

# Profiling the drug offender population in Canadian federal corrections

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This article presents a comparison between drug offenders serving sentences in federal corrections for trafficking, importation, cultivation (including production) and/or possession offences 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 drug offender groupings and non-drug offenders on type of offence and amount of time served in custody.

Comprehensive information was obtained for profiling the federal drug offender population<sup>2</sup> through Correctional Service of Canada's Offender Management System (OMS), Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process,<sup>3</sup> and Community Intervention Scale (CIS).<sup>4</sup>

## National and regional distribution

A December 31, 2000 review of the Correctional Service of Canada's OMS, identified 5,779 (or 26%) drug offenders under federal jurisdiction. More specifically, 3,890 (or 18%) were serving sentences for drug trafficking, 621 (or 3%) for importation, 225 (or 1%) for cultivation, and 2,221 (or 10%) for possession of illicit drugs. Note that we included possession of narcotics (or other illicit substances) for the purpose of trafficking with drug trafficking.

The Service's Quebec and Ontario regions account for the most drug offenders, being responsible for almost one-third and one-quarter of the drug offender population. There are more drug offenders in the Quebec region relative to their proportion of all federal offenders.

## Institutional population (stock)

The end-of-2000 review also determined that there were 2,548 (or 21.3%) drug offenders in federal

institutions. More specifically, 1,613 (or 13.4%) were serving sentences for drug trafficking, 113 (or 0.9%) for importation, 82 (or 0.7%) for cultivation/manufacturing and 1,318 (or 11%) for possession of illicit drugs. Some offenders might be represented in more than one drug offence category.

Slightly more than one-quarter of federally incarcerated drug offenders were held in maximum-security institutions, about one-half 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 3,231 (or 32.3%) drug offenders on conditional release. Again, 2,312 (or 23.1%) were serving sentences for drug trafficking, 508 (or 5.1%) for importation, 145 (or 1.5%) for cultivation and 946 (or 9.5%) for possession of illicit drugs.

About three-fifths of drug offenders were on full parole, one-seventh on day parole and one-quarter on statutory release.

## Drug offender population trend

The drug offender population under federal supervision has continued to grow — particularly in the conditional release population. Over a recent five year period (31 December 1995 to 31 December 2000) the total drug offender population has increased by 8.8%, the drug offender population in institutions has decreased by nearly 2% and the drug offender population under community supervision has increased by 19% (see Table 1).

Table 1

National Distribution of Drug Offenders						
	As of 31 December 1995	As of 31 December 1996	As of 31 December 1997	As of 31 December 1998	As of 31 December 1999	As of 31 December 2000
Institutional	2,590	2,899	2,659	2,398	2,574	2,548
Community	2,720	2,716	2,856	3,039	3,186	3,231
Total	5,310	5,615	5,515	5,437	5,760	5,779

### Drug offender admissions (flow)

The absolute number of drug offenders in federal institutions declined very slightly by 0.1% over the 2000 calendar year (see Table 2). The Ontario and Pacific regions experienced decreases in the absolute number of drug offenders (-11.5% and -0.7%, respectively). The Atlantic, Quebec and Prairie regions showed increases in drug offenders in federal custody (+4%, +0.5% and +6.4%, respectively).

**Table 2**

**Regional Distribution of the Federal Drug Offender Institutional Population and Admissions (1999-2000)**

Region	Institutional Population 1999 [stock]	Admissions 2000 [flow]	Institutional Population 2000 [stock]	Flow-to-stock Ratio	Growth %
Atlantic	198	245	206	1:0.84	+4.0
Quebec	901	678	906	1:1.34	+0.5
Ontario	643	532	569	1:1.07	-11.5
Prairie	575	682	612	1:0.90	+6.4
Pacific	257	187	255	1:1.36	-0.7
Total	2,574	2,324	2,548	1:1.10	-0.1

When you compare regional “flow-to-stock ratios”, the Quebec and Pacific regions retained a greater number of drug offenders in federal custody relative to the other regions. The Atlantic region retained the least numbers of drug offenders relative to the other regions.

### Drug offender releases (flow)

The number of drug offenders supervised under some form of conditional release increased by 1.4% over the 2000 calendar year (see Table 3). Note that we removed from the release figures any offender who was at the end of their sentence.

Regionally, the Prairie region has experienced the most growth in the absolute number of drug offenders under community supervision, with an increase of 91 cases. However, an examination of the regional flow-to-stock ratios reveals that the Quebec region experienced the lowest retention in drug offenders under community supervision during 2000 relative to the number of community supervision releases.

### Time served

The average time served (at the end of 2000) for drug offenders in federal custody was about 2.2 years,

ranging from 0.03 to 30 years (revoked cases removed). On conditional release, drug offenders had accumulated, on average 3.7 years of time served, ranging from 0.03 to 30 years.

**Table 3**

**Regional Distribution of the Federal Drug Offender Conditional Release Population and Releases (1999-2000)**

Region	Conditional Release Population 1999 [stock]	Releases 2000 [flow]	Conditional Release Population 2000 [stock]	Flow-to-stock Ratio	Growth %
Atlantic	258	285	237	1:1.46	-8.1
Quebec	1,127	754	1,072	1:1.54	-4.9
Ontario	906	620	901	1:1.45	-0.6
Prairie	592	665	683	1:1.03	+15.4
Pacific	302	232	338	1:1.46	+11.9
Total	3,185	2,556	3,231	1:1.26	+1.4

Not surprisingly, the average amount of time served for drug offenders across the various groupings (see Table 4) was found to be substantially shorter than non-drug offenders (e.g., homicide, sex, robbery), in institutions and on conditional release.

**Table 4**

**Average Time Served (years) across Drug and Non-Drug Offender Groupings**

Population	Trafficking	Impor-tation	Culti-vation	Possession	Non-drug
<b>Institutional</b>	1.89 (.03-28)	1.48 (.03-7)	0.88 (.05-5.1)	2.52 (.04-31)	3.82 (.03-45)
<b>Conditional release</b>	3.5 (.04-30)	4.6 (0.1-29)	2.2 (0.1-13)	3.6 (.03-33)	6.84 (.03-60)

### Overlap with other major offence categories

To examine overlap with three major offence categories (homicide, sex, and robbery) across the four drug offender groupings, we separated the end-of-December 2000 institutional (stock) and conditional release (stock) populations (see Table 5).

We can see from Table 5 that drug offenders in federal custody who are serving sentences for trafficking and possession offences are also likely to be serving sentences for other offences, particularly robbery.

Table 5

Distribution of Overlap with Other Major Offence Categories				
Population/Offence	Trafficking	Importation	Cultivation	Possession
<b>Institutional/</b>	<b>13.4% (1,613)</b>	<b>0.9% (113)</b>	<b>0.7% (82)</b>	<b>11.0% (1,318)</b>
Homicide	8.6% (138)	0.9% (1)	2.4% (2)	10.3% (154)
Sex	6.5% (104)	0.9% (1)	3.7% (3)	8.8% (136)
Robbery	33.9% (546)	8.0% (9)	23.2% (19)	46.9% (704)
Drug:				
Trafficking	—	38.1% (43)	67.1% (55)	32.0% (422)
Importation	2.7% (43)	—	1.2% (1)	0.9% (12)
Cultivation	3.4% (55)	0.9% (1)	—	1.7% (22)
Possession	26.2% (422)	10.6% (12)	26.8% (22)	—
<b>Conditional Release/</b>	<b>23.1% (2,312)</b>	<b>5.1% (508)</b>	<b>1.5% (145)</b>	<b>9.5% (946)</b>
Homicide	3.0% (70)	0.0% (0)	4.8% (7)	7.2% (68)
Sex	2.0% (46)	0.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	4.1% (39)
Robbery	13.7% (316)	2.2% (11)	17.2% (25)	39.6% (375)
Drug:				
Trafficking	—	23.6% (120)	73.8% (107)	44.0% (416)
Importation	5.2% (120)	—	3.5% (5)	1.4% (13)
Cultivation	4.6% (107)	1.0% (5)	—	3.7% (35)
Possession	18.0% (416)	2.6% (13)	24.1% (35)	—

### Profiling men and women drug 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, 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. Six years later we extracted case-specific information on available OIAs contained in OMS. To facilitate comparative analyses we focused on men and women offenders who had full OIAs and were under federal supervision on December 31, 2000. Note that these results are generalized to a recent admission population (within the last six years).

### Profiling criminal history

As mentioned, the OIA process collects extensive information on each federal offender's criminal history record at time of admission to federal custody. In Table 6, we present comparative statistics on selected criminal history variables for federally sentenced men and women offenders across four drug offender groupings.

With respect to drug trafficking offenders there are statistically meaningful differences between men and women offenders in each of the selected young and adult offender history variables. As a group, men offenders serving sentences for drug trafficking possess more extensive criminal history backgrounds than their women counterparts. Among drug importation offenders there are statistically meaningful differences between men and women offenders at admission in young offender histories, however, men offenders are more likely than women offenders to have an adult offender history.

While there were negligible women offenders for whom a drug cultivation/manufacturing offence was recorded, the majority of men in this category

Table 6

Criminal Histories across Drug Offender Groupings								
Variable	Trafficking		Importation		Cultivation		Possession	
	Men (2,873)	Women (198)	Men (336)	Women (109)	Men (202)	Women (1)	Men (1,597)	Women (41)
<b>Young offender history</b>								
Previous offences	34.5%	22.2%***	12.5%	6.4% <sup>ns</sup>	31.7%	—	52.5%	34.2% <sup>ns</sup>
Community supervision	24.5%	13.8%***	7.5%	4.6% <sup>ns</sup>	20.4%	—	38.4%	19.5%*
Open custody	17.2%	7.6%***	3.0%	1.8% <sup>ns</sup>	16.4%	—	28.6%	9.8%**
Secure custody	18.4%	7.6%***	5.1%	0.9% <sup>ns</sup>	18.3%	—	32.7%	17.1%*
<b>Adult offender history</b>								
Previous offences	82.2%	67.2%***	53.4%	31.2%***	90.2%	—	94.1%	90.2% <sup>ns</sup>
Community supervision	66.8%	48.3%***	35.5%	19.3%**	77.8%	—	84.5%	68.3%**
Provincial term(s)	64.3%	46.0%***	27.3%	11.9%**	71.4%	—	85.5%	70.7%**
Federal term(s)	31.6%	6.7%***	13.7%	0.9%***	28.6%	—	53.6%	22.0%***

*Note: n's may vary slightly due to missing cases, statistical significance men/women.  
 \*\*\* = The difference is statistically significant p<0.001; \*\* p<0.01; \* p<0.05; ns = not significant.*

had extensive previous adult criminal histories. Although men and women drug offenders serving sentences for drug possession were found have had previous young offender histories, particularly men, both had extensive previous adult criminal histories.

**Identified needs at admission**

Earlier, we noted that the Service has an automated means of collecting offender criminogenic needs levels organized in seven need domains at time of admission to federal custody (see Table 7). OMS currently contains the identified need levels gathered since implementation of the OIA *Case Needs Identification and Analysis* (now known as the Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis). This information can be retrieved at any time to provide caseload snapshots.

Among drug trafficking offenders there are statistically meaningful differences between men and women offenders at admission in every need area. Similarly, among drug importation offenders there are statistically meaningful differences between men and women offenders at admission in every need area except personal/emotional orientation (see Table 7). Men drug trafficking and importation are more likely than women counterparts to be problematic in the area of associates whereas women offenders are more likely to be needy in the areas of employment and marital/family relations. While there was no woman offender for whom a drug cultivation/manufacturing offence was recorded,

men offenders in this category were most needy in the area of associates. Although men and women drug offenders serving sentences for drug possession were found to be needy in most need areas, women offenders were more likely to have been experiencing difficulties in the areas of employment and marital/family relations at time of admission to federal custody.

**Identified 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.

Anational 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 drug offender groupings and gender specific offender categorizations (see Table 8).

Among the various drug offender groupings there were very few statistically meaningful gender differences while on conditional release for most of the need areas. Women offenders serving sentences for drug trafficking and importation were more likely

Table 7

Identified Needs of Drug Offenders at Admission								
Variable	Trafficking		Importation		Cultivation		Possession	
	Men (3,423)	Women (203)	Men (419)	Women (112)	Men (215)	Women (1)	Men (2,109)	Women (44)
Employment	54.9%	74.4%***	49.9%	67.0%**	39.5%	—	63.0%	72.7% <sup>ns</sup>
Marital/family	29.9%	63.1%***	17.4%	34.8%***	24.7%	—	40.9%	63.6%**
Associates	75.3%	70.4%*	69.5%	56.3%**	70.7%	—	77.8%	79.6% <sup>ns</sup>
Substance abuse	61.5%	68.0%*	33.4%	13.4%***	59.5%	—	81.8%	81.8% <sup>ns</sup>
Community functioning	33.5%	43.8%**	32.9%	44.6%*	25.6%	—	46.9%	43.3% <sup>ns</sup>
Personal/emotional	71.7%	83.3%***	56.6%	60.7% <sup>ns</sup>	63.6%	—	85.8%	81.8% <sup>ns</sup>
Attitude	56.3%	25.6%***	51.3%	16.1%***	62.3%	—	62.4%	40.9%**

Note: statistical significance men/women.  
 \*\*\* = The difference is statistically significant  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; ns = not significant.

than men offenders to be experiencing problems in the area of marital/family relations. In Table 8, we also see that drug trafficking offenders on conditional release are most needy in the area of associates and personal/emotional orientation. Among drug importation offenders, the major areas of difficulty were in employment and associates. Interestingly, there were no women offenders on conditional release who had been sentenced for drug cultivation/manufacturing. Finally, both men and women offenders serving sentences for drug possession were found to be needy in most areas while on conditional release.

## Discussion

The capacity to produce meaningful, timely and accurate profiles of selected offender characteristics can raise awareness about the composition of the federal drug offender population. In Canada, drug offenders under federal supervision are accumulating.

As a group, drug offenders are likely to have been convicted of another serious offence (such as robbery), have had previous involvement with the criminal justice system as youth and/or adult, have some unique criminogenic needs (e.g., negative peer attachments). These findings point to offering specialized programs and services to drug offenders. As well, careful attention should be paid to these individuals while in custody and during the reintegration process. ■

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- 3 Motiuk, L. L. (1997). Classification for correctional programming: The Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process. *Forum on Corrections Research*, 9(1), 18-22.
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Table 8

Identified Needs of Drug Offenders on Conditional Release								
Variable	Trafficking		Importation		Cultivation		Possession	
	Men (1,405)	Women (73)	Men (187)	Women (35)	Men (93)	Women (0)	Men (750)	Women (14)
Employment	40.1%	42.5% <sup>ns</sup>	33.2%	48.6% <sup>ns</sup>	31.2%	—	54.5%	42.9% <sup>ns</sup>
Marital/family	22.9%	42.5%***	12.8%	25.7%*	21.5%	—	36.3%	50.0% <sup>ns</sup>
Associates	46.2%	52.1% <sup>ns</sup>	34.8%	37.1% <sup>ns</sup>	49.5%	—	56.1%	57.1% <sup>ns</sup>
Substance abuse	37.1%	48.0% <sup>ns</sup>	21.1%	8.6% <sup>ns</sup>	36.6%	—	62.9%	64.3% <sup>ns</sup>
Community functioning	27.0%	30.1% <sup>ns</sup>	26.5%	31.4% <sup>ns</sup>	21.5%	—	41.3%	28.6% <sup>ns</sup>
Personal/emotional	47.7%	46.6% <sup>ns</sup>	29.6%	20.0% <sup>ns</sup>	43.0%	—	68.3%	64.3% <sup>ns</sup>
Attitude	29.6%	21.9% <sup>ns</sup>	15.5%	5.7% <sup>ns</sup>	33.0%	—	37.9%	35.7% <sup>ns</sup>

Note: statistical significance men/women.  
 \*\*\* = The difference is statistically significant  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; ns = not significant.