



Research at a glance

Self-Injury Incidents in CSC Institutions over a Thirty-Month Period

KEY WORDS: *self-injurious behaviour, self-harm, offender mental health, offender suicide.*

Why we did this study

Issues around offenders who self-harm are of growing concern within CSC. There is a need to understand better the incidence and nature of these events to better inform prevention and intervention strategies.

What we did

This study examined all 1230 self-harm incidents that occurred in CSC institutions over a 30-month period. Data were extracted from the Offender Management System and situation reports. Analysis focused on the nature of the incident (e.g., method of self-harm, degree of injury) and, where possible, the self-harming offender (e.g., gender, race, frequency of self-harm).

What we found

The number of self-harm incidents reported increased between April 2006 and September 2008. The majority of such incidents occurred in one of the five treatment centres or in maximum-security institutions.

Women offenders were more likely than men to engage in self-harm, and to do so more than once. The number of self-injury incidents among Aboriginal offenders was greater than would be expected based on their institutional population. While male offenders tended to self-harm by slashing or overdosing, women offenders used ligatures or head-banging significantly more often.

Two thirds of incidents were committed by offenders who self-harmed only once during the study period. Conversely, a small proportion of women (11%) accounted for 52% of women's incidents. Similarly, a small group of men (5%) accounted for a substantial proportion (27%) of the incidents in men's institutions.

While ninety percent of all incidents resulted in no or minor injury to the offender, 26 incidents resulted in death. However, a large majority of offenders who

died (77%) had no previous incidents of self-harm suggesting that the deaths were not likely an extension of self-harm attempts.

What it means

The present results confirm that based on CSC reporting sources the frequency of incidents of self-harm appears to be increasing across CSC. The results show that a fairly small group of offenders (both male and female) are responsible for a disproportionate number of self-injurious incidents and that identifying and intervening with these offenders should continue to be a priority. Moreover, the data suggest that self-harm should be studied as a phenomenon on its own rather than representing a subset of suicidal behaviours. Future research should focus on the characteristics of the self-harming offender, particularly those variables that would inform interventions with repetitive self-harmers.

For more information

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