

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Characteristics of Men Offenders who Self-Reported Veteran Status

Veteran offenders represent 2.5% of the federal offender population, but require more mental health supports than non-veterans.

Why we did this study

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has a partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) to support veterans involved with the federal correctional system. Previous research indicates that veterans are older than non-veterans and have unique needs with respect to personal/emotional issues and antisocial attitudes, with a third having a history of sexual offending.¹ This study was undertaken to update our knowledge of the characteristics of federal veteran offenders.

What we did

Offenders assessed by the CSC's Computerized Mental Health Intake Screening System (CoMHISS) between August 2014 and March 2018 were included in this study. Men offenders who self-reported former service in the Canadian Forces were identified as veterans ($N = 374$) while all other men offenders were categorized as non-veterans ($N = 14,471$).^{2,3} Additional information from CSC's Offender Management System (OMS) was extracted.

What we found

Overall, 2.5% of men offenders self-reported veteran status. On average, veterans were older at CoMHISS assessment than non-veterans (44 versus 37 years, respectively), with a third of veterans aged 50 or older. A third of both groups reported being married/common law.

Veterans and non-veterans were serving sentences of, on average, three and a half years. Although their sentence duration was comparable, veterans were more likely to have been sentenced for a violent offence (61% versus 56%, respectively) and were almost twice as likely as non-veterans to have committed a sex offence (31% versus 17%, respectively). Thirty percent of veterans were identified with deviant sexual preferences compared to 15% of non-veterans.

Veteran offenders were assessed as lower risk than non-veterans using the Criminal Risk Index (CRI; 62% versus 44% as low or low-moderate). Veteran offenders also had a higher reintegration potential. Although they were less likely than non-veterans to have high criminogenic needs,

their three main need areas were personal/emotional orientation, attitudes, and substance abuse. One-quarter had a moderate to severe substance use issue; 6% had alcohol and 22% had drug issues. Veterans were less likely to have a link between their substance use and criminal offending (38% versus 49% for non-veterans).

With respect to mental health indicators, 35% of veterans reported a past diagnosis of depression compared to 26% of non-veterans. Over one-quarter (28%) reported having a current diagnosis for a mental illness (22% for non-veterans) and veterans were more likely to report previously mental health treatment (36% compared to 29% for non-veterans). They had higher depression, anxiety, and general distress scores than non-veterans, and were more likely to be assessed as requiring mental health follow-up at admission. Twenty-two percent of veterans were screened for additional ADHD assessment.

What it means

Offenders who self-report service in the Canadian Forces represent a small proportion of the federal offender population. Veterans are older at admission to custody, and with one-third being older offenders, may require physical health supports during incarceration. Veterans are more likely than their counterparts to have committed a sexual offence and would require institutional and community supports to address their sex offending history, although they are generally considered lower risk than non-veterans. Veterans require more mental health supports than non-veterans, as they are more likely to have past or current mental health concerns. Overall, this profile of veteran offenders confirms previous information known about incarcerated veterans within CSC.

For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

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¹ Derkzen, D. & Wardrop, K. (2015). *A profile of veterans within the Correctional Service of Canada* (RIB 15-09). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

² Only 11 women reported veteran status, therefore women were excluded from this study.

³ Offenders assessed using CoMHISS represented 83% of all federal offenders admitted to CSC on a warrant of committal during the study period.

