

Aboriginal offenders in federal corrections: A profile

by **Larry Motiuk¹** and **Mark Nafekh**
Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada

This article presents a comparison between North American (NA) Indian, Metis and Inuit/Innu offenders by institutional and conditional release status, admissions and releases, criminal histories, and identified needs at admission as well as on conditional release. Additional comparisons are made between the Aboriginal groupings and non-Aboriginal offenders on type of offence and sentence lengths.

Comprehensive information was obtained for profiling the federal Aboriginal offender population² through Correctional Service of Canada's Offender Management System (OMS), Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process,³ and Community Intervention Scale (CIS).⁴

National and regional distribution

A December 31, 1998 review of the Correctional Service of Canada's OMS identified 3,107 (or 14%) Aboriginal offenders under federal jurisdiction. More specifically, 2,183 (or 9.9%) were NA Indian offenders, 747 (or 3.4%) Metis offenders, and 177 (or 0.8%) Inuit/Innu offenders.

The Service's Prairie region accounts for the most Aboriginal offenders, being responsible for almost two-thirds of the Aboriginal offender population. There are more Aboriginal offenders in the Prairie and Pacific regions relative to their proportion of all federal offenders.

Institutional population (stock)

The end-of-1998 review also determined that there were 2,105 (or 16.8%) Aboriginal offenders in federal institutions. More specifically, 1,468 (or 11.7%) NA Indian offenders, 514 (or 4.1%) Metis offenders, and 123 (or 1.0%) Inuit/Innu offenders. It is notable that in relation to the proportion of incarcerated offenders, there are more Aboriginal offenders in the Prairie and Pacific regions relative to all federal offenders.

About one-fifth of federally incarcerated Aboriginal offenders were held in maximum-security institutions, slightly more than two-thirds were in medium-security institutions and the remainder were in minimum-security institutions.

Conditional release population (stock)

As well, this review determined that there were 997 (or 10.4%) Aboriginal offenders on conditional release. More specifically, 712 (or 7.5%) NA Indian offenders, 231 (or 2.4%) Metis offenders and 54 (or 0.6%) Inuit/Innu offenders. Again, an examination of each region's proportion of offenders on conditional release revealed more Aboriginal offenders in the Prairie and Pacific regions relative to their proportion of all federal offenders.

Consistent with the general federal offender population, Aboriginal offenders were not evenly distributed across three types of conditional release — day parole, full parole and statutory release. In contrast, one-half of Aboriginal offenders were on statutory release, one-third on full parole and one-sixth on day parole.

Aboriginal offender admissions (flow)

The absolute number of Aboriginal offenders in federal institutions increased by 6.7% over the 1998 calendar year (see Table 1). The Atlantic and Pacific regions experienced decreases in the absolute number of Aboriginal offenders (9.2% and 8.0% respectively). The Quebec, Ontario and Prairie regions showed increases in Aboriginal offenders; the Ontario region had the largest increase in Aboriginal offenders (56.5%) in federal custody.

When you compare regional "flow-to-stock ratios", the Quebec region retained a greater number of Aboriginal offenders in federal custody relative to the other regions. Both the Atlantic and Prairie regions retained the least numbers of Aboriginal offenders relative to the other regions.

Table 1

**Regional Distribution of the Federal Aboriginal Offender
Institutional Population and Admissions (1997-1998)**

Region	International Population 1997 [stock]	Admissions 1998 [flow]	International Population 1998 [stock]	Flow-to-stock Ratio	Growth
Atlantic					
NA Indian	55	36	56	1: 1.56	+1.8
Metis	2	1	4	1: 4.00	+100.0
Inuit/Innu	30	12	19	1: 1.58	-37.0
Quebec					
NA Indian	89	41	85	1: 2.07	-4.5
Metis	24	13	38	1: 2.92	+58.3
Inuit/Innu	16	10	14	1: 1.40	-12.5
Ontario					
NA Indian	160	127	254	1: 2.00	+58.8
Metis	8	5	10	1: 1.46	+25.0
Inuit/Innu	2	3	2	1: 0.67	0.0
Prairie					
NA Indian	822	580	847	1: 1.46	+3.0
Metis	349	285	371	1: 1.30	+6.3
Inuit/Innu	68	48	86	1: 1.79	+26.5
Pacific					
NA Indian	251	112	226	1: 2.02	-10.0
Metis	93	38	91	1: 2.39	-2.2
Inuit/Innu	3	2	2	1: 1.00	-33.3
Total					
NA Indian	1,377	896	1,468	1: 1.63	+6.6
Metis	476	342	514	1: 1.50	+7.9
Inuit/Innu	119	75	123	1: 1.64	+3.4

Aboriginal offender releases (flow)

The number of Aboriginal offenders supervised under some form of conditional release increased by 10.4% over the 1998 calendar year (see Table 2). Note that we removed from the release figures any offender who was at the end of their sentence. For example, nearly 185 Aboriginal offender releases were at the end of their sentence.

Regionally, the Quebec region has experienced the most growth in the number of Aboriginal offenders under community supervision, with an increase of 34%. However, an examination of the regional flow-to-stock ratios reveals that the Atlantic region experienced the lowest retention in Aboriginal offenders under community supervision during 1998 relative to the number of community supervision releases.

Table 2

Regional Distribution of the Federal Aboriginal Offender Conditional Release Population and Releases (1997-1998)					
Region	Cond. Rel. Population 1997 [stock]	Releases 1998 [flow]	Cond. Rel. Population 1998 [stock]	Flow-to-stock Ratio	Growth
Atlantic					
NA Indian	17	25	19	1: 0.76	+11.8
Metis	0	1	1	1: 1.00	+100.0
Inuit/Innu	6	12	10	1: 0.83	+66.7
Quebec					
NA Indian	34	41	44	1: 1.07	+29.4
Metis	10	16	14	1: 0.88	+40.0
Inuit/Innu	3	6	5	1: 0.83	+66.7
Ontario					
NA Indian	84	102	111	1: 1.09	+32.0
Metis	5	5	3	1: 0.60	-40.0
Inuit/Innu	1	1	1	1: 1.00	0.0
Prairie					
NA Indian	381	411	408	1: 0.99	+7.1
Metis	167	185	176	1: 0.95	+5.4
Inuit/Innu	38	34	35	1: 1.03	-7.9
Pacific					
NA Indian	119	121	133	1: 1.10	+11.8
Metis	42	45	39	1: 0.87	-7.1
Inuit/Innu	1	2	3	1: 1.50	+200.0
Total					
NA Indian	635	699	715	1: 1.02	+12.6
Metis	224	242	233	1: 0.92	+4.0
Inuit/Innu	49	55	54	1: 0.98	+10.2

Sentence length

The average sentence length (in 1998) for newly admitted Aboriginal offenders was about 3.6 years (lifers and revoked cases removed). When comparing this figure to the average sentence length of non-Aboriginal offenders admitted to federal custody, it was almost two months shorter (see Table 3).

As expected, the average sentence length in 1998 for Aboriginal offender and non-Aboriginal categories released under supervision was lower than for their counterparts at admission. It is also not surprising that the average sentence lengths of incarcerated Aboriginal offenders were found to be higher than for either the admission or conditional release populations.

Of special note, the average sentence length of Aboriginal offenders was found to be shorter than the length of non-Aboriginal offenders at admission and release, in institutions and on conditional release.

Table 3

Average sentence lengths (years) across Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal groupings				
Population	NA Indian	Metis	Inuit/ Innu	Non- Aboriginal
Admissions	3.57	3.24	3.92	3.72
Releases	3.94	4.11	4.12	4.41
Institutional	5.06	5.16	4.95	5.75
Conditional release	4.07	4.43	4.28	5.47

Major offence categories

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

We can see from Table 4 that NA Indian offenders (11.6%) in federal prison are over-represented by homicide (12.9%) and sex offenders (15.7%) and under-represented by robbery (9.8%) and drug (6.1%) offenders. A similar result was found for the conditional release population. In contrast, Metis offenders (4.2%) in institutions are under-represented by homicide (3.8%), sex (3.6%), robbery (4.0%) and drug (3.5%) offenders. Inuit/Innu offenders (1%) in federal prison and on conditional release are over-represented by sex offenders (3.4% respectively).

Table 4

Main offence categories across Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal groupings				
Population	NA Indian	Metis	Inuit/ Innu	Non- Aboriginal
Institutional	11.6%	4.2%	1.0%	83.2%
Homicide ^{ns}	12.9%	3.8%	0.7%	86.6%
Sex ^{***}	15.7%	3.6%	3.4%	77.3%
Robbery ^{***}	9.8%	4.0%	0.2%	86.1%
Drug ^{***}	6.1%	3.5%	0.2%	90.0%
Conditional Release	7.3%	2.5%	0.6%	89.6%
Homicide ^{***}	13.4%	2.6%	0.4%	83.6%
Sex ^{***}	13.2%	3.9%	3.4%	79.6%
Robbery ^{***}	6.7%	3.6%	0.2%	89.5%
Drug ^{ns}	4.7%	2.6%	0.2%	92.5%

*** = The difference is statistically significant $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$;
ns = non-significant.

Profiling Aboriginal male and female offenders

The Correctional Service of Canada's Offender Intake Assessment (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/variety of convictions and

previous exposure/response to youth and adult corrections) and factors relevant to identifying offender needs (such as employment history, family backgrounds, criminal associations, addictions, attitudes). While the results help determine institutional placement and correctional plans, a distribution of selected *criminal history* and *case need* variables can result in a comprehensive profile of the federal offender population.

In November 1994, the OIA process was implemented Service-wide. Four years later we extracted case-specific information on available OIAs contained in 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

As mentioned, the OIA process collects extensive information on each federal offender's criminal history record. In Table 5, we present comparative statistics on selected criminal history variables for Aboriginal male and female federal offenders across the selected Aboriginal groupings.

We found a highly significant difference across the Aboriginal groupings in relation to young offender (under 18) history. Metis offenders in federal prisons were more likely to have had previous offences, community supervision, open and secure custody as young offenders than their NA Indian and Inuit/Innu counterparts.

Needs at admission

Among male Aboriginal offenders at admission there appear to be statistically meaningful differences between NA Indian, Metis and Inuit/Innu offenders in relation to the marital/family and personal/emotional orientation need areas (see Table 6). For female offenders there were no statistically meaningful differences between the various Aboriginal groupings and need areas. In Table 6, we can see that Aboriginal offenders in each grouping are most needy in the areas of substance abuse and personal/emotional orientation.

Table 5

Criminal histories across Aboriginal groupings						
Variable	NA Indian		Metis		Innu/Innu	
	Male (1,471)	Female (71)	Male (501)	Female (22)	Male (145)	Female (3)
Young offender history						
Previous offences***/ns	57.9%	43.7%	61.6%	45.5%	43.2%	33.3%
Community supervision***/ns	46.4%	24.6%	49.9%	33.3%	34.0%	33.3%
Open custody***/ns	33.5%	19.1%	38.4%	23.8%	20.4%	0.0%
Secure custody***/ns	34.8%	16.2%	40.3%	9.5%	19.7%	0.0%
Adult offender history						
Previous offences ^{ns} /ns	89.9%	83.6%	88.6%	86.4%	68.7%	67.7%
Community supervision ^{ns} /ns	77.2%	68.1%	77.6%	63.6%	54.5%	33.3%
Provincial term(s) ^{ns} /ns	80.6%	65.3%	81.8%	63.6%	51.5%	0.0%
Federal term(s) ^{ns} /ns	27.7%	13.9%	31.9%	13.6%	30.6%	0.0%

Note: statistical significance male/female
 *** = The difference is statistically significant $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; ns = not significant.

Table 6

Identified needs at admission						
Variable	NA Indian		Metis		Innu/Innu	
	Male (1,389)	Female (43)	Male (488)	Female (11)	Male (121)	Female (1)
Employment ^{ns} /ns	76.6%	95.6%	75.4 %	84.6%	66.9%	n/a
Marital/family***/ns	62.8%	82.2%	54.3%	92.3%	76.9%	n/a
Associates ^{ns} /ns	65.9%	75.6%	69.5%	69.2%	62.0%	n/a
Substance abuse ^{ns} /ns	92.7%	95.6%	90.8%	100.0%	92.6%	n/a
Community functioning ^{ns} /ns	52.0%	62.2%	49.8%	61.5%	59.5%	n/a
Personal/emotional*/ns	95.7%	95.6%	93.0%	100.0%	98.4%	n/a
Attitude ^{ns} /ns	57.4%	33.3%	55.7%	30.8%	58.7%	n/a

Note: statistical significance 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. OMS currently contains the overall risk/need and identified need levels gathered since implementation of the *Community Risk/Needs Management Scale* (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 there is some variation across these need areas between Aboriginal groupings and gender specific offender categorizations (see Table 7).

Among male and female Aboriginal offenders there were no statistically meaningful differences between the various groupings and need areas. In Table 7, we also see that Aboriginal offenders on conditional release are most needy in the area of personal/emotional orientation.

Table 7

Identified needs on conditional release						
Variable	NA Indian		Metis		Innu/Innu	
	Male (592)	Female (33)	Male (203)	Female (12)	Male (49)	Female (3)
Employment ^{ns/ns}	48.7%	42.4%	47.8%	25.0%	34.7%	33.3%
Marital/family ^{ns/ns}	41.2%	50.0%	40.2%	58.3%	30.6%	33.3%
Associates ^{ns/ns}	39.7%	41.2%	39.9%	33.3%	28.6%	33.3%
Substance abuse ^{ns/ns}	34.8%	32.4%	34.5%	41.7%	26.5%	66.7%
Community functioning ^{ns/ns}	24.1%	29.4%	27.9%	25.0%	18.4%	33.3%
Personal/emotional ^{ns/ns}	60.1%	73.5%	56.7%	66.7%	42.9%	66.7%
Attitude ^{ns/ns}	14.7%	8.8%	17.2%	0.0%	14.3%	0.0%

Note: statistical significance male/female, ns = not significant.

Discussion

The Service's capacity to produce meaningful and accurate profiles of selected characteristics can be used to raise awareness about composition of the federal Aboriginal offender population. If it serves to yield anything, it tells us we are managing a more culturally diverse federal offender population than before.

In federal corrections, Aboriginal offenders are accumulating at an increased rate in institutions and on conditional release irrespective of having slightly

shorter sentences. As a group, Aboriginal offenders are likely to have been convicted of a serious offence, have had extensive involvement with the criminal justice system as a youth/adult and possess some unique criminogenic needs at admission and on conditional release. These findings suggest offering specialized programs and services to Aboriginal offenders. Hence, careful attention should be paid to these individuals during the reintegration process. ■

¹ 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P9.

² L.L. Motiuk and R. Belcourt, "Profiling federal offenders with violent offences" *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9, 2 (1997): 8-13.

³ L.L. Motiuk, "Classification for correctional programming: The Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process" *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9, 1 (1997): 18-22.

⁴ L.L. Motiuk, "The Community Risk/Needs Management Scale: An effective supervision tool" *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9, 1 (1997): 8-12.

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