

The long-term offender in federal corrections: A profile

by **Larry Motiuk and Mark Nafekh**¹
Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada

This article presents a comparison between life sentenced, indeterminate, and offenders serving sentences of 10 years or more 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 long-term offender groupings and shorter sentenced offenders on type of offence and amount of time served in custody.

Comprehensive information was obtained for profiling the federal long-term 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, 1999 review of the Correctional Service of Canada's OMS identified 6,040 (or 27%) long-term offenders under federal jurisdiction. More specifically, 3,728 (or 17%) were life sentenced offenders, 247 (or 1%) were indeterminate offenders and 2,065 (or 9%) were sentenced 10 years or more.

The Service's Ontario and Quebec regions account for the most long-term offenders, being responsible for almost two-thirds of the long-term offender population. There are more long-term offenders in the Quebec and Ontario regions relative to their proportion of all federal offenders.

Institutional population (stock)

The end-of-1999 review also determined that there were 3,805 (or 30.1%) long-term offenders in federal institutions. More specifically, 2,362 (or 18.7%) were life sentenced offenders, 238 (or 1.9%) were indeterminate offenders and 1,205 (or 9.5%) were sentenced 10 years or more. It is notable that in relation to the proportion of incarcerated offenders, there are more long-term offenders in the Quebec, Ontario and Pacific regions relative to all federal offenders.

Slightly more than one-third of federally incarcerated long-term offenders were held in maximum-security institutions, about one-quarter 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 2,235 (or 22.5%) long-term offenders on conditional release. More specifically, 1,366 (or 13.8%) were life sentenced offenders, 9 (or 0.1%) were indeterminate offenders and 860 (or 8.7%) were sentenced 10 years or more. Again, an examination of each region's proportion of offenders on conditional release revealed more long-term offenders in the Quebec, Ontario and Pacific regions relative to their proportion of all federal offenders.

Consistent with the general federal offender population, long-term offenders were not evenly distributed across three types of conditional release — day parole, full parole and statutory release. In contrast, about four-fifths of long-term offenders were on full parole, one-seventh on day parole and one-fifteenth on statutory release.

Long-term offender admissions (flow)

The absolute number of long-term offenders in federal institutions declined by 0.8% over the 1999 calendar year (see Table 1). The Atlantic, Quebec and Ontario regions experienced decreases in the absolute number of long-term offenders (-16, -26 and -4, respectively). The Prairie and Pacific regions showed increases in long-term offenders in federal custody (+8 and +3, respectively).

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

Long-term offender releases (flow)

The number of long-term offenders supervised under some form of conditional release increased by 6.6% over the 1999 calendar year (see Table 2). Note that we removed from the release figures any offender who was at the end of their sentence.

Regionally, Ontario has experienced the most growth in the absolute number of long-term offenders under community supervision, with an increase of 45 cases. However, an examination of the regional flow-to-stock ratios reveals that the Ontario

Table 1

**Regional Distribution of the Federal Long-Term Offender
Institutional Population and Admissions (1998–1999)**

Region	Institutional Population 1998 [stock]	Admissions 1999 [flow]	Institutional Population 1999 [stock]	Flow-to-stock Ratio	Growth
Atlantic					
Life sentenced	201	20	196	1:9.90	-2.5
Indeterminate	12	1	16	1:16.0	+33.0
10 years +	82	9	67	1:7.44	-18.3
	295	30	279	1:9.30	
Quebec					
Life sentenced	585	50	580	1:11.6	-0.9
Indeterminate	8	0	10	1:10.0	+25.0
10 years +	430	51	407	1:7.98	-5.3
	1,023	101	997	1:9.87	
Ontario					
Life sentenced	731	58	735	1:12.7	+0.5
Indeterminate	95	9	99	1:11.0	+4.0
10 years +	358	50	346	1:6.92	-3.4
	1,184	117	1,180	1:10.0	
Prairie					
Life sentenced	362	34	373	1:11.0	+3.0
Indeterminate	38	4	41	1:10.3	+7.9
10 years +	216	29	214	1:7.38	-0.9
	616	67	628	1:9.37	
Pacific					
Life sentenced	475	47	478	1:10.2	+0.6
Indeterminate	65	11	72	1:6.55	+10.8
10 years +	178	20	171	1:8.55	-3.9
	718	78	721	1:9.24	
Total					
Life sentenced	2,354	209	2,362	1:11.3	+0.3
Indeterminate	218	25	238	1:9.52	+9.2
10 years +	1,264	159	1,205	1:7.58	-4.7
	3,836	393	3,805	1:9.68	-0.8

region experienced the lowest retention in long-term offenders under community supervision during 1999 relative to the number of community supervision releases.

Major offence categories

To examine differences in four major offence categories (homicide, sex, robbery and drug) across the selected long-term and non-long-term groupings, we separated the end-of-December 1999 institutional (stock) and conditional release (stock) populations (see Table 3).

We can see from Table 3 that life sentenced offenders (18.6%) in federal custody are over-represented by homicide (74.3%) and under-represented by sex (7.6%) and drug (6.5%) offenders. A similar result was found for the conditional release population.

In contrast, indeterminate offenders (1.9%) in institutions are under-represented by homicide (0.4%) and over-represented by sex offenders (9.0%). Sentenced 10 years or more offenders in federal prison (9.5%) are over-represented by sex offenders (12.5%), robbery (14.0%) and drug offenders (10.7%).

Table 2

Regional Distribution of the Federal Long-Term Offender Conditional Release Population and Releases (1998–1999)					
Region	Cond. Rel. Population 1998 [stock]	Releases 1999 [flow]	Cond. Rel. Population 1999 [stock]	Flow-to-stock Ratio	Growth
Atlantic					
Life sentenced	78	16	84	1:5.25	+7.7
Indeterminate	1	0	0	0:0	-100.0
10 years +	32	18	40	1:2.22	+25.0
	111	34	124	1:3.65	
Quebec					
Life sentenced	383	98	402	1:4.10	+5.0
Indeterminate	0	0	0	0:0	0.0
10 years +	346	102	366	1:3.59	+5.8
	729	200	768	1:3.84	
Ontario					
Life sentenced	362	82	379	1:4.62	+4.7
Indeterminate	2	0	2	0:0	0.0
10 years +	200	58	228	1:3.93	+14.0
	564	140	609	1:4.35	
Prairie					
Life sentenced	199	38	206	1:5.42	+3.5
Indeterminate	1	0	1	0:1	0.0
10 years +	70	32	79	1:2.47	+12.9
	270	70	286	1:4.09	
Pacific					
Life sentenced	280	83	295	1:3.55	+5.4
Indeterminate	7	4	6	1:1.50	-14.3
10 years +	136	48	147	1:3.06	+8.1
	423	135	448	1:3.20	
Total					
Life sentenced	1,302	317	1,366	1:4.31	+4.9
Indeterminate	11	4	9	1:2.25	-18.2
10 years +	784	258	860	1:3.33	+9.7
	2,097	579	2,235	1:3.86	+6.6

Table 3

Major Offence Categories Across Longer-Term and Shorter-Term Groupings				
Population	Life sentenced	Indeterminate	Sentenced 10 years +	Shorter-term
Institutional	18.6%	1.9%	9.5%	70.0%
Homicide***	74.3%	0.4%	7.3%	18.1%
Sex***	7.6%	9.0%	12.5%	70.9%
Robbery***	9.7%	0.9%	14.0%	75.4%
Drug***	6.5%	0.4%	10.7%	82.4%
Conditional Release	13.8%	0.1%	8.7%	77.4%
Homicide***	71.9%	0.0%	7.0%	21.1%
Sex***	2.4%	0.6%	5.5%	91.5%
Robbery***	6.6%	0.0%	11.7%	81.7%
Drug***	2.8%	0.0%	10.8%	86.4%

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

Table 4

Average Time Served (Years) Across Long-Term and Non-Long-Term Offender Groupings				
Population	Life sentenced	Indeterminate	Sentenced 10 years +	Non-long-term
Institutional	9.01 (0.1 to 44)	7.06 (0.1 to 32)	5.11 (0.1 to 32)	1.48 (0.1 to 41)
Conditional release	21.4 (1.5 to 59)	23.8 (16.9 to 36)	9.80 (0.3 to 36)	3.30 (0.3 to 43)

Time served

The average time served (at the end of 1999) for long-term offenders in federal custody was about 8 years, ranging from 0.1 to 44 years (revoked cases removed). On conditional release, long-term offenders had accumulated, on average 17 years of time served, ranging from 0.3 to 59 years.

Not surprisingly, the average amount of time served of long-term offenders across the various groupings (see Table 4) was found to be substantially greater than shorter term offenders, in institutions and on conditional release.

Profiling long-term male and female offenders

The Correctional Service of Canada’s Offender 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 and 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, 1999. Note that these results are generalized to a recent admission population (within the last five 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 long-term male and female federal offenders across the selected long-term offender groupings.

We found significant differences across the long-term groupings for males in relation to young

Table 5

Variable	Criminal Histories Across Long-Term Offender Groupings					
	Life sentenced		Indeterminate		Sentenced 10 years or more	
	Male (738)	Female (44)	Male (103)	Female (0)	Male (241)	Female (18)
Young offender history						
Previous offences ***/ns	35.1%	20.5%	40.8%	—	35.5%	44.4%
Community supervision ***/ns	26.3%	14.3%	31.6%	—	26.4%	23.5%
Open custody ***/**	18.3%	11.9%	20.2%	—	19.0%	33.3%
Secure custody ***/ns	18.7%	11.6%	25.5%	—	21.5%	33.3%
Adult offender history						
Previous offences ns/ns	67.7%	52.3%	93.4%	—	71.8%	67.7%
Community supervision ns/**	53.3%	29.6%	87.6%	—	56.8%	38.9%
Provincial term(s) ns/*	50.1%	65.3%	83.0%	—	53.3%	27.8%
Federal term(s) ns/ns	22.6%	25.0%	63.2%	—	30.8%	27.8%

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

Table 6

Variable	Identified Needs at Admission					
	Life sentenced		Indeterminate		Sentenced 10 years or more	
	Male (2,553)	Female (69)	Male (237)	Female (0)	Male (1,613)	Female (23)
Employment ^{ns/ns}	65.3%	55.1%	62.5%	-	68.9%	56.5%
Marital/family ^{***/ns}	67.4%	62.3%	75.5%	-	54.2%	73.9%
Associates ^{ns/ns}	65.1%	52.2%	61.2%	-	74.0%	69.1%
Substance abuse ^{ns/ns}	72.9%	53.6%	74.7%	-	64.5%	56.5%
Community functioning ^{ns/ns}	62.8%	49.3%	74.3%	-	60.6%	69.6%
Personal/emotional ^{*/ns}	95.9%	89.9%	100.0%	-	86.3%	91.3%
Attitude ^{ns/ns}	66.4%	33.3%	82.3%	-	70.8%	43.5%

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

offender (under 18) history. Indeterminate offenders were more likely to have had previous offences, community supervision, open and secure custody as young offenders than their life sentenced and sentenced 10 years or more counterparts.

Needs at admission

Among male long-term offenders at admission there appear to be no statistically meaningful differences between life sentenced, indeterminate and sentenced 10 years or more offenders in relation to all of the seven need areas (see Table 6). Similarly, for female offenders, there were no statistically meaningful differences between the various long-term groupings in relation to the various need domains. In Table 6, we can see that long-term offenders in each grouping are most needy in the area of personal/emotional orientation.

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 or Reintegration Potential Reassessment). 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 long-term groupings and gender specific offender categorizations (see Table 7).

Table 7

Variable	Identified Needs on Conditional Release					
	Life sentenced		Indeterminate		Sentenced 10 years or more	
	Male (1,143)	Female (55)	Male (5)	Female (0)	Male (606)	Female (17)
Employment ^{****/****}	19.2%	9.1%	20.0%	-	28.7%	17.7%
Marital/family ^{****/****}	18.7%	20.0%	0.0%	-	21.0%	17.7%
Associates ^{****/****}	11.6%	18.2%	0.0%	-	26.5%	17.7%
Substance abuse ^{****/****}	14.4%	9.1%	20.0%	-	19.3%	23.5%
Community functioning ^{****/****}	17.0%	12.7%	0.0%	-	25.1%	11.8%
Personal/emotional ^{****/****}	33.4%	30.9%	20.0%	-	41.7%	35.3%
Attitude ^{ns/****}	7.0%	1.8%	0.0%	-	19.3%	5.9%

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

Among male and female long-term offenders there were statistically meaningful differences between the various groupings and most of the need areas. In Table 7, we also see that long-term offenders on conditional release are most needy in the area of personal/emotional orientation.

Discussion

Producing meaningful, timely and accurate profiles of selected offender characteristics can raise awareness about the composition of the federal long-term offender population. In Canada, long-term offenders are accumulating in institutions and on conditional release. As a group, long-term offenders are likely to have been convicted of a serious offence, have had extensive involvement with the criminal justice system as youth/adult and

possess some unique criminogenic needs at admission and on conditional release. Such findings point to offering specialized programs and services to long-term offenders. More importantly, careful attention should be paid to these individuals during the reintegration process. ■

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

² Motiuk, L.L. and R. Belcourt. "Profiling federal offenders with violent offences," *Forum on Corrections Research*, vol. 9, n° 2, 1997, p. 8-13.

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

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

Let's Talk

Let's Talk is a magazine published by the Communications and Consultation Sector of the Correctional Service of Canada.

Let's Talk welcomes letters to the editor, suggestions for articles and contributions from readers. Materials submitted may be edited for style and length. Please include your electronic mail address and a daytime telephone number. Address all correspondence to:

Let's Talk / Entre Nous
Correctional Service of Canada
340 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9
Telephone: (613) 995-5364
Fax: (613) 947-0091
Internet: <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca>