

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Indigenous Men Offenders who Self-Reported Veteran Status

Indigenous veterans have more mental health needs than offenders in the other study groups.

Why we did this study

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) in partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) supports veterans involved with the federal correctional system. Current research indicates that veteran offenders have a unique profile compared to non-veterans.¹ This study was conducted to examine the profile of Indigenous veterans.

What we did

Indigenous offenders assessed using the Computerized Mental Health Intake Screening System (CoMHISS) between August 2014 and March 2018 were included in this study. Indigenous men who self-reported former service in the Canadian Forces were identified as veterans ($N = 66$) while all other Indigenous men were categorized as non-veterans ($N = 3,424$)^{2,3}. Indigenous veterans were also compared to non-Indigenous men veterans ($N = 308$) and non-veterans ($N = 11,047$).⁴ Additional data were extracted from CSC's Offender Management System.

What we found

Overall, 1.9% of Indigenous men offenders self-reported veteran status. Indigenous veterans were older than Indigenous non-veteran offenders at CoMHISS assessment (38 versus 33 years). However, Indigenous veterans were younger than non-Indigenous veterans (46) but were similar in age to non-Indigenous non-veterans (37). Indigenous veterans were more likely to be married/common law than those in the other study groups.

Although sentence duration was comparable across all groups, Indigenous veterans were more likely to have committed a violent offence (76% versus 52% to 69% for the other study groups). They were most likely to commit sex-related (23%), robbery (17%), or assault (14%) offences.

Static risk and dynamic need information indicates that Indigenous veterans have more difficulties than non-Indigenous veterans and non-veterans but are similar to Indigenous non-veterans. Indigenous veterans have lower Criminal Risk Index scores than Indigenous non-veterans (29% versus 45% high risk) and lower substance use

needs (35% versus 48% with a moderate to severe issue). Indigenous veterans are less likely than Indigenous non-veterans to have a link between their substance use and criminal offending (60% versus 71%), but almost twice as likely to have this link compared to the other two study groups (34% and 41%). Indigenous veterans have lower reintegration potential than the non-Indigenous groups but are comparable to Indigenous non-veterans.

CoMHISS indicators demonstrate that Indigenous veterans have more mental health needs than the other study groups. Over forty percent of Indigenous veterans reported a past diagnosis of depression compared to 25% to 33% of the other groups. Indigenous veterans had higher rates of current diagnosis for a mental illness (33% versus 21% to 26%), previous treatment for an emotional or mental health issue (30% versus 16% to 23%), and higher depression, anxiety, and general distress scores. They were also more likely to be assessed as requiring additional mental health screening at admission than the other three groups (66% versus 46% to 55%).

What it means

Indigenous men offenders who self-report service in the Canadian Forces represent 18% of all men veterans in federal custody during the study period. Indigenous veterans have a unique profile compared to other study groups. They have higher risk and need profiles and higher mental health needs than non-Indigenous groups. In comparison to Indigenous non-veterans, they have comparable risk and need profiles, but are assessed with lower risk for recidivism, correctional program needs, and substance use issues.

For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#).

You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

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¹ Farrell MacDonald, S. & Cram, S. (2020). *Characteristics of offenders who self-report veteran status* (RIB 20-01). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

² Indigenous men offenders assessed using CoMHISS represented 81% of all federal Indigenous offenders admitted to CSC during the study period.

³ Four Indigenous women self-reported veteran status.

⁴ Other ethnocultural groups accounted for 14% ($N = 54$) of veterans, however, the largest specific group had 12 offenders. Therefore, analyses across other ethnocultural groups were not undertaken.

