



Emerging Research Results

Rates of current mental disorders among women offenders in custody in CSC

Rates of mental disorder among women offenders are very high; many of these women will require mental health services

Why we did this study

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) requires information on the prevalence of major mental health disorders among federal offenders to plan for appropriate services. The research literature has reported higher rates of mental disorder in offender populations than community samples and there is evidence to suggest that the rates of mental disorder among women offenders may be particularly high.

What we did

The study determined the prevalence rates of major mental disorders among women currently in custody in CSC facilities. Using the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM Axis I and Axis II Disorders (SCID-I and SCID-II) the following disorders were assessed: 1) mood; 2) psychotic; 3) substance use; 4) anxiety; 5) eating; 6) pathological gambling; 7) Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD); and 8) Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). Rates were obtained for both lifetime and current prevalence (i.e., the past month). Women in custody were approached to participate in the diagnostic interview from February 2016 to October 2016. In total, 154 women from across the five regions provided consent and were included in the study.

What we found

Almost 80% of women meet criteria for some current mental disorder. When APD and alcohol and substance use disorders are not considered rates remain very high at 67%. In terms of specific disorders, the highest prevalence rates were for alcohol and substance use disorders (lifetime) and for current anxiety disorders. Within anxiety disorders, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) had the highest prevalence rate, with nearly a third of women (33%) assessed as meeting the criteria. In addition, almost half the women meet criteria for APD (see Table). Co-morbid diagnoses were common; half of the women in custody have a mental disorder in combination with APD. Many of the women with a disorder are functioning quite well, with 67% rated as having no impairment to minimal or moderate impairment in functioning based on the Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) scale.

Prevalence Rates for Current Diagnosis of Major Mental Disorders among Incarcerated Women (N=154)

Disorder	%
Any disorder	79.2
Mood disorders	22.1
Psychotic disorders	4.6
Alcohol/substance use disorders ^a	76.0
Anxiety disorders	54.2
Eating disorders	11.0
Pathological gambling	†
Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD; lifetime only)	33.3
Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD; lifetime only)	49.4

Note. Percentages may not add to 100% as participants could meet the diagnostic criteria for more than one category.
^a Diagnosis of substance abuse disorders relies on lifetime estimates.
† Numbers suppressed due to frequency < 5.

What it means

Women in custody have very high rates of mental disorder including high lifetime rates of alcohol and substance use disorders and APD. Omitting these disorders, two-thirds of federally sentenced women still meet the criteria for a current diagnosis and, among these, GAF scores indicate 38% are suffering serious impairment because of their diagnosis. Results suggest that many women in CSC require interventions to address their mental health problems. Findings from the study will inform management strategies for mental health services offered by CSC.

For more information

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

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