

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.



SPECIAL REPORT

What We Know About Security Threat Groups (STGs)

2026

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This report is also available in French. Should additional copies be required, they can be obtained from the Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Ave. West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

What we know about Security Threat Groups (STGs)

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2026

Acknowledgements

This special report pulls together information from a variety of STG related reports and one-pagers previously published by the Research Branch. Select findings have been transformed into the included infographics.

Thank you to the members of the STG Strategy Working Group for their support and feedback on prior drafts of the infographics.

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Security Threat Groups (STGs): Overview

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) defines Security Threat Groups (STGs) as "any formal or informal on-going inmate/offender group, gang, organization or association consisting of three or more members" (Commissioner's Directive 568-3, 2016). CSC is currently reviewing and updating the policy and this definition.

Federally incarcerated offenders affiliated with STGs can pose population management and operational security concerns for CSC. To ensure a current understanding of the STG affiliated sub-population, recently completed research focused on pathways or trajectories to STG affiliation, STG disaffiliation, and comparisons across STG subgroups. Notable findings include:

- 11% of the general offender men's population were STG affiliated compared to 4% of the women's population ([Farrell MacDonald, 2022](#));
- STG affiliation was more prevalent among the federal in-custody population, in the Prairie, Ontario, and Pacific regions, and for Indigenous peoples incarcerated in federal custody ([Farrell MacDonald, 2022](#));
- Social networks, marginalization factors (e.g., poverty, unemployment, homelessness, racism, etc.), and childhood adversity (e.g. childhood abuse/trauma, family fragmentation, foster care, etc.) all play a role in STG affiliation ([Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023](#));
- STG subgroups have unique profiles and offenders affiliated with street gangs (including street gangs, Indigenous gangs, Asian gangs, and prison gangs) were more likely to be involved in institutional incidents or to have release suspensions or revocations of their release ([Farrell MacDonald, Cram, Smeth, Jones, Garrel, & Derkzen, 2023](#)); and,
- A variety of push (internal to STG) and pull (external to STG) factors can motivate an individual to disengage or disaffiliate from a STG ([Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023](#)).

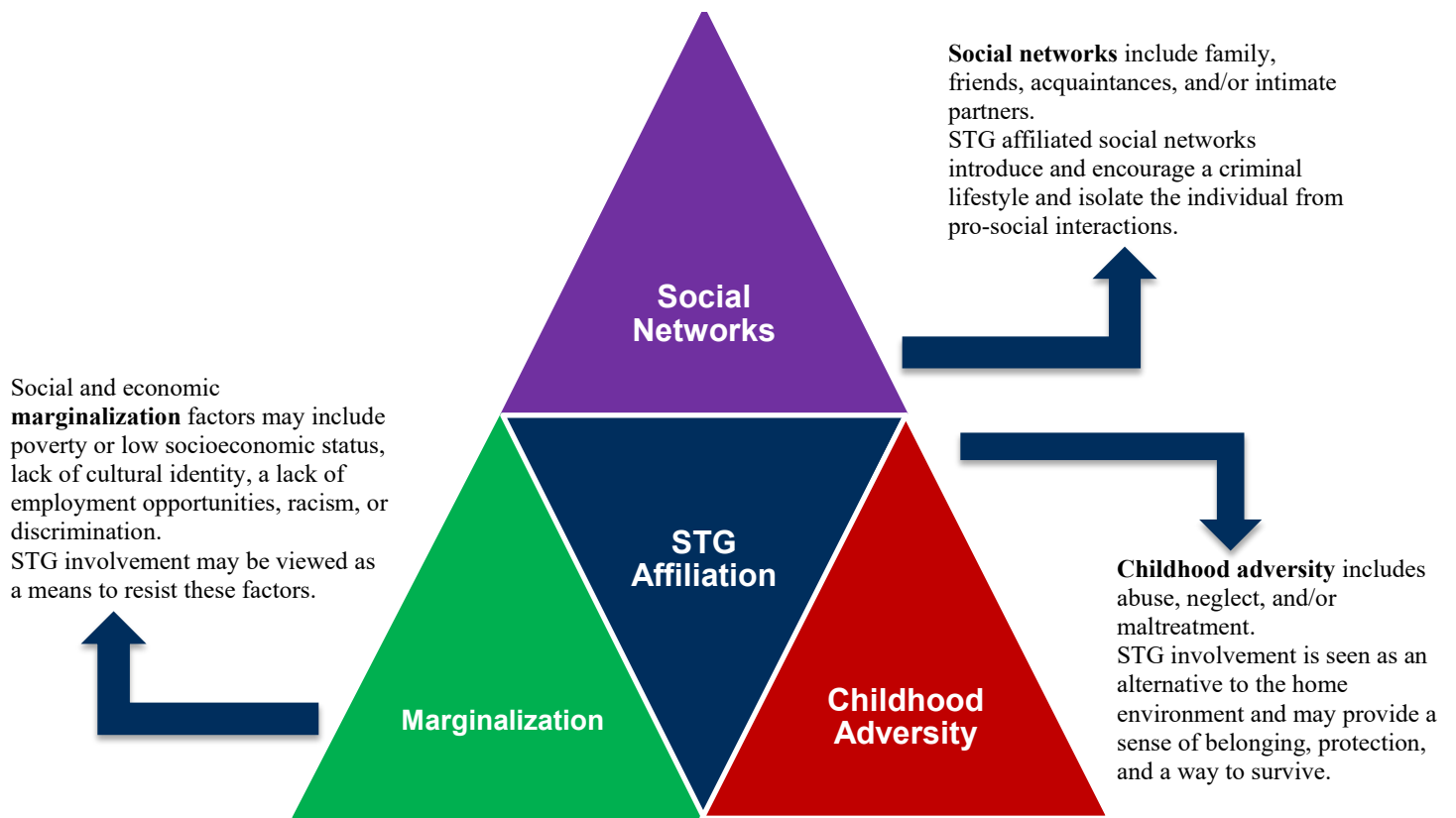
What We Know About Security Threat Groups (STGs)

Understanding various aspects of the history and characteristics of offenders affiliated with STGs assists CSC in their identification, prevention, management, and disengagement strategies for these offenders.

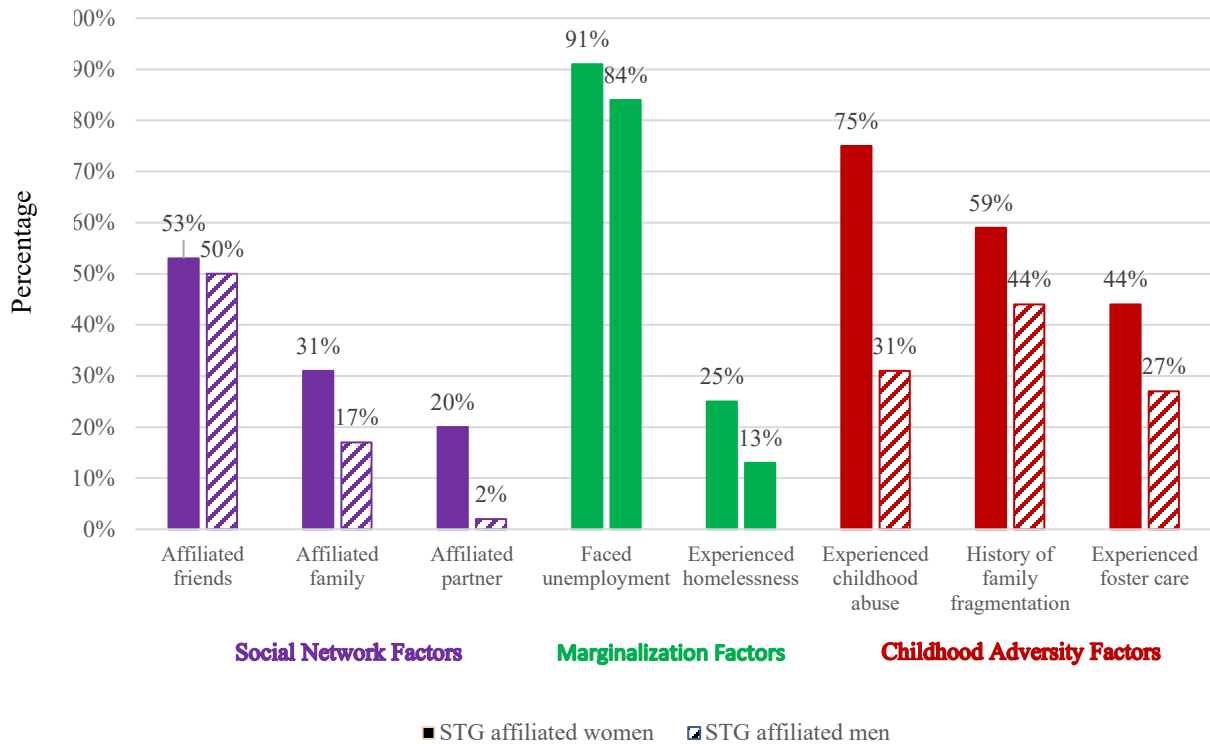
Precursors to STG Involvement

Research literature indicates that certain factors are common among individuals affiliated with STGs ([Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023](#)).

These precursors (pathways/trajectories) to STG affiliation include:



Precursors to STG affiliated for federal offenders



Source: [Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023](#); [Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023](#)¹

- All of these factors were more common for STG affiliated Indigenous women compared to non-Indigenous women. For STG affiliated men, social network, marginalization factors, and childhood adversity were most common for Indigenous men, and higher proportions were identified for Black men for social network and marginalization factors.

Comparisons across STG subgroups

Examination of the differences across STG subtypes for both men and women offenders was undertaken ([Farrell MacDonald, Smeth, Cram, & Derkzen, 2023](#)).

- Among men:
 - comparisons were made across street gangs, Indigenous gangs, outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMG)/traditional organized crime (TOC), prison gangs, and all other STGs.

¹ Information related to the pathways or trajectories for STG affiliated men was not as readily available in case management documentation as it was for women offenders, so these data may be underreported.

- men affiliated with OMG/TOC groups were older and serving longer sentences,
 - men in street, Indigenous, and prison gangs were younger and more likely to be convicted of violent offences,
 - criminogenic risk/need profiles varied across STG subtypes,
 - men in OMG/TOC less likely than the other groups to have guilty disciplinary charges or institutional incidents.
 - in the community, men in Indigenous gangs were more likely than the other groups:
 - to have a release suspension,
 - to have a return to custody.
- Among women:
 - Comparisons were made across Indigenous gangs, street gangs, and all other STGs:
 - those in Indigenous gangs were more likely to be serving longer sentences (more than four years) and to have committed violent offences,
 - all STG subtypes for women had similar criminogenic risk and need profiles,
 - similar proportions with guilty disciplinary charges and institutional incidents,
 - in the community:
 - women in street gangs were more likely to be suspended during release,
 - women in Indigenous gangs were more likely to return to custody.

Comparisons across STG involvement status

An examination of the differences between STG affiliated offenders actively engaged versus inactive in STG activities while under federal jurisdiction was conducted ([Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2022](#); [Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2022](#)).

- STG affiliated women offenders

- Those actively engaged in their STG were more likely to:
 - have committed a violent offence,
 - be serving a sentence of more than four years,
 - have a history of institutional transfers,
 - to have suspensions of release.
- Criminogenic risk and need ratings were higher for women active in their STG.
- STG affiliated men offenders
 - Men who were active in their STG were more likely to:
 - be younger,
 - be serving their first federal sentence,
 - be an associate,
 - be serving shorter sentences,
 - have committed drug offences,
 - have not completed correctional programming.

Comparisons of STGs across region

Regional comparisons of STG affiliated offenders indicate ([Farrell MacDonald, Smeth, & Cram, 2023](#)):

- almost half of STG affiliated offenders were incarcerated in the Prairie Region,
- one-third of STG affiliated offenders under community supervision were in the Prairie Region,
- STG affiliated offenders in the Quebec Region were older,
- criminogenic risk/need profiles of STG affiliated offenders were similar across all regions,
- STG affiliated offenders in the Atlantic and Pacific Regions were more likely to have disciplinary charges, institutional incidents, and positive urinalysis tests.

Comparisons between STG and non-STG affiliated offenders

Understanding how STG affiliated offenders compare to the general offender population provides CSC with a greater understanding of the impacts of these groups as well as enables the Service to identify potential areas of intervention and support ([Farrell MacDonald, Cram, Smeth,](#)

[Jones, Garrel, & Derkzen, 2023](#)).

- Men offenders:
 - In-custody
 - STG affiliated men compared to non-affiliated men were:
 - younger,
 - more likely to be Indigenous,
 - had high static risk and dynamic need,
 - more likely to have issues with institutional adjustment as evidenced by a greater proportion of disciplinary charges and institutional incidents.
 - In the community
 - STG affiliated offenders compared to non-affiliated men were:
 - more likely to be on non-discretionary release (e.g., statutory release or long-term supervision order),
 - more likely to have release suspensions.
- Women offenders:
 - In-custody
 - STG affiliated women compared to non-affiliated women were:
 - younger,
 - more likely incarcerated in the Prairie and Pacific Regions,
 - had high static risk and dynamic need,
 - had issues of institutional behaviour (e.g., charges and incidents).
 - In the community
 - STG affiliated women were more likely than non-affiliated women:
 - to be on non-discretionary release,
 - to have a residency condition,
 - to have a suspension of their release.

Indigenous offenders and STG affiliation

- STG affiliation is prevalent among Indigenous offenders within CSC, particularly among the in-custody population with 20% of Indigenous men and 13% of Indigenous women identified as STG affiliated ([Farrell MacDonald, 2022](#)).
- Among STG affiliated offenders, Indigenous men accounted for about half of affiliated men, while Indigenous women account for 90% of affiliated women ([Farrell MacDonald, Smeth, Cram, & Derkzen, 2023](#)).
- Indigenous offenders had a history of the precursors associated with STG affiliation, especially with over half of STG affiliated women (53%) and men (50%) having friends that were also affiliated ([Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023; Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023](#)).

In comparison to non-affiliated Indigenous men offenders, Indigenous STG affiliated men offenders were:

- younger,
- more likely to be serving a second or subsequent sentence,
- had higher criminogenic risk/needs,
- had higher proportions of institutional behaviour concerns such as institutional incidents ([Farrell MacDonald, Cram, Smeth, Jones, Garrel, & Derkzen, 2023](#)).

Ninety percent of STG affiliated women were Indigenous, therefore comparisons between Indigenous STG affiliated and non-Indigenous STG women offenders were not conducted.

Black men offenders and STG affiliation

- Black men accounted for 13% of STG affiliated compared to 6% of the general Black non-affiliated men's population ([Farrell MacDonald, Cram, Smeth, Jones, Garrel, & Derkzen, 2023](#)).
- Almost one-quarter of STG affiliated offenders who belonged to street gangs were Black men, with much lower proportions of affiliated Black men belonging to other STG subtypes (e.g., 1% of affiliated offenders in outlaw motorcycle gangs or traditional organized crime groups were Black); [Farrell MacDonald, Smeth, Cram, & Derkzen, 2023](#)).

- Almost two-thirds (63%) of Black men affiliated with STGs had STG affiliated friends ([Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023](#))

In comparison to non-affiliated Black men offenders, Black STG affiliated men offenders were:

- younger,
- more likely to be serving a second or subsequent sentence,
- had higher criminogenic risk/needs,
- had higher proportions of institutional behaviour concerns such as institutional incidents and disciplinary charges ([Farrell MacDonald, Cram, Smeth, Jones, Garrel, & Derkzen, 2023](#)).

STG disengagement and disaffiliation

Correctional jurisdictions encourage offenders to disengage or disaffiliate from STGs to enhance the safety and security of institutions and to support their community reintegration.

Disengagement is a non-linear process whereby an individual removes themselves from the STG or from STG related activities. **Disaffiliation** is the formal process to leave the STG ([Farrell MacDonald, Cram, & Smeth, 2023](#)).

The disaffiliation literature indicates that a variety of push (internal to STG) and pull (external to STG) factors may motivate an individual to disaffiliate from an STG ([Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023](#)). While one major factor may cause an offender to disengage or disaffiliate from an STG, a combination of push and pull factors may inform this decision. These include:

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Pull factors (external – pull offender away from STG)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pro-social environment - parenthood - employment responsibilities - non-affiliated friends - desire to be with non- affiliated family | <p>Push factors (internal – push offender away from STG)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - violence/violent environment - victimization - aging/maturation - fear of incarceration (esp. long sentences) - disbanding of the STG |
|---|---|

Research examining 161 previously STG affiliated offenders with a “terminated” status indicated that reasons for the termination were documented for 44% of these offenders in CSC’s Offender Management System (OMS; [Farrell MacDonald, Cram, & Smeth, 2023](#)).

- The individuals with a termination status:
 - were predominantly men (99%),
 - had an average age of 38 years old,
 - 37% were Indigenous, 36% were White, 16% were Black, and 11% were from other ethnocultural groups,
 - were predominantly high static risk (83%) and high dynamic need (87%),
 - had about two-thirds engaged in their correctional plan.
- Of those with documented information, the three main reasons provided were:
 - a lack of substantiating information to maintain the affiliation,
 - the disbanding of the STG,
 - the offender being forced out of their STG.
- A few other factors were noted in a small number of cases:
 - physical separation from the STG,
 - disillusionment with the STG,
 - parental responsibilities,
 - maturation of the offender,
 - pro-social supports,

- employment opportunities,
- to access programming.

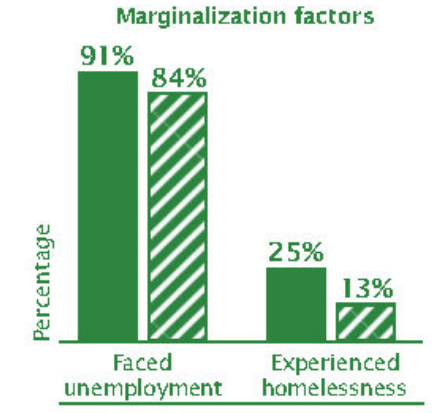
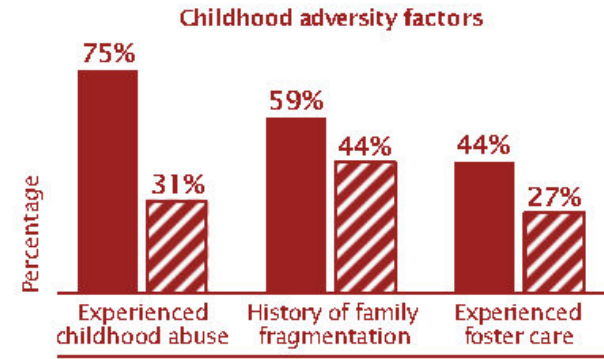
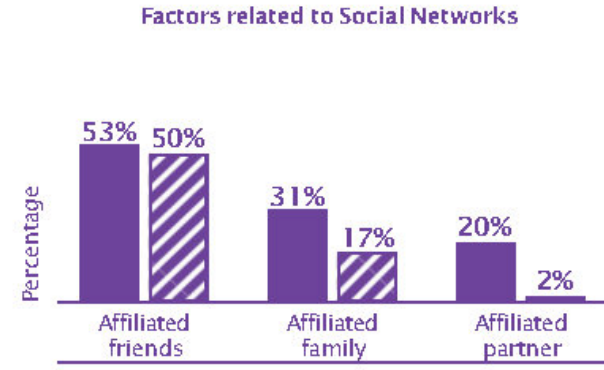
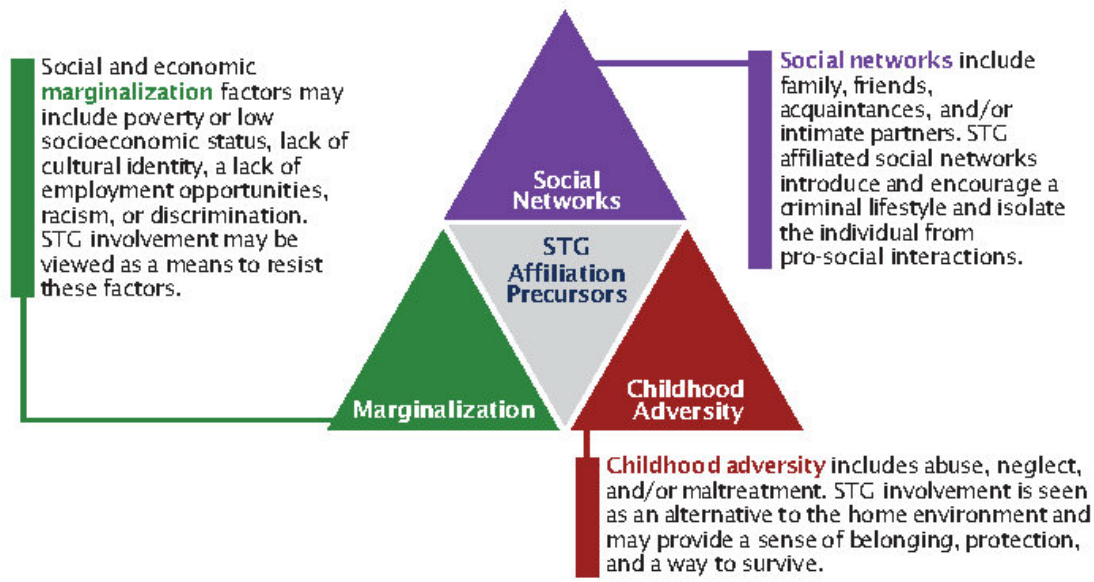
CSC's current case documentation related to progress regarding STG disengagement or disaffiliation is limited. Providing reasons for STG termination ([Farrell MacDonald, Cram, & Smeth, 2023](#)) or the inactive involvement status of STG affiliated offenders ([Farrell MacDonald, Cram, & Smeth, 2023](#)) would enhance CSC's ability to understand the motivating factors for offenders to disengage or disaffiliate from STGs, thereby informing interventions in this area.

Moving forward, CSC research will continue to build on what is known about federally incarcerated individuals affiliated with STGs while informing policies, national strategies, and management practices for this population.

Infographic: Precursors to STG Involvement

Precursors to Security Threat Group (STG) Involvement

Research literature indicates that certain factors are common among individuals affiliated with STGs. (Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023)



Source: Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023; Cram & Farrell MacDonald 2023

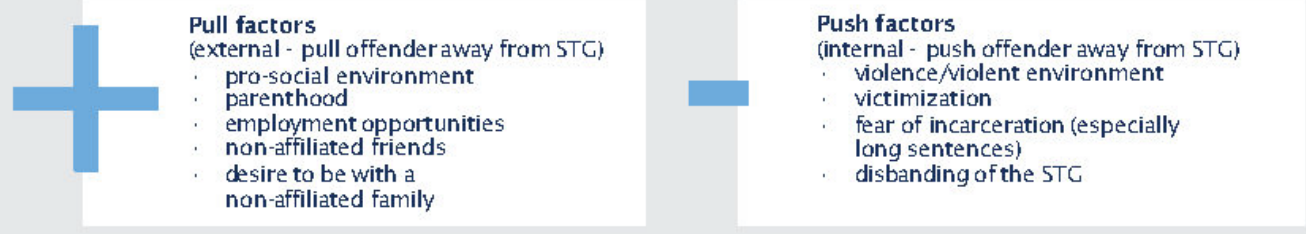
All of these factors were more common for STG affiliated Indigenous women compared to non-Indigenous women. For STG affiliated men, social network, marginalization factors, and childhood adversity were most common for Indigenous men, and higher proportions were identified for Black men for social network and marginalization factors.

■ STG affiliated women ▨ STG affiliated men
 † Information related to the pathways or trajectories for STG affiliated men was not as readily available in case management documentation as it was for women offenders, so these data may be underreported.

STG Disengagement and Disaffiliation

Correctional jurisdictions encourage offenders to disengage or disaffiliate from STGs to enhance the safety and security of institutions and to support their community reintegration.

Disengagement is a non-linear process whereby an individual removes themselves from the STG or from STG related activities. **Disaffiliation** is the formal process to leave the STG. (Farrell MacDonald, Cram, & Smeth, 2023)

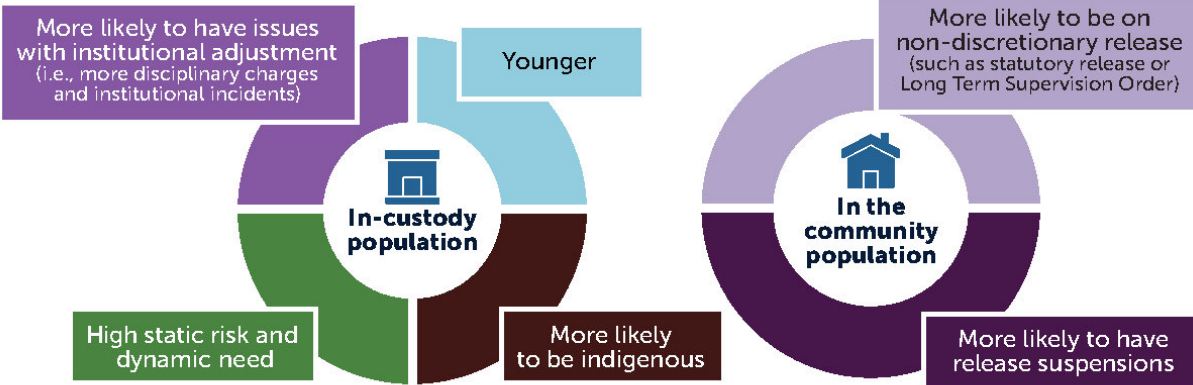


Source: Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023

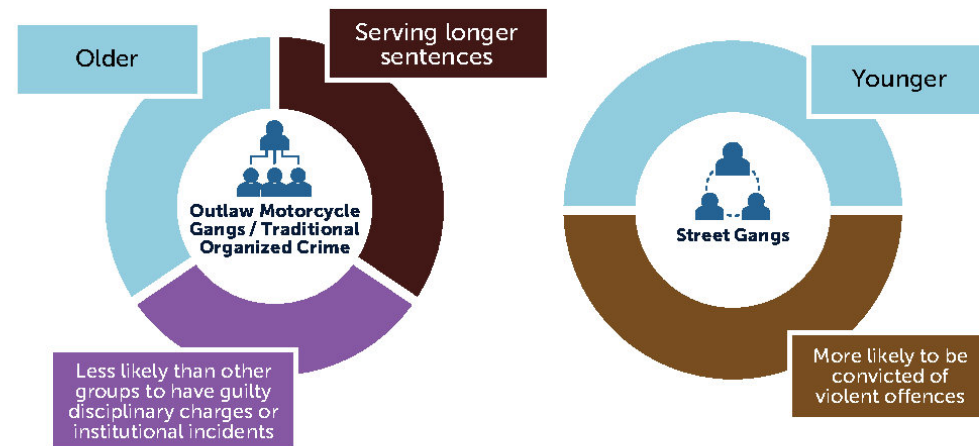
Prepared by Research Branch, 2025

Infographic: STG Affiliated Men's Population

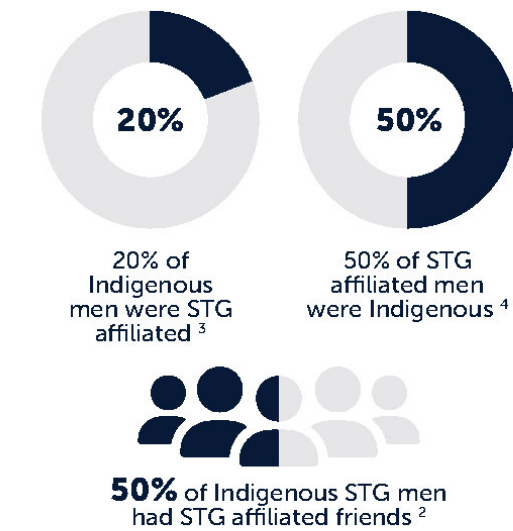
Security Threat Group (STG) affiliated men offenders⁺ compared to the general men offender population⁵



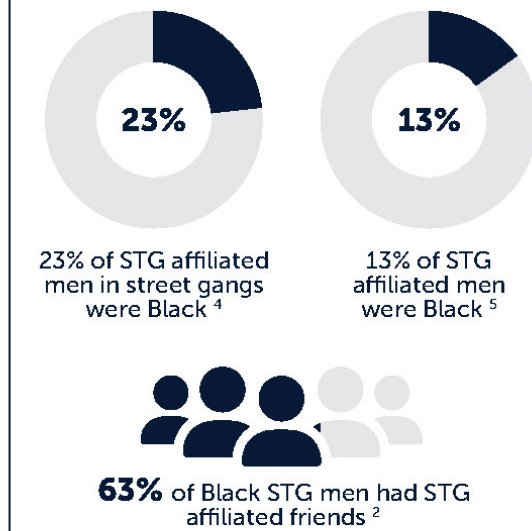
Differences across STG subtypes for men offenders⁺



STG affiliated Indigenous men offenders⁺



STG affiliated Black men offenders⁺



STG affiliated Indigenous and Black men offenders compared to non-affiliated Indigenous and Black men offenders⁵



Compared to those classified as inactive, STG affiliated men⁺ actively engaged in their STG during their sentence were:¹

⁺ Men offenders referred to individuals identified as biologically male at the time of the study.



¹ Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2022.

² Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023.

³ Farrell MacDonald, 2022.

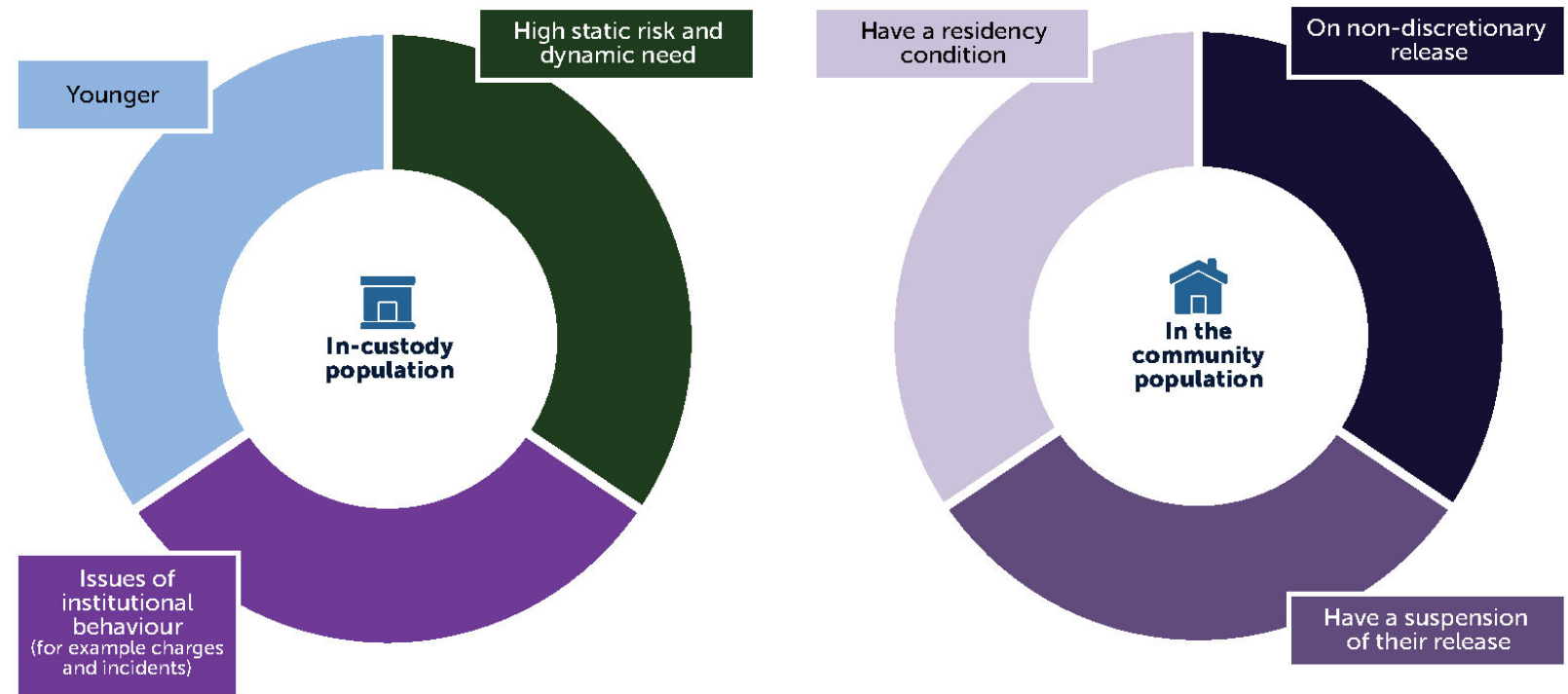
⁴ Farrell MacDonald, Cram, Smeth, & Derksen, 2023.

⁵ Farrell MacDonald, Cram, Smeth, Jones, Garrel, & Derksen, 2023.

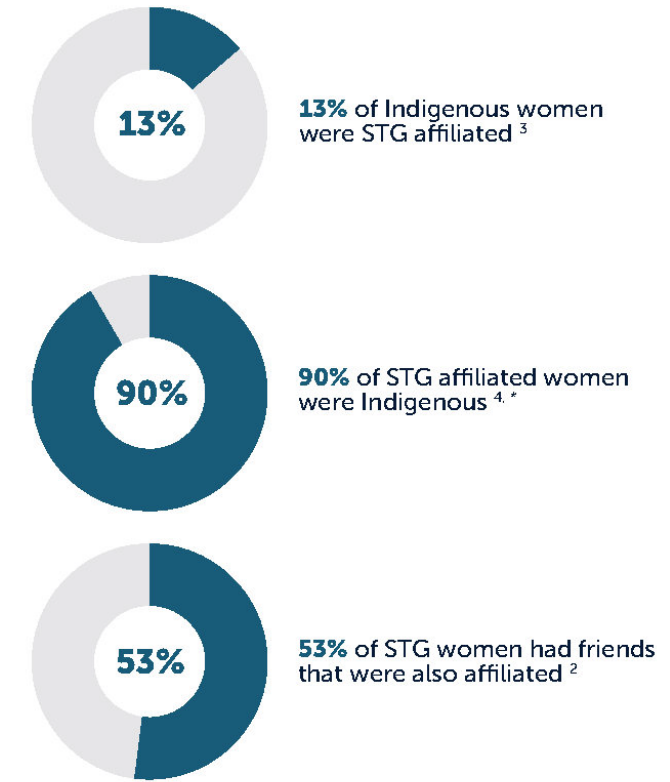
Prepared by Research Branch, 2025

Infographic: STG Affiliated Women's Population

Security Threat Group (STG) affiliated women offenders compared to the general women offender population ⁵



STG affiliated Indigenous women offenders⁺



⁺ Comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous STG-affiliated women offenders were not undertaken due to the small number of non-Indigenous STG-affiliated women.

STG affiliated women offenders⁺ who were actively engaged in STG activities during their sentence were more likely than those inactive in their STG to ¹:



¹ Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2022.
² Cram & Farrell MacDonald, 2023.
³ Farrell MacDonald, 2022.
⁴ Farrell MacDonald, Cram, Smeth, & Derksen, 2023.
⁵ Farrell MacDonald, Cram, Smeth, Jones, Garrel, & Derksen, 2023.

⁺ Women offenders referred to individuals identified as biologically female at the time of the study.

References

Most recent STG related CSC Research Publications

- **R-465_E** [Examining the Differences between Security Threat Groups \(STGs\) and the General Offender Population](#) (S. Farrell MacDonald, S. Cram, A. Smeth, K. Jones, S. Garrel, D. Derkzen)
Farrell MacDonald, S., Cram, S., Smeth, A., Jones, K., Garrel, S., & Derkzen, D. (2023). *Examining differences between security threat groups (STGs) and the general offender population (R-465)*. Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-465_I** [Indigenous Men Affiliated with Security Threat Groups \(STGs\) Compared to the General Indigenous Men Offender Population](#) (S. Farrell MacDonald, S. Cram, A. Smeth, K. Jones, S. Garrel, D. Derkzen)
Farrell MacDonald, S., Cram, S., Smeth, A., Jones, K., Garrel, S., & Derkzen, D. (2023). *Examining differences between security threat groups (STGs) and the general offender population (R-465)*. Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-451** [Comparing Characteristics, Institutional Adjustment, and Post-Release Outcomes of Security Threat Groups \(STGs\)](#) (S. Farrell MacDonald, A. Smeth, S. Cram, D. Derkzen)
Farrell MacDonald, S., Smeth, A., Cram, S., & Derkzen, D. (2023). *Comparing characteristics, institutional adjustment, and post-release outcomes of Security Threat Groups (STGs) (R-451)*. Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RIB-23-06** [Men Offenders' Trajectories to Security Threat Group \(STG\) Affiliation](#) (S. Cram, S. Farrell MacDonald)
Cram, S., & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2023). *Men offenders' trajectories to Security Threat Group (STG) affiliation (RIB-23-06)*. Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RIB-23-05** [Indigenous Offenders Affiliated with Security Threat Groups \(STGs\)](#) (S. Farrell MacDonald, S. Cram, A. Smeth, D. Derkzen)
Farrell MacDonald, S., Cram, S., Smeth, A., & Derkzen, D. (2023). *Indigenous offenders affiliated with Security Threat Groups (STGs) (RIB-23-05)*. Ottawa, ON: CSC.

- **RIB-23-04** [Security Threat Groups \(STGs\): Measuring Disengagement or Disaffiliation?](#) (S. Farrell MacDonald, S. Cram, A. Smeth)

Farrell MacDonald, S., Cram, S., & Smeth, A. (2023). *Security Threat Groups (STGs): Measuring disengagement or disaffiliation?* (RIB-23-04). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RIB-23-03** [What does the termination of Security Threat Group \(STG\) designation signify?](#) (S. Farrell MacDonald, S. Cram, A. Smeth)

Farrell MacDonald, S., Cram, S., & Smeth, A. (2023). *What does the termination of Security Threat Group (STG) designation signify?* (RIB-23-03). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RIB-22-31** [Regional Comparisons of Security Threat Group \(STG\) Affiliated Men Offenders](#) (S. Farrell MacDonald, A. Smeth, S. Cram)

Farrell MacDonald, S., Smeth, A., & Cram, S. (2023). *Regional comparisons of Security Threat Group (STG) affiliated men offenders* (RIB-22-31). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RIB-21-24** [Examining Involvement Status of Security Threat Group Affiliated Men Offenders](#) (S. Cram, S. Farrell MacDonald)

Cram, S., & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2022). *Examining involvement status of Security Threat Group affiliated men offenders* (RIB-21-24). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RIB-21-23** [Federal Women Offenders Involvement in Security Threat Groups \(STGs\)](#) (S. Cram, S. Farrell MacDonald)

Cram, S., & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2022). *Federal women offenders involvement in Security Threat Groups (STGs)* (RIB-21-23). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RIB-21-16** [Women Offenders' Pathways to Security Threat Group Affiliation](#) (S. Cram, S. Farrell MacDonald)

Cram, S., & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2023). *Women offenders' pathways to Security Threat Group affiliation* (RIB-21-16). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

- **RR-21-02** [Disaffiliation from Security Threat Groups: A Review of the Literature](#) (S. Cram, S. Farrell MacDonald)
Cram, S., & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2023). *Disaffiliation from Security Threat Groups: A review of the literature* (RR-21-02). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RR-21-01** [Pathways to Security Threat Groups: A Review of the Literature](#) (S. Cram, S. Farrell MacDonald)
Cram, S., & Farrell MacDonald, S. (2023). *Pathways to Security Threat Groups: A review of the literature* (RR-21-01). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RIB-20-09** [Federal offenders affiliated with Security Threat Groups](#) (STGs) (S. Farrell MacDonald)
Farrell MacDonald, S. (2022). *Federal offenders affiliated with Security Threat Groups (STGs)* (RIB 20-09). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

Previously published STG related CSC Research Publications

- **R-415** [Anti-Corruption Models and Elimination of Staff Involvement in Trafficking Contraband in Correctional Settings: Review of the Current Literature](#) (Brown, G., & Hoffman, R. 2018)

Brown, G., & Hoffman, R. (2018). *Anti-corruption models and elimination of staff involvement in trafficking contraband in correctional settings: Review of the current literature* (R-415). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-390** [Assessing Susceptibility to Group-Based Influence](#) (Scott, T. 2017)

Scott, T. (2017). *Assessing susceptibility to group-based influence* (R-390). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-347** [Criminal Organizations: An Examination of Gang Management Practices inside Canadian Institutions](#) (S. Michel, Y. Stys, 2015)

Michel, S., & Stys, Y. (2015). *Criminal organizations: An examination of gang management practices inside Canadian institutions* (R-347). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RS-14-30** [Gender Differences in the Factors Related to Non-engagement](#) (2014)

Tam, K., & Thompson, J. (2014). *Gender differences in the factors related to non-engagement* (RS-14-30). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **RS 13-07** [Gangs and institutional adjustment in the context of the Security Reclassification Scale](#) (T. Forrester, 2013).

Forrester, T.K. (2013). *Gangs and institutional adjustment in the context of the Security Reclassification Scale* (RS-13-07). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-292** [Gang Cohesion and Intervention Strategies: A Review of the Literature](#) (Dunbar, 2012)

Dunbar, L. (2012). *Gang Cohesion and Intervention Strategies: A Review of the Literature* (R-292). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-272** [Women Gang Inmates](#) (Scott, 2012)

Scott, T.-L. (2012). *Women Gang Inmates: A Profile* (R-272). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

- **R-227** [Conditional Release of Federal Offenders Convicted of Criminal Organization Offences](#) (Stys, 2010)

Stys, Y. (2010). *Conditional release of federal offenders convicted of criminal organization offences* (R-227). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-161** [Street Gangs: A Review of Theory, Interventions, and Implications for Corrections](#) (Jones, Roper, Stys & Wilson, 2004)

Jones, D., Roper, V., Stys, Y., Wilson, C. (2004). *Street gangs: A review of theory, interventions, and implications for corrections* (R-161). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-154** [A Profile and Examination of Gang Affiliation within the Federally Sentenced Offender Population](#) (Nafekh & Stys, 2004)

Nafekh, M., & Stys, Y. (2004). *A profile and examination of gang affiliation within the federally sentenced offender population* (R-154). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-138** [A Profile of Women Gang Members in Canada](#) (Mackenzie & Johnson, 2003)

Mackenzie, A., & Johnson, S.L. (2003). *A profile of women gang members in Canada* (R-138). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **R-121** [An Examination of Youth and Gang Affiliation within the Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Population](#) (Nafekh, 2002)

Nafekh, M. (2002). *An examination of youth and gang affiliation within the federal sentenced Aboriginal population* (R-121). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **B43** [Prison Gangs: A Review and Survey of Strategies](#) (2009)

Winterdyk, J., Fillipuzzi, N., Mescier, J., Henckh, C., Ruddell, R. (2009). *Prison gangs: A review and survey of strategies* (B-43). Ottawa, ON: CSC.
- **B42** [Prison Careers of Federal Offenders with Criminal Organization Offences: A Follow-up](#) (2009)

Motiuk, L.L., & Vuong, B. (2009). *Prison careers of federal offenders with criminal organization offences: A follow-up* (B-42). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

- **B38** [Federal Offenders with Criminal Organization Offences: A Profile](#) (2005)
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