



Research in Brief

Lifetime Substance Use Patterns of Men Offenders

Substance use continues to be an identified treatment need area for the majority of newly-admitted men offenders.

Why we did this study

Previous research indicated that between 70% and 80% of men offenders had a substance abuse problem.¹ An updated profile of this population may provide direction on intervention needs and offender case management regarding substance abuse.

What we did

The Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (CASA) assesses the severity and scope of substance use issues of men offenders at admission to federal custody. In total, 3,388 men (19% Aboriginal) completed the CASA between April 1, 2013 and March 31, 2014.²

What we found

- Almost 70% of men offenders who completed the CASA had an assessed substance abuse issue, with 37% identified as having a moderate to severe problem.
- Three-quarters of men used both drugs and alcohol during their lifetime.
- On average, men were 15 years of age when they first tried alcohol, and 16 for drugs.
- Marijuana was used most (50%) in the 12 months prior to arrest, followed by cocaine/crack (22%) and opioids, including heroin (14%).
- Almost two-thirds of men (63%) reported polydrug use – that is, using different drugs on the same day – in the 12 months prior to their arrest. During the same time period, polysubstance use (using alcohol and drugs on the same day) was reported by 61%.

¹ Weekes, J., Moser, A., Ternes, M., & Kunic, D. (2009). *Substance abuse among male offenders* (RS 09-02). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

² Offender assessed by the CASA account for 70% of all federal men offenders admitted to custody in FY2013-14. Reasons for non-assessment may include: lack of referral by case management staff, offenders appealing their sentence/conviction, or offenders refusing to complete the assessment.

- Overall, 21% of drug users indicated a history of injection drug use. Among these offenders, 39% reported sharing needles and 52% worried about blood-borne disease transmission due to their use.
- Over twice as many men indicated using drugs while previously incarcerated compared to using alcohol (26% versus 10%).
- Of those who reported injecting drugs while previously incarcerated (11%), 66% shared needles with others.
- Just under half (42%) of offenders had previously participated in a substance abuse treatment program.

What it means

Almost 70% of assessed federally sentenced men have a substance use issue. Although the prevalence of substance use issues has decreased slightly since the last profile, the nature and scope of offenders' use, particularly the high rates of polysubstance use and injection drug use, support the need for interventions in this area. The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) offers programs of different intensities for a variety of treatment needs. These programs, as well as maintenance programs which offer ongoing support for those who have already completed a mainstream program, continue to address offender needs such as substance abuse.

For more information

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