



Research in Brief

Comparing Substance Use Patterns of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Women Offenders

KEY WORDS: *Women’s Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (W-CASA), women offenders, Aboriginal, severity of substance use, injection drug use, poly-substance use, lifetime substance use*

What it means

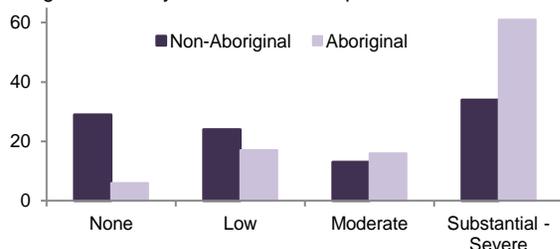
Women’s Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (W-CASA) data demonstrate that Aboriginal women have greater substance use issues than non-Aboriginal women with respect to severity, poly-substance use, and injection drug use. Other research has shown that Aboriginal women also report higher rates of HIV/HCV infection¹, which in addition to their injection drug use, highlights the need for public health interventions.

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) ensures that Aboriginal women have access to targeted treatment interventions that address their criminogenic needs, including substance abuse – in particular, the multi-target Aboriginal Women Offender Correctional Program. CSC also has a comprehensive and holistic Aboriginal Health Strategy that, together with the public health policy, ensures health promotion and disease prevention for substance users and non-substance users alike.

What we found

- On average, Aboriginal women were younger than non-Aboriginal women when they first tried alcohol (13 years vs. 16 years) and drugs (14 years vs. 16 years).
- A greater proportion of Aboriginal women than non-Aboriginal women had an identified substance use issue (94% vs. 71%). In particular, Aboriginal women were more likely to have a moderate or substantial to severe substance use issue (see Figure).

Figure. Severity of substance use problem



- Fewer non-Aboriginal women reported a lifetime use of both alcohol and drugs (59% vs. 85%).

- Fifty-three percent of Aboriginal women reported combining alcohol and drugs on the same day, compared to 26% of non-Aboriginal women. Patterns of use of more than one type of drug on the same day were similar (51% vs. 29%).
- Almost half (47%) of Aboriginal women indicated a history of injection drug use, compared to 24% of non-Aboriginal women. Among these women, fewer Aboriginal women shared needles (47% vs. 57%).

Why we did this study

Aboriginal offenders, especially women, are disproportionately represented among federal offenders and are identified as having higher levels of need, particularly in the area of substance use. That said, little is known about differences in the scope and nature of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women offenders’ substance use.

What we did

The W-CASA assesses substance use issues of women offenders upon admission to federal custody. In total, 279 Aboriginal and 683 non-Aboriginal women completed the W-CASA between February 2010 and February 2014.²

For more information

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

You can also visit the website for a full list of research publications.

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¹ Zakaria, D., Thompson, J.M., Jarvis, A., & Smith, J. (2010). *Testing and treatment for Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Hepatitis C Virus infections among Canadian federal inmates* (Research Report, R-223). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

² The W-CASA was piloted in 2010 and nationally implemented in 2011. Overall 90% of federal women offenders admitted to custody after national implementation completed the W-CASA.