

————— **Research Report** —————

First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Non-Aboriginal
Federal Offenders: A Comparative
Profile

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**First Nations, Métis, Inuit and Non-Aboriginal
Federal Offenders: A Comparative Profile**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proportion of Aboriginal peoples in corrections has become an issue of concern. It is clear that Aboriginal groups are over-represented in several segments of the criminal justice system (see Trevethan, Tremblay & Carter, 2000). To better understand the reasons for this over-representation, some research has focused on identifying differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders. Numerous socio-economic differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders thought to contribute to the over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in the criminal justice system have been identified. However, for the most part, little attention has been devoted to profiling differences between various Aboriginal groups and identifying factors which contribute to the over-representation of each.

The objective of this study was to profile First Nations (N = 1,490), Métis (N = 586) and Inuit (N = 100) federal offenders currently incarcerated in federal correctional facilities. A snapshot of offenders (August, 2000) were retrieved from the Offender Management System (OMS) of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Aboriginal groups were profiled on their socio-demographic, offence, static and dynamic characteristics. Aboriginal groups were also compared to a non-Aboriginal comparison group. Similar to other studies (Motiuk & Nafekh, 2000; Trevethan et al., 2000), the present study found that federally-sentenced Aboriginal offenders, in general, have had considerable prior involvement with the criminal justice system, violent offence backgrounds, and present a greater need for specialized programming.

Despite certain similarities, the profiles of First Nations, Métis and Inuit offenders are generally different. Each group has unique background, offence and need characteristics.

First Nations offenders in federal corrections can be characterized by previous involvement in the criminal justice system and violent criminal behaviour. Larger proportions of First Nations than non-Aboriginal offenders have participated in youth custody and have been incarcerated for homicide offences (28% versus 24%) and

serious assault (39% versus 26%). The seriousness of the offences for which First Nations are incarcerated is reflected in the level of security under which they are classified. Significantly larger proportions of First Nations offenders are recommended for maximum levels of security at intake than Métis, Inuit or non-Aboriginal offenders. First Nations offenders also present a multitude of needs for correctional administrators at the time of admission. Large proportions are rated as having "some" or "considerable" need in the areas of personal/emotional orientation (96%), substance abuse (94%), employment (70%), associates/social interaction (65%) and marital/family background (60%).

Similar to First Nations offenders, Métis offenders are characterized by extensive involvement in criminal justice system. As is the case with First Nations offenders, Métis offenders have had lengthy criminal experience during childhood and previously as adults. However, the offences for which Métis are currently incarcerated are more varied than other offenders. Significantly greater proportions are incarcerated for robbery (40%) than any other group (First Nations, 29%; Inuit, 8%; non-Aboriginal, 35%). Métis offenders are also more likely to be convicted of a drug offence (17%) than First Nations and Inuit offenders (11% and 6%, respectively). Larger proportions of Métis than non-Aboriginal offenders are incarcerated for break and enter (38% versus 31%). Métis offenders also have unique needs for institutional programming. Large proportions have "some" or "considerable" need in the areas of personal/emotional orientation (95%), substance abuse (91%), employment (71%) and associates/social interaction (70%).

The profile of Inuit offenders can best be reflected in their offending behaviour. The crimes for which Inuit are incarcerated are frequently of a sexual nature. Almost two-thirds (62%) are currently incarcerated for sex offences, which is substantially larger than First Nations (22%), Métis (16%), and non-Aboriginal (17%) offenders. The severity of these crimes is reflected in their assessed level of risk. While Aboriginal offenders, in general, are rated as greater risk to re-offend than non-Aboriginal offenders, larger proportions of Inuit offenders are classified as high risk to re-offend

(85%) at intake than First Nations (73%), Métis, (68%), and non-Aboriginal (57%) offenders. Findings also highlight that Inuit offenders have greater need overall for intervention (89%) than other groups (First Nations, 78%; Métis, 73%; non-Aboriginal, 62%). Large proportions were rated as having "some" or "considerable" need in the areas of personal/emotional orientation (99%), substance abuse (92%) and marital/family (73%) background.

Unlike previous studies that have focused solely on comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders, the present report examines the characteristics of specific Aboriginal offender groups. The results highlight the importance of acknowledging between-group differences in the design of correctional policies and programs for Aboriginal offenders. Modes of intervention could be enhanced by delivering services that are tailored to the specific needs and issues of each Aboriginal group.

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INTRODUCTION

The Over-Representation of Aboriginal Peoples

There has been a growing interest concerning the experience of Aboriginal peoples in conflict with the Canadian criminal justice system. Research focusing on this area has been largely fuelled by the disproportionate involvement of Aboriginal peoples at several levels of the Canadian justice system. In general, reports have found Aboriginal peoples to be over-represented among those charged in various urban areas (Quann & Trevethan, 2000; LaPrairie, 1994; Trevethan, 1993), among offenders admitted to provincial and federal institutions and those participating in probation services (Trevethan, Carrière, MacKillop, Finn, Robinson, Porporino & Millson, 1999; Trevethan, Tremblay & Carter, 2000). A study conducted by Trevethan et al. (2000), examining the over-representation of Aboriginal persons in the Canadian justice system, indicates that Aboriginal persons generally comprise 15% of provincial/territorial admissions, 17% of federal admissions, and 14% of admissions to probation. Aboriginal peoples, however, account for only 2% of the Canadian adult population. Moreover, disproportionate rates of participation appear to be a problem for each major Aboriginal group. Canadian data indicate that First Nations, Métis and Inuit comprise 1.9%, 0.7% and 0.02% of the total Canadian population, respectively (Statistics Canada, 1996), yet account for 11.7%, 4.1% and 1.0 % of the federally-incarcerated population (Motiuk & Nafekh, 2000). Other countries have struggled with similar problems. International research demonstrates that Aboriginal peoples in Australia are also disproportionately represented within their criminal justice system, suggesting that the problem of over-representation is widespread (Smandych, Lincoln & Wilson, 1993).

A number of factors have been explored in an attempt to explain the over-representation of Aboriginal people within the Canadian justice system. For example, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) has identified a link between deplorable socio-economic conditions and rates of representation. This report suggests that factors associated with poverty and unemployment influence the extent to which

Aboriginal peoples participate in the justice system. Some of the most notable academic contributions have rooted over-representation in the inherent differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders. LaPrairie (1996) suggests that, for several reasons, Aboriginal persons may commit more crimes than non-Aboriginals, leading to higher official rates of offending. In addition, LaPrairie contends that the crimes committed by Aboriginal people are often of a violent nature and are more likely to result in custodial sanctions than offences committed by non-Aboriginal persons. Similarly, Tonry (1994) suggests that differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons likely reflect actual variation in offending patterns.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Education

Numerous studies have found that Aboriginal offenders have considerably lower levels of educational attainment than non-Aboriginal offenders (Bonta, 1989; Broadhurst & Maller, 1992; Johnston, 1994, 1997, 2000; McCaskill, 1970, 1985). Bonta, LaPrairie and Wallace-Capretta's (1997) examination of risk predictors among 1,200 Manitoba probationers used Royal Canadian Mounted Police records and risk/need assessment information to compare differences between various Aboriginal groups and non-Aboriginals. Findings indicated that Aboriginal offenders had fewer years of formal education than non-Aboriginal offenders. Furthermore, the mean amount of time Aboriginal offenders spent in school (8.8 years) was 2.2 years less than that of their non-Aboriginal offender counterparts (10.2 years). Trevethan et al.'s (2000) report on Aboriginal over-representation in Canada found comparable results. Trevethan and her colleagues examined several demographic and need factors related to the disproportionate incarceration of provincially and federally imprisoned Aboriginal offenders. Approximately 56% of federally incarcerated Aboriginal offenders had less than a grade 10 education, as compared to only 43% of non-Aboriginal offenders.

Research has also found educational discrepancies between different Aboriginal offender groups. McCaskill (1970, 1985) found that status Indian offenders possess lower levels of education than Métis and non-status Indians. Bonta et al. (1997) found similar differences between Métis and treaty Indians involved in the criminal justice system. These findings indicate that education, as a socio-demographic feature, may help differentiate group profiles.

Employment

Studies examining employment among offenders have consistently found significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders (Bonta et al., 1997; Trevethan et al., 1999; Trevethan et al., 2000). For example, Trevethan et al. (2000) found that Aboriginal offenders were more frequently unemployed at the time of admission to federal institutions than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. More than one-half of Aboriginal offenders were without work at the time of entry to federal correctional facilities, compared to 40% of non-Aboriginal offenders. Moreover, this pattern was amplified among provincial/territorial offenders. Approximately three-quarters of Aboriginal persons and one-half of non-Aboriginal persons imprisoned at the provincial/territorial level were unemployed at the time of admission. In addition, research has shown that Aboriginal offenders appear to require more intervention targeting vocational skills, workplace etiquette and training than non-Aboriginal offenders (Johnston, 1997; Trevethan et al., 1999).

Evidence also suggests discrepancies in work history across different Aboriginal groups. Status Indian offenders living off-reserve appear to have higher rates of unemployment than Métis offenders and treaty Indians living on-reserve. Bonta et al.'s (1997) study of probationers found that 80% of off-reservation treaty Indians were unemployed, compared to 64% of on-reservation treaty Indians and 65% of Métis. Similarly, Motiuk and Nafekh's (2000) examination of Aboriginal offender groups found that, while differences were not significant, a greater proportion of First Nations offenders had need for employment-related intervention when compared to Métis and

Inuit offenders. As such, research appears to highlight the difficulties of First Nations offenders in securing employment.

Criminal History

Research generally suggests that Aboriginal offenders have high rates of prior criminal convictions and incarcerations (Bonta, Lipinski & Martin, 1992). Research has also shown that Aboriginal offenders have more criminal experience and probation failures than non-Aboriginal offenders (Bonta et al., 1997). Moreover, involvement in the adult justice system tends to be preceded by a long history of crime beginning in childhood or early adolescence. Consequently, in addition to being over-represented in the adult criminal justice system, Aboriginal peoples are also over-represented in the youth system. In 1997-98, Aboriginal youth accounted for only 4% of the total youth population, yet comprised 26% of admissions to secure custody and 23% of admissions to open custody facilities (Trevethan et al., 2000). Research also suggests that Aboriginal youth are more likely to receive harsher dispositions than non-Aboriginal youth (Schissel, 1993), and are less likely to be released on bail or have their charges dropped (LaPrairie, 1983; Stevens, 1990). However, these judiciary patterns appear to be reflected in the nature and circumstances surrounding the crimes committed by this group. Studies have indicated that Aboriginal people come into contact with the criminal justice system at an earlier age than other groups (LaPrairie, 1983; Jolly, 1983), and are disproportionately involved in serious violent offences (i.e., murder, serious physical assault) against the person (Meloff & Silverman, 1992; Moyer, 1992).

There also are significant criminal background differences between Aboriginal groups. Motiuk and Nafekh's (2000) study of Aboriginal offenders found that while there were no significant differences between offender groups concerning prior adult offences, Métis males had significantly more previous offences and secure custody sentences in their youth than First Nations and Inuit male offenders. Similarly, Bonta et al.'s (1997) study of adult probationers found that Métis offenders were more likely to have a prior probation failure than off-reservation treaty Indians, and more likely to have prior

convictions and breaches of probation than treaty offenders living on-reserve. As such, research appears to highlight the more extensive criminal careers of Métis offenders in comparison to other groups.

Current Criminal Conviction

The greater involvement of Aboriginal people within the criminal justice system may reflect a number of social and systemic issues. However, extensive contact may also be indicative of the types of crime being committed by Aboriginal offenders. Research has consistently shown that Aboriginal people are more likely to be incarcerated for crimes against the person than non-Aboriginals. These crimes are also more likely to be of a serious and violent nature (LaPrairie, 1996; Meloff & Silverman, 1992; Moyer, 1992; Trevethan et al., 1999; Trevethan et al., 2000). As a result, crimes such as homicide, sexual and physical assault, and robbery have been found to be over-represented, while drug offences tend to be under-represented within the Aboriginal federal offender population (Welsh, 2000). Despite the grave nature of these offences, there is significant variability in the sentence lengths given for Aboriginal crimes. Federal sentences for Aboriginal offenders are typically shorter in duration than those of non-Aboriginal offenders (LaPrairie, 1996; Motiuk & Nafekh, 2000; Trevethan et al., 1999; York, 1995). Trevethan et al.'s (1999) snapshot study of the Canadian offender population indicates that Aboriginal federal male offenders receive a median sentence of 4 years, while non-Aboriginal males serve a median sentence of 5 years. Similar conclusions have been drawn from other studies (Moyer, 1992). Surprisingly, however, research also indicates that Aboriginal offenders serve longer sentences than their non-Aboriginal counterparts at the provincial/territorial level (Trevethan et al., 2000).

Offence and sentencing differences also exist between Aboriginal groups. Motiuk and Nafekh (2000) found that groups were not equally represented across various offence categories. Inuit offenders were under-represented in homicide, robbery, and drug offences, but over-represented in sexual offences, suggesting that a high proportion are incarcerated for sexual crimes. The considerable involvement of Inuit in sex-related

offences corresponds with similar research in the field (Faulkner, 1989; Johnston, 1994). In the same study, Métis were under-represented in homicide, sex, robbery and drug offences. First Nations were over-represented in homicide and sex offences, but under-represented in drug and robbery offences, underlining the disproportionately serious and violent offence profiles of First Nations offenders. Overall, research appears to support the notion that Aboriginal groups are distinct in their offending behaviour.

Dynamic Factors

Aboriginal offenders have been found to possess significant need for intervention across several criminogenic domains. Criminogenic domains refer to factors that are related to offender needs (such as employment history, family background, associations, addictions, attitudes). These need areas help to determine institutional placement and correctional plans for offenders.

Alcohol and substance abuse

Research has found that Aboriginal offenders have considerably greater need for alcohol and substance abuse treatment than non-Aboriginal offenders (Johnston, 1997; Trevethan et al., 1999; Trevethan et al., 2000). For instance, Trevethan et al. (1999) found that over three-quarters of federally-incarcerated Aboriginal offenders demonstrated "some" or "considerable" need in the area of substance abuse at the time of intake to the federal institution), compared to one-half of non-Aboriginal offenders. A study on the personality characteristics of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal medium-security federal offenders found similar results. Weekes, Morison, Millson and Fetting (1995) examined the scores of Caucasian, Métis and First Nations offenders on the Millon Clinical Multi-axial Inventory (MCMI).¹ Findings demonstrated that First Nations

¹ Psychometric assessment used to assess a range of psychopathological syndromes. See Millon, T. (1985). *The Clinical Multi-axial Inventory*. Sourcebook: On the mentally disordered prisoner. Washington, D.C.

and Métis had significantly more psychological problems related to chemical dependency than Caucasian offenders, emphasizing a greater need for intervention targeting drug and alcohol related problems among these groups (Vanderburg, Weekes, & Millson, 1994).

Research on various Aboriginal groups indicates that substance abuse is a pervasive issue for each of the major groups. Motiuk and Nafekh (2000) found no significant between-group differences on the substance abuse domain at intake. Rather, the proportion requiring substance abuse programming was high in each group. More specifically, the study found that substance abuse was a considerable or high need area for 93% of First Nations and Inuit, as well as 91% of Métis offenders.

Personal/emotional orientation issues

Some studies examining the emotional needs of offenders suggest that Aboriginal offenders may have more personal problems than non-Aboriginal offenders. Trevethan et al. (1999) found that three-quarters of Aboriginal federal offenders have "some" or "considerable" need for intervention targeting personal and emotional problems at the time of intake. In contrast, only two-thirds of non-Aboriginal offenders have need in the same area.

The prevalence of psychological problems within the Aboriginal offender population is not surprising considering that many have experienced considerable hardship as children. Johnston's (1997) study of 556 federally-incarcerated Aboriginal offenders found that 45% of respondents had experienced physical abuse and 21% had experienced sexual violence during their childhood. A similar study using a sample of 64 Aboriginal federal offenders from the northern region of Canada found comparable results (Johnston, 1994). In this study, one-half of the interviewees had been physically abused as youth and approximately one-quarter had been sexually mistreated. Apart from abuse, over one-third of the subjects reported being neglected at home and having at least one absent parent while growing up (Johnston, 1994). Available research,

therefore, indicates that the psychological problems of Aboriginal offenders are likely rooted in troubled childhood experiences, many of which, are characterized by violence, maltreatment and parental desertion.

Evidence suggests that personal/emotional orientation differences also exist between various groups of Aboriginal offenders. The only study to have profiled need differences between distinct Aboriginal groups compared male offenders of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit heritage. In this study, Motiuk and Nafekh (2000) found that, while all Aboriginal groups demonstrated considerable need for personal/emotional intervention, significantly more Inuit offenders presented need in this area than other groups. More specifically, 98% of Inuit, 96% of First Nations, and 93% of Métis were identified as having personal/emotional orientation problems. These findings emphasize the importance of providing individual-oriented mental health programming to Aboriginal offenders.

Marital/family problems

In general, studies have indicated that a high proportion of Aboriginal offenders require intervention programs in the area of family and marital functioning (Johnston, 1997; Trevethan et al., 1999; Trevethan et al., 2000). More specifically, research by Trevethan, Auger, Moore, MacDonald and Sinclair (2002) on the effects of family disruption has suggested that Aboriginal offenders have more difficulty in the area of family than non-Aboriginal offenders. Findings from interviews of 323 randomly selected federal offenders demonstrated that Aboriginal offenders were more likely to have experienced family disruption, childhood instability and poor relations with family members than non-Aboriginal offenders. In addition, instability in the home during youth appeared to impact the current relationships between Aboriginal offenders and their families. Significantly smaller proportions of those who reported an unstable home environment currently felt attached to their parents and had regular contact with their parents and children, in comparison to those who reported being raised in a stable environment. However, despite indications that family-related interventions are

important for Aboriginal offenders in general, need for such intervention does not appear to be equally distributed across Aboriginal groups. While Motiuk and Nafekh (2000) found that all groups demonstrated "some" or "considerable" need on the marital/family domain of the "Offender Intake Assessment" (OIA), larger proportions of Inuit male offenders exhibited need than First Nations and Métis groups. Specifically, 77% of Inuit, 63% of First Nations, 54% of Métis offenders demonstrated need in this area. Results highlight the unique family profile of offenders from remote and northern regions of Canada.

Risk

Research concerning the extent to which Aboriginal offenders pose a threat to community safety has been mixed. One seminal study in the area of Aboriginal risk for re-offending examined the institutional needs and characteristics of Aboriginal peoples incarcerated at the provincial level. This study found that Aboriginal offenders differed little from their non-Aboriginal counterparts on their required level of supervision, suggesting that the risk posed by Aboriginal offenders was comparable to that of non-Aboriginal offenders (Bonta, 1989). In addition, Bonta et al.'s (1997) examination of recidivism among Manitoba probationers found that the proportion of Aboriginal participants classified as low, medium and high risk was similar to that of non-Aboriginal participants.

Overall, the findings in these studies suggest that the potential to re-offend among Aboriginal offenders is no greater than that of non-Aboriginal offenders. In contrast, some research conducted on federally-incarcerated offenders has indicated that Aboriginal offenders tend to be classified at a higher risk for recidivism than non-Aboriginal offenders. These studies have also found higher rates of re-incarceration among Aboriginal offenders (Hann & Harman, 1992; Harman & Hann, 1986).

Few studies have actually explored differences between Aboriginal groups on risk-related measures. A study by Bonta et al. (1997) found that certain groups presented

greater risk to re-offend than others. In general, they found that a larger proportion of treaty Aboriginals living off-reserve (45%) were assessed as high risk than Aboriginals living on-reserve (15%) and Métis offenders (31%). Their findings suggested that the risk to recidivate among certain Aboriginal groups may be linked to criminogenic environments.

The Need to Examine Aboriginal-Specific Groups

While Aboriginal over-representation has emerged as a serious dilemma in corrections, our understanding of why Aboriginal people are over-represented in the criminal justice system is still limited. Perhaps, in part, our lack of knowledge can be attributed to the type of research that has dominated the field in recent decades. A great deal of research in the last twenty years has examined Aboriginal offenders and their criminal conduct through the use of qualitative and critical methodologies (LaPrairie, 1992; Marenin, 1992). The result has produced literature focusing on constructionist criticism and the socio-historical context of over-representation. While these perspectives have offered valuable insight into factors contributing to the disproportionate incarceration of Aboriginal peoples, research has indicated that these factors alone cannot adequately account for the inequitable figures (LaPrairie, 1997; Tonry, 1994).

In recent years, qualitative efforts to understand Aboriginal criminality have been complemented by quantitative endeavours. Several of these studies have examined social and psychological differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in an attempt to explore key areas of disparity, and pinpoint characteristics related to inequitable rates of incarceration (LaPrairie, 1996; Motiuk & Nafekh, 2000; Moyer, 1992; Trevethan et al., 1999; Trevethan et al., 2000). These studies have greatly contributed to furthering our understanding of Aboriginal over-representation. However, research has yet to comprehensively explore differences between distinct Aboriginal populations in a manner that encompasses those aspects most important to their offending behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose

Identifying between-group differences is important for numerous reasons. Statistics have indicated that Aboriginal offenders are disproportionately represented in comparison to their national figures. Over-representation has become an issue for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples alike. However, surprisingly, little attention has been given to the limitations of studying these heterogeneous populations as one group. While the vast majority of investigative reports have clustered these denominations into a single homogeneous group, few studies have actually examined these populations comparatively. Comparative research has traditionally explored differences between Aboriginals (essentially, an all-inclusive category) and non-Aboriginals, sometimes masking the variation existing between distinct Aboriginal groups. More research is needed to explore potential factors related to the disproportionate involvement of distinct Aboriginal groups in corrections (LaPrairie, 1997; Smandych et al., 1993).

This exploratory report aims to expand our understanding of Aboriginal over-representation and criminality by addressing the issue of heterogeneity. Generally, areas of disparity are identified through profiling differences between three distinct Aboriginal populations incarcerated at the federal level: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Offenders are compared along socio-demographic, criminal history, offence and criminogenic need characteristics. In addition, the present study compares each Aboriginal group to the non-Aboriginal group. The purpose of these comparisons is to evaluate whether differences found between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders in past research can be better accounted for by specific groups, and therefore, be used to better understand the profiles of those particular populations. Overall, the study offers a comparative and descriptive portrait of the three main Aboriginal groups imprisoned in Canada's federal institutions, and pinpoints group-specific characteristics to better understand their disproportionate rates of incarceration.

Design

To analyze differences between groups (across discrete variables) a series of chi-square analyses were performed on the data. Furthermore, chi-square analysis was used as a multiple comparison procedure to identify differences between pairs of groups. These analyses were performed in a post hoc manner. An inevitable concern when conducting exploratory research is the possibility of committing a Type I error, that is, finding significant differences between groups that do not really exist. This is often the case when multiple statistical tests are performed using the same independent variable. As such, a bonferroni correction was employed to reduce the possibility of error. The correction was applied to each variable in the analysis and was based on the number of serial tests performed on the data. For example, six group comparisons were conducted on any given dependent measure. This required six separate tests to be performed on the same data ($0.05/6 = .008$). The result was a more stringent cut-off for identifying significant comparisons ($p < .008$). This procedure ensured that only findings with a high degree of significance were interpreted. In addition, Cramer's phi and phi coefficients measured the level of association between the independent variable and dependent measures.

The design for analyzing continuous variables varied slightly from that used to evaluate dichotomous variables. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze differences between groups when variables did not meet the requirements necessary for the chi-square analysis. Essentially, this statistical procedure compared means as opposed to the observed and expected frequencies of the categorical analysis. Furthermore, R^2 was employed to assess the magnitude of the effect that the dependent variables had on the independent variable. When significance was found in the general ANOVA, Scheffe's multiple comparison procedure was used to identify statistical variation between sets of groups. This test was selected for its conservative approach and ability to maximize the reduction of Type I errors (Howell, 1997).

Data Collection

Data were obtained from records existing within the Offender Management System (OMS), a comprehensive database of offender files maintained by the Correctional Service of Canada. Data were compiled at the point of admission by parole officers and a multidisciplinary team consisting of mental health specialists within CSC. The data for the study were retrieved from a one-day snapshot in August 2000. A snapshot is an inventory of all those who are inside a federal institution (in Canada) on any given day, and includes information from Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) records and OIA evaluations.

Population Characteristics

The total incarcerated federal offender population of 12,638 (August 2000) is comprised of 10,368 non-Aboriginals (82.7% of the population), 1,490 First Nations (11.9% of the population), 586 Métis (4.7% of the population) and 100 Inuit (0.8% of the population). Most of the offenders are incarcerated in the Ontario region (including Nunavut), the Quebec region, or the Prairie region (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Northwest Territories) of Canada. Each region accounts for roughly one-quarter of the total federal population. In addition, most offenders are male (N = 12,292 or 97.3% of the population). Women offenders comprise 2.8% of the population (N = 347). The mean age for the entire population is 36.5 years. Furthermore, the population of study only consists of those federal offenders who were inside Canada's federal penitentiaries on the day of inventory, and does not include those on parole or under escorted/unescorted temporary absence.

RESULTS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

As indicated in Table 1 (Appendix A), federal offenders, in general, have low levels of education and are frequently unemployed upon admission to correctional facilities. However, despite some shared characteristics, groups appear to vary on several demographic variables.

Gender

Findings demonstrate that there are similar proportions of women offenders among First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups. Moreover, there are no significant differences in the proportion of women offenders between non-Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit offenders. However a significantly larger proportion of First Nations than non-Aboriginal offenders are women (4.4% versus 2.5%).

Age

Aboriginal groups are similar in age at admission and currently. However, significant differences emerge between First Nations and Métis groups as compared to non-Aboriginal offenders. First Nations and Métis offenders are admitted to federal institutions at an earlier age (average 31 years) and are currently younger (average 33 and 34 years, respectively) than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (average 34 at admission and 37 currently). Although the average age for Inuit offenders at admission (33) and currently (35) is older than both First Nations and Métis, the differences are not significant. These results contribute greater specificity to studies that have found Aboriginal offenders, in general, to be younger than non-Aboriginal offenders. Rather, age disparity appears to be accounted for by Métis and First Nations groups.

Education

Overall, Aboriginal offenders have less education than non-Aboriginal offenders. In addition, Aboriginal groups differ on educational attainment. Significantly larger proportions of Inuit offenders (57%) have less than a grade 8 education when compared to First Nations and Métis offenders (31% and 22%, respectively). Furthermore, a larger proportion of First Nations than Métis offenders report having less than a grade 8 education (31% versus 22%). Métis offenders do not differ significantly from non-Aboriginal offenders on education.

In general, the findings illustrate the higher educational status that non-Aboriginals have over certain Aboriginal offender populations and point to differences among Aboriginal groups. These results provide clarity to previous findings that have pointed to the lower level of education among the general Aboriginal offender population. Rather, differences between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal groups appear to be best accounted for by Inuit and First Nations groups.

Employment

While Aboriginal offender groups do not differ significantly from each other on employment-related variables, findings suggest that meaningful differences exist between various Aboriginal groups and non-Aboriginal offenders. Métis and First Nations offenders are more often unemployed at the time of arrest than non-Aboriginal offenders. Approximately three-quarters (77% of First Nations; 75% of Métis) were not employed at the time of arrest, compared to 68% of non-Aboriginal offenders. No significant differences emerged between Inuit and non-Aboriginal offenders.

First Nations also differ from non-Aboriginal offenders in regards to employment history. Significantly more First Nations offenders report not having ever been employed in the past than non-Aboriginal offenders (22% versus 12%). These results provide greater specificity to research suggesting that Aboriginal offenders, in general, have more

problems with employment than non-Aboriginal offenders. Findings in the present report indicate that differences between these two groups can be attributed to Métis and First Nations offenders.

Criminal History

As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, Aboriginal offenders have a more extensive criminal background than non-Aboriginal offenders. However, some variation also exists between Aboriginal offender groups.

Differences were found between Aboriginal groups on the extent of youth criminal history (Table 2). Significantly greater proportions of Métis and First Nations offenders have been involved in closed (46% and 40%, respectively) and open (42% and 40%, respectively) youth custody as compared to Inuit offenders (18% and 20%). In addition, significantly larger proportions of Métis than Inuit offenders have been involved in youth community supervision (57% versus 41%). Some variation also exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders. Significantly greater proportions of Métis and First Nations offenders have been involved in youth custody (open and closed) and youth community supervision in comparison to non-Aboriginal offenders. Differences between Inuit and non-Aboriginal offenders are not significant.

No significant differences exist between Aboriginal groups on adult criminal history (Table 3). Rather, disparity is best accounted for by Aboriginal comparisons with non-Aboriginal offenders. Each Aboriginal offender group has served significantly more provincial terms than non-Aboriginal offenders. In addition, Inuit (87%) and First Nations (79%) offenders are more likely to have received a previous adult community supervision sentence than non-Aboriginal offenders (72%). No significant differences exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders on previous adult federal terms.

Overall, findings highlight the extensive contact Métis and First Nations offenders have had with the youth and adult justice systems.

Current Criminal Conviction

Offence type

Table 4 indicates that, in addition to differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders, Aboriginal groups also differ in the offences for which they are currently incarcerated.

Aboriginal offenders do not differ from one another on homicide-related offences. No Aboriginal group is currently incarcerated for homicide or attempted murder more than another. Furthermore, Métis and Inuit offenders do not differ significantly from non-Aboriginal offenders on homicide-related offences. However, First Nations are more likely to be incarcerated for homicide than non-Aboriginal offenders (28% versus 24%), but less likely to be given a sentence for murder (2% versus 5%). These results contribute greater insight to research which has found the general Aboriginal population to have more murder-related convictions than non-Aboriginals. Rather, the present study illustrates that differences in murder convictions can be attributed to First Nations offenders.

Each Aboriginal group is more likely to be imprisoned for an assault-related offence when compared to non-Aboriginal offenders. Forty percent of Inuit, 39% of First Nations and 33% of Métis have a current conviction for a major assault-related crime, compared to 26% non-Aboriginal offenders. However, a significantly larger proportion of First Nations than Métis are incarcerated for serious assault. This suggests that while Aboriginal offenders, in general, are more likely than non-Aboriginals to be convicted of a serious assault, some Aboriginal groups are more often incarcerated for this type of offence than others.

Inuit offenders are incarcerated for a larger proportion of sexual offences than any other Aboriginal group. Almost two-thirds (62%) of Inuit offenders are currently incarcerated

for a sex-related crime, in comparison to 16% of Métis and 22% of First Nations offenders. Inuit offenders also tend to differ significantly from non-Aboriginal offenders on sex offences. A larger proportion of Inuit offenders are currently incarcerated for sex crimes than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (62% versus 17%). Overall, findings point to the sexual nature of crimes for which Inuit are brought to federal custody.

Generally, Métis offenders are more frequently imprisoned for robbery than First Nations or Inuit offenders (40% versus 29% and 8%, respectively). These findings suggest that offenders are more represented in robbery-related crimes than other Aboriginal groups. Results show that differences also exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders. A considerably smaller proportion of First Nations, and a larger proportion of Métis, have a robbery-related conviction compared to non-Aboriginal offenders.

Aboriginal groups do not differ from one another in regard to the proportion incarcerated for break and enter offences. However, Métis offenders are more frequently imprisoned for break and enter crimes than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (38% versus 31%).

A larger proportion of Métis offenders are currently incarcerated for drug-related offences than First Nations and Inuit offenders (17% versus 11% and 6%, respectively). Disparity is also apparent when Aboriginal groups are compared to the non-Aboriginal group. All Aboriginal groups are less likely to be serving a sentence for a drug-related crime than non-Aboriginals. For example, 6% of Inuit offenders are incarcerated for a drug offence, as compared to 21% of non-Aboriginal offenders.

Current number of criminal offences

Despite large differences, significant differences did not emerge between Aboriginal groups on the number of offences for which they are currently incarcerated. Rather, significantly smaller proportions of First Nations (25%), Métis (30%) and Inuit (19%) offenders are currently incarcerated for 5 or more offences in comparison to non-

Aboriginal offenders (37%). The low frequency of multiple convictions among Aboriginal groups may point to differences in offending behaviour and sentencing practices. Offence and sentencing characteristics, however, are not controlled for, and cannot conclusively account for these findings.

Sentence length

As indicated in Table 4, groups vary significantly on current sentence length.² Although no significant differences exist between Aboriginal groups, differences exist between certain Aboriginal groups and non-Aboriginal offenders. On average, of those in the snapshot, the average aggregate sentence length for First Nations offenders is less than non-Aboriginal offenders (5.4 years versus 6.7 years).

Initial level of custody

No significant differences exist between Aboriginal groups on recommended level of security at admission. However, First Nations offenders are more often recommended for maximum-security placement than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (21% versus 15%).

Dynamic Factors

As indicated in Table 5, Aboriginal groups have significant variation in their requirements for need-specific intervention. In addition, Aboriginal groups differ on their risk for recidivism.

Overall need

² Mean aggregate sentence is calculated with life sentences removed.

Overall, there is considerable variation among Aboriginal groups in their overall need for programming. In particular, significantly more Inuit offenders are rated as having high need than First Nations and Métis offenders (89% versus 78% and 73%, respectively). Aboriginal groups more frequently exhibit high overall need than non-Aboriginal offenders (62%). In sum, while need is a common area of concern for all Aboriginal groups, results highlight the unique profile of Inuit offenders and draw attention to their considerable need for comprehensive correctional programming.

Personal/emotional issues

Aboriginal groups do not differ from each other in terms of personal and emotional needs. However, larger proportions of First Nations and Métis offenders are rated as having "some" or "considerable" need on personal and emotional issues compared to non-Aboriginal offenders (96% and 95% versus 91%). Results highlight the high level of psychological distress reported by First Nations and Métis offenders. These findings offer specificity to studies that point to personal/emotional differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders. Results in the present study indicate that differences can be attributed to Métis and First Nations offenders.

Substance abuse

In general, First Nations offenders tend to exhibit more need related to substance dependency than their Métis counterparts (94% versus 91%). There is also considerable variation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders. Each Aboriginal group has significantly greater need for substance abuse treatment when compared to the non-Aboriginal group. Generally, findings suggest that while substance abuse is an area of importance for all Aboriginal offenders, it may be particularly problematic for First Nations offenders.

Employment

Aboriginal offender groups do not differ significantly from each other on employment needs. However, some Aboriginal groups differ from the non-Aboriginal group. Larger proportions of Métis and First Nations offenders require intervention targeting employment and education than those from the non-Aboriginal group (71% and 70% versus 58%). Results highlight the disproportionate difficulty Métis and First Nations offenders have with occupation-related issues. These results contribute greater specificity to research that has found the general Aboriginal offender population to have more problems associated with employment than non-Aboriginal offenders. The present report illustrates that employment need disparity between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals can best be accounted for by Métis and First Nations offenders.

Marital/family relationships

A significantly larger proportion of Inuit and First Nations offenders demonstrate "some" or "considerable" need for marital/family intervention than Métis offenders (73% and 60% versus 53%). Differences are also apparent between certain Aboriginal groups and the non-Aboriginal group. A significantly greater proportion of First Nations and Inuit require marital/family intervention than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (51%). These findings highlight the importance of offering programs that target family dysfunction and marital discord in the federally incarcerated Inuit and First Nations groups.

Associates/social interaction

Significantly more Métis offenders require intervention targeting anti-social relationships and interactions than Inuit offenders. Approximately 70% of Métis offenders have "some" or "considerable" need on the associates/social interaction domain, as compared to 55% of Inuit. There are also differences between the Métis and non-Aboriginal group. More Métis exhibit need for intervention in the area of social interaction than non-Aboriginals (70% versus 63%). Overall, findings appear to demonstrate the unique profile of Métis offenders concerning the extent and nature of

their criminogenic relations. The large proportion of Métis offenders involved in criminogenic relationships may be related to residency in urban areas.

Attitude

No significant differences emerged between Aboriginal groups on attitude. Rather, various Aboriginal groups vary from non-Aboriginals. Significantly fewer Métis and First Nations offenders were rated as having "some" or "considerable" need for intervention geared towards criminogenic attitudes than non-Aboriginal offenders. For example, 56% of Métis and 52% of First Nations offenders need to have their attitudes and beliefs addressed in programming, as compared to 62% of non-Aboriginal offenders. Differences underscore the importance of correcting antisocial attitudes in non-Aboriginal offenders, and suggest that Aboriginal offenders, in general, report less need for programs addressing pro-criminal attitudes than non-Aboriginal offenders.

Risk

A greater proportion of Inuit offenders are classified as high risk to re-offend than both Métis and First Nations offenders. For example, 85% of Inuit offenders have been assessed as high risk, compared to 73% of First Nations and 67% of Métis offenders. Findings also indicate that there are meaningful differences between Aboriginal groups and non-Aboriginals. Each Aboriginal group is more likely to be classified as high risk for re-offending than the non-Aboriginal group (57%), suggesting that Aboriginal offenders, in general, are considered to pose a significant risk at the time of admission.

COMPARATIVE PROFILES

While Aboriginal groups are unique in their background, needs and offence patterns, certain themes arise irrespective of Aboriginal classification. Overall, Aboriginal offenders have low levels of education, high rates of unemployment, considerable need for comprehensive intervention, problems related to personal well-being, difficulties associated with substance abuse, and extensive criminal careers exemplified by violent behaviour. These factors, when grouped collectively, provide a general explanation for the over-representation of Aboriginal peoples in corrections. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the Aboriginal offender population is composed of several indigenous groups. These groups may share common links, but are still distinct in the issues they present. In other words, some characteristics may contribute to the over-representation of all Aboriginal groups, but better account for the over-representation of one group over another. In addition, upon careful examination of the data, some areas believed to characterize all Aboriginal offenders, in fact, appear to only characterize certain groups.

The following identifies those characteristics that appear to be the most salient for each Aboriginal group.

First Nations Offenders

- Young
- Low levels of education
- Unemployment
- Extensive youth and adult criminal history
- Violent criminal behaviour (murder, serious assaults)
- Maximum security classification
- Programming needs in areas of personal/emotional, substance abuse, employment, criminal associates/social interaction, marital/family issues

Several key characteristics are at the core of the First Nations offender profile. The most compelling of these appear to be associated with their criminal history. Overall, First Nations offenders have backgrounds characterized by convictions in youth and adult court and a past history of custody. The extensive nature of their criminal involvement underscores the early onset of their unlawful behaviour and highlights the entrenchment of their criminogenic lifestyle. Research has supported similar findings. In general, Aboriginal offenders have been shown to have enduring criminal careers often beginning in early youth (Trevethan et al., 2000).

The involvement of First Nations in the criminal justice system is likely indicative of several factors. Perhaps some of the most important concern their patterns of criminal behaviour. In other words, the high frequency of criminal convictions and custodial sanctions among these offenders may be related to the type of crimes they commit. In general, a relatively large proportion of First Nations are incarcerated for murder and other serious violent offences (i.e., serious assault). Crimes such as these are typically associated with high rates of arrest and clearance by police (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1992). Moreover, offences against the person are also associated with high rates of incarceration. The penalty for such crimes usually requires a sentence to be served (LaPrairie, 1996). As a result, First Nations may be entering the federal system because a large proportion of their crimes are of a serious and violent nature. The seriousness of the offences for which First Nations are incarcerated is reflected in the level of security under which they are classified. Findings indicate that significantly more First Nations offenders are recommended for maximum-security facilities at intake than other groups, highlighting the severity of their crimes and the potential danger these offenders pose to the community at large.

The over-representation of First Nations is inseparable from their personal struggles with alcohol and substance abuse (Havemann, Couse, Foster & Matonvich, 1985). Generally, First Nations offenders have been shown to have higher need in the area of substance abuse than non-Aboriginals and some Aboriginal groups, suggesting that this population may be disproportionately impacted by the effects of alcohol and substance

abuse. This is not to say that the role of substance abuse is absent in other Aboriginal groups. Rather, the issue is one of degree. One explanation for this finding may be rooted in community differences. It is possible that a larger proportion of First Nations offenders require substance abuse intervention because a greater number come from communities that have problems with substance abuse. Research indicates that large proportions of First Nations live on reservations (Quann & Trevethan, 2000), suggesting that a considerable number are living in conditions characterized by economic depression, unemployment and destitution. Typically, these conditions are believed to make reservation life conducive to abusing alcohol and illicit substances (Ross, 1992).

In addition to alcohol and substance abuse, this study has also identified family problems to be important in understanding both the crimes committed by First Nations and their over-representation in prison. Overall, First Nations were more likely than non-Aboriginals and some Aboriginal groups to exhibit high need on the marital/family domain of the OIA. As such, more offenders from this group require programs that target marital discord and family dysfunction. These results suggest that a large proportion of First Nations offenders have had significant family difficulties in the past and many are from troubled homes. The extent to which First Nations offenders have experienced family-related hardship is well documented in the research. Leclair's study of Aboriginal sex offenders (1996) identified a large proportion of First Nations offenders with dysfunctional family backgrounds. In this study, over three-quarters of respondents reported coming from a fragmented home often characterized by abuse and parental alcoholism. There are also studies highlighting the instability faced by First Nations offenders in their youth. Research in the area of family attachment has shown that a high proportion of First Nations offenders were removed from their homes in childhood and placed in foster care, group homes, or put up for adoption. Not surprisingly, results from this study demonstrated that offenders involved in the child-welfare system were more likely to exhibit low attachment to their family members and report dysfunctional family lives than those who were not involved (Trevethan et al., 2002). Moreover, these offenders also displayed more criminogenic needs at the point of institutional admission,

indicating a link between family instability and those factors which give rise to criminal behaviour. Therefore, it appears that family-related difficulties are central to understanding the over-representation of First Nations in corrections.

Métis Offenders

- Young
- Unemployment
- Extensive youth and adult criminal history
- Property (robbery, break and enter) and drug-related offences
- Programming needs in areas of personal/emotional, substance abuse, employment, and criminal associates/social interaction issues

Similar to their First Nations counterparts, the over-representation of Métis offenders can also be understood through their contact with the criminal justice system. As previously indicated, Métis offenders have had more extensive criminal involvement than Inuit and non-Aboriginal offenders. These findings offer greater specificity to research which has solely identified criminal history differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups (Bonta et al., 1992; Bonta et al., 1997; LaPrairie, 1983; Schissel, 1993). Overall, Métis offenders tend to have criminal pasts characterized by youth and adult court convictions. The involvement of Métis offenders in the justice system suggests that their criminal involvement may have been fostered early in life. Studies generally support the findings which underline the extensive criminal backgrounds of Métis offenders (Bonta et al., 1997; Motiuk & Nafekh, 2000).

Contrary to the offence profiles of Inuit and First Nations offenders, Métis offenders are more likely to be incarcerated for robbery, property, and drug-related crimes. The present study found that Métis offenders have more robbery offences on record than any other Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal group, more break and enter crimes than non-Aboriginals, and more drug offences than their First Nations and Inuit counterparts. These findings challenge previous studies which have presumed Aboriginal groups to be homogeneous on such offence categories. In general, the high proportion of Métis

convicted of such crimes as robbery and drug violations is likely to be associated with their area of residence. Research indicates that a large number of Canada's Métis population live in or around an urban centre where many of these crimes are likely to be committed. Leclair (1995) notes that approximately two-thirds of Métis currently reside in a major Canadian city, where both criminal opportunity and crime-driven markets for stolen property and drugs are abundant. In contrast, a smaller proportion of First Nations and Inuit currently live in a major city (Quann & Trevethan, 2000). However, while geography appears to be useful in explaining the offence disparities between Métis and other Aboriginal groups, it does not seem to be as helpful in providing a viable explanation for the differences between Métis and non-Aboriginal offenders. Other factors may be accounting for these differences.

Apart from specific offending behaviours, some psycho-social characteristics also appear to contribute to the over-representation of Métis peoples in corrections. Findings from the OIA suggest that a significantly greater number of Métis offenders require intervention geared towards addressing criminogenic interpersonal relationships than non-Aboriginals and some Aboriginal groups alike. In other words, offenders from this group are disproportionately involved in a criminal lifestyle characterized by a pro-criminal social milieu and strong ties to criminal associates. These results most likely reflect a number of complex social and psychological issues inherent to the Métis experience. Some literature suggests that Aboriginal individuals of bi-cultural ancestry have considerable difficulty with matters of identity and ethnicity. Forming bonds with one particular group is believed to be problematic in the face of diversity, and many are left distressed by the dichotomy of their heritage (Krouse, 1999). Similarly, some criminological literature has demonstrated an association between poor social bonds and criminal interaction. Hirshi (1969) suggests that those with few ties to culture, community and traditional social institutions are more likely to interact with criminal peers and become entrenched in a criminal lifestyle than individuals with strong ties. As such, the need for treatment targeting pro-criminal interactions may be particularly useful in accounting for the representation of Métis in corrections.

Inuit Offenders

- Low levels of education
- Extensive adult criminal history
- Sexual criminal behaviour
- High need for comprehensive intervention
- Programming needs in areas of personal/emotional, substance abuse, and marital/family issues
- High risk for recidivism

Unlike other Aboriginal groups, past involvement in the criminal justice system does not appear to be as important a feature to the profile of Inuit offenders. This group is not defined by extensive involvement in youth custody. However, there are some important differences in offending patterns between Inuit offenders and other groups that appear to contribute to their over-representation in corrections. Smaller proportions of Inuit offenders are placed in federal custody for multiple criminal offences in comparison to other groups, suggesting that the Inuit enter the federal system for fewer infractions relative to other populations. The small number of criminal convictions appears to reflect the specific and serious nature of those crimes for which Inuit are serving time. The present study found that almost two-thirds of Inuit are incarcerated for a sexual offence. Inuit offenders are incarcerated for more sex offences than any other group, and more serious assaults than non-Aboriginals, underscoring the violent behaviour for which these offenders are imprisoned. Similar studies have also found a large proportion of Inuit incarcerated for crimes against the person (Motiuk & Nafekh, 2000), suggesting that these offences may provide insight into why Inuit offenders are disproportionately represented in the federal system.

Apart from highlighting the violent offence profile of many Inuit offenders, results have also demonstrated that these offenders are more likely to be classified as high risk to re-offend than any other offender group. These findings appear to point to the elevated threat that many Inuit offenders pose to society at the point of admission. However,

some literature suggests that offenders' risk level is more likely to be reflected in the crimes they commit and the perceptions people have of their offences than their actual propensity to recidivate. Nugent and Zamble's study (2001) on risk assessment and factors related to detention indicates that a greater number of detained offenders are convicted of sex offences than those who are not detained, suggesting that a considerable proportion of those incarcerated for sex-related crimes are classified as "high risk". Interestingly, Nugent and Zamble also found that certain discretionary factors play an important role in decisions to detain. They found that reactions to repulsive crimes (such as sex offences), rather than actuarial risk assessments, influenced detention. As such, the extent to which Inuit offenders are classified as high risk may best be understood through the nature of their offences (for example, sex offences) and society's response to their offending behaviour.

The inequitable rates in which Inuit are incarcerated are not only reflected in their offence patterns, but are also in their needs. A significantly larger proportion of Inuit offenders exhibit high need for comprehensive intervention than both First Nations and Métis offenders, indicating that these offenders are presenting a multitude of social and psychological issues at the point of admission. More specifically, the high need for comprehensive intervention among Inuit offenders demonstrates the necessity of offering programs that address problems related to substance abuse, marital and family discord, employment, and emotional difficulties. Some suggest that these needs are fostered by the social and geographic conditions under which many Inuit live. Villages in the north are often more remote and impoverished than other rural communities in Canada (McMillan, 1995). These locales offer little promise for industry and provide few resources for stable employment and education. As a result, those who reside in these communities may present more needs than residents of more prosperous communities. In fact, the present study shows that significantly more Inuit offenders are admitted to an institution without having completed grade 8 than any other Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal group, underlining their disproportionate need for social programs and opportunity. As such, poor socio-economic conditions are believed to create a source of strain for the individual, the family and the community at large (Messner & Rosenfeld, 1997a).

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

The most apparent shortcoming in the present study involves the classification of Aboriginal offenders. Analyses were performed to examine differences between groups of First Nations, Métis and Inuit offenders. While this approach has offered a marked improvement from the traditional Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal comparison, it is far from ideal. The complexity of heritage and lineage is impossible to capture within exclusive categories. Figures suggest that Canada is home to hundreds of First Nations bands in the south and a multitude of Inuit peoples in the north (McMillan, 1995). Each group has its own history, heritage and culture, often distinct from that of other seemingly similar groups. Consequently, research that classifies subjects according to loose criteria of inclusion inadvertently masks the variation that exists within the categories. Individual bands risk being misrepresented by artificial groupings. Nonetheless, it is impossible to test differences between groups without classifying subjects into clear categories.

Issues of grouping not only limit the overall approach of the study, but also impact the general findings. In brief, the present study employed four groups of offenders, each consisting of a different aggregate number. Three problems arise as a consequence of using unequal group sizes. First, the majority of Aboriginal offenders fall into the First Nations category. Over 80% of all Aboriginal subjects come from this group. As a result, differences between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals are more likely to be absorbed by the First Nations group than any other Aboriginal group. Second, Inuit offenders only account for a modest proportion of the total federal population. The low number of offenders within this group makes it difficult to detect significant differences between Inuit offenders and other groups. Consequently, comparisons using the Inuit population are difficult to interpret with a high degree of confidence. Third, comparisons (between groups) using a large aggregate number of subjects are more likely to yield significant findings than comparisons using smaller groups.

In other words, as the number of subjects in a statistical test approximates the total population there is a greater likelihood that significant between-group differences will be found (Gravetter & Wallnau, 1996). This is particularly problematic for First Nations-non-Aboriginal and Métis-Inuit comparisons. The former comparison more closely resembles the total offender population than the latter. As such, statistical tests are more likely to detect significant between-group differences for First Nations-non-Aboriginal contrasts than Métis-Inuit comparisons.

Methodological limitations in the present study also stem from design-related factors. In implementing a quasi-experimental framework, this study offered a portrait of Aboriginal groups incarcerated at the federal level. While this approach is valuable in identifying group differences for exploratory purposes, it does not go beyond a descriptive level of research. For this reason, it is important not to draw causal assumptions from the data. Moreover, the design employed multiple chi-square tests for independence. While a bonnferroni correction was used to reduce comparison-wise error, the adjustment resulted in an increase in the probability of committing Type II (Beta) errors. As such, several group comparisons reached the first critical value for significance, but failed to reach the adjusted alpha level. Several comparisons were subsequently rejected based on the adjusted criteria for statistical significance. Thus, some repudiated group differences may have been meaningful.

Future research should address the limitations and expand on some of the ideas put forth in the present report. First, Aboriginal research in the field of criminology needs to acknowledge the diversity of indigenous peoples in Canada. More comparative and population-specific research needs to be conducted on First Nations, Métis and Inuit offenders at both the federal and provincial/territorial levels. The present study has merely taken the first steps in exploring variation between these three groups. Studies should examine these populations in more depth. Moreover, researchers need to address the complexity of Aboriginal identity. This involves going beyond the First Nations-Métis-Inuit distinction. Future studies should focus on developing band and group specific profiles to better inform correctional policy and program administrators.

Second, it is important that questions are asked at the correlational and causal levels of analysis. Comprehensive models need to be developed to better account for the over-representation of Aboriginal groups in the prison population. While this study has identified several characteristics that may help explain disproportionate rates of incarceration, it is unable to conclusively answer queries of causation and prediction.

CONCLUSION

Aboriginal over-representation has recently become an issue of serious contention in Canadian criminology. When examined as a whole, Aboriginal peoples have been disproportionately represented at every level of the criminal justice system. As such, research has begun to examine factors that may help explain the number of Aboriginal people in prison. Some studies, including the present, have tried to address this concern by examining various aspects of the Aboriginal offender profile. However, for the most part, research has overlooked the heterogeneous make-up of Aboriginal identity in Canada, thereby masking the unique profiles of offenders of First Nations, Métis and Inuit ancestry. The purpose of this study was to provide a more accurate description of Aboriginal offenders by acknowledging the variation between them, and identify population-specific characteristics of each group. Generally, the results indicated that there was considerable variation among Aboriginal offender groups as well as between individual Aboriginal groups and non-Aboriginals. Findings emphasized the unique socio-demographic, need and criminal profiles of First Nations, Métis and Inuit offenders.

It is evident from the findings that several factors are related to the over-representation of Aboriginal people. As such, over-representation should be conceptualized as a complex manifestation of social and psychological antecedents interacting in a sophisticated and mutually dependent manner. It is also important to acknowledge that each Aboriginal group has its own unique set of characteristics. Knowing which characteristics are most important, and which attributes differentiate various groups from others is key to understanding the disproportionate rates of incarceration of each population. Ultimately, knowledge of these characteristics has implication for both correctional programming and prevention.

As suggested in previous research, Aboriginal crime can be partially accounted for by problems in the community. Poverty, low levels of education, and little opportunity have been identified as problems in several Aboriginal communities (Siggner, 1992).

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that these community features tend to be criminogenic in nature (Crutchfield, 1995; Merton, 1938; Messner & Rosenfeld, 1997b). As such, responsible social programming and policy reform at the level of the community may be crucial to the long-term prevention of crime. This involves increased funding to industry and education, and the implementation of social and psychological support services. Ultimately, addressing the social ills which contribute to criminal behaviour may be key to lowering Aboriginal rates of incarceration. Other factors that contribute to over-representation, however, may not be as easy to change through policy. Theorists have argued that the effects of colonialism and alcohol have displaced indigenous culture and identity all together, creating an existential crisis among the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Problems of addiction, suicide, violence and crime are said to be manifestations of a disintegrating culture and deregulated society (LaPrairie, 1992). As such, the impact of historical injustices and socio-cultural malaise may be more difficult to address through conventional social policy.

In addition to reform at the level of the community, findings may also be used to inform program practitioners inside the institutions. The results have suggested that while Aboriginal groups share several characteristics in common, each group is unique. Consequently, it may be important for those designing correctional plans to acknowledge intra-group disparity in order to increase the efficacy of programs offered to Aboriginal offenders. Studies have indicated that sensitivity to the issues of different client groups plays a key role in providing effective intervention. Andrews, Bonta & Hoge (1990) suggest that one of the main components of effective treatment is the ability to address the specific needs and issues of the target population. This means tailoring programs around the risk, criminogenic needs and responsivity of the client base. For example, if a program were to effectively curb the offending patterns of Inuit offenders it would need to address those specific characteristics related to their incarceration. Effective programming for other Aboriginal groups would require practitioners to consider their specific concerns.

Overall, the over-representation of each Aboriginal group can be conceptualized as a culmination and manifestation of several psycho-social factors. As such, it is imperative that crime prevention and offender intervention practitioners develop policies and programs that not only acknowledge the differences between Aboriginal groups, but also appreciate the interplay of social and psychological dynamics in the lives of those they assist. Effective policy and programming must address the impact of social disadvantage and psychological distress on the lives of those in the communities as well as those involved in the criminal justice system.

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APPENDIX A: TABLES

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics

	First Nations % (n)	Métis % (n)	Inuit % (n)	Non- Aboriginal % (n)	χ^2 (ϕ)
Gender (male)	95.6 (1424)	97.3 (570)	97.0 (97)	97.5 (10113)	19.21*** (.0391)
Less than grade 8 education	31.0 (309)	21.7 (80)	57.1 (44)	20.0 (1215)	117.71*** (.1251)
No high school diploma	88.4 (880)	84.8 (313)	96.1 (74)	78.5 (4758)	70.90*** (.097)
Unemployed at arrest	76.7 (761)	74.9 (275)	68.0 (51)	67.9 (4130)	37.12*** (.0703)
No history of employment	22.0 (219)	16.3 (60)	10.5 (8)	12.3 (749)	71.24*** (.0972)
	M SD (n)	M SD (n)	M SD (n)	M SD (n)	F (R²)
Age at admission	30.50± 8.81 (1490)	30.60± 9.10 (586)	33.07± 8.49 (100)	33.90± 10.43 (10368)	63.32*** (.0149)
Current age	33.41± 9.37 (1490)	33.59± 9.84 (586)	35.37± 8.43 (100)	37.14± 11.02 (10368)	67.81*** (.0160)

*** $p < .001$ (bonferroni = $p < .007$)

Table 2. Youth custody and community supervision

	First Nations % (n)	Métis % (n)	Inuit % (n)	Non-Aboriginal % (n)	χ^2 (ϕ)
Youth closed custody	40.0 (382)	45.9 (166)	17.8 (13)	27.5 (1635)	111.41*** (.1233)
Youth open custody	39.5 (378)	42.3 (153)	20.3 (15)	24.9 (1475)	130.63*** (.1336)
Youth community supervision	53.0 (506)	57.3 (205)	40.5 (30)	34.0 (2010)	188.81*** (.1608)

*** p<.001; ** p<.01 (bonferroni = p<.01)

Table 3. Prior adult custody and community supervision

	First Nations % (n)	Métis % (n)	Inuit % (n)	Non-Aboriginal % (n)	χ^2 (ϕ)
Previous federal term	31.5 (310)	38.7 (143)	33.3 (25)	34.7 (2101)	6.92 (.0304)
Previous provincial term	82.0 (808)	80.2 (296)	85.3 (64)	70.8 (4293)	70.60*** (.0971)
Previous adult community supervision	78.5 (772)	77.0 (285)	86.7 (650)	72.0 (4358)	28.12*** (.0613)

*** p<.001; ** p<.01 (bonferroni = p<.01)

Table 4. Current offence characteristics

	First Nations % (n)	Métis % (n)	Inuit % (n)	Non-Aboriginal % (n)	χ^2 (ϕ)
Homicide	27.8 (414)	23.7 (139)	16.0 (16)	23.6 (2447)	16.10*** (.0358)
Attempted murder	2.4 (35)	3.9 (23)	1.0 (1)	4.5 (468)	17.88*** (.0378)
Serious assault	38.8 (578)	32.6 (191)	40.0 (40)	26.1 (2709)	117.24*** (.0967)
Sex offence	22.4 (333)	15.9 (93)	62.0 (62)	16.7 (1736)	164.46*** (.1145)
Robbery	28.6 (426)	40.4 (237)	8.0 (8)	34.8 (3610)	63.29*** (.0710)
Other violent offence	15.0 (223)	16.6 (97)	18.0 (18)	18.3 (1901)	10.79** (.0293)
Break and enter	32.0 (477)	37.9 (222)	35.0 (35)	30.5 (3157)	15.91*** (.0356)
Drug offence	11.1 (165)	16.7 (98)	6.0 (6)	21.2 (2193)	99.28*** (.0890)
Other <i>Criminal Code</i> offence	61.3 (914)	63.7 (373)	53.0 (53)	62.4 (6473)	4.80 (.0196)
Maximum security custody	21.4 (275)	17.3 (85)	16.5 (15)	15.5 (1311)	28.45*** (.0526)
5 or more current convictions	25.4 (250)	29.5 (109)	18.7 (14)	37.2 (2250)	66.36*** (.0942)
	M SD	M SD	M SD	M SD	F (R²)
Sentence length (years) ⁽¹⁾	5.37± 4.31	5.94± 4.99	4.98± 2.99	6.65± 6.16	19.57*** (.0059)

*** p<.001; ** p<.01 (bonferroni for offence variables = p<.006; for other current offence variables = p<.02)

⁽¹⁾ Sentence length was calculated with those serving life sentences removed.

Table 5. Dynamic factors: "Some" or "considerable" need

	First Nations % (n)	Métis % (n)	Inuit % (n)	Non-Aboriginal % (n)	χ^2 (ϕ)
OIA Overall Need	77.6 (1146)	72.8 (423)	89.0 (89)	62.0 (6257)	182.78*** (.1221)
Personal/ Emotional	96.1 (1201)	94.9 (460)	98.8 (83)	91.4 (7699)	44.18*** (.0657)
Substance Abuse	94.2 (1178)	90.5 (439)	91.7 (77)	69.9 (5889)	423.12*** (.2032)
Employment	69.8 (872)	70.7 (343)	57.1 (48)	57.9 (4882)	88.21*** (.0928)
Marital/ Family	60.3 (754)	53.4 (259)	72.6 (61)	51.3 (4324)	49.16*** (.0693)
Associates/ Social Interaction	65.4 (817)	70.3 (341)	54.8 (46)	62.7 (5282)	16.61*** (.0403)
Attitudes	52.5 (656)	56.1 (272)	52.4 (44)	62.2 (5239)	49.66*** (.0696)
Community Functioning	45.0 (563)	47.0 (228)	44.1 (37)	48.7 (4100)	6.48 (.0252)
OIA Risk (High)	72.9 (1077)	67.5 (392)	85.0 (85)	56.7 (5727)	184.99*** (.1229)

*** p<.001; ** p<.01 (bonferroni = p<.006)