



Research in Brief

Risk and Need among Young Adult Offenders

KEY WORDS: *Young adults, younger offenders, profile, risk, need*

What it means

The principles underlying correctional intervention – know as Risk, Need, and Responsivity – have been well established for both juvenile and adult offenders, as has evidence for the relationship between established risk factors and criminal behaviour. It is therefore not surprising that, in a sample of offenders aged 18 to 30 in custody in a Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) institution, age was unrelated to most indicators of risk and need.

The few noted differences were in keeping with normal life course development – with, for instance, younger offenders more frequently having employment and education needs, likely due in large part to their more limited time (if any) as part of a workforce. Higher needs relating to associates and lower needs in the marital / family domain are also consistent with common priorities among younger individuals, with peers typically being quite important. Overall, differences associated with age are not unique to the offender population but rather reflect typical young adult development.

What we found

Younger offenders were more likely than their older counterparts to be Aboriginal, which aligns with Canadian population norms. They were also more likely to be serving short sentences and slightly more likely to have been convicted of a violent offence, with robbery and assault most common.

Age was not found to be associated with security classification, static risk, reintegration potential, motivation, accountability, or engagement. While offenders in the three age categories also did not differ in terms of overall dynamic need, there were differences specific need domains (see Table). Greater percentages of offenders in the younger categories were identified as having moderate or high levels of need relating to employment and education, and, to a lesser extent, associates. Conversely, marital and family needs tended to be less common among the younger offenders.

Need Domains by Age Category

Need Domain	Age Category (%)		
	18-21	22-25	26-30
Employment / education	80	73	65
Marital / family	25	30	34
Associates	82	80	76
Attitudes	79	78	77
Substance abuse	67	65	65
Community functioning	31	31	30
Personal / emotional	81	77	78

Further examinations were conducted to better understand the differences found in the employment and education domain. Not surprisingly, younger offenders were found to be less likely to have a high school diploma, to have more limited employment histories and job skills, and to have been unemployed at arrest.

Why we did this study

Younger offenders represent a comparatively small proportion of CSC’s population and it has been argued that they may differ from their older counterparts in important ways. To examine this question, the risk and needs presented by younger offenders were compared to those of older offenders.

What we did

Data were extracted from CSC’s computerized offender databases for all those in custody on March 31, 2014. The 523 offenders aged 18 to 21 years were compared to their counterparts aged 22 to 25 years (*n* = 1,700) and aged 26 to 30 years (*n* = 2,433) on risk and need information.

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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