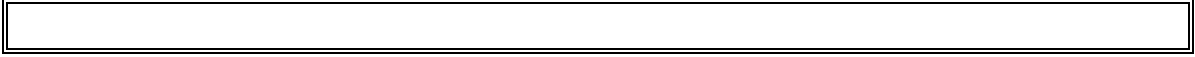


**An Examination of Aboriginal and Caucasian
Women Offender Risk and Needs Factors**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past three decades research has focussed on the over-representation of various minority groups (i.e., Aboriginal, Asiatic, and Black) in the prison populations in North America. A consequence has been intense focus on differences between defined racial groups, while similarities have been routinely minimized. Research on Canadian offenders has invariably concluded that Aboriginal and Caucasian offenders have different criminogenic needs. Discussions have centered primarily on assumptions of racial heterogeneity: similarities between individuals are assumed to arise more from racial experience than from shared or common life histories.

This research undertakes a comparison of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) risk and needs to determine the degree of difference in ratings between Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders in federal custody. The original study from which a portion of the data for this research was collected was the One-Day Snapshot survey collected by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, in collaboration with federal and provincial/territorial correctional authorities. "The purpose of the project was to provide more detailed information on the make-up of federal and provincial/territorial [women and men] inmate populations in Canada" (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1997, p. 2). The Snapshot survey was the first collection of data on inmate characteristics at the national level. The contribution of this report is the analysis and comparison of the risk and needs levels of Aboriginal and Caucasian federal women offenders.

Needs ratings measure a variety of interpersonal and personal dynamics in an offender's life. They are used by CSC to indicate the extent of difficulties experienced by offenders, and provide insight into individual life histories, pre-incarceration lifestyles, and programming requirements. For example, a high substance abuse need level rating reflects an individual's life history (e.g., possibly chronic alcoholism). The risk rating is an assessment of future probability of re-offending if identified needs are not adequately addressed. The rating is determined by an individual's offence history characteristics and specific risk assessment measures. Risk and need measurements are used by the CSC to facilitate program referral as well as guide the case management process.

Statistical analyses revealed difference in many of the needs ratings and, to a lesser extent, in the risk ratings of Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders. Caucasian women rated consistently lower levels of need in the seven domains. The greatest difference was in the substance abuse domain, followed by the employment, marital/family, and association/socialization. There was also substantial difference in their individual risk ratings. Racial experience may, therefore, be an influencing factor in offender risk/needs ratings (e.g., relationship between historic oppression of Aboriginal women and substance abuse). However,

similarities between Aboriginal and Caucasian women were also found in the overall risk domain and some of the need domains; community functioning, personal/emotional orientation, and attitude. Hence, individual life history may also be influencing Aboriginal and Caucasian offender risk and need level ratings.

The findings of this research support that both similarities and differences exist in comparison of the OIA risk and needs ratings of Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders. It suggests that this be acknowledged in the criminological research field. As well, it suggests that criminological research that forefronts offender race may also need to account for individual life histories, acknowledging potential similarities across racial groupings. Individuals differ due to their racialized experiences but they also resemble one another due to common life experiences. The overall implication is that caution must be exercised in focussing research exclusively on race.

With the current trend in research focusing on cultural heterogeneity, the lack of attention to similarity across racial categories may result in overlooking or minimizing elements of individual shared life histories that may contribute to understanding and identifying criminogenic factors (risk and needs). A suggested implication for CSC policy and practice, based on the diversity observed between Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders in the analyses, is continued support for the current emphasis on culturally specific offender institutions and programming (i.e., Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge). However, it is equally important to acknowledge the similarity between offenders, as revealed in the analyses, and the potential implications for increased understanding in correctional practices. Continued research in this area, including a focus on men offenders, is encouraged by this research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF DIAGRAMS	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
Institutional Offender Intake Assessment.....	2
<i>Risk</i>	4
<i>Need</i>	4
METHOD	6
Population.....	6
POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS	7
RESULTS	8
Overall Risk and Needs Ratings.....	8
Individual Risk Ratings.....	9
Individual Needs Ratings.....	10
<i>Employment</i>	10
<i>Marital/family</i>	10
<i>Association/socialization</i>	10
<i>Substance abuse</i>	10
<i>Community</i>	11
<i>Personal/emotional</i>	11
<i>Attitude</i>	11
DISCUSSION	12
REFERENCES	14
APPENDIX A	17

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Incarcerated federal women offender characteristics.....	7
Table 2	Incarcerated Aboriginal and Caucasian federal women offender characteristics	7
Table 3	Aboriginal and Caucasian women offender overall risk ratings	8
Table 4	Aboriginal and Caucasian women offender overall needs ratings.....	9
Table 5	Aboriginal and Caucasian women offender individual risk ratings	9
Table 6	Percentage of Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders concentrated in seven needs domains at the highest level	11

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

Diagram 1	Offender intake assessment	3
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INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades research has focussed on the over-representation of various minority groups (i.e., Aboriginal, Asiatic, and Black) in the prison populations in North America. A consequence has been intense focus on differences between defined racial groups, while similarities have been routinely minimized. Research on Canadian offenders has invariably concluded that Aboriginal and Caucasian¹ offenders have different criminogenic needs. Discussions have centered primarily on assumptions of racial heterogeneity: similarities between individuals are assumed to arise more from racial experience than from shared or common life histories.

This research undertakes a comparison of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) risk and needs to determine the degree of difference in ratings between Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders in federal custody. The original study, from which a portion of the data for this research was collected was the One-Day Snapshot survey, compiled by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, in collaboration with federal and provincial/territorial correctional authorities. "The purpose of the project was to provide more detailed information on the make-up of federal and provincial/territorial [women and men] inmate populations in Canada" (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1997, p. 2). The Snapshot survey was the first collection of data on inmate characteristics at the national level.² The contribution of this report is the analysis and comparison of the risk and needs levels of Aboriginal and Caucasian federal women offenders.

¹ The category "Caucasian" is individuals identified as "Caucasian" on the Offender Intake Assessment. It does not include all individuals identified as "non-aboriginal".

² See *Women Inmates, Aboriginal Inmates, and Inmates Serving Life Sentences: A One Day Snapshot* by Finn, Trevethan, Carrière, and Kowalski, in *Juristat* Vol. 19 no. 5, 1999. Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE; *A One Day Snapshot of Inmates in Canada's Adult Correctional Facilities* by Robinson, Millson, Trevethan, and MacKillop, in *Juristat* Vol. 18 no. 8, 1998. Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE, and *A One Day Snapshot of Inmates in Canada's Adult Correctional Facilities* by Trevethan, Carriere, MacKillop, Finn, Robinson, Porporino, and Milson, 1999, Catalogue no. 85-601-XPE.

It is important to focus exclusively on women offenders because overall, in comparison to men offenders, they have received much less attention in Canada (Faith, 1993; Boritch, 1997; DeKeseredy, 2000). Within CSC, there has been an increased amount of research attention within the past two decades toward women offenders. It is necessary to identify women offenders as a group separate from men so that, as is characteristic of traditional research, men offenders do not continue to be the standard against which women are compared. A similar argument can be made for the Aboriginal women offender population.

Offender Intake Assessment needs ratings measures a variety of interpersonal and personal dynamics in an offender's life. Needs ratings, measured by the Dynamic Factor Analysis,³ are used by CSC to indicate the extent of difficulties experienced by offenders and provide insight into individual life histories, pre-incarceration lifestyles, and programming requirements. The risk rating is an assessment of future probability of re-offending if identified needs are not adequately addressed. An individual's offence history characteristics and specific risk assessment measures (i.e., Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale) determine the rating. Risk and need measurements are used by the CSC to facilitate program referral as well as guide the case management process.

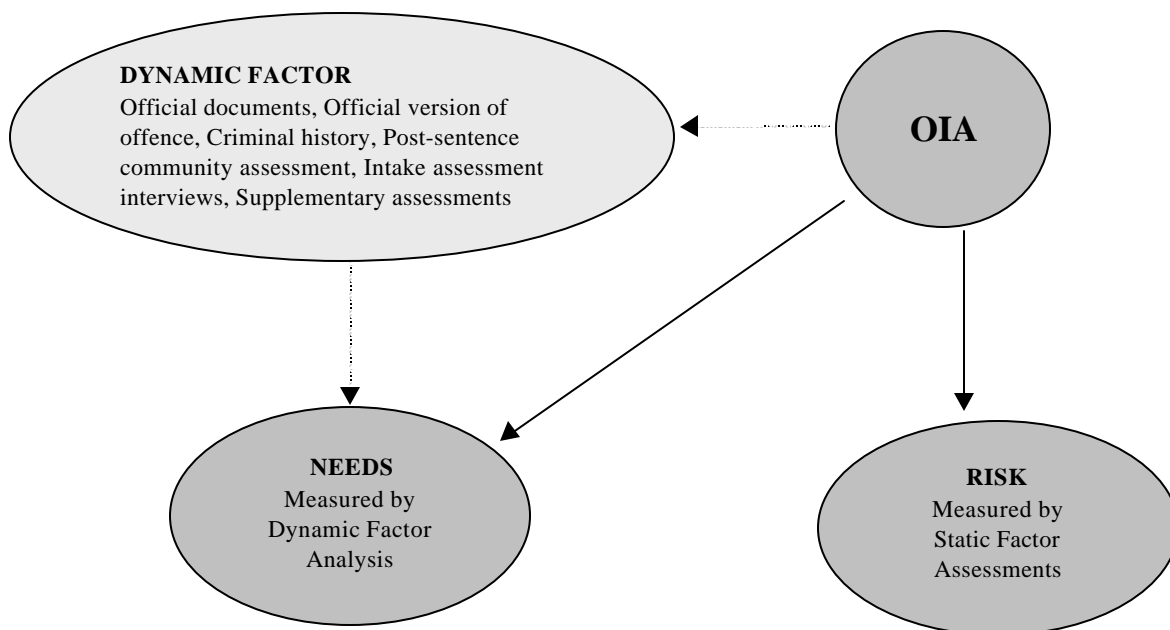
Institutional Offender Intake Assessment

The largest body of well-established research findings in criminology is devoted to the prediction of criminal behavior (Andrews, 1989). Most literature focuses on offender risk rather than needs, community protection rather than offender reintegration. Canada has been progressive in the correction field in focussing attention to offender needs.

³ Previously termed the Case Needs Identification and Analysis (CNIA). Creation of the institutional Case Needs Identification and Analysis (CNIA) is based on the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale (CRNMS), developed by L. Motiuk and F. Porporino and implemented by CSC in 1990. The CRNMS is comprised of 12 needs domains and serves 2 prime functions: assessment of offender needs in the community, and determination of the frequency of contact between a parole officer and offender.

The Correctional Service of Canada identifies offender risk and needs measurements through the OIA⁴ to assist in determining the type of correctional programming an offender requires while incarcerated and predict how well she or he will integrate into the community upon release if identified needs are not adequately addressed. The OIA was introduced in 1994 as a standard part of the federal offender institutional intake assessment process and is defined as "...the timely and systematic analysis of significant information and the identification of the critical static and dynamic factors that affect the safe, timely reintegration of each offender" (CSC 1999, p. 2). Information is collected and analyzed on static (termed risk) and dynamic (termed need) indicators (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1 Offender intake assessment



DYNAMIC FACTORS ANALYSIS

- Marital/family
- Associates/social interaction
- Substance abuse
- Community
- Personal/emotional
- Attitude

- Criminal History
- Offence Severity
- Sex Offence History Checklist
- Guidelines to Assess Serious Harm
- Statistical Information on Recidivism

⁴ CSC has two main forms of offender risk and needs assessment: the institutional Offender Intake Assessment and the Community Risk/Needs Assessment. The former is the focus of this report.

Risk

Offender risk focuses on risk of re-offending through the application of research-derived measures. Offender risk is primarily determined by an individual's current offence and criminal history. Risk is identified through the "application of several research-based tools and policy guidelines that focus on historical and static factors that are correlated to the risk for re-offending" (CSC, 1999, p. 3). The measures are Criminal History Record, Offence Severity Record, Sex Offence History Checklist, Guidelines to Assess Serious Harm, and the Statistical Information on Recidivism Scale (SIR).

Criminal History Record focuses on principal indicators related to an individual's conflict with the law. Offence Severity Record identifies the nature and degree to which an offender has inflicted harm on her/his victims and society in general. Sex Offence History focuses on the nature and extent of sex offending, the harm inflicted upon victims, and any assessment/treatment/ intervention (CSC, 1999, p. 3). Serious harm is determined by the extent of injury inflicted in the commission of a Schedule I or II offence (CSC, 1999, p. 10). The SIR scale, a statistically-derived recidivism prediction tool which combines measures of demographic characteristics and criminal history in a scoring system, is mandatory for all federal offenders except those who are women or Aboriginal (CSC, 1999, p. 14).

Need

Offender needs are measurements of a variety of inter-personal and personal skills identified as criminogenic factors. Needs factors are dynamic in nature: the level and nature of needs can change and problems can improve or worsen (Canadian Center for Justice Statistics, 1997).

To inform the Dynamic Factor Analysis process, indicators of need are extracted from several sources: official documents, official version of the offence (court, police and pre-sentence reports), criminal history (Finger Print System and Canadian

Police Information Centre), post-sentence community assessment, intake assessment interviews, and supplementary assessments during the intake process.⁵ On a standard rating scale,⁶ factors are identified and analyzed through the systematic assessment of seven domains: employment, marital/family, associates/social interaction, substance abuse, community functioning, personal/emotional orientation, and attitude. The dynamic factor analysis is conducted within the Offender Management System (OMS), and for each domain, the OMS scores the number of responses and ranks them in order of priority.

In addition to individual risk and needs scores, using the multitude of measurement indicators for risk and needs, again through the OMS, the indicator scores are converted into an overall risk rating and an overall needs rating.

The OIA is conducted at intake for all offenders. Men offenders go through intake at a regional reception centre, where their physical, mental and emotional status is evaluated. For women offenders, the OIA is conducted at one of the regional institutions for women. The same information is collected and analyzed for both men and women (with the exception of the SIR scale) - criminal and personal history - to determine their risk and identify their programming needs (Blanchette, 1997). It is important to acknowledge that increased research on the risk/needs scoring system for women and Aboriginal offenders is needed, and attention is currently being allotted to this both within the CSC and the academic research community. The OIA, however, is the measuring tool the Service currently uses, so research in this area is limited to this tool and should, therefore, be viewed with caution.

⁵ Psychological assessments, substance abuse assessments (i.e., Computerized Lifestyle Assessment Instrument - CLAI), educational and vocational assessments, family violence assessments (Family Violence Risk Assessment - SARA), sex offender assessment.

⁶ Needs ratings are commonly measured on a scale of zero (lowest need) to three (highest need). For example, employment need is rated as: (0) stable pattern of employment; (1) no current difficulties; (2) employment situation causing minor adjustment problems; (3) employment situation causing major adjustment problems. See Appendix A for descriptions of the seven domains and corresponding rating scales.

METHOD

Population

On October 5, 1996, data from a One-Day snapshot identified 288 women offenders on-register in adult correctional facilities. Concentrating on offenders whose race was known to be either "Aboriginal" or "Caucasian", individual OIA risk/needs data were available for 198 of the offenders and overall OIA assessment data were available for 164. The sample for the current study represents about 57% of the total federal women offender population at the time. Caucasian offenders comprise the majority (75%) of the present sample and Aboriginal offenders the remaining (25%).

The data were originally collected for the Special Corrections Utilization (SCU) study by the Canadian Center for Justice Statistics (CCJS), a satellite of Statistics Canada, in partnership with CSC. The study is entitled *One-Day Snapshot Project* and the population included offenders in federal custody, temporary detainees, and offenders serving intermittent sentences. The Snapshot database was merged with CSC risk/needs data by the CSC Research Branch to produce the data set used for this research. The unique contribution of this research, in comparison to the Snapshot study, is its comparison of risk and needs ratings of the Aboriginal and Caucasian women populations.

There are two cautionary notes regarding the data set. First, the risk and needs ratings were extracted from the offenders' most recent institutional OIA (most recent incarceration). In all likelihood, this assessment is compatible with the offender in the data set. However, in the event that an offender was released and re-admitted between October 6, 1996 and March, 1997, the intake assessment would not then be the most recent. The potential occurrence of this and the change between the two intake assessments is modest. Second, the risk and needs ratings were completed during the institutional OIA by a CSC staff member from November 1994 onward and a back-fill was conducted for individuals who had been admitted prior to the implementation of the OIA. This backfill information, therefore, is susceptible to being biased by assessment of the offenders' current status rather than their status at sentence commencement.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

The typical Canadian federal women offender is young, a single parent, unemployed, addicted to drugs, alcohol or both, and serving her first penitentiary term. A disproportionate number is Aboriginal, and a large percentage has been physically, emotionally or sexually abused (Boritch, 1997; CCJS, 1997; CSC, 1998; DeKeseredy, 2000). Characteristics of the Aboriginal and Caucasian federally incarcerated women offender populations are outlined in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 Incarcerated federal women offender characteristics

	Number of offenders	%
Age 20-34 yrs	184	52%
Serving a sentence of less than six years	207	58%
Serving a sentence for:		
- Murder	71	20%
- Schedule I offence (violence)	163	46%
- Schedule II offence (drugs)	84	24%
- Non schedule offence (all other)	39	11%

Data Source: *Basic Facts About Corrections in Canada. 1997 Edition* (1998). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada. N = 357.

Table 2 Incarcerated Aboriginal and Caucasian federal women offender characteristics

	Aboriginal		Caucasian	
	n	%	n	%
Canadian citizen	63	98%	200	89%
English as primary language	63	98%	178	79%
Married or common-law	25	39%	65	29%
13 years or more of education	0	0%	7	3%
Mean education level completed		8.97		10.31

Data Source: current study population (pre OIA demarcation) with Caucasian n = 224 and Aboriginal n = 64. Note there is a high missing frequency for the education variable (n = 96).

RESULTS

Overall, the OIA rating of risk and needs (see Tables 3 & 4) and individual risk and needs (see Tables 5 & 6) revealed both similarities and differences between Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders. Each are discussed separately and it is through the latter that insight is gained into the individual life histories of offenders. At the introduction of each individual needs domain a brief description is provided and a description of the rating scale is located in Appendix A.

It is important to acknowledge the small population size of this study, which will reduce the power of various tests of statistical significance. Differences and similarities are determined by comparison of the percentage differences within the individual risk and needs categories. It is important to highlight once again that the OIA is the measuring tool the Service currently uses, so research in the area is limited to it and should be viewed with caution. Research on the risk/needs scoring system for women and Aboriginal offenders is currently being undertaken within both the CSC and the academic research community.

Overall Risk and Needs Ratings

The overall OIA risk ratings revealed some similarity in comparison of Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders (see Table 3). The greatest difference is 13% in the "high" risk category (42% Aboriginal and 29% Caucasian).

Table 3 Aboriginal and Caucasian women offender overall risk ratings

	Overall Risk		
	Low	Moderate	High
Aboriginal	21%	37%	42%
Caucasian	27%	44%	29%

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Comparison of the overall needs ratings revealed dissimilarity (see Table 4). The overall "high" need level for Aboriginal women is considerably higher than for Caucasian women, 67% compared to 39% - a substantial difference of 28% ($p < .01$).

Table 4 Aboriginal and Caucasian women offender overall needs ratings

	Overall Needs**		
	Low	Moderate	High
Aboriginal	9%	23%	67%
Caucasian	19%	42%	39%

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Individual Risk Ratings⁷

Criminal history record, one of numerous factors included in the determination of offender risk, is presented here. There was great discrepancy in comparison of the risk ratings of the Aboriginal and Caucasian populations. This was evident at both the adult and youth levels. To illustrate, 85% of the Aboriginal population and 58% of the Caucasian had previous involvement in adult court. Similarly, 65% of the Aboriginal and only 19% of the Caucasian population had previous involvement in youth court. See Table 5 for additional comparisons.

Table 5 Aboriginal and Caucasian women offender individual risk ratings

	Aboriginal	Caucasian
YOUTH		
Previous involvement in youth court	65%	19%
Previous open custody	43%	13%
Previous secure custody	37%	13%
ADULT		
Previous involvement in adult court	85%	58%
Previous provincial incarceration	67%	42%

⁷ Data source: current study population (post OIA demarcation). Note a high missing frequency (n = 122).

Previous federal incarceration	42%	12%
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Individual Needs Ratings⁸

Employment

Employment need is an offender’s employment skills and general employability. Aboriginal women have considerably higher employment needs than Caucasian women, 53% of Aboriginals and only 25% of Caucasians are rated at the highest level ($p<0.001$).

Marital/family

Marital/family need is determined by the stability and support, as well as negative attributes, in an offender’s inter-personal relationships. Aboriginal women have substantially higher marital/family relations need levels than Caucasian women - 55% versus 29%, respectively. Similarly, the two lowest levels were comprised of only 8% Aboriginals and 27% Caucasians ($p<0.01$).

Association/socialization

Association/socialization need is an offender’s pro- and/or anti-social personal contacts, primarily determined by whether associates are involved in criminal activity. The highest need level is comprised of a disproportionately high number of Aboriginal women (37%), and only 15% of Caucasian women ($p<0.01$).

Substance abuse

Substance abuse need is an individual’s use/abuse of alcohol and its impediment to their community adjustment. The greatest difference between the two groups was in this domain. A notable 82% of Aboriginal women and only 37% of Caucasian women comprised the highest need level grouping, a difference of 45% ($p<0.001$).

⁸ See Table 6 for percent of Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders concentrated in seven needs domains at the highest level.

Community

Community need is an offender's ability to function independently in the community, including social skills, life skills and money management. The Aboriginal population revealed a somewhat similar need level in comparison to the Caucasian population: 18% of Aboriginal women and 7% of Caucasian women rated at the highest level ($p < 0.01$).

Personal/emotional

Personal and emotional need is the psychological needs of an offender. Both Aboriginal and Caucasian women were rated as having either "some" or "considerable" difficulty in this domain: 57% of Aboriginal women and 42% of Caucasian women.

Attitude

Attitude need is an offender's attitude toward a pro-social lifestyle, ability to recognize problem areas and receptiveness to assistance. This includes an individual's attempt to further her own position (self-help) and demonstrate a pro-social attitude. Aboriginal women were similar in comparison to Caucasian women in their rating in the highest need level: 12% Aboriginals and 8% Caucasians.

Table 6 Percentage of Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders concentrated in seven needs domains at the highest level

	Aboriginal (%)	Caucasian (%)
Employment ^{***}	53%	25%
Marital/family ^{**}	55%	29%
Association/socialization ^{**}	37%	15%
Substance abuse ^{***}	82%	37%
Community ^{**}	18%	7%
Personal/emotional	57%	42%
Attitude	12%	8%

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Substance Abuse & Personal/Emotional use a 3-level scoring system (1-3) and all others use a 4-level scoring system (See Appendix A). Collapsing levels two and three for both needs reveals similar results in comparison to the highest need level ratings in each. The collapsed level ratings are: Substance Abuse 94% Aboriginal and 63% Caucasian; Personal/Emotional 96% Aboriginal and 88% Caucasian.

DISCUSSION

Since the early 1950s and more over the past decade, offender risk and needs have received increased attention in the field of corrections and criminological research. CSC is established in this field with its creation and implementation of the Community Risk/Needs Management Scale in the 1990s, followed by the Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) process in 1994. The Service's current research continues to re-evaluate and revise the needs component of the OIA.

The Canadian Center for Justice Statistics, in its 1997 *One-Day Snapshot Project*, provided risks and needs descriptions for the first time. And recent criminological research (Dowden & Blanchette, 1999) has focused exclusively on criminological risk and needs factors, while others (Hannah-Moffat, 1999) have raised concerns with applying offender risk/needs scales to women.

This research has compared risk and needs ratings of Aboriginal and Caucasian women under federal jurisdiction. Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders revealed difference in many of their needs ratings and, to a lesser extent, in their risk ratings.

The greatest difference in the highest level of need ratings was in the substance abuse domain, followed by the employment, marital/family, and association/ socialization. There was also substantial difference in the individual risk ratings (Criminal History Record). Racial experience may, therefore, be an influencing factor in offender risk/needs ratings (e.g., relationship between historic oppression of Aboriginal women and substance abuse).

Similarities between Aboriginal and Caucasian women were also found in the overall risk domain and some of the need domains; community, personal/emotional, and attitude. Hence, individual life history may also be influencing offender risk and need level ratings.

Given that the analysis of the data revealed both similarities and differences across Aboriginal and Caucasian racial groupings of women, it is suggested that criminological research that forefronts offender race may need also to account for individual life histories, acknowledging potential similarities across racial groupings. Individuals differ due to their racialized experiences but they also resemble one another due to common life experiences. The overall implication is that it is not wise to categorize offenders in research exclusively by race; this research cautions against overly race-centred research.

With the current trend in research focus being on cultural heterogeneity, the lack of attention to similarity across race categories may result in overlooking or minimizing elements of individuals' shared life histories that may contribute to understanding and identifying criminogenic factors (risk and needs). A suggested implication for CSC policy and practice, based on the diversity observed between Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders in the analyses, is continued support for the current emphasis on culturally specific offender institutions and programming (i.e., Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge). However, it is equally important to acknowledge the similarity between offenders, as revealed in the analyses, and the potential implications for increased understanding in correctional practices. Continued research in this area, including a focus on men offenders, is encouraged by this research.

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APPENDIX A

Need Dimension	Descriptor	Rating
Employment	stable pattern of employment	0
	no current difficulties	1
	employment situation causing minor adjustment problems	2
	employment situation causing major adjustment problems	3
Marital/Family	pattern of stable and supportive relationships	0
	no current difficulties	1
	occasional instability in relationships	2
	very unstable pattern of relationships	3
Associate/Social Interaction	pattern of non-criminal and/or positive associations	0
	mostly non-criminal and/or positive associations	1
	some criminal and/or negative associations	2
	mostly criminal and/or negative associations	3
Attitude	actively involved and responding consistently well to assistance	0
	motivated to change, and has attitudes receptive to assistance	1
	recognizes problem areas, but has attitudes not receptive to assistance	2
	unable to recognize problem areas and has attitudes not receptive to assistance	3
		3
Community Functioning	functioning pattern of satisfactory adjustment	0
	no current difficulties	1
	deficient skills limit but do not prohibit independent functioning	2
	deficient skills severely limit independent functioning	3
Personal/Emotional Orientation	no current difficulties	0
	personal/emotional problems indicate some need for assistance	1
	personal/emotional problems indicate significant need for assistance	2
Substance Abuse	no current difficulties	0
	some substance usage causing moderate adjustment problems	1
	frequent uncontrolled usage causing serious adjustment problems	2