

# Reintegration potential profiles for federally sentenced women

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**C**urrent federal correctional assessment strategies and standards of practice should help to identify women offenders at admission with good potential for successful reintegration. For example, women offenders with 'high' reintegration potential at time of admission might be defined as either low-risk offenders or medium-risk offenders who are manageable in the community with prescriptive intervention and appropriate supervision. Women offenders with 'moderate' reintegration potential at time of admission might be re-evaluated as offenders having high reintegration potential upon successful program completion at time of parole eligibility.

The 'Reintegration Potential Profiles' explored in the body of this article are based on objective classification information derived from the Correctional Service of Canada's Offender Management System (OMS). It should be noted that the profiles reflect available offender intake assessment information. A review of OMS indicates variations exist in the number of classification instruments completed. (The files of those offenders admitted prior to implementation may be missing information.) Future analyses will account for more completeness. It is expected that judicious attention to case management practice and improved efficiency will increase safe reintegration.

**C**ase management 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 decision-makers, equipped with objective classification procedures, play in the timely and safe release of a women offender.

Although the increased emphasis on public safety in the 1990s fuelled substantial gains in the predictive accuracy of objective risk assessment technology, it also contributed to

safe reintegration efforts by identifying good release potential candidates earlier in the sentence and encouraging greater efficiencies across case management functions.

Today, most correctional agencies administer objective classification instruments to improve case management decision-making. 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. High reintegration potential might therefore be conceptualized as either low-risk offenders or those women offenders deemed moderate risk, but manageable in the community with prescriptive intervention and suitable level of supervision.

## Safe reintegration

Legally, the Correctional Service of Canada operates under the 1992 *Corrections and Conditional Release Act*.<sup>2</sup> It 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;
- assisting in the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community.

The values and beliefs of the Correctional Service of Canada are articulated in its mission document,<sup>3</sup> which has been endorsed by every Solicitor General of Canada

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since 1989, including the Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, who formally signed the document in April 1999. The mission statement sets out the following: the Correctional Service of Canada, as part of the criminal justice system and respecting the rule of law, contributes to the protection of society by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens, while exercising reasonable, safe, secure and humane control. The mission statement provides federal corrections with a strategic framework for contributing to safe reintegration.

Operationally, safe reintegration encompasses a broad range of decisions intended to place women offenders in the least restrictive setting possible, grant temporary absence or conditional release, and invoke suspension or revocation of conditional release when necessary. At admission to federal corrections, decisions about security-level placement, program requirements and release potential significantly affect a woman offender's movement through her sentence.

**Assumptions and estimating potential**

The estimation of reintegration potential at admission is based on several major assumptions about case management practice. First, a review of objective classification information derived from the OMS indicates that some potential release candidates may not always be processed according to their relative risk level. For example, there may be female offenders, rated lower risk by objective tools, who are not being placed at the expected security levels, or who remain in custody after parole eligibility or are released later on statutory release. By directing correctional attention toward women offenders who meet objective criteria for being considered lower risk and providing support to these offender groups accordingly, safe reintegration will be advanced.

Secondly, variations in the amount of time that is required to complete various case management activities suggest significant contributions to safe reintegration would be realized by modest reductions in processing time frames. For example, modest reductions in case preparation days for women offenders, or waiting periods to program, accumulated over hundreds of cases, can result in substantial improvements in safe reintegration.

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Objective security and program classification is desirable for good correctional management and to demonstrate that decisions are informed and defensible.<sup>4</sup> Systematic and objective classification may reduce decision-making errors regarding the incarceration of women offenders at too high a security level. Over-classification is not only more expensive financially, but also limits subsequent release opportunities for women offenders.

Federally sentenced women undergo a comprehensive and integrated Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process at time of admission.<sup>5</sup> The OIA has a number of components: community intake assessment, initial assessment, static risk (youth and adult criminal history) assessment, dynamic risk (employment, marital/family, associates/social interaction, substance abuse, community functioning, personal/emotional orientation, attitude) assessment, psychological and supplementary assessments, level of motivation assessment, security level

designation using the Custody Rating Scale,<sup>6</sup> and an estimate of reintegration potential (low, moderate, high).

A particular combination or convergence of three objective risk-based measures — static risk rating, dynamic risk rating and security level designation — determines reintegration potential at admission for women offenders.

For example, a women offender rated at admission as 'low' on static risk, 'low' on dynamic risk and minimum-security (as reflected by the Custody Rating Scale) would be classified as 'high' reintegration potential. Conversely, a women offender rated 'high' on static risk, 'high' on dynamic risk and maximum-security would be classified as 'low' reintegration potential. The 27 possible combinations of the three intake measures are grouped according to relative reintegration potential ranging from 'low', to 'moderate' to 'high.'

### Women offenders in federal institutions

A 31 December 1998 review of the Correctional Service of OMS files with *complete* OIA data identified a total of 293 (87% of 336) federally sentenced women in institutions. The Service has special facilities for women offenders that accounted for most of the institutional population. For example, 21 (7%) were located at Nova Institution for Women, 52 (18%) at Joliette Institution, 26 (9%) at Prison for Women, 76 (26%) at Grand Valley Institution for Women, 9 (3%) at Isabel McNeil House, 26 (9%) at Okimaw Ochi Healing Lodge and 52 (18%) at Edmonton Institution for Women.

The average age of the federally sentenced woman in institutions was 35 years, ranging from 19 to 88. Roughly, 60% of the institutional population were Caucasian, 23% Aboriginal, 8% Black and 3% Asiatic.

An end-of-1998 OMS review also determined that among the incarcerated women offender population there were 79 homicide offenders, 6 sex offenders, 120 robbery offenders and 71 drug offenders. The average sentence length for federally incarcerated women offenders was 3.1 years (excluding lifers and revoked cases). Nearly 75% were serving sentences four years or less and 60 cases (18%) were serving life sentences.

### Intake assessment measures

Table 1 shows a distribution of the three objective classification measures taken at admission — static risk, dynamic risk and custody level designation — as well as reintegration potential, by quarter in 1998. The table illustrates that women offenders, as a group, show considerable potential for successful reintegration at admission. In fact, roughly half the female offenders in the institutional population were objectively classified as 'high' reintegration potential at admission. The possibility

remains that, with the benefit of appropriate programming, those women offenders assessed at admission to be 'moderate' or 'low' reintegration potential might be re-evaluated as having 'high' reintegration potential upon successful program completion at time of parole eligibility.

### Profiling reintegration potential

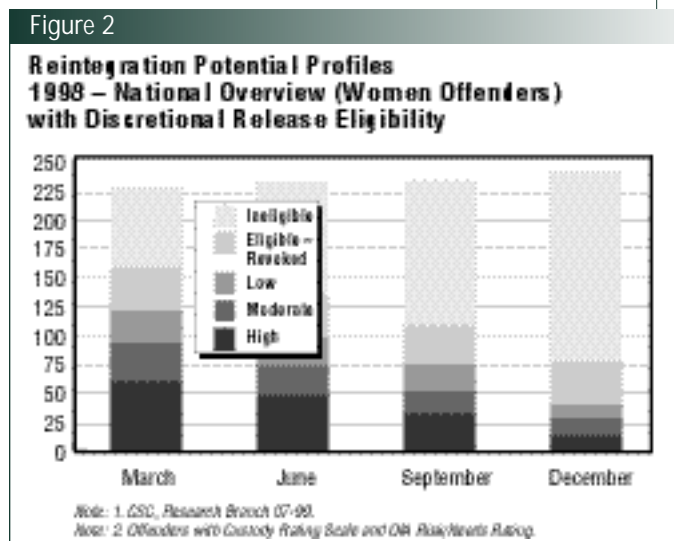
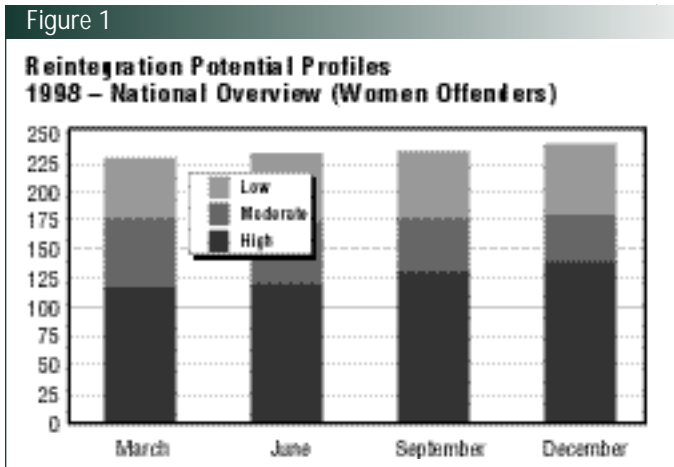
Reintegration potential profiles can offer an early indication of the release potential and program services necessary to enhance the release potential of women offenders. Among women offenders with the highest potential for release and for whom priority case preparation should be provided are those cases rated in the high or moderate reintegration

Table 1

#### National Overview of the Federal Women Institutional Population: Percentage Distribution of Intake Measures (at time of admission)

Intake Measure	March	June	September	December
	1998	1998	1998	1998
	N=228	N=232	N=234	N=240
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
<b>Static Risk Level</b>				
Low	58 (25.4)	59 (25.4)	61 (26.1)	58 (24.2)
Medium	101 (44.3)	104 (44.8)	107 (45.7)	115 (47.9)
High	69 (30.3)	69 (29.7)	66 (28.2)	67 (27.9)
<b>Dynamic Risk Level</b>				
Low	45 (19.7)	44 (19.0)	37 (15.8)	38 (15.8)
Medium	94 (41.2)	95 (40.9)	107 (45.7)	115 (47.9)
High	89 (39.0)	93 (40.1)	90 (38.5)	87 (36.3)
<b>Custody Level</b>				
Minimum	61 (26.8)	62 (26.7)	68 (29.1)	86 (35.8)
Medium	148 (64.9)	149 (64.2)	144 (61.5)	134 (55.8)
Maximum	19 (8.3)	21 (9.1)	22 (9.4)	20 (8.3)
<b>Reintegration Potential</b>				
Low	52 (22.8)	55 (23.7)	58 (24.8)	56 (23.3)
Moderate	59 (25.9)	57 (24.6)	46 (19.7)	45 (18.8)
High	117 (51.3)	120 (51.7)	130 (55.6)	139 (57.9)

Note: Distributions based on availability of three intake measures on each offender.



potential categories. Among these groups, women offenders who do not receive a discretionary release or receive it sometime after their day or full parole eligibility dates represent additional release potential that would contribute to safe reintegration.

A review of OMS data, using stacked bar-charts (see Figure 1), suggests that some women offenders rated in the 'high' reintegration potential categories may be available for an earlier discretionary release, and additional or earlier releases from the 'moderate' reintegration potential category may be possible with proper support. However, a potential release presupposes eligibility while under sentence.

Figure 2 introduces the criteria of within or beyond 180 days prior to full parole eligibility date (also known as day parole). Using discretionary release eligibility dates, another reintegration potential category is formed of women offenders who had their conditional

release revoked. A close inspection of these cases across each quarter in 1998 revealed a substantial percentage of revoked women offenders with potential for re-release.

An examination of the end-of-December 1998 'Reintegration Potential Profile' bar chart for women offenders relative to an earlier profile taken at the end-of-March 1998 reveals a number of interesting findings. Overall, there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of women offenders in federal institutions *ineligible* for discretionary release over this time period. Taken with the noticeable decrease in the proportion of 'high' reintegration potential women offenders beyond day parole eligibility over the past year, it may be reflecting improvements in the timely preparation of good release potential candidates for discretionary release decision-making.

### Validity

One way of looking at the validity of an estimate of 'reintegration potential' for women offenders at admission is by examining the relationships between the various categories and release. A follow-up of the 228 women offenders in the end-of-March 1998 profile to June 1999 revealed that 133 (58%) have been released. Of those released, 60.2% were assessed to be 'high' reintegration potential, 24% were 'moderate' and 15.8% were 'low.' Higher reintegration potential was found to be significantly associated ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ ) with likelihood of release.

When discretionary release was taken into account (65% of those released), 72.4% were assessed to be 'high' reintegration potential, 16.1% were 'moderate' and 11.5% were 'low.' Again, higher reintegration potential was found to significantly associated with likelihood of discretionary release ( $r = .30$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

As for post-release outcome, 15 (11.3%) of the released women offenders had been returned to federal custody. Of note, almost 75% were revoked without committing a new offence. Although the highest percentage of return to federal custody was among the 'low' reintegration potential group, the very low base rate across the categories made tests of statistical significance invalid. It would appear that the desired correctional objective of safe reintegration for women offenders is being achieved.

## Gaining potential through intervention

Consistent with efforts directed towards realization of the Service's mission, a concerted effort is required to ensure that correctional programs and interventions are linked to estimates of reintegration potential. To accomplish this task, several things in corrections must happen. First, evaluations of core programs for women offenders have to be ongoing and reflect impacts on achieving safe reintegration. Second, the practice of accrediting correctional programs for women offenders has to begin to ensure programs meet high standards of integrity, both in terms of content and delivery. Finally, a mechanism is required to incorporate treatment information on women offenders into decisions regarding future reintegration potential.

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## Summary

The incorporation of objective and systematic assessments of women offenders and principles of effective intervention into a reintegration framework is both legitimate and potentially fruitful. The process and content reflected in the Correctional Service of Canada's static/dynamic risk assessment and custody level designation practices with women offenders are clearly compatible with the goals of safe reintegration. Importantly, this appears to be occurring as correctional staff and decision-makers have begun to more carefully consider the issue of 'Reintegration Potential Profiles.' Future research will highlight several new areas where further reintegration gains can be made and add support to the position that success is being achieved with women offenders. ■

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<sup>2</sup> Corrections and Conditional Release Act, RSC, C-20, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Mission of the Correctional Service of Canada, Cat. No. JS 82-46/1999 (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> L. Motiuk and R. Serin, "Situating Risk Assessment in the Reintegration Potential Framework," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 10, 1 (1998): 19-22.

<sup>5</sup> L. Motiuk, "Classification for Correctional Programming: The Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) Process," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9, 1 (1997): 18-22; see also K. Blanchette, "Classifying Female Offenders for Correctional Interventions," *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9, 1 (1997): 36-41.

<sup>6</sup> F. Luciani, "Tried and True: Proof that the Custody Rating Scale is Still Reliable and Valid" *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9, 1 (1998): 13-18; see also F. Luciani, "Exploring Reintegration Potential: Impacts of Initial Placement Practice" *Forum on Corrections Research*, 10, 1 (1998): 23-28.

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