

## Profiling the Canadian federal sex offender population

*Correctional Research and Development, Correctional Service of Canada*

*The Correctional Service of Canada routinely collects sentence and demographic information on offenders under federal jurisdiction (those serving sentences of two years or longer). In 1994, the Service implemented the Offender Intake Assessment process to produce a comprehensive and integrated evaluation of offenders as they enter the federal correctional system.<sup>(2)</sup> This process involves the systematic collection and analysis of information on each offender's criminal and mental health background, social situation, education, and factors relevant to determining criminal risk and identifying offender needs.*

*Similarly, in compliance with national standards for conditional release supervision, Service parole officers use the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale to systematically assess 12 separate offender need areas (such as employment patterns), offender risk of reoffending and any other factors that might affect their successful reintegration into the community.<sup>(3)</sup>*

*While these case-based assessments help to determine sex offender correctional plans, this information can also be used to produce meaningful and accurate profiles of the sex offender population. This article illustrates the value of profiling sex offenders throughout the correctional process, and demonstrates that this practice can lead to more effective and efficient sex offender management. The current situation<sup>(4)</sup> A December 31, 1995, review of the Correctional Service of Canada offender management system identified 3,875 sex offenders under federal jurisdiction, which accounts for 17% of the total federal offender population. However, these figures understate the actual number of sex offenders under Service jurisdiction because current computer systems do not identify all previous sex offence convictions (such as those resulting in a provincial sentence), offenders who have committed a "sex-related" offence, or offenders who have previously sexually offended without being convicted.*

*A 1991 national sex offender census identified **all** sex offenders.<sup>(5)</sup> This census determined that about 85% of the sex offender population were identified by current computer systems. Therefore, it can be estimated (using a correction factor of 1.173) that there were actually 4,545 sex offenders under federal jurisdiction at the time of this review. This adjusted number accounts for about 20% of the total federal offender population. Institutional population (stock) This end-of-1995 review also determined that there were 2,766 sex offenders incarcerated in federal institutions, which accounts for about 20% of the total federal inmate population.*

*Using a correction factor,<sup>(6)</sup> it is estimated there were actually 3,245 sex offenders in federal institutions. This adjusted number accounts for about 24% of the total federal inmate population. About 20% of these sex offenders were incarcerated in maximum-security institutions, with 68% in medium-security and 12% in minimum-security institutions. Conditional release population (stock) Finally, this review determined that there were 1,109 sex offenders on conditional release, which accounts for about 12% of the federal conditional release population. Using a correction factor, it is estimated that there were actually 1,301 sex offenders under community supervision. This adjusted number accounts for about*

14% of the total federal conditional release population. About 38% of these federal sex offenders had been released on full parole, with 50% released on statutory release and 12% on day parole. Regional distribution The Service's Prairie and Ontario regions account for the most sex offenders, with each being responsible for slightly more than one quarter of the federal sex offender population. When you compare each region's proportion of all federal sex offenders with its proportion of all federal offenders, the Quebec region has fewer sex offenders relative to its proportion of all federal offenders.

More specifically, the Atlantic region accounts for 11.6% of federal sex offenders but just 10.1% of all federal offenders, the Prairie region accounts for 29.6% of sex offenders but just 22.4% of all offenders, and the Pacific region accounts for 15.1% of sex offenders but just 13.9% of all offenders (these regions have proportionately more sex offenders). The Ontario region accounts for 25.9% of sex offenders and 27% of all offenders (about the same proportion), while the Quebec region accounts for just 17.8% of sex offenders and 26.6% of all offenders (proportionately fewer sex offenders). Demographic characteristics The end-of-1995 review also revealed that virtually all sex offenders are men (99.7%). The review only identified 10 female sex offenders.

The average age of sex offenders under federal jurisdiction was about 42. The oldest sex offender was 85, while the youngest was 20. As a group, the sex offender population appears to be aging. The average sex offender age at admission was about 38, with the oldest sex offender admitted being 83 and the youngest 15.

The majority of sex offenders (74.8%) were Caucasian. However, there was a somewhat larger proportion of Aboriginal sex offenders relative to this group's proportion of all federal offenders.

More specifically, 17.9% of federal sex offenders and 13.2% of all federal offenders were Aboriginal (proportionately more sex offenders). In contrast, 74.8% of sex offenders and 75.6% of all offenders were Caucasian, 4.6% of sex offenders and 6.1% of all offenders were Black, 0.5% of sex offenders and 2.1% of all offenders were Asian, and 2.2% of sex offenders and 3% of all offenders were from other ethnic groups (proportionately fewer sex offenders). Recent trends The sex offender population has continued to grow rapidly and disproportionately to the total non-sex offender population, particularly within federal institutions. Over the last five years (December 31, 1990 to December 31, 1995), the federal sex offender population has increased by 40% (from 2,768 to 3,875), the sex offender institutional population has increased by nearly 50% (from 1,861 to 2,766) and the sex offender population on some form of conditional release has increased by 22% (from 907 to 1,109).

Sex offender admissions (flow)

The absolute number of sex offenders in federal institutions increased by 2.3% over the 1995 calendar year (see Table 1). Of the 1995 admissions, 70% were for a sex offence conviction, 18% were for a conditional release violation and 12% for other reasons (such as a transfer).

---

**Table 1**

**Regional Distribution of Federal Sex Offender Institutional and Admission Populations (1994-1995)**

	<b>Institutional population 1994 (stock)</b>	<b>Admission 1995 (flow)</b>	<b>Institutional population 1995 (stock)</b>	<b>Fow-to-stock ratio</b>	<b>Growth</b>
Atlantic	333	242	321	1:1.33	-3.6%
Quebec	468	206	493	1:2.39	+5.3%
Ontario	724	239	716	1:3.00	-1.1%
Prairie	766	493	819	1:1.66	+6.9%
Pacific	412	133	417	1:3.14	+1.2%
Total	2703	1313	2766	1:2.11	+2.3%

It is notable that for every sex offender younger than 30 admitted during 1995 (20%), a sex offender was admitted who was older than 50.

The Prairie and Quebec regions experienced the most growth in the absolute number of sex offender inmates, with increases of 6.9% and 5.3% respectively. When you compare regional "flow-to-stock ratios," the Pacific and Ontario regions retained greater numbers of sex offenders in federal custody relative to admissions. Sex offender releases (flow) Approximately 51% of the federal sex offenders released in 1995 were released on statutory release, with 13% released on day parole, 12% on full parole, 20% at the end of their sentence and 5% for other reasons. Overall, 724 federal sex offenders received some form of conditional release -- one third on day or full parole, and the other two thirds on statutory release.

The absolute number of federal sex offenders released under some form of supervision increased by 6.1% over the 1995 calendar year (see Table 2). This figure does not, of course, include the nearly one-quarter of the sex offender releases where the offender was not under any form of supervision (such as when their sentence ended). Again, for every release of a sex offender younger than 30 (20%), a sex offender was released who was 50 or older.

**Table 2**

<b>Regional Distribution of the Federal Sex Offender Conditional Release Population and Releases (1994-1995)</b>					
	<b>Cond. Rel. population 1994 (stock)</b>	<b>Releases 1995 (flow)</b>	<b>Cond. Rel. population 1995 (stock)</b>	<b>Flow-to-stock ratio</b>	<b>Growth</b>
Atlantic	140	110	161	1:1.46	+15.0%
Quebec	266	164	253	1:1.54	-4.9%
Ontario	256	168	242	1:1.44	-5.5%

Prairie	231	186	285	1:1.53	+23.4%
Pacific	152	96	168	1:1.75	+10.5%
Total	1,045	724	1,109	1:1.53	+5.1%

The Prairie and Atlantic regions experienced the most growth in the absolute number of sex offenders released into the community under supervision, with increases of 23.4% and 15% respectively. However, when you examine regional flow-to-stock ratios, the Pacific region retained the greatest number of sex offenders on conditional release relative to releases under community supervision. Sentence length The average sentence length of all sex offenders admitted to federal custody in 1995 was four years and three months (without considering lifers and those whose conditional release was revoked). This is five months longer than the overall average sentence length at admission for federal offenders. There has not been any change in the average federal sex offender admission sentence length during the last five years.

As expected, the average sentence length of all sex offenders released in 1995 was lower than the average sentence length of the sex offenders admitted in 1995. The average sentence length of the sex offenders released was three years and eleven months (not considering lifers and conditional release revocations) - the same as for all federal offenders released in 1995. We were unable to make historical comparisons for this group as earlier figures are not available.

It is also not surprising that the average sentence length of the sex offender institutional population (four years and eight months) was higher than that of either the sex offender admission or release populations. An institutional population tends to include many of the offenders serving longer sentences because they are not yet eligible for conditional release.

However, the average sentence length of the sex offender institutional population was substantially lower than the average sentence length of all incarcerated federal offenders (six years and six months). This may have resulted from the fact that inmates serving sentence "remnants" (the time left in a sentence when conditional release is revoked) were not included in these calculations. Non-sex offenders are more likely to be serving sentence "remnants" and shorter "remnants" than sex offenders. The inclusion of sentence "remnants" in the calculations would probably reduce the overall average sentence length of incarcerated offenders. Recidivism and return rates A recent follow-up (3.5 year average) study<sup>7</sup> of federal sex offenders revealed that about one third of the sex offenders were convicted of a new criminal offence, nearly one-fifth were convicted of a violent offence and less than one in 10 were convicted of a new sex offence during the follow-up period. Offence types According to the Offender Intake Assessment process, most of the 808 recent federal admissions with a sex offence history (past and/or current) had committed either a sexual assault or a "mixed" (any combination of the sex offence types) sex offence(s). Pedophilia was also common. The least frequent sex offence among these histories was incest and "other" sex offences (such as exhibitionism). More specifically, 50.2% of the sex offenders had committed a sexual assault, 21.2% had committed a "mixed offence," 14.9% had committed a pedophile offence, 8.4% had committed an incest offence, and 5.3% had committed an "other" sex offence. However, keep in mind that this distribution is based on an admission population. An institutional population would probably break down differently as it would tend to be composed of sex offenders serving longer sentences, with lengthier criminal histories and higher risk ratings. Criminal

history The Offender Intake Assessment process collects extensive information on offender criminal histories (youth and adult court involvements), offence severity records (victimization patterns) and sex offence histories. Non-sex offenders are significantly more likely than sex offenders to have been exposed to the criminal justice system at admission (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

<b>Criminal Histories of Sex Offenders at Admission</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Sex offenders (795)</b>	<b>Non-sex offenders (2,726)</b>
<b>Young offender history</b>		
Previous offences	25.9%	41.9%
Community supervision	17.5%	29.4%
Open Custody	11.7%	21.8%
Secure custody	12.7%	24.1%
<b>Adult offender history</b>		
Previous offences	76.9%	84.9%
Community supervision	60.4%	71.0%
Provincial custodial term(s)	56.3%	71.4%
Federal custodial term(s)	21.2%	27.4%
<b>Sex offence history</b>		
Previous offence(s)	39.3%	0.0%
Current offence(s)	82.2%	0.0%

To examine differences in criminal history across sex offender type, we collapsed the offenders with a sex offence history (past and/or current) into five groups: sexual assault, "mixed," pedophiles, incest offenders and "other" (see Table 4). This revealed that offenders in the sexual assault and "other" groups had extensive criminal histories, similar to that of the non-sex offender population.

**Table 4**

<b>Criminal Histories and Sex Offender Types</b>					
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Sexual assaulted (386)</b>	<b>"Mixed" (163)</b>	<b>Pedophiles (115)</b>	<b>Incest offenders (65)</b>	<b>Other sex offs. (41)</b>
<b>Young offender history</b>					
Previous offences	34.9%	14.8%	20.7%	9.4%	22.5%

Community supervision	22.9%	9.4%	15.3%	7.8%	20.0%
Open Custody	17.3%	5.6%	5.5%	4.7%	17.5%
Secure custody	18.0%	6.2%	9.1%	1.6%	17.5%
<b>Adult offender history</b>					
Previous offences	83.9%	68.7%	73.9%	58.5%	82.9%
Community supervision	66.2%	54.6%	53.5%	43.1%	75.6%
Provincial custodial term(s)	61.3%	48.7%	53.9%	33.9%	73.2%
Federal custodial term(s)	24.6%	17.2%	18.3%	10.8%	34.2%
<b>Sex offence history</b>					
Previous offence(s)	38.1%	42.9%	45.2%	24.6%	48.8%
Current offence(s)	78.8%	93.9%	89.6%	93.9%	46.3%

While both the "mixed" and pedophile groups also had criminal histories (particularly as adults), the incest offender group had the least exposure to the criminal justice system. Victims The Offender Intake Assessment process also gathers comprehensive information on each sex offender's victimization pattern (age and gender preferences). Based on this admission sample, a child or adolescent was the victim in almost three-quarters of the sex offences for which the offender was now being incarcerated.

More specifically, there were 302 female and 103 male child (under 12) victims, 322 female and 66 male adolescent (12-17) victims, 296 female and 12 male adult (18-65) victims, and 8 female elderly victims (65 or older). Needs on conditional release The Service has also developed an automated means of monitoring offender risk/needs levels in the community. The Offender Management System currently contains all of the overall risk/need and identified need level information gathered since the implementation of the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale. This information can be retrieved at any time to provide caseload snapshots.

A national review of 12 identified offender needs (areas rated as "some need for improvement" or "considerable need for improvement") within the conditional release population indicates that there is considerable variation across these need areas between sex offenders and non-sex offenders (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

<b>Identified Needs of Sex Offenders and Non-sex Offenders on Conditional Release</b>		
<b>Type of need</b>	<b>Sex offenders (737)</b>	<b>Non-sex offenders (4,534)</b>
Academic/vocational	30.9%	37.5%
Employment pattern	39.0%	45.0%
Financial management	33.4%	39.5%
Marital/family	30.9%	27.1%

Companions	14.7%	30.4%
Accommodation *	9.7%	11.6%
Behavioural/emotional	54.1%	36.9%
Alcohol use	12.5%	15.5%
Drug use	6.0%	17.5%
Mental ability	6.4%	4.6%
Health	21.6%	16.3%
Attitude *	10.8%	10.6%
* = The difference is not statistically significant		

Sex offenders are more likely to be needy in family/marital, behavioural/emotional, mental ability and health areas. However, non-sex offenders are more likely to experience problems in academic/vocational skills, employment, financial management, companions, alcohol use, and drug use. There appear to be no statistically meaningful differences between sex offenders and non-sex offenders with respect to the accommodation and attitude need areas. Discussion The ability to produce meaningful and accurate profiles of the entire federal sex offender population can be used to increase awareness about the specific issues raised by institutional and community supervision populations.

It also allows the Service to assemble basic statistics on both previous exposure/response to the criminal justice system when an offender enters federal custody and on specified sex offender needs when an offender is released under community supervision. Such data can help direct limited resources and controls to particular segments of the sex offender population to reduce risk.

---

(1)Second Floor, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.

(2)L. L. Motiuk, "Where Are We in Our Ability to Assess Risk?" *Forum on Corrections Research*, 5, 2 (1993): 14-18.

(3)L. L. Motiuk and F. J. Porporino, *Field Test of the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale: A Study of Offenders on Caseload* (Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada, 1989).

(4)Please note that the selection criteria used to define the current federal offender population excluded the following Offender Current Status Table codes: deceased; on bail; sentence completed; suspended (unlawfully at large); and suspended (temporary detained).

(5)F. J. Porporino and L. L. Motiuk, *Preliminary Results of the National Sex Offender Census* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1991).

(6)L. L. Motiuk and R. L. Belcourt, *Statistical Profiles of Homicide, Sex, Robbery and Drug Offenders in Federal Corrections* (Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada, 1995).

(7)L. L. Motiuk and S. L. Brown, *Factors Related to Recidivism Among Federal Sex Offenders* (Ottawa: Correctional Service Canada, 1996).