



# Research at a glance

## Aboriginal Women: An Overview of the Correctional Process from Admission to Warrant Expiry

**KEY WORDS:** *social history, Aboriginal women, First Nations women, Métis women*

### What it means

Our study was the first to comprehensively examine differences between First Nations and Métis women. Differences in offending patterns, criminogenic need, and other areas suggest that further consideration of diversity *among* Aboriginal women – in addition to that between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women – may improve the effectiveness of interventions and correctional management.

The differences found between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women aligned with previous research findings. Consistent with these patterns, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has provided Aboriginal-specific interventions for several years. CSC has implemented the Aboriginal continuum of care, which includes, for example, culturally-informed programs, Pathways units, and Healing Lodges – all of which were found to have been utilized by a large proportion of women in this study. While participation in some of these initiatives has been linked with positive outcomes for Aboriginal offenders, it has been argued that to see larger improvements, interventions could also be implemented prior to women's involvement in the criminal justice system in order to reduce disparities between the two groups of women at the time of admission.

### What we found

In general, Aboriginal women's social histories as assessed at intake demonstrated that many had challenging lives prior to their current incarceration, including difficult upbringings, traumatic experiences, and substance abuse issues. More positively, however, many were connected with their Aboriginal community, culture, and spirituality.

First Nations and Métis women differed in terms of their social histories, offences, assessed risk, institutional adjustment, release types, and post-release outcomes, with, for example, First Nations women having higher security classification and poorer post-release outcomes. In contrast with this pattern, First Nations women more frequently took advantage of opportunities, such as visits, completing correctional programming, and employment during their incarceration.

Although comparisons of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women were not the study's primary focus, it was noted that relative to their non-Aboriginal counterparts, Aboriginal women were more likely to be convicted of violent offences, to be assessed as higher risk, to break institutional rules, and to be placed in segregation. They were also less frequently granted a discretionary release, and more frequently returned to custody after release.

### Why we did this study

Aboriginal women have been identified as the fastest growing offender population. Although much is known about the differences between Aboriginal offenders and non-Aboriginal offenders, less is known about differences *among* Aboriginal women offenders of different ancestries. Therefore, this study aimed to describe and contrast First Nations and Métis women.

### What we did

A comprehensive examination was conducted of the correctional experiences of 626 women newly admitted to CSC between April 1, 2008 and March 31, 2010. Of these women, 124 identified as being of First Nations ancestry and 46 of Métis ancestry (given their small number, the 4 women of Inuit ancestry could not be examined as a separate group). CSC's administrative data was used to assess Aboriginal social history and women's experiences in the correctional process.

### For more information

Thompson, J. & R. Gobeil. (2015). *Aboriginal women: An overview of the correctional process from admission to warrant expiry* (Research Report R-342). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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