overall, violent offenders tended to be slightly but (statistically) significantly older, less likely to be married and more likely to be Aboriginal

peoples. They were also more likely to have had more than one offence, less likely to have been returned to federal custody on their current sentence and less likely to have served previous federal or provincial incarcerations. Moreover, violent offenders were more likely to have been placed in administrative and disciplinary segregation and more likely to have used illegal drugs inside prison; they were less likely to be past their parole eligibility date and were serving considerably longer sentences.

As Table 2 shows, educational achievement and having children were the only variables on which the two groups were not significantly different. It should be noted, however, that some of the statistically significant differences were not large.

There was variation in the characteristics of offenders across the subtypes of violent offences. For example, sex offenders tended to be different from other violent offenders on most factors: they were older and more likely to be married and have children. They were also less likely to have been segregated for administrative or disciplinary reasons and less likely to have reported using drugs. Sex offenders were also less likely to have been returned to custody or to have earlier provincial or federal incarceration histories, but more likely to be past their parole eligibility dates.

Robbery offenders, in contrast to sex offenders and other violent offenders (assault, weapons and offences involving the death of a victim), were somewhat younger, more likely to have spent time in segregation, reported higher levels of illegal drug use inside prison, were more often recidivists with previous federal and provincial histories, and had more than one offence type for their current terms.

### Staff and programming

Inmates reported their relationships with staff, enrollment in work and education programs, and their views about the effectiveness of programs. Violent and non-violent offenders exhibited few differences on these attitudinal variables (see Figure 1). Both groups reported similar relationship quality with staff, perceptions about the positive aspects of case management and satisfaction with work and programming. Violent offenders, however,

Table 2

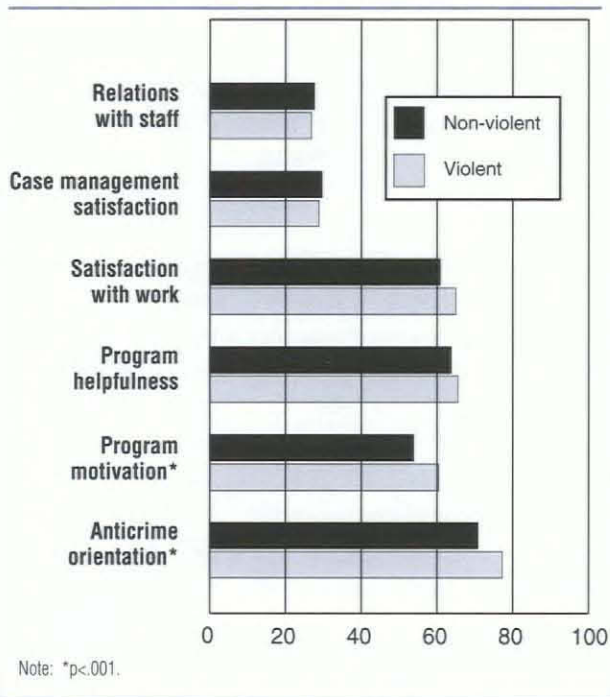
#### Demographic and Criminal History Characteristics Factors by Offence Type (Means/%)\*

Characteristics	Any Violent Offences (n=3,202)	Non-violent Offences Only (n=770)
Mean age**	35.2	34.2
Less than Grade 8 education	19.1	22.0
Married***	32.5	42.5
Have children	59.4	60.9
Aboriginal***	16.5	8.9
More than one offence***	43.6	34.1
Return to custody***	21.9	30.8
Previous provincial incarceration***	66.7	73.2
Previous federal incarceration***	49.3	56.3
Administrative segregation***	21.7	13.4
Disciplinary segregation***	25.8	16.3
Used drugs inside prison***	40.2	33.9
Past parole eligibility date***	53.8	66.1
Length of sentence among non-lifers***	7.5	5.9

Notes: \*age is expressed as mean years; all other figures in Table 2 are percentages; \*\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .001.



**Figure 1**  
**Relationships with Staff and Perceptions about Programming – % of Inmates Responding Positively by Offence Type**



showed higher motivation for programs and greater anticrime orientations than non-violent offenders.

The presence of sex offenders in the violent offence category accounted for most of the differences between violent and non-violent offenders for program-related variables. Sex offenders showed the most motivation for programs and were more likely to endorse anticriminal orientations than other inmates. Robbery offenders, on the other hand, had the least motivation for programs and fewer anticriminal attitudes.

Sex offenders also showed higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of their relationships with staff – 45% were positive versus 27% of all violent offenders. Robbery offenders reported the lowest levels of satisfaction (18%) with their relationships with staff.

**Victimization**

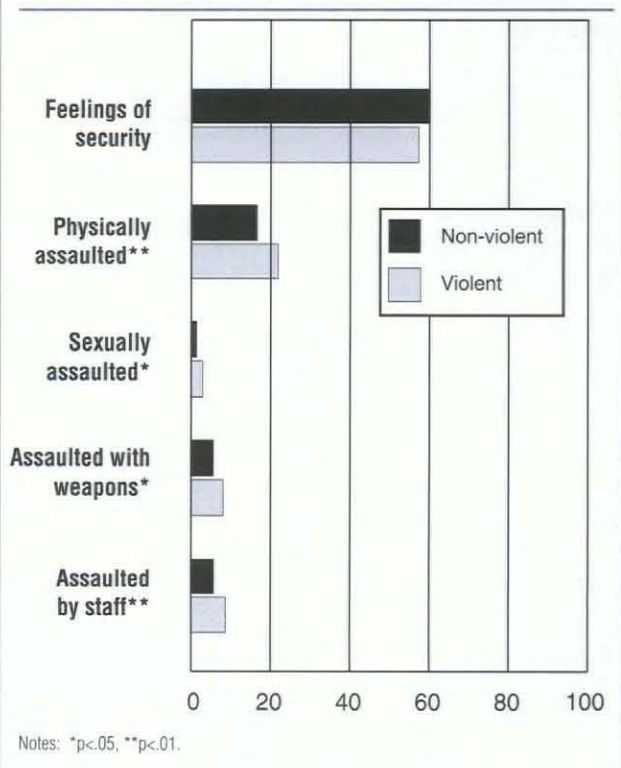
The inmate survey contained a large section devoted to information about which offenders were victimized while incarcerated. As indicated in Figure 2, violent offenders reported a significantly greater number of assaults

committed against them compared to non-violent offenders. Again, there were interesting differences within the violent offence group. Sex offenders reported the highest level of victimization, reporting, for example, a rate of sexual assault (5.5%) that was nearly double that reported by other violent offenders (2.9%). Interestingly, within the non-violent group, break and enter offenders also reported high rates of physical assaults (25.5%), a rate comparable to that observed for sex offenders (24.9%). In most other comparisons of survey results, break and enter and robbery offenders had similar patterns; however, in this, the victimization category, robbery offenders reported generally lower rates.

**Risk of HIV/AIDS**

A large section of the survey was devoted to collecting information about inmates' perceptions about HIV/AIDS and the behaviours that place them at risk of contracting the infection. A behavioural risk index used in the survey included injection drug use, unsafe sexual behaviour and the use of unclean tattooing or body piercing

**Figure 2**  
**Self-reported Victimization (%) by Offence Type**





equipment. Overall, 26% of inmates engaged in one or more of these risk behaviours. There were no significant differences, however, between violent (26.7%) and non-violent offenders (23.6%). Injection drug use was the most frequently occurring risk behaviour reported by the sample (11%). Violent and non-violent offenders differed on this important variable, with violent offenders reporting the highest levels (11.8%) of injection drug use compared to non-violent offenders (7.9%). Consistent with the patterns reported above, robbery offenders reported the highest levels of injection drug use (18.2%), while sex offenders (4.1%) reported the lowest levels.

### Mental health

A number of mental health measures were included in the survey. One measure attempted to assess the level of stress that inmates experience as a result of being incarcerated (e.g., relationships with staff, relationships with other inmates, the inside drug trade, obtaining early release, relationships with family, access to goods and services, prison violence, etc.). About 38% of the sample scored within the "high stress" range of the scale. There were no statistically significant differences by offence type.

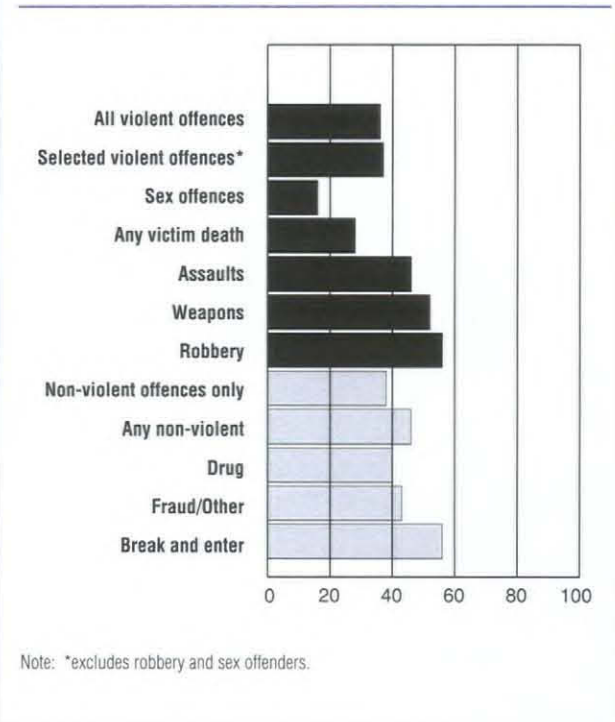
Violent offenders reported significantly higher levels (29.1%) of depression than non-violent offenders (22.3%). In keeping with different patterns described above, a higher proportion of sex offenders (32%) reported depression. There was also an indication that violent offenders (45.6%) were more satisfied than non-violent offenders (36.8%) with the mental health services they received while incarcerated. Sex offenders who received mental health services were more satisfied than other groups (49.6%).

### Criminal risk

While criminal risk is normally assessed using interview and file review sources, a number of standard actuarial risk indicators were available as self-reported items in the inmate survey (age, return to custody, previous provincial and federal incarcerations). These static items, which normally predict recidivism, were combined to form a "mini" self-reporting risk scale. Three additional items which we believed would be

Figure 3

Proportion of Offenders (%) by Offence Type Classified as High Risk



correlated with recidivism were also included: time spent in disciplinary segregation, other disciplinary charges and drug use while in prison. After constructing the risk index, we divided the sample into three levels which were roughly equal in size: low, medium and high risk. Figure 3 shows the proportion of offenders from each offence type who were placed in the high risk category using the available self-reporting indicators.

There were no differences in the proportions classified as high risk when the violent (36%) and non-violent (38%) offence categories were inspected. Sex offenders and offenders who committed offences involving the death of a victim had the lowest proportions falling within the high risk category. Violent offenders who had used weapons or were serving time for assaults, had substantially higher proportions of high risk cases. The robbery (56%) and break and enter (56%) groups had the largest proportions of high risk offenders. Generally, offenders who had committed non-violent offences (break and enter, drug, fraud/other) exhibited higher than average risk using the self-reporting scale.



## Heterogeneity within the violent offence category

In terms of public perceptions, many people attribute the same characteristics to all offenders who commit violent offences, regardless of what type of violent offence was committed. This is particularly the case when the notion of criminal risk is discussed. However, the inmate survey results corroborate findings from other research which suggest that there is a high degree of heterogeneity in the characteristics of this large offender group. Sex and robbery offenders, two major offence groups within the violent category, were dissimilar on most of the measures examined in this study. In addition, the generally violent group (assaults, weapons, death of victims) also differed from both the sex and robbery offender groups on many of the survey indicators.

Generally, when robbery offenders were compared with sex offenders, the latter group were more motivated for programming, had more positive relationships with staff, reported higher levels of prison victimization and exhibited higher levels of depression. Most notably, robbery offenders appeared to be at dramatically higher levels of criminal risk. Among the remaining violent offender types, homicide offenders tended to be at lower risk, while those who had committed assaults or weapons offences were more likely to score in the higher risk range.

An important finding concerns the similarity between robbery and break and enter offenders. Generally, these groups displayed the most troublesome behaviour inside prison and had exhibited more extensive criminal histories before they arrived. In short, these two groups of offenders had the most elevated criminal risk profiles. These data confirm

earlier findings related to recidivism and responses to correctional programming among property offenders – both robbery (violent) and break and enter (non-violent) offenders.<sup>3</sup>

The simplest conclusion from these inmate survey analyses is that not all violent offenders are the same. Those who generate the greatest fear in members of the public (sex offenders and those who kill their victims) actually show the most evidence of co-operation, treatment motivation and a lower risk of recidivism.

The violent offence category, typically used to define correctional populations, is a very inclusive grouping encompassing more than four out of five federal offenders. Because of the differences observed in offenders across the various violent offence categories, the current findings argue for more detailed breakdowns of offence types when describing federal offender populations. At a minimum, the differences observed across offence types on some of the major inmate survey indicators suggest that researchers should avoid using the violence/non-violence dichotomy as the primary division of offence type. Use of such an offence dichotomy is likely to mask both differences and similarities in the characteristics of different types of offenders. ■

1. 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.
2. Correctional Service of Canada, *1995 National Inmate Survey: Final Report*, Special Report No. 2 (Ottawa: Research Division, Correctional Service of Canada, 1996). See also D. Robinson and L. Mirabelli, *Summary of Findings of the 1995 CSC National Inmate Survey*, Report No. B-14 (Ottawa: Research Division, Correctional Service of Canada, 1996).
3. D. Robinson, *The Impact of Cognitive Skills Training on Postrelease Recidivism Among Canadian Federal Offenders*, Research Report R-41 (Ottawa: Research Division, Correctional Service of Canada, 1995).



# When the risks become reality: Messages for practitioners and researchers from national investigations

by Tanya Nouwens Gurberg, Jim Vantour and Richard Christy<sup>1</sup>

**C**orrections involves the management of risk. As in any enterprise where there are risks, sometimes things go wrong. Unfortunately, in our business, the costs of something going wrong can be enormous. Sometimes, despite our best efforts, offenders commit serious violent offences when they get out while they are under our supervision.

*The Correctional Service of Canada sees it as its responsibility to examine these cases in detail, to learn what it can from how these offenders, and the risks they posed, were managed and to share the lessons that are ultimately learned in the hopes of reducing the risk of future tragedies.*

*In this article, we share what we learned from 32 national investigations over a two-year period into serious violence offences, mainly murder, committed by federal offenders on some form of conditional release.*

**N**ational investigations are used only in the most serious of circumstances, when a very serious incident occurs – either in an institution or in the community – involving an offender under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Service of Canada. National boards of investigation are convened by, and report to, the Commissioner and include an outside community representative as a member of the board.

The last two fiscal years (1994/95 and 1995/96) saw 32 national investigations into incidents occurring in the community. Almost all of these cases involved an offender on some form of conditional release being charged with murder.

We analyzed the findings and recommendations of these national investigations to identify the recurring problems. This article discusses what we found. Our hope is that our analysis may help practitioners do their work more effectively. At the same time, it may underscore for researchers that the best intentions still require follow-through. And don't be fooled into thinking that this article is only relevant to those who work with offenders in the community – all of our community cases get their start inside.

## Our focus

The goal in corrections is to reduce the risk posed by offenders. Simply put, successful correctional planning for safe reintegration depends on the accurate identification of the criminogenic needs of individual offenders and ensuring that we respond to those needs with relevant program opportunities. But we cannot hope to assess accurately the risk posed by an offender and manage that risk safely without having appropriately handled and communicated information about that offender. Information is key to risk assessment and management. This is the framework within which we have organized our thoughts.

This article is based on a larger report available from the Investigations Division of the Correctional Service of Canada. We focus here on the findings of our analysis that have lessons for both practitioners and researchers. The lessons show that despite, and indeed perhaps because of, significant advances made in correctional research on the terrain of correctional operations – in the assessment tools available for practitioners, in the programs available for offenders and in practitioners' use of research jargon – some of the messages have been lost or misconstrued.

## Could the tragedies have been prevented?

It is important to state right from the beginning that in none of the 32 investigations we studied did we find that if staff had noticed "this" and done "that," the incident (e.g., the murder) would have been prevented.

Furthermore, when an investigation did uncover a problem in the way a case was handled, that problem was not usually in and of itself causal; rather, in combination with other problems or situations, it contributed to (as opposed to caused) the undesired result.



These two points should be kept in mind as you read this article. Otherwise, you may overestimate the gravity of the problems we will be describing.

### Risky information

Our national investigations tell us time and again that:

- We can't analyze information that isn't there.
- We can't afford to overlook information that is there.
- When it is there, we have to evaluate the information before we analyze it.
- Analyzing information is more difficult than it sounds.

### What you don't know can hurt you

When an offender begins a sentence, the main problem right from the start, according to our investigations, is an absence of relevant file information, which leads to an incomplete history on an offender. The "missing" information includes reports from the police and the courts; information related to withdrawn charges, stayed proceedings and charges reduced as a result of plea bargaining; provincial and juvenile records; psychological or psychiatric assessments; and information related to the victims of an offender's crimes and the impact of their victimization. All this information may have something to contribute to our knowledge of an offender's criminal history. Without an accurate criminal history, our assessment of the risk posed by an offender, of that offender's needs and of the management strategies required may be flawed.

Illustrating this point, we had the case of an offender who had had two previous charges for attempted murder stayed because the witnesses had failed to appear in court. There was also a third charge of attempted murder, but it had been plea bargained down to assault. Until the offender was charged with murder while on statutory release, the case was managed essentially as that of a property offender.

As the offender moves through the system, there is often an overreliance on self-reported information, according to our investigations. The problem here is that we do not attempt to

verify the information provided by the offender. Many years later, this self-reported information ends up being interpreted as true, with the assumption that if there was any question about the reliability of the information, someone would have checked it long ago.

### Seeing through the fog

In our investigations, we find one single recurring theme when it comes to collating information: our files are fragmented and cumbersome, particularly with long-term offenders.

The dilemma is that, in planning for reintegration as well as in assessing risk, we cannot afford to overlook information. On the other hand, the sheer volume and repetitive nature of the files, particularly for long-term offenders, presents a challenge.

*A reminder ... In case this article is beginning to look like just another diatribe on how we need to do things better, we thought we should remind you what we're talking about. These are not merely helpful hints based on some textbook about proper risk assessment and management. These messages come from real-life cases where an offender on conditional release, while under our supervision, took someone else's life or committed another serious violent offence. We owe it to the victims and the victims' families and to ourselves to learn what we can from these cases. Okay, back to the story ...*

### Where did you get this anyway?

Before we analyze the information that we do have, we need to evaluate its accuracy. Why would we want to analyze less than quality information? At best, it is a waste of time. At worst, it leads to bad decisions.

Some investigations have found that "need" or "treatment" concepts formulated earlier in the correctional process were repeated throughout the offender's file and throughout our management of the offender with no attempt to evaluate whether they were still relevant. This is facilitated by technology; anyone who works with a computer knows how tempting it can be simply to cut and paste parts of previous reports.

Additionally, we found a failure to resolve various discrepancies in file information, such as differing professional opinions. It is interesting



that investigations generally find that we do reasonably well at initially identifying the criminogenic needs of individual offenders with the information that we have available. When we do not do well in identifying needs, it is most often as a result of conflicting advice from professionals.

A number of investigations have also underscored the problem of having on file differing Statistical Information on Recidivism (SIR) Scale scores when different people draw different conclusions processing the same data.

The failure to resolve discrepancies or inconsistencies in information enables a “shopping for positives” to take place or the filtering out of information that does not suit a preconceived purpose and the selective presentation of the preferred results to decision makers. This is a surprisingly common theme in our investigations and is closely associated with a perception among some staff that corporate pressure to release offenders (to decrease the carceral population and use the least restrictive option) dominates the need to assess their risk. Our investigations found several examples of the focus being on release at the expense of assessing risk. In one case, when concerns about an offender’s release were raised in a negative community assessment, the response was to seek support in another community rather than assess the validity and implications of the concerns raised.

Several investigations have also found weaknesses in the calculation of SIR Scale scores, including scores based on incomplete file information, incorrect scoring compounded by a lack of quality control of scoring and inaccurate scores which generally underestimate risk.

Many investigations have also raised concerns about how SIR Scale scores are interpreted. We often see the statement in offender files that a particular score suggests that “one of two offenders with such a score will succeed” rather than the interpretation that “one of two offenders with such a score will recidivate.” Some boards of investigation have stated that it is inappropriate to focus on the “one of two will succeed” when you are specifically assessing the risk of a negative outcome.

In other cases, little importance was placed on the score. On this point, one investigation recommended that case managers and decision

makers be required to explain their reasoning when their recommendations or decisions varied with the assessment of risk indicated by the results of a SIR assessment.

### What does all this mean, anyway?

What is analysis? This is an important question because the ability to analyze information is critical to the ability to manage offenders, particularly violent ones. Those who are responsible for offenders are required to make sense of a myriad of information about that offender, to sift through all the information and pull out the key messages that will enable that person to determine the risk posed by the offender and the management strategies required as well as the needs of the offender and the interventions required.

One problem with our analysis of information may be described as “pop” offender management. In one case, the concept of “burn out” was introduced, erroneously, early during treatment. This theme was repeated several times during the management of the case with no attempt to validate it, to the point where it ended up driving prerelease planning.

The core correctional programs of the Correctional Service of Canada have been considered to be state-of-the-art by many correctional experts and jurisdictions. Unfortunately, a number of our investigations have shown that we have not done as well at demonstrating to our staff how they should analyze the impact of these programs at the individual level.

The main problem seems to be a lack of useful feedback on whether program participation was a success or failure in individual cases. Many investigation reports have described a lack of analysis in our files on the impact program participation had on offenders, particularly in terms of their risk and criminogenic needs. These reports have pointed out that statements to the effect that an offender “attended all 12 sessions of the program and was co-operative during class” provide little useful information on whether the program addressed or reduced the offender’s criminogenic needs and risk level.

Investigations have also found problems with the quality and extent of analysis in progress summaries, which are reports prepared for



decision-making purposes summarizing an offender's history, critical needs and the progress made to date to address those needs (including program participation). One of the main problems noted by investigations has been the superficiality of the analysis contained in some progress summaries. The criticisms have been insufficient discussion or analysis of the dynamics of offenders' previous conditional releases; insufficient detail concerning institutional programming successes or failures; incomplete analysis of "risk" in the appraisal portion of the progress summary; and no discussion of how the critical factors identified in psychological assessments could be effectively managed in the community.

These weaknesses all relate to an inability or a hesitation to take available information and pull it one step further into meaningful messages – to analyze information effectively.

### Points to ponder

Throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s, research advanced quite quickly into the world of correctional operations, coming up with tools for the assessment of risk, tools for the assessment of needs, and programs or interventions to address risk and needs. Language that typically belonged only in journals now frequently appears in progress summaries completed by case management officers.

Some of the lessons from our national investigations, however, teach us that the marriage between research and operations has not been an easy one and that some of the bonding is not yet complete. As mechanisms to increase this bonding, some investigations have recommended refresher training for staff on how to complete and analyze accurately the results of the assessment tools used. They have also recommended training to assist decision makers and case managers in the interpretation and application of relevant information contained in psychological or psychiatric reports and assessments. Other investigations have pointed to the need for stronger quality-control mechanisms to ensure that meaningful and complete progress summaries and program reports are being prepared.

Perhaps the solutions lie elsewhere. It is not our place to guess what they are or where they might be; it is our place to learn from our investigations and to share the lessons learned with our staff and managers. We hope you have gained something from our experience. ■

1. Tanya Nouwens Gurberg may be reached at Leclerc Institution, Quebec Region, Correctional Service of Canada, 400 Montée Saint-François, City of Laval, Quebec, H7C 1S7. Jim Vantour is Manager of the Investigations Division, National Headquarters, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, 5-B, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9. Richard Christy is at National Headquarters, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.



