

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

CANADA

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PREVENTION AND CHILDREN COMMITTEE

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OFFENDER PROFILES

The Prevention and Children Committee of the National Crime Prevention Council is developing a strategy to help create better opportunities for children from the prenatal stage to six years of age. High-quality and consistent nurturing combined with a secure, physically and emotionally safe environment through childhood will improve each child's prospects of success in life and make it less likely that they will later be victimized or become offenders.

This fact sheet is one component of the Committee's work. For more information, call the National Crime Prevention Council at (613) 941-0505.

I. General Findings

The following general findings are drawn from studies involving Canadian federal male offenders convicted and sentenced to two or more years of incarceration, unless otherwise indicated.

Family Violence

A national file review study of family violence among federal inmates, conducted by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), randomly sampled a total of 935 files of men admitted to federal facilities between June and November of 1992.¹ The study produced the following estimates:

- One in three inmate files showed there had been family violence where the offender was the perpetrator (partner abuse, child abuse), that had involved a formal response by the legal system.
- In over half of the cases where the male offender had either physically or sexually abused a female partner, the victim received a physical injury that required medical attention.
- In a third of the cases where the male offender had physically or sexually abused a child, the victim received a physical injury requiring medical attention.
- Almost half of the inmate files showed that the offender had been a victim of child abuse (physical, sexual, psychological, neglect) as a child or adolescent, or had witnessed family violence.
- In three-quarters of the childhood victimization cases (excluding witnessing), offenders had suffered abuse (physical, sexual, psychological, neglect) from their fathers. In less than half of the cases, the offenders were abused by their mothers.

- In two-thirds of the cases where the offender witnessed abuse as a child or adolescent, the victim was his mother (or an adult female). In most cases, the abuse witnessed was physical.
- Offenders who had been victimized as children were more likely to commit acts of family violence as adults.
- Witnessing abuse as a child was also strongly related to abusing others as an adult.

Offender institutional files may underestimate the incidence and prevalence of offenders' involvement in family violence. In another study² (Dutton and Hart, 1992), based on self-reports made during interviews with male offenders and their female partners, family violence was reported in 58% of the cases. In contrast, the CSC national file review found only 29% of institutional files of offenders with partners which showed indications of family violence.³

Health

- In 1992-93, a study⁴ conducted by the Correctional Service of Canada in eight federal institutions in British Columbia found that 69% of the group of inmates tested had some degree of hearing loss. This is more than nine times the rate of hearing loss in the general Canadian population (7%). Similar studies conducted in the United States support the findings of greater hearing loss among inmate populations than the national average.
- There are several medical and neurological hazards of low birth weight which can put children at risk of

improper development and physical and mental health. When a mother is poor, unmarried, a teenager, poorly educated, malnourished, receiving poor prenatal care, or a heavy smoker, there is a greater risk of low birth weight. Social conditions and smoking are thought to be the main causes of low birth weight.⁵

- Children affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome can experience neurological damage that results in hyperactivity, behavioural problems, learning problems, learning disabilities, and a general inability to function normally in a social milieu.⁶

Mental Health

- Recent studies of federal inmates have shown that they have a far higher rate of major mental disorders (e.g. schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorder) than that of the general Canadian population.⁷
- The nature of mental disorder in federal offender population was broken down as follows in a 1989 survey conducted by the Correctional Service of Canada:⁸

– Psychotic disorders	10.4%
– Psycho-sexual disorders	24.5%
– Depressive disorders	29.8%
– Anxiety disorders	55.0%
- Only 48% of inmates with a major mental disorder had reported their symptoms to a physician or a mental health professional.⁹

Criminal History

- It is widely accepted that the majority of crimes are committed by a small minority of male persistent offenders. Approximately 75% to 80% of incarcerated adults were persistent offenders in their youth.¹⁰
- There is a close relationship between juvenile and adult crime. Studies have shown that there is a developmental sequence between troublesome behaviour at age 8 and criminal behaviour at ages 21-24.¹¹
- In 1990-1991, in 19% of youth court cases, the accused already had five or more previous convictions.¹²
- An English longitudinal study that followed boys up to at least the age of 25, found a close association between juvenile and adult participation in crime. Of those convicted as juveniles, over 70% were convicted again as adults, whereas only about 16% of those not convicted as juveniles were convicted as adults.¹³
- It was also found that the younger the offender was when he began his career, and the more serious and extensive his juvenile crime record, the more likely it was that he would remain criminally active as an adult.¹⁴
- A cohort study consisting of 1,222 members in the U.S. found that one-time juvenile offenders were less frequently arrested as adults (36.1%), while 77.5% of chronic juvenile offenders were convicted again as adults.

Education

- Most federal inmates are undereducated, although the I.Q. distribution among the inmate population is not significantly different from that of the general population.¹⁶
- A 1993 study explored the relationship between school experience during early and late adolescence and criminality. School performance has been found to be the best and most stable predictor of adult offending. Poor school performance and a weak bond to school will increase the probability of misbehaviour in school, which, in turn, provokes disciplinary reactions. This escalates through elementary and secondary school, leading to a higher level of adolescent delinquency and eventually to adult offending.¹⁷
- Poor school performance is common among federal offenders. Upon admission to federal custody, approximately 65% of offenders test at lower than a Grade 8 completion level and 82% test lower than Grade 10.¹⁸

Substance Abuse

- Although the exact nature of the relationship between alcohol and drug use and criminal behaviour is not known, it has long been recognized that a link exists.¹⁹
- 55% of federal offenders reported that they were under the influence of alcohol, drugs or both on the day they committed the offence(s) for which they are now incarcerated.²⁰

- Approximately 50% of the federal offender population suffers from some type of substance abuse problem.²¹
- A CSC study of approximately 9,000 offenders²² reviewed early substance abuse and its impact on adult offenders' alcohol and drug problems. The study found that:
 - the average age that offenders first tried alcohol was 14, and 29% were 12 or younger;
 - the average age that offenders first tried either prescription or nonprescription drugs for nonmedicinal purposes was 16; and
 - approximately 58% of the overall sample reported that they had been involved in illegal activities before the age of 18. Of this subsample, almost 90% had been convicted of a crime as a young offender. Offenders who had first tried alcohol in their preteens became involved in illegal activities at a significantly younger average age (15.8 years) than those who first tried alcohol as teenagers (18.8 years).

II. Specific Categories Of Offenders

Offender-profiling research has also been conducted on the following categories of offenders.

Aboriginal Offenders

- A socio-demographic study of aboriginal inmates versus non-aboriginal inmates²³ found that, in many cases, aboriginal inmates are even more disadvantaged in some respects than non-aboriginal inmates:
 - Alcohol abuse was identified as a problem among 76% of the aboriginal inmates in comparison to 64.6% of non-aboriginal inmates.
 - Fewer than 20% of the aboriginal offenders had a grade 10 education or more, compared to more than 30% of other offenders.
 - Employment rates also varied, with less than 17% of aboriginal offenders employed at the time of their offence, in comparison to nearly 30% of non-aboriginal offenders.
- Although aboriginal people comprise only 2.5 % of Canada's population, approximately 9% of federally incarcerated males are aboriginal.²⁴
- First Nations people are six times more likely to go to prison than the majority of the non-aboriginal Canadian population.²⁵

- Although First Nations women make up only 3% of Canada's population, they represent approximately 17% of federally sentenced women.²⁶
- The crime rates on aboriginal reserves and in aboriginal communities, particularly in the northern regions of Canada, are higher than the rates for the general population.²⁷
- The crime rate among Canada's registered aboriginal people is nearly two times the national crime rate.²⁸
- The violent crime rate for aboriginal bands is 3 1/2 times the national rate.²⁹
- A review of CSC prairie region aboriginal inmates' files found that, as of 1984, although only 20.4% had been born in communities of more than 10,000 people, at the time of their admission to a federal institution, 67% of aboriginal offenders had been living in urban communities of more than 10,000 people.³⁰
- Only 22.5% of aboriginal offenders had any vocational training and about 67% had no previous skilled employment.³¹
- The Canadian Council on Social Development has found indications of a high incidence of family violence, sexual assault, and incest in many native communities.³²
- Among the findings of a study conducted by the Ontario Native Women's Association³³ were the following:

- 85% of the women surveyed indicated that family violence occurred in their community.
- 80% of the women had personally experienced family violence.
- Alcoholism was identified by nearly 80% of the women as the main cause of family violence.

Young Offenders

- Each year, almost 1 in 10 youths come into contact with the police for a violation of the *Criminal Code* or other federal statutes.³⁴
- The charge rate for youths is much higher and has been increasing faster than the charge rate for adults. In 1992, the youth charge rate was 63 per 100,000 youths, 2.5 times the adult rate of 25. (Increases in the youth charge rate may reflect an increase in youth crime, but they may also reflect an intensification of the charging practices of police departments.)³⁵
- All studies agree that there are two categories of crime. The first, which is episodic and occasional and generally harmless, is associated with adolescence – some 80% of adolescents engage in it at one time or another. The second is more permanent and results in a criminal way of life that continues into advanced childhood.³⁶
- A Montreal study has concluded that 6% of people born in any given year will account for 20% of delinquents and will commit 50% of offences.³⁷

- A longitudinal study of 10,000 boys born in Philadelphia in 1945 found that less than 7% of the sample were responsible for nearly 70% of all crimes attributed to the 10,000.³⁸
- High-risk family factors commonly discussed in delinquency literature³⁹ are:
 - neglect (low levels of parental involvement and supervision of the child);
 - conflict (resulting from inadequate and/or inconsistent discipline style; parent-child rejection);
 - poor parental characteristics (alcoholism, criminality, violence, lack of maturity); and
 - disruption (unhealthy marital relations, parental absence, poor parental physical and emotional health).
- Criminality in the family, whether it be parents or siblings, is a powerful predictor of children's delinquency, even more than the child's early delinquency and social class, and equally potent for boys and girls. The probability of a boy becoming delinquent increases more than 2½ times if an older member of his family has been convicted of a criminal offence.⁴⁰
- Increased friendship with delinquent peers is associated with more frequent delinquency because this interaction gives the offender "permission" to offend.⁴¹
- Among the strongest predictors of delinquency in boys are aggression, drug use and stealing.⁴²
- A recent 10-year study by researchers at McGill University and Université de Laval reveals three key factors that identify which five-year-old boys are most at risk of turning into violent delinquents by the time they are teenagers. Little boys who are overactive, rarely anxious or worried and who seldom move to help or comfort another person are most likely to later behave in violent, antisocial ways.⁴³
- A summary of available studies concluded that 70% to 90% of violent offenders had been highly aggressive when young.⁴⁴
- One study shows that 45% of delinquents had been behind in reading and 36% in writing⁴⁵ by the time they were in Grade 2.
- An investigation of 489 runaway youths in Edmonton found that 71% of runaways reported being encouraged by others to participate in crime while on the street; moreover, 49% admitted to using unspecified illegal means to satisfy their needs.⁴⁶
- Even though homeless youths constitute a relatively small proportion of all adolescents, they are involved in a substantial and disproportionate share of crime.⁴⁷
- Compared with youths at home, homeless youths are more likely to have lived in a family lacking one or both biological parents, and they have

experienced lower amounts of parental, relational and instrumental control and greater amounts of coercive control and sexual abuse.⁴⁸

- Homeless youths are also much more likely to be the victims of physical and sexual abuse and parental neglect.⁴⁹
- Poverty and related disadvantages lead to many problems for children that are linked with later involvement in crime. The lack of basic necessities for families living in poverty can add to parents' stress and focus attention away from quality time spent with children. A Quebec study⁵⁰ involving 4,000 schoolchildren found the following:
 - The deeper the level of poverty, the higher the incidence of violence among children.
 - 14% of the poorest boys were violent, compared to 5% of boys who lived in the wealthiest areas.
 - 5% of very poor girls, but only 1% of the most well-to-do girls, committed acts of violence.

Women Offenders

- According to official statistics, only a small minority of Canadian women engage in crime. For example, in 1992, only 16.4% of all criminal charges laid against adults⁵¹ were against women.
- Official statistics show that women engage primarily in “street crime” (offences against the person, property and morality) as opposed to white-collar, corporate, organized or political crime.⁵²
- Women are concentrated in certain categories of less-serious offences. In 1992, about 55% of adult women accused faced charges for petty theft, fraud and a crime provincial statute violations.⁵³
- The poverty of many accused women is directly linked to their lack of formal education and job skills. Unable to support themselves, they often live alone in extremely poor conditions, relying on government welfare payments and/or support from friends, family and charitable organizations.⁵⁴
- The Law Foundation of Nova Scotia financed a research study on crimes committed by women in Nova Scotia that showed that most offences are crimes of poverty. The study also found that the number of charges for theft under \$1,000 generally increased in August and peaked in December, “times when mothers could be under unusual pressure to supply school clothes and Christmas presents.”⁵⁵
- As many as 49% of all accused women used legal aid lawyers, which means that their income must have been below the province's poverty line.⁵⁶
- Two-thirds of women imprisoned at the federal Prison for Women have children. Most of these women were the sole or primary caregivers for their children prior to their incarceration. Consequently, many of these children end up in state care⁵⁷.
- 75% of women imprisoned at the federal Prison for Women have no

more than basic education (junior high level), and 40% have been classified as functionally illiterate.⁵⁸

- 43% of federally sentenced women have substance abuse or addiction problems, and 69% have indicated that drugs and/or alcohol played a major part in their offence or their offending history.⁵⁹
- 82% of federally sentenced women and 72% of provincially sentenced women have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse.⁶⁰
- Self-injury (including slashing) is also common among federally sentenced women – 59% of women at the Prison for Women have disclosed self-injurious behaviour.⁶¹
- Eating disorders, as well as mental health problems such as depression, sleep disorders and high anxiety levels, are common among federally sentenced women.⁶²

Sex Offenders

An examination of 785 sex offender case histories in federal corrections facilities⁶³ conducted by the Correctional Service of Canada yielded the following results.

Juvenile offence history

- More than 40% had a history of arrests as juveniles.

Education and employment history

- Four out of five sex offenders had less than Grade 12 and half had less than Grade 10.

- More than 50% were found to be unstable in their employment pattern.
- 65% were unskilled labourers.
- Two out of three sex offenders had relied on social assistance.

Family history

- The majority of sex offenders (60%) had been separated from their biological parents before age 16.
- Of those separated from their biological parents, a third had been placed in child welfare agencies and training schools.
- More than a third of all the sex offenders reviewed had been abused (physically abused or emotionally neglected) by their parent(s) or primary caregiver(s) before the age of 16 years.
- More than half of the sex offenders' parent/primary caregiver(s) were reported to have had alcohol/drug problems, 8% had psychiatric problems, and 6% had criminal histories.

Sexual abuse

- One third of sexual offenders reviewed had been sexually abused before the age of 16.
- Among those abused, more than three-quarters had been abused by males, a quarter had been abused by authority figures and a third had experienced physical aggression by a sexual abuser.

Mental health

- A third of sex offenders reviewed had suffered severe emotional problems prior to the current offence.

Substance abuse

- Three-quarters of sex offenders reviewed had an adult history of alcohol abuse.
- Approximately two-thirds of sex offenders reviewed had an adult history of drug abuse.⁶⁴

Robbery Offenders

- A profile of robbery offenders in Canada compiled by the Correctional Service of Canada⁶⁵ revealed that:
 - Robbery is almost exclusively an offence of the young male.
 - In Canada, approximately two-thirds of persons accused of robbery are younger than 25 and virtually no accused is older than 50.
 - Compared with the general criminal population, there is no exceptional prior criminal violence in the backgrounds of robbery offenders.
- In 1987, a University of Montreal task force on armed robbery developed a typology of armed robbery by breaking down a sample of robbery offenders. Most armed robbers interviewed by the task force:

- were younger than 30;
- had only a secondary school education;
- had spent less than one year on any job;
- had no children (half were married and half single);
- tended to change residences frequently;

The task force also found that:

- chronic armed robbery offenders were, on average, 12 when they began to commit criminal offences;
 - offenders who began at a very early age (around 10) tended to gradually escalate from simple thefts to burglary and then, in late adolescence or adulthood, moved on to robberies; and
 - during adolescence, about half of the offenders drank alcohol regularly and used drugs (particularly marijuana and hashish).
- In 1988, Correctional Services of Canada commissioned a national survey⁶⁶ to assess the mental health problems among the male federal offender population in federal custody.
 - Contrasting the lifetime prevalence rates of mental disorders across major offence groups (homicide, manslaughter, robbery, sex, drugs), the likelihood of having met the criteria for Antisocial Personality Disorder was greatest among robbery offenders (almost 9 out of 10).

- The survey also found that robbery offenders, as a group, were characterized by a relatively high, life long problem with substance (more than 2/3) and alcohol (3/4) disorders among them.

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