

Profiling federal offenders with violent offences

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.² Similarly, the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale systematically assesses and reassesses the risks and needs of offenders on conditional release.³ 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, review⁴ 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.

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	1:15:4	+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

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.

Table 2

Regional Distribution of the Federal Violent Offender Conditional Release Population and Releases (1995-1996)					
Region	Institutional population 1995 (stock)	Admissions 1996 (flow)	Institutional 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	168	198	285	1:1:44	0.0
Robbery	333	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

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

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

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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 study⁵ 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.⁶) 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.

Table 4

Criminal Histories of Violent and Non-violent Male Offenders		
Variable	Violent (4,311)	Non-violent (1,703)
Young offender history		
Previous offences	43.2	41.5
Community supervision	31.2	29.8
Open custody	22.5	24.1
Secure custody	24.7	26.0
Adult offender history		
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
Violent offence history		
Previous offence(s)***	62.1	40.0
Note: indicators numbers may vary slightly; ***p<0.001		

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

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)
Young offender history					
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%
Adult offender history					
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%
Violent offence history					
Previous offence(s)***	7.5%	1.8%	21.2%	55.5%	25.9%

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.

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%
Marital/Family***	32.0%	27.8%
Companions***	27.0%	38.4%
Accommodations ns	11.7%	12.2%
Behavioural/Emotional***	48.0%	38.3%
Alcohol use ns	17.4%	16.9%
Drug use***	17.3%	20.9%
Mental ability***	5.8%	3.5%
Health***	19.5%	16.1%
Attitude ns	10.6%	11.5%
Notes: *p<0.05, p<0.01, p<0.001, ns=non significant		

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, 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.

1. 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.
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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). See also L.L. Motiuk, "The Community Risk/Needs Management Scale: An Effective Supervision Tool," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9, 1 (1997): 8-12
4. 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 Canada, 1997).
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6. K. Blanchette, "Classifying Female Offenders for Correctional Interventions," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9, 1 (1997): 36-41.