

Young adult offenders in federal corrections: A profile

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The Correctional Service of Canada's Offender Management System (OMS), Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process² and Community Risk/Needs Management Scale (CRNMS)³ yield comprehensive information for profiling the federal offender population.⁴ Young adult offenders (18 to 20 years and 21 to 24 years) are compared with other age groups (25 to 49 years and 50 and over) by type of offence, institutional and conditional release status, admissions and releases, sentence lengths, criminal histories, and identified needs at admission as well as on conditional release.

National and regional distribution

A December 31, 1998, review⁵ of the Correctional Service of Canada's OMS identified 350 (or 1.6%) offenders aged 18 to 20 years, 2,000 (or 8.9%) offenders aged 21 to 24 years, 16,514 (or 73.6%) offenders aged 25 to 49 years and 3,583 (or 16%) offenders aged 50 years and over under federal jurisdiction.

The Service's Prairie and Ontario regions accounted for the most young adult offenders (under 25), each being responsible for more than one third and one fifth of the young adult offender population, respectively. When you examine each region's proportion of offenders, the Prairie and Atlantic regions had more young adult offenders relative to their proportion of all federal offenders.

The Ontario and Quebec regions had the most older offenders (50 and over), each being responsible for roughly one quarter of the older offender population. However, the Pacific region had a somewhat larger proportion of older offenders relative to this region's proportion of all federal offenders.

Institutional population (stock)

The end-of-1998 review also determined that there were 303 (or 2.4%) offenders aged 18 to 20 years, 1,314 (or 10.3%) offenders aged 21 to 24 years, 9,535 (or 74.7%) offenders aged 25 to 49 years and 1,606 (or 12.6%) offenders aged 50 and over in federal institutions. Young adult offenders made up roughly the same proportion (12.7%) as older offenders (12.6%) in the federal institutional population. About one fifth of federally incarcerated young adult offenders were located in maximum-security institutions, slightly more than two thirds were in medium-security institutions and the rest were in minimum-security institutions.

Conditional release population (stock)

Finally, this review determined that there were 47 (or 0.5%) offenders aged 18 to 20, 686 (or 7.1%)

offenders aged 21 to 24 years, 6,979 (or 72%) offenders aged 25 to 49 and 1,977 (or 20.4%) offenders aged 50 and over on conditional release. It is not surprising that the proportion of older offenders on conditional release was substantially higher than young adult offenders. The conditional release population included many offenders serving longer sentences such as life.

Young adult offenders were almost evenly distributed across three types of conditional release — day parole, full parole and statutory release. In contrast, more than two thirds of older offenders were on full parole.

Young adult offender admissions (flow)

The absolute number of young adult offenders in federal institutions decreased by 5% over the 1998 calendar year (see Table 1). The Atlantic region experienced the largest decrease in the absolute number of young adult offenders with a decrease of 13.1%. While the Quebec, Ontario and Pacific regions also showed declines in young adult offenders, the Ontario region had the largest increase in older offenders (2.3%) in federal custody. When you compare regional “flow-to-stock” ratios, the Pacific region retained a greater number of young adult offenders in federal custody compared with the other regions. Both the Ontario and Pacific regions retained the greatest numbers of older offenders relative to the other regions. Across regions, young adult offenders are turning over at the greatest rate in federal institutions.

Young adult offender releases (flow) While the number of young adult offenders supervised under some form of conditional release increased by 4% over the 1998 calendar year, the number of older offenders increased by nearly 9% (see Table 2). Note that we removed from the release figures the nearly 400 federal offender releases who were at the end of their sentence.

Regionally, the Quebec region experienced the most growth in the number of young adult offenders under community supervision, with an increase of 35%. However, an examination of the regional flow-to stock ratios reveals that the Quebec region experienced the lowest retention in young adult offenders under community supervision during 1998 relative to the number of community supervision releases. Again, young adult offenders are turning over at the greatest rate on conditional release.

Table 1

Regional Distribution of the Federal Offender Institutional Population and Admissions (1997–1998)						
Region		Institutional population 1997 (stock)	Admissions (flow) 1998	Institutional population (stock) 1998	Flow-to-stock ratio	Growth

Atlantic	18 to 20	61	89	69	1: 0.78	+13.1
	21 to 24	190	145	149	1: 1.03	-21.6
	25 to 49	883	545	773	1: 1.42	-12.5
	50 plus	173	65	158	1: 2.43	-8.7
Quebec	18 to 20	39	74	50	1: 0.68	+28.2
	21 to 24	285	223	257	1: 1.15	-9.8
	25 to 49	2,813	1,501	2,673	1: 1.78	-5.0
	50 plus	393	161	395	1: 2.45	+0.5
Ontario	18 to 20	56	58	45	1: 0.78	-19.6
	21 to 24	327	242	316	1: 1.31	-3.4
	25 to 49	2,648	1,322	2,629	1: 1.99	-0.7
	50 plus	477	143	488	1: 3.41	+2.3
Prairie	18 to 20	116	152	124	1: 0.82	+6.9
	21 to 24	453	373	446	1: 1.20	-1.5
	25 to 49	2,296	1,442	2,175	1: 1.51	-5.3
	50 plus	307	116	291	1: 2.51	-5.2
Pacific	18 to 20	27	15	15	1: 1.00	-44.4
	21 to 24	151	94	146	1: 1.55	-3.3
	25 to 49	1,389	637	1,285	1: 2.02	-7.5
	50 plus	275	72	274	1: 3.81	-0.4
Total	18 to 20	299	388	303	1: 0.78	+1.3
	21 to 24	1,406	1,077	1,314	1: 1.22	-6.5
	25 to 49	10,029	5,477	9,535	1: 1.75	-4.9
	50 plus	1,625	557	1,606	1: 2.88	-1.2

Sentence length

The average sentence length (in 1998) for newly admitted young adult offenders was about 3.3 years (lifers and revoked cases removed) . Compared with the average sentence length of older adult offenders admitted to federal custody, it was almost one- sixth shorter (see Table 3). As expected, the average sentence length in 1998 for most of the age categories released under supervision was lower than for their counterparts at admission. The exception was older offenders , who typically were serving longer sentences.

Table 2

Regional Distribution of the Federal Offender Conditional Release Population and Releases (1997–1998)

Region		Cond. rel. population 1997 (stock)	Admissions (flow) 1998	Cond. rel. (stock) 1998	Flow-to- stock ratio	Growth
Atlantic	18 to 20	25	38	11	1: 0.29	-56.0
	21 to 24	94	162	123	1: 0.76	+30.9
	25 to 49	525	552	554	1: 1.00	+5.5
	50 plus	144	75	146	1: 1.95	+1.4
Quebec	18 to 20	7	25	10	1: 0.40	+42.9
	21 to 24	94	206	126	1: 0.61	-6.6
	25 to 49	525	1,808	2,123	1: 1.17	-0.1
	50 plus	144	217	612	1: 2.82	+11.3
Ontario	18 to 20	2	13	4	1: 0.30	+100.0
	21 to 24	152	209	165	1: 0.79	-8.6
	25 to 49	1,868	1,541	1,962	1: 1.27	+5.0
	50 plus	495	212	525	1: 2.48	+6.1
Prairie	18 to 20	20	40	18	1: 0.45	-10.0
	21 to 24	205	294	207	1: 0.70	-1.0
	25 to 49	1,454	1,448	1,497	1: 1.03	+3.0
	50 plus	303	159	343	1: 2.16	+13.2
Pacific	18 to 20	4	10	4	1: 0.40	0
	21 to 24	64	90	65	1: 0.72	+1.6
	25 to 49	798	807	843	1: 1.04	+5.6
	50 plus	325	119	351	1: 2.95	+8.0
Total	18 to 20	58	126	47	1: 0.37	-19.0
	21 to 24	650	961	686	1: 0.71	+5.5
	25 to 49	6,771	6,156	6,979	1: 1.13	+3.1
	50 plus	1,817	782	1,977	1: 2.53	+8.8

It is not surprising that the average sentence lengths of incarcerated young adult offenders were found to be higher than for either the admission or conditional release populations. Similarly, the average sentence lengths of incarcerated middle and older age offenders were found to be higher than for those same offenders on conditional release. Of special note, the average sentence length of incarcerated older offenders was found to be more than double the sentence length of young adult offenders in institutions.

Table 3

Average Sentence Lengths and Offender Age Groups				
Region	Sentence length (years)			
Population	18 to 20	21 to 24	25 to 49	50+
Admissions	3.26	3.47	3.70	4.15

Releases	2.42	2.46	3.29	4.65
Institutional	3.54	4.45	6.87	9.18
Conditional release	2.64	3.37	5.87	8.09

Major offence categories

To examine differences in four major offence categories (homicide, sex offence, robbery and drug offence) across the selected age groups, we separated the end-of-December 1998 institutional (stock) and conditional release (stock) populations (see Table 4).

Table 4

Major Offence Categories Across Age Groups				
	Age of offender			
Population	18 to 20 years	21 to 24 years	25 to 49 years	50+ years
Institutional	2.4%	10.3%	74.7%	12.6%
Homicide***	0.7%	4.3%	75.6%	19.6%
Sex offence***	0.4%	4.2%	70.5%	24.9%
Robbery***	2.9%	10.9%	79.3%	7.0%
Drug offence***	1.1%	6.9%	84.5%	7.5%
Conditional release	0.5%	7.1%	72.0%	20.4%
Homicide***	0.0%	0.4%	51.5%	48.1%
Sex offence***	0.2%	2.2%	60.8%	36.8%
Robbery***	0.5%	9.5%	80.0%	9.9%
Drug offence***	0.3%	5.7%	80.4%	13.6%
*** The difference is statistically significant $p < .001$				

Table 4 shows that incarcerated young adult offenders (12.7%) are over-represented by robbery offenders (13.8%) and under-represented by homicide (5.0%), sex (4.6%) and drug (8.0%) offenders. A similar result was found for the conditional release population. In contrast, those aged 25 to 49 and older in federal prison (87.3%) are over-represented by homicide (95.2%), sex (95.4%) and drug (92.0%) offenders.

Table 5

Criminal Histories Across Selected Age Groups								
	18 to 20 years		21 to 24 years		25 to 49 years		50+ years	
Variable	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
	(291)	(7)	(1,213)	(28)	(5,977)	(191)	(806)	(18)

Young offender history								
Previous offences***/**	86.6%	85.7%	83.2%	35.7%	40.1%	23.0%	10.1%	0.0%
Community supervision***/**	80.4%	85.7%	73.2%	32.1%	27.3%	11.8%	4.2%	0.0%
Open custody***/**	60.9%	57.1%	53.1%	21.4%	19.3%	12.8%	3.3%	0.0%
Secure custody***/**	59.0%	57.1%	54.3%	25.0%	22.7%	12.8%	5.6%	0.0%
Adult offender history								
Previous offences***/**	32.4%	28.6%	70.0%	50.0%	90.4%	73.2%	68.7%	44.4%
Community supervision***/**	22.1%	14.3%	51.7%	42.9%	78.8%	59.3%	54.5%	27.8%
Provincial term(s)***/**	25.2%	14.3%	57.4%	32.1%	78.2%	53.9%	51.5%	22.2%
Federal term(s)***/ns	0.3%	0.0%	2.9%	3.6%	38.9%	10.3%	30.6%	0.0%
Note: statistical significance across age groups is presented as male/female. *** The difference is statistically significant $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; ns = not significant.								

Profiling young adult male and female offenders

The Service's OIA process collects and stores information on each federal offender's criminal and mental health background, social situation and education, factors relevant to determining criminal risk (such as number and variety of convictions and previous exposure and response to youth and adult corrections) and factors relevant to identifying offender needs (such as employment history, family background, criminal associations, addictions and attitudes). The results help determine institutional placement and correctional plans, but criminal history and case need variables can also be used to build a comprehensive profile of the federal offender population.

Table 6

Identified Needs at Admission								
	18 to 20 years		21 to 24 years		25 to 49 years		50+ years	
Variable	male (293)	female (7)	male (1,265)	female (28)	male (8,887)	female (219)	male (1,475)	female (24)
Employment ***/**	70.3%	57.1%	76.0%	78.6%	67.3%	69.9%	46.0%	33.3%
Marital/family ***/ns	34.5%	85.7%	45.5%	53.6%	56.5%	69.9%	59.9%	66.7%
Associates ***/ns	76.8%	85.7%	78.2%	64.3%	67.0%	59.8%	42.7%	58.3%
Substance abuse ***/**	62.7%	71.4%	71.5%	50.0%	76.2%	65.3%	52.2%	29.2%
Community functioning ***/ns	35.8%	42.9%	50.3%	39.3%	56.5%	57.1%	46.4%	45.8%
Personal/emotional **/ns	94.5%	100.0%	93.2%	85.7%	90.9%	89.5%	91.9%	87.5%
Attitude ***/ns	43.0%	28.6%	57.8%	39.1%	63.4%	29.7%	63.7%	29.2%
Note: statistical significance across age groups is presented as male/female. *** The difference is statistically significant $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; ns = not significant.								

In November 1994, the OIA process was implemented Service-wide. Four years later we extracted case-

specific information on available OIAs contained in the OMS. To facilitate comparative analyses we focused on male and female offenders who had full OIAs and were under federal supervision on December 31, 1998. Note that these results are generalized to a recent admission population (within the last four years).

Criminal history. Table 5 presents comparative statistics on selected criminal history variables from the OIA for male and female federal offenders across the selected age groups. We found highly significant differences across the selected age categories in relation to young offender (under 18) history. Young adult male and female offenders in federal prisons were more likely to have had previous offences, community supervision, and open and secure custody as young offenders than offenders in other age categories.

Needs at admission. Among male offenders (n = 11,920) at admission, there appear to be statistically significant differences between the selected age groups in all need areas (see Table 6). For female offenders (n = 278), statistically meaningful differences were found between the various age groups in the areas of employment and substance abuse. Table 6 also shows that young adult offenders are more likely to be needy in the areas of employment, associates/social interaction and personal/emotional orientation.

Table 7

Identified Needs on Conditional Release								
	18 to 20 years		21 to 24 years		25 to 49 years		50+ years	
Variable	male (33)	female (3)	male (541)	female (34)	male (5,469)	female (277)	male (1,631)	female (59)
Employment ***/**	48.5%	66.7%	57.9%	50.0%	40.9%	43.9%	22.8%	22.0%
Marital/family ***/ns	39.4%	33.3%	39.3%	35.3%	29.5%	41.5%	16.6%	13.6%
Associates ***/ns	57.6%	100.0%	57.5%	67.6%	32.8%	37.1%	13.1%	17.0%
Substance abuse ***/**	30.3%	0.0%	36.5%	29.4%	28.0%	22.7%	7.6%	6.8%
Community functioning ***/ns	30.3%	0.0%	34.9%	20.6%	26.9%	31.2%	14.7%	44.4%
Personal/emotional **/ns	69.7%	67.7%	60.5%	58.8%	48.6%	51.4%	34.0%	27.8%
Attitude ***/ns	24.2%	33.3%	19.2%	11.8%	12.0%	6.5%	9.0%	6.9%
Note: statistical significance across age groups is presented as male/female. *** The difference is statistically significant p < .001; ** p < .01; ns = not significant.								

Needs on conditional release. The Service has an automated means of monitoring offender risk/needs levels in the community. The OMS currently contains the overall risk/need and identified need levels gathered since implementation of the CRNMS (now known as the Community Intervention Scale). This information can be retrieved at any time to provide caseload snapshots. A national overview of seven separate identified needs (ratings of “some need for improvement” or “considerable need for improvement”) in the conditional release population shows considerable variation across these need

areas between young adult offenders and other age- specific offender categories (see Table 7). Among male offenders (n = 7,674) on conditional release, there appear to be statistically significant differences between the selected age categories in all need areas. For female offenders (n = 373), there are statistically meaningful differences between the various age groups in all need areas except community functioning and attitude. Again, in Table 7 we see that young adult offenders of both sexes are more likely to be needy in the areas of employment, associates/ social interaction and personal/ emotional orientation.

Discussion

The Service's capacity to produce meaningful and accurate profiles of the federal offender population across selected age groups can be used to raise awareness that we are managing a more diverse federal offender population than before. In federal corrections, young adult offenders are turning over at the greatest rate in institutions and on conditional release, are serving shorter sentences, are likely to be robbery offenders, have more criminal history as youths and possess unique criminogenic needs at admission and on conditional release. These findings suggest offering specialized programs and services to these individuals. Hence, careful attention should be paid to these individuals during reintegration.

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