



Research in Brief

Regional Comparisons of Men and Women Offenders' Substance Use

Regional comparisons underscore important differences in offender substance use behaviours.

Why we did this study

Regional variations among Canadians' substance use patterns impact on related social and health resources. As well, the prevalence of infectious diseases, such as Hepatitis C, among offenders varies by region.¹ Understanding the regional substance use patterns of offenders may assist with the management of both substance use issues and related health issues.

What we did

Federal offender's substance use issues are assessed using the Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (CASA) or the Women's Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (W-CASA) upon admission. In total, 962 women (29% Aboriginal) were assessed between February 2010 and February 2014 and 3,388 men (19% Aboriginal) were assessed between April 2013 and March 2014.² Regional patterns were compared. Results that differ for men and women are presented separately.

What we found

- The proportion of offenders with an identified substance use issue was highest in the Prairie region (91% for men and women), and lowest in Ontario region (58% for men; 59% for women).
- Almost half of women in the Atlantic region and over a third of men in the Atlantic and Pacific regions had a moderate to severe drug only problem. Moderate to severe alcohol only problems were less common, but were most prevalent in the Prairie and Pacific regions for both men and women.
- Across regions, marijuana, crack/cocaine, and opioids were the most frequently used among

those who used drugs in the 12 months prior to arrest. Men in the Atlantic region were more likely to use opioids while men in the Québec and Prairie regions were more likely to use cocaine/crack. Women were most likely to use cocaine/crack in all regions except Ontario, where opioids were used most often.

- Histories of injection drug use were most common in the Atlantic region (34% for men and 44% for women) and lowest in Québec (17% for men and 21% for women). Among those with an injection drug use history, more offenders in Québec indicated that they shared needles. Men in Ontario and women in Québec were most worried about disease transmission due to their injection drug use.
- Using alcohol and drugs in the same day was reported most often in the Prairie region (66% for men and 45% for women) while using multiple types of drugs in the same day was reported most often in the Atlantic region (70% for men and 47% for women).

What it means

Regional comparisons of men and women offenders' substance use revealed differences in the prevalence and nature of substances use. Considering the regional variation in substance use patterns may assist the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) in appropriately targeting public health interventions and identifying community supports to meet the various needs of these offenders upon release. As well, knowledge of regional differences in substance use patterns may be helpful in the allocation of resources to initiatives (e.g., Opioid Substitution Therapy).

For more information

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

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¹ Health Services. (2015). *Public health quarterly report Q1 and Q2 – FY2014-2015*. Ottawa, ON: CSC.

² 90% of all federal women and 70% of all federal men admitted to custody were assessed. Representation was similar across regions for women, but varied for men with the Atlantic region, in particular, being under-represented. As a result, analyses were replicated for earlier time periods where representation across all regions was comparable, and regional patterns were largely consistent across time. This verification supports the validity of the current results.