

A profile of federally-sentenced women on conditional release

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Almost all offenders who receive a custodial sentence will eventually return to society, and most federal offenders in Canada will serve a portion of their sentence in the community under the supervision of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Those released into the community prior to the expiration of their sentence may be released on day parole, full parole, or statutory release². Currently, women constitute a relatively small percentage of the total federal offender population (approximately 4%). However, of these federal women offenders, 56% are serving their sentence while on supervised release in the community. As a result, the field of community corrections relating to women has gained considerable interest over the past several years.

Legally, the Correctional Service of Canada operates under the 1992 Corrections and Conditional Release Act. This act states that the purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by carrying out sentences imposed by the courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of offenders; and by assisting in the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and the community³.

Offender reintegration has been defined as all correctional and programming activity conducted to prepare an offender to return safely to the community as a law-abiding citizen⁴. Decision-making is the foundation on which the success of offender reintegration rests. To ensure safe reintegration, it is necessary to acknowledge the pivotal role of decision makers, as well as gaining a complete understanding of the objective classification procedures that play a major role in the timely and safe release of women offenders. Operationally, safe reintegration encompasses a broad range of decisions intended to place the women offenders in the least restrictive setting possible, grant temporary absence or conditional release, and invoke suspension or revocation of conditional release when necessary.

An integral aspect of this process is the Offender Intake Assessment (OIA), which all women sentenced to federal corrections undergo⁵. The OIA process is a comprehensive and integrated evaluation

of the offender at the time of admission to the federal system that involves the collection and analysis of information on a number of factors relevant in determining criminal risk and identifying offender needs⁶. A variety of assessments inform decisions regarding an offender's level of motivation, security level, and reintegration potential, ultimately resulting in the development of a correctional plan specific to each individual offender and a decision of institutional placement. In addition to being central to daily operations in the long-term management of offenders, the OIA process provides a comprehensive database that can be used to produce distinct profiles of various segments of the offender population.

Researchers such as Motiuk and Blanchette⁷, Motiuk and Nafekh⁸, and Andrews and Dowden⁹ have demonstrated these measures of risk and need to be good predictors of outcome while on parole. Once the offender's criminogenic need areas have been appropriately targeted by the OIA, a level of service that is best suited to the individual offender is determined. Such systematic use of static dynamic risk assessment strategies can yield gains in the correct identification and timely release of women offenders with good potential for successful reintegration.

Through the OIA process, the Correctional Service has made considerable progress in incorporating static and systematic risk assessment into the development of correctional plans in a manner that respects the risk and need principles of effective offender management¹⁰. The correctional plan is the pivotal document that defines the best professional opinion on how the agency intends to manage the offenders sentence and what expectations the agency has for the offender. More specifically, the correctional plan includes long term, time-referenced goals, program requirements, offender specific supervision techniques, and behavioral indicators related to the offenders' crime cycle. This is the foundation upon which release is predicted and often the basis upon which discretionary release is supported or denied.

The CSC and the National Parole Board (NPB) are committed to ensuring the safe and timely reintegration of offenders into the community. Frequency of contact standards, special release conditions, and restrictions that the NPB imposes

upon newly released offenders to facilitate safe reintegration, are used in part to meet this objective.

Each of these areas, from the comprehensive OIA process, to the principles of effective treatment and management of offenders, to special conditions upon release, are essential elements of community corrections. As such, a profile of women offenders in the community should include women who are currently under supervision in the community, and examine the complex interplay of factors that contribute to their reintegration.

Who are the women in the community?

As of March 1, 2004, there were 449 women offenders under federal supervision in the community. The earliest release date for this snapshot of women was June 1962 and the most recent release date was February 2004. The average age of these women offenders is 39.5, the youngest being 19 and the eldest 89 years of age. The majority of women offenders in the community are either single (41%) or married/common-law (39%). In addition, 12% of the women offenders are divorced or separated, 5% are widowed and for the remaining 3% marital status is either not yet determined or simply unknown.

An examination of the racial composition of these women offenders reveals that 60% are Caucasian, 19% a visible minority (including Black, Asiatic, Chinese, Filipino, Hispanic, Japanese, Latin American, South Asian and South East Asian), 17% Aboriginal (including Inuit, Métis and First Nations) and 4% are classified as 'other'. Interestingly, yet not surprisingly, a breakdown of race by region shows that the population of women offenders in the community coincides with the population base of Canada as a whole. That is, findings indicate that the Ontario and Pacific regions have the most heterogeneous population, the Prairie region has a large Aboriginal population, while the Atlantic and Quebec regions have the most homogeneous populations.

When considering the most recent admission type of these women offenders, results indicate that the majority (79%) were admitted on a 'warrant of committal'. A further 10% were admitted as a result of 'revocation without an offence', 7% as a 'transfer from a foreign country', 3% as a result of 'revocation with an offence', and the remaining 1% were admitted as a result of other circumstances.

When examining the offences committed by these women, the following patterns appear. The most commonly cited offences are drug related, as 43% of the women were currently incarcerated for such an offence. Further, 25% were incarcerated for homicide

offences, 14% for robbery offences, 13% for assault offences, 1% for sexual offences and 55% were "other" offences¹¹.

Risk and needs at intake and post-release

As previously mentioned, motivation level is assessed during the OIA process through the examination of past performance within the institution and/or community. It is important to note that clearly, the majority of these women were very motivated upon admission as 73% received an assessment of being highly motivated to participate in their correctional plan. Only 3% were identified as having a low motivation level and 24% as a moderate level of motivation.

An offender's criminogenic needs are also identified during the OIA, via the Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis (DFIA)¹². The DFIA considers various aspects of an offender's personality and life circumstances. Data are clustered into seven target domains, with multiple indicators for each: marital/family (31 indicators), personal/emotional orientation (46 indicators), substance abuse (29 indicators), employment (35 indicators), associates/social interaction (11 indicators), community functioning (21 indicators), and attitude (24 indicators)¹³. Each domain is rated as an 'asset to community adjustment', 'no need for improvement', 'some need for improvement', or 'considerable need for improvement'.

An overall examination of the criminogenic needs upon intake revealed that 34% of the women were rated as low, 38% as moderate, and 28% as high. Interestingly, an examination of these needs post-release revealed that 47% of the women were rated as low, 34% as moderate, and 19% as high. This finding suggests that criminogenic needs are decreasing over time. However, making any substantive conclusions or interpretations regarding this finding is beyond the scope of this article.

Table 1 provides the percentages of women with needs in each of the seven target domains as identified at intake and post-release. Upon reviewing this table, it becomes evident that in the majority of instances, the needs of these women changed in an encouraging direction. That is, after release, we see higher proportions of women identified with needs being an 'asset to community adjustment' or having 'no need for improvement', and lower proportions of women identified with needs of requiring 'some' or 'considerable' improvement. Once again, no direct conclusions or interpretations regarding this finding can be made in this article.

Table 1

Need Domains	Need Domains							
	Percentages of Women with Identified Needs							
	At Intake				Post-Release			
	Asset	No	Some	Consid.	Asset	No	Some	Consid.
Family	11	42	31	16	18	42	31	9
Attitude	21	53	17	9	36	49	11	4
Employment	8	39	42	11	14	47	34	5
Substance Abuse	N/A	52	15	33	N/A	62	19	19
Community Functioning	8	56	33	3	15	57	26	2
Associates/Social Interaction	7	39	41	13	18	44	32	6
Personal/Emotional Orientation	N/A	23	45	32	N/A	39	44	17

Note: N/A = Not Applicable, Asset = Asset to community adjustment, No = No need for improvement, Some = Some need for improvement, Consid. = Considerable need for improvement.

Although reviewing all of the indicators for each target domain is beyond the scope of this article, the authors selected five specific indicators. These indicators are related to areas such as education, employment, number of dependents and the use of alcohol and/or drugs. For this particular group of women in the community, upon admission to an institution, 60% had no high school diploma, 65% were unemployed at the time of their arrest, 38% were abusing drugs, 25% were abusing alcohol and 60% had dependents.

When reviewing the risk levels assessed at intake, findings reveal that 51% of the women are identified as being low risk to re-offend, 35% were rated as moderate risk and 14% as high risk. After release, 62% of the women are identified as low risk to re-offend, 29% as moderate risk and 9% as high risk. Again, these findings suggest that assessed levels of risk decrease slightly over time.

Location, type and conditions of release

An examination of the releasing regions of these women revealed that 7% were released in the Atlantic region, 18% in the Quebec region, 41% in the Ontario region, 24% in the Prairie region, and 10% in the Pacific region. Further examination revealed that the majority of these women (73%) were released on day parole, 14% on full parole, and 13% on statutory release.

The conditions of release that were imposed upon the women were also examined. In order to simplify the output, those conditions of release dealing with similar issues such as addictions, counselling, or the avoidance of persons or places, were combined. About one-third (33%) of the conditions of release

dealt with the abstinence of an addiction (16% intoxicants, 9% drugs, 7% alcohol, 1% gambling). Another one-third (31%) of the conditions dealt with the avoidance of persons or places (25% persons, 6% places). Approximately thirteen percent of the conditions involved counselling (12% psychological, 1% psychiatric), 10% involved following a treatment plan, 2% involved residing at a specific place, and the remaining 11% were classified as other.

What have women in the community been involved in?

Employment provided by CSC's institutions appear to be the most frequently utilized program by women in the community. Second to this are educational programs and living skills programming. Third are substance abuse programs. There does not appear to be any substantial regional differences in the programs being utilized. Table 2 provides a rank order listing of the programs being utilized by federally sentenced women serving their sentence in the community as of March 1, 2004.

Conclusion

The present profile of women in the community demonstrates how integral the area of community corrections is to both the criminal justice system and to society as a whole. Encompassing numerous aspects of corrections such as risk and need levels at intake and release, motivation levels, as well as programs post-release, community corrections is a continuously evolving avenue of study for researchers interested in the process of criminal justice from sentencing through to reintegration and beyond. The present profile has implications for

Table 2

Programs

1. CSC Institutional Employment
2. Educational Programs
2. Living Skills Programming
3. Substance Abuse Programs
4. Personal Development Programming
4. Women Programs
5. Aboriginal Programs
5. Psychological Programming
6. Corcan Institutional Employment
7. Family Violence Programs
8. Violent Offender Programming
9. HIV/AIDS Services
10. Physical Health Care Services
11. Special Needs Programs
12. Mental Health Care Services
13. Chaplaincy

policy and operations within the area of community corrections. Issues such as the location, type, and conditions of release, examined in the present profile, are essential features to be considered in the development of programs. A profile of women in the community demonstrating that the majority of women released to a specific area tend to be aboriginal, for example, suggests that the availability of programs sensitive to the needs of aboriginal peoples may be critical to a woman's success upon release. Similarly, programs implemented should consider issues such as type of parole, as this greatly impacts time frames in which programs should be offered, as well as the appropriate length of programs offered. Furthermore, as evident in the present profile, many women released into the community have conditions of release imposed on them regarding such issues as addictions and counseling, both of which are substantial factors to consider in program development and implementation.

As further conclusions or implications were beyond the scope of this article, future research in this area should focus on examining the risk and need level of offenders upon intake and after release, investigating and attempting to gain a thorough understanding of any changes that occur. Furthermore, evaluation of the programs being utilized after release into the community is necessary in order to ensure that, once released, the most effective methods are in place for a smooth and successful reintegration. ■

- 1 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, ON K1A 0P9
- 2 Brown, S. (2001). "Encouraging community release and appropriate supervision," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 13(1), 41-45.
- 3 Corrections and Conditional Release Act, RSC, C-20, 1992.
- 4 Thurber, A. (1998). "Understanding offender reintegration," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 10(1), 14-19.
- 5 Motiuk, L. (1997). "Classification for correctional programming: The offender intake assessment (OIA) process," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9 (1), 18-22.
- 6 Motiuk, L. (1993). "Where are we in our ability to assess risk?" *Forum on Corrections Research*, 5(2), 14-21.
- 7 Motiuk, L., & Blanchette, K. "Assessing Women Offenders: What Works," *Assessment to Assistance: Programs for Women in Community Corrections*, M. McMahon, Ed. (Lanham, MD: American Correctional Association, 2000).
- 8 Motiuk, L., & Nafekh, M. (1999). "Reintegration potential profiles for federally sentenced women," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 11(3), 13-17.
- 9 Andrews, D., & Dowden, C. (1999). "A meta-analytic investigation into effective correctional intervention for female offenders", *Forum on Corrections Research*, 11(3), 18-21.
- 10 The four principles of effective treatment are risk, need, responsivity and the role of the professional and the integrity of assessment as identified by Andrews and Bonta. Andrews, D., & Bonta, J. (2003). *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*, 3rd Ed. (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson Publishing Company).
- 11 This may include multiple offences that the women are currently incarcerated for and will therefore not sum to 100%.
- 12 Creation of the institutional Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis (DFIA) is based on the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale (CRNMS), developed by L. Motiuk and F. Porporino and implemented by CSC in 1990.
- 13 See Correctional Service of Canada's Standard Operating Practice 700-04 for a complete listing of indicators.

Coming up in *FORUM on Corrections Research*

The December 2004 issue of *FORUM* will focus on "Employment".