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_____ **Research Report** _____

**A Profile of Women Who
Sexually Offend**

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This report is also available in French. Should additional copies be required, they can be obtained from the Research Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Ave. West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

A Profile of Women Who Sexually Offend

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Executive Summary

Key words: *women sexual offenders, women offenders, sexual offending*

Women sexual offenders represent less than 1% of women offenders in Canada, yet, given the nature of their crimes it is critical to understand this subset of the population. Recent efforts of Gannon and Cortoni (2010) have begun to shed light in this area; however, as a whole, research on women sexual offenders (WSOs) is limited, and what is available has largely focussed on offender and victim characteristics and typology classifications. The current study provides a descriptive profile of WSOs and serves to enhance our understanding of this population and provide context for current and upcoming research.

The Offender Management System (OMS) was used to collect data on all Canadian federal women offenders identified as sexual offenders between 2001 and 2010 ($N = 58$). Data were collected via both automatic extraction and manual file review. Results reveal that WSOs are most likely to be Caucasian women, in their thirties at the time of intake. They present with high levels of risk and need, and low reintegration potential. Most women (91%) presented with considerable personal/emotional needs, and nearly three-quarters (72%) presented with considerable family/marital needs. Examining women's social backgrounds revealed that 70% of the women had childhood experiences of abuse (most commonly sexual abuse), and 84% had experienced abuse as adults (most commonly physical abuse).

Analysis of offence-related data reveal that while most women were convicted of sexual offences (e.g., assault, exploitation; 72%), another 16% were serving sentences for murder/manslaughter. Concerning sexual offending behaviour, 72% of WSOs commit their offence alongside at least one accomplice, who was most commonly male and was most likely to be the offender's partner. The highest proportions of victims were between the ages of 12 and 17 (30%), and 5 and 11 (23%). Victims were mostly female (71%) and not directly related to the offender.

Typological analyses reveal that over half the women were identified as either male accompanied/male coerced offenders (55%); 19% were identified as angry/impulsive offenders. Women identified as male accompanied/coerced offenders presented with more considerable family/marital needs than the rest of the sample, while angry/impulsive WSOs presented with higher risk and more considerable needs relating to the substance abuse, associates and personal/emotional domains.

In addition to contributing to our general understanding of the risk and needs of this specific women offender subgroup, these results will provide background for future research that aims to develop a descriptive model of the female sexual offence process. Furthermore, these results also provide context for the development and implementation of the newly redesigned Program for Women Who Sexually Offend.

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Introduction

Women sexual offenders in Canada represent less than 1% of our women offender population and compared to male offenders, women commit sexual offences at a ratio of approximately 1 to 20 (Cortoni, Hanson, & Coache, 2010). In considering rates of recidivism, research indicates that recidivism rates for women sexual offenders are 1.5% for new sexual offences, 9% for new violent (including sexual) offences, and 23.5% for any new type of offence (Cortoni, Hanson, & Coache, 2010). Much of the past research in the area of women who commit sexual offences has focused on exploring typologies of sexual offending among women (e.g., Knopp & Lackey, 1987; Mathews, 1987; Mathews et al., 1989; Syed & Williams, 1996; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). More recently, innovative research by Gannon, Rose, & Ward (2008; 2010) has examined the pathways that lead women to commit sexually offensive behaviours and has resulted in a descriptive, offence process model of female sexual offending.

As introduced above, in recent years, there has been progress in our understanding of women who commit sexual offences including our understanding in the areas of theory and program development. In considering prevalence of sexual offending behaviour, historical evidence, victims' studies, and research with known offenders demonstrate that there are many confounding factors in establishing prevalence rates of female sexual offending. Nevertheless, Saradjian (2010) argues that sexual abuse of children by women is less rare than once thought. In considering theory, many (including the current authors) argue that the application of male theories to female offenders is inappropriate as men and women engage in the behaviour for very different reasons. Harris (2010) outlines the use of 1) multi-factorial theories (a range of interrelated factors typically pre-determined by existing empirical research – e.g., powerlessness); 2) single factor theories (focus on a specific-factor variable – e.g., childhood victimization); and 3) micro-level theories (developed from offence accounts and seek to explain the offence process and its constituent parts – e.g., pathways model) with women sexual offenders. It is the belief of the current authors that the micro-level theories are best situated to provide researchers with the most comprehensive explanation of sexual offending behaviour among women.

Research examining mental health among women sexual offenders (Rousseau & Cortoni, 2010) demonstrates that women sexual offenders experienced increased rates of

psychopathology as well as past sexual, and physical, victimization. However, research on mental health prevalence provides varying findings as a result of methodological problems including a lack of standardized assessment and inconsistency of definitions across studies. In considering the general risk assessment of women sexual offenders, it is clear that many jurisdictions have adopted tools for male sexual offenders to be used with women. Cortoni (2010) argues that this is an inappropriate application given the low base rates for women who engage in sexual offending behaviour, thereby resulting in an overestimate of risk for recidivism. She further argues that it is critical that assessments always include empirically guided clinical judgement given a lack of validated instruments for use with women sexual offenders.

Research on treatment (Ford, 2010) demonstrates that some of the underlying behaviour characteristics are similar to those for men; however, these similarities do not automatically constitute similar healing needs and therefore there is a need for individual case formulation and treatment planning given the differing motivators and attitudes between men and women. Both Canada (CSC) and the United Kingdom (Lucy Faithful Foundation) have demonstrated great innovation when it comes to their interventions with women sexual offenders (Blanchette & Taylor, 2010); however, demonstrating contributions to reductions in recidivism will take decades given there are so few female offenders in any particular intervention.

Understanding gender differences in offending behaviour is critical to our ability to intervene and contribute to successful reintegration efforts. Furthermore, understanding the differences and commonalities amongst offender subtypes is important in developing treatment programs equipped to address the underlying needs and/or behaviours of these specific offenders. This is particularly true for women who have committed a sexual offence. These women represent a small proportion of our women offender population and it is only recently that we have gained some ground in theory and program development (see Gannon & Cortoni, 2010). An in-depth analysis of demographic and offence-related characteristics of women who have committed sexual offences can contribute to understanding their common, and diverse, needs, risks, and social history. Furthermore, a knowledge base of these characteristics can contribute to disaggregating offenders into typologies in order to better understand differences, and similarities, among this small population of women. The provision of this type of information will contribute to the development of program material by ensuring that interventions are targeting and treating specific areas of need.

In an effort to further contribute to our understanding of women who commit sexual offences, a research agenda including two specific projects is being undertaken. The first project, which forms the basis of this paper, will focus on a profile of women sexual offenders, including a preliminary analysis of the typology and the second project will replicate the work of Gannon and colleagues by examining the pathways to sexual offending behaviour among women. It is anticipated that this analysis will contribute to the understanding of this rarely studied population. Furthermore, this profile will provide context for the development and implementation of the Program for Women Who Have Sexually Offended which aims to target the needs of these women, reduce their risk of recidivism and promote successful community reintegration.

Method

Participants

The selection of the current sample is based on a definition of women sexual offenders (WSO) developed by CSC as part of the assessment and treatment protocol for women who sexually offend. More specifically, a woman is considered to have sexually offended if she has:

- a) been convicted of a sexual offence;
- b) been convicted of a non-sexual offence for which there was sexual motivation; and/or,
- c) admitted to a sexual offence for which she has not been convicted (CSC, 2002).

Notably, according to this definition, prostitution and prostitution-related offences are not considered to be sexual offences. Accordingly, all women offenders falling into one of the aforementioned categories and under the supervision of CSC (i.e., incarcerated or in the community) between January 2001 and March 2010 were included in the analyses for this profile. In total, 58 WSOs are included in the analyses.

Procedure

Data were collected for all participants from the Offender Management System (OMS; described below) either by automated extraction or by manual coding through the review of offender files. Information retrieved included data concerning: offender demographics (e.g., marital status, age); details and characteristics pertaining to the offence, accomplices, and victims; intake assessment (e.g., levels of risk and need); and, brief information pertaining to the women's social backgrounds and histories.

To provide a descriptive profile of these women, data presented throughout the results section were analysed for their presence within the given sample and are therefore typically presented as frequencies or prevalence rates.

Data Sources

Offender Management System

The Offender Management System (OMS) is an offender database monitored and maintained by the CSC. It is used to record, collect and share information on offenders serving federal sentences (CSC, 2009). Information can either be directly downloaded from the OMS or

offender files can be reviewed and information can be manually coded. As mentioned, both methods were employed in the current study. Offender demographics and information pertaining to sentence, risk and needs were extracted directly from the database. Information pertaining to accomplices, victims, histories of abuse and typology were collected via manual review of offender files. To ensure data were being accurately coded, inter-rater analyses were conducted. For these analyses, 50% of the sample was randomly selected to be coded by a second, independent coder and comparisons were made between the two cases using Cohen's Kappa. Inter-rater reliability for those variables reported within this study all fell between what is considered a substantial to outstanding range (.60 - .80+; Landis & Koch, 1977). The only variable for which reliability fell outside this range concerned childhood experiences of emotional abuse (Kappa = 0.57). This value is considered to present moderate reliability and is not unexpected for this type of variable, given the ambiguity of what is reported and interpreted as emotional abuse (by coders, as well as those individuals involved in writing offender reports).

Offender Assessment: Dynamic Factor Intake Assessment and Dynamic Factor Intake Assessment – Revised

As part of the Offender Intake Assessment (OIA), the Dynamic Factor Intake Assessment (DFIA) is used to assess the presence of dynamic risk factors (i.e., those factors amenable to change) upon an offender's admission to a federal institution. The DFIA-R, a newly revised version of the original DFIA, identifies offenders' needs in order to focus correctional interventions on those factors that can be addressed and reduce the likelihood of recidivism (CSC, n.d.). These needs pertain to seven identified areas, or criminogenic need domains, and include: *employment* (i.e., value placed on education and work and the role these have in one's life); *marital/family* (i.e., value put on being with family and the support derived from them); *associates* (i.e., value put on associating with non-criminal peers); *substance abuse*; *community functioning* (i.e., knowledge of, and ability to use skills necessary for daily living); *personal/emotional* (i.e., amount of control one exerts over his or her own life); and, *attitude* (i.e., ability to live in a law-abiding and prosocial manner) (CSC, 2007).

Indicators from the OIA, DFIA and the DFIA-R were used to analyze the level of risk, need, motivation and reintegration potential, as well as the presence of dynamic risk indicators and needs in the sample of WSOs.

Operationalization of Key Terms

Index Offence

For the purposes of this report, the term *index offence* will be used to refer to the offence

which was committed and resulted in the offender's current conviction and term of incarceration.

Assessment: Risk, need, motivation and reintegration potential

Overall risk

Determining an overall risk level is essential as it is used to establish the level of service required for each offender. A rating of low, medium, or high risk is given to offenders based on an assessment of static factors concerning criminal history, offence severity and sex offence history (CSC, 2007).

Overall criminogenic need

An overall criminogenic need rating is also used to determine the level of service intervention an offender requires. A rating of low, medium or high need is given to an offender based on the severity and number of criminogenic need domains he or she presents with (CSC, 2007).

Motivation

An offender's level of motivation is assessed as being either low, medium or high based on the individual's drive and willingness to complete his or her correctional plan (CSC, 2007).

Reintegration potential

Reintegration potential is used to assess the risk an offender poses to the community when making decisions regarding his or her required level of intervention or when being considered for conditional release (CSC, 2003). For women offenders, this rating is based on an assessment of the Custody Rating Scale, and both the Dynamic (i.e., overall needs) and Static (i.e., overall risk) Factor Ratings (CSC, 2007).

Typology

As previously discussed, researchers have developed preliminary typologies of women who commit sexual offences. In this report, previously derived typologies are utilized to attempt to categorize the current sample of WSOs. The typologies used include that which was first developed by Mathews et al. (1989) and the work of Syed and Williams (1996) that expanded upon the work of Mathews et al.

The typology considered information concerning accomplices, victims and motivation for offending in order to classify the WSOs and consisted of the following categories:

- a) *Male accompanied / coerced.* These women commit offences alongside a male partner, and typically offended against young children over an extended period of time. Women with male accomplices were further identified as being male-accompanied (i.e., women who participated willingly in the offending behaviour), or male-coerced (i.e., those who felt forced, or obligated to participate due to the perceived or actual threat of violence to themselves or the children).
- b) *Teacher / lover.* These women were solo offenders who were typically in a position of authority or power over their victim. Victims were generally pre-adolescent or adolescent aged males, and the offender often believed that she was engaging in a consensual relationship with the victim.
- c) *Predisposed.* These women were solo offenders who, after enduring a lifetime of physical and/or sexual abuse as children and/or in later romantic relationships, went on to commit sexual offences against young children.
- d) *Angry / impulsive.* The presence of accomplices varies for these women: some were solo offenders, while others had one or multiple accomplices. These women often commit sexually violent acts on impulse as part of another crime or out of anger in order to humiliate or exact revenge upon the victim(s).

Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 displays results pertaining to women's age, ethnicity and marital status. The average age at admission for the sample of women who sexually offended was 36.1 years ($SD = 11.70$), and ranged from 19 to 73 years of age. When breaking age at admission into age categories, it can be seen that the largest proportion of women were in their 30s upon intake into federal institutions (38%). Additionally, another quarter of the sample was in their 40s (26%). Three-quarters (74%) of the sample identified as Caucasian, while 19% identified as Aboriginal. Concerning women's marital statuses, results revealed similar proportions of women being married/in common law relationships (40%) or single (36%) and a slightly smaller proportion being either divorced, separated or widowed (24%). Of the 55 women for whom there was available DFIA/R data concerning level of education, 69% ($n = 38$) had less than a high school education.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics: Age, ethnicity and marital status

Demographic Variable	Percent (<i>n</i>)
Age at admission	
< 20	6.9 (4)
20 – 29	17.2 (10)
30 – 39	37.9 (22)
40 – 49	25.9 (15)
50 +	12.1 (7)
Race	
Caucasian	74.1 (43)
Aboriginal ^a	19.0 (11)
Other	6.9 (4)
Marital Status	
Single	36.2 (21)
Married / Common-law	39.7 (23)
Divorced / Separated / Widowed	24.1 (14)

Note. $n = 58$.

^aIncludes Native American Indian, Métis, and Inuit.

Sentence and Offence Characteristics

Nearly all women were serving determinate sentences (91.4%; $n = 53/58$); the remaining five women (8.6%) were serving indeterminate sentences¹. Of those WSOs serving determinate sentences, the average sentence length was 44.70 months ($SD = 23.41$), and ranged from 24 to 144 months. The most common sentence lengths were for 24 and 36 months with 17% ($n = 9/53$) of the women being sentenced to a two year term and another 17% being sentenced to a three year term. Index offences were examined by looking at the most serious offence for which each WSO was convicted. As would be anticipated, just under three-quarters of the sample was convicted for sex-related offences (72%; Table 2). An additional 16% of the sample was convicted for murder or manslaughter offences.

Table 2

Most serious index offence

Most serious offence	Percent (<i>n</i>)
Murder / manslaughter	15.5 (9)
Sexual offences ^a	72.4 (42)
Assault	8.6 (5)
Robbery	1.7 (1)
Other	1.7 (1)

Note. $N = 58$.

^aIncludes sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual interference, sexual touching, and invite sexual touching.

Sexual Offending and Accomplice Characteristics

In examining the characteristics specific to the women's individual patterns of sexual offending, close to three-quarters of WSOs (72%; $n = 42/58$) committed their offence(s) alongside at least one accomplice. In these cases, the number of accomplices present at the time of offending ranged from one to four (see Table 3), although it was most frequent that only one other individual was present (76%). When looking at the entire sample, there were a total of 60 accomplices. Accomplices were predominately male (82%; $n = 49/60$) and were most likely to be the offender's partner (63%; $n = 38$).

For some women, the sexual offending behaviour lasted a number of years; however, the average age of WSOs when the offending behavior first started was 29.3 years ($SD = 8.19$), and

¹ An indeterminate sentence occurs when a court imposes a sentence of detention in an institution for an indeterminate period of time.

ranged from 15 to 47 years of age.

Table 3

Accomplices: Presence, number, gender and relation to offender

Variable	Percent (n)
	<i>N</i> = 58
Presence of accomplice(s)	72.4 (42)
Number of accomplices present	<i>N</i> = 42 ^a
1	76.2 (32)
2	11.9 (5)
3	7.1 (3)
4	4.8 (2)
Accomplice demographics	<i>N</i> = 60 ^b
Gender	
Male	81.7 (49)
Female	18.3 (11)
Relation to offender	
Partner ^c	63.3 (38)
Friend / Acquaintance	35.0 (21)
Family member	1.7 (1)

Note. ^aSample of co-offending WSOs. ^bSample of accomplices.

^cIncludes individuals identified as common-law partners, husbands, or significant others.

Victim Characteristics

Of the WSOs for whom comprehensive victim information was available for ($n = 57$)², there was a total of approximately 104 victims³. It was most common for women to have only one victim (58%), while nearly an additional quarter of the sample had two victims (23%; Table 4).

Table 4

Number of victims

Number of victims	Percent (n)
1	57.9 (33)
2	22.8 (13)
3	7.0 (4)
4	8.8 (5)
5	-- (-)
6	1.8 (1)
7	1.8 (1)

Note. n = 57

Victims were examined to identify potential patterns in demographic information including age and gender, as well as the victim's relationship to the offender. These data are displayed in Table 5. Concerning the victims' ages, age could not be determined for 17% of the entire victim sample ($n = 18/104$). Where age was known, the highest proportion of victims (36%) was identified as adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17, while the next highest proportion (28%) were identified as children between the ages of five and 11. Twenty one percent of victims were identified as adults over the age of 18 and 15% were identified as young children, four years of age or younger.

Most victims (71%) were female and were not directly related (i.e., extra-familial) to the offender (63%). When looking at more detailed specifics of the offender/victim relationship it becomes clear that, victims were most likely to be the offender's own birth child (36%), a friend or acquaintance (26%), or a non-birth child (14%). Victims who were non-birth children were primarily family member's children (e.g., nieces, nephews) and neighbour's children.

² Information could not be attained concerning victim information for one of the women.

³ Total number of victims is stated to be approximate to account for the possibility of some victims not being identified in offender or OMS reports.

Table 5

Victim information: Age, gender and relation to offender

Variable	Percent (n)
Age^a	
0 – 4	12.5 (13)
5 – 11	23.1 (24)
12 – 17	29.8 (31)
18+	17.3 (18)
Unknown child	9.6 (10)
Unknown	7.7 (8)
Gender	
Male	28.8 (30)
Female	71.2 (74)
Relation to offender	
Intra-familial	37.5 (39)
Extra-familial	62.5 (65)
Detailed relationship information	
Birth child	35.6 (37)
Partner's child	4.8 (5)
Other child ^b	14.4 (15)
Partner	3.8 (4)
Friend / acquaintance	26.0 (27)
Stranger	3.8 (4)
Other ^c	4.8 (5)
Unknown ^d	6.7 (7)

Note. n = 104

^aFor those victims who may have experienced longstanding periods of sexual abuse, age identified was the victim's age at the onset of offending. ^bIncludes such cases as family member's children, neighbor's children and family members (e.g., sister, cousin) considered children (i.e., under 18) at the time of the offence. ^cIncludes cases where offences were committed against patients or other inmates. ^dFor one woman, it was not possible to identify detailed relationship information other than intra-/extra-familial.

Offender Intake Assessment

Offender security level upon intake could be determined for 90% of WSOs ($n=52/58$). Two-thirds of the women (64%) were placed at medium security upon intake, while a third (33%) was placed at minimum (see Table 6).

Table 6

Offender security level at intake

Offender Security Level	Percent (<i>n</i>)
Minimum	32.7 (17)
Medium	63.5 (33)
Maximum	3.8 (2)

Note. $n = 52$

Table 7 displays WSOs' distribution in ratings of risk, need, motivation and reintegration potential. Results revealed that the highest proportions of women were found to present with high risk (49%) and high needs (72%). These findings are not surprising given the sample in question; however, these findings do contribute to the knowledge base which typically finds women who sexually offend to be a high needs population (a breakdown of the seven criminogenic need areas is presented on page 15). Furthermore, rates of high risk and need among this subset of the population are higher than that typically exhibited by Canadian women offenders. In addition, more than half the sample presented with a moderate level of motivation to change (56%) and low reintegration potential (51%).

Table 7

Ratings of risk, need, motivation and reintegration potential at intake

Variable	Percent (n)
Overall Risk	<i>N</i> = 51
Low	13.7 (7)
Moderate	37.3 (19)
High	49.0 (25)
Overall Need	<i>N</i> = 58
Low	---
Moderate	28.1 (16)
High	71.9 (41)
Motivation	<i>N</i> = 41
Low	19.5 (8)
Moderate	56.1 (23)
High	24.4 (10)
Reintegration Potential	<i>N</i> = 41
Low	51.2 (21)
Moderate	34.1 (14)
High	14.6 (6)

To examine the specific needs of women who sexually offend, a breakdown of the criminogenic need domains was examined. Linked to re-offending, these needs are often targeted in treatment to reduce the likelihood of recidivism (Bonta & Andrews, 2007) and as mentioned earlier, include attitudes, associates, substance abuse, family/marital, community functioning, personal/emotional and employment needs. Table 8 displays the distribution of WSOs who present with the domain as an asset (i.e., history of positive behaviour that will contribute to reintegration), no/low need, some need or considerable need in each of the aforementioned areas.

Table 8

Need domain ratings at intake

Need domain	Percent (n)
Community functioning	
Factor seen as asset	1.8 (1)
No or low	64.9 (37)
Some	28.1 (16)
Considerable	5.3 (3)
Family / marital	
Factor seen as asset	-- (-)
No or low	14.0 (8)
Some	14.0 (8)
Considerable	71.9 (41)
Substance abuse	
No or low	50.9 (29)
Some	15.8 (9)
Considerable	33.3 (19)
Personal / emotional	
No or low	-- (-)
Some	8.8 (5)
Considerable	91.2 (52)
Attitudes	
Factor seen as asset	12.3 (7)
No or low	57.9 (33)
Some	24.6 (14)
Considerable	5.3 (3)
Employment	
Factor seen as asset	8.8 (5)
No or low	28.8 (16)
Some	52.6 (30)
Considerable	10.5 (6)
Associates	
Factor seen as asset	3.5 (2)
No or low	57.9 (33)
Some	22.8 (13)
Considerable	15.8 (9)

Note. n = 57.

These results display the common needs of women who sexually offend. Personal and emotional needs present most frequently with nearly all the women (91%) being found to have considerable need in this domain. Additionally, a large number of women also presented with considerable need in the family / marital domain (72%). Other needs of WSOs, although not as prominent, include employment with 63% of the sample demonstrating some (53%) or considerable (11%) need, and substance abuse with 49% demonstrating some (16%) or considerable (33%) need. As this demonstrates, personal / emotional and family / marital related needs are evidently the most prominent within the sample. In fact, as compared to trends witnessed with Canadian women offenders, this sample of women sexual offenders appear as significantly higher in family marital needs and personal emotional needs and lower in needs associated with substance abuse, attitudes, and associates.

Personal / Emotional Need Indicators

Given the high number of WSOs presenting with considerable needs in the personal / emotional domain, additional domain indicators were considered for more in-depth examination. These indicators were taken from both the DFIA and the DFIA-R (see Table 9). These data demonstrate that most WSOs have difficulty solving interpersonal problems (76%), limited assertion skills (69%), difficulty coping with stress (69%) and a limited ability to both identify consequences (67%) and generate choices (67%). Other issues that were common among the women included deviant sexual attitudes (66%), impulsive behaviour (50%) and poor problem recognition skills (46%).

Recognizing the aforementioned problem areas can be beneficial in designing programs that a) are responsive to women's learning styles, and b) address such problem areas through appropriate interventions and material.

Table 9

Personal / emotional need indicators at intake

Need indicator	Percent (n)
Problem recognition skills limited	45.5 (25/55)
Difficulty solving interpersonal problems	76.4 (42/55)
Ability to generate choices limited	66.7 (36/54)
Limited ability to link actions to consequences	67.3 (37/55)
Impulsive	50.0 (27/54)
Acts in aggressive manner	27.8 (15/54)
Manipulates others to achieve goals	38.9 (21/54)
Assertiveness skills limited	68.5 (37/54)
Difficulty coping with stress	68.5 (37/54)
Deviant sexual preferences	38.5 (20/52)
Deviant sexual attitudes	66.0 (35/53)
Empathy skills limited	39.6 (21/53)
Poor conflict resolution	77.1 (37/48)

Other Need Indicators Common Among WSOs

In addition to the personal / emotional need indicators, indicators relative to other criminogenic areas (i.e., family / marital, associates, substance use, and employment) were analyzed for their prevalence within the sample. Prominent indicators are presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10

Additional need indicators at intake

Need domain and indicators	Percent (n)
Family / Marital	
Limited attachment in childhood	29.1 (16/55)
Negative parental relations	58.2 (32/55)
Witness of family violence in childhood	42.6 (23/54)
Victim of spousal abuse	74.5 (41/55)
Associates	
Socially isolated / Limited community attachment	50.0 (27/54)
Substance Abuse	
Abuses alcohol	36.4 (20/55)
Abuses drugs	45.5 (25/55)
Employment	
Unemployed at arrest	42.6 (23/54)

As demonstrated, for those women with available information, slightly less than half (43%) reported witnessing family violence or spousal abuse in their childhood, while three-quarters (75%) reported being victims of spousal abuse themselves later in life. A little less than half the women (43%) were unemployed at the time of their arrest, while half (50%) were socially isolated or had minimal attachments to the community. Concerning substance use, slightly more women indicated excessively using drugs as part of their lifestyle than alcohol (46% vs. 36%).

Childhood and adulthood trauma and abuse

Previous studies have demonstrated that histories of lifetime abuse are common among women who sexually offend (e.g., Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Strickland, 2008). Histories of abuse could be determined for 56 of the WSOs in childhood and 55 WSOs in adulthood⁴. It was found that 70% ($n = 39/56$) of WSOs experienced abuse as children, and that 84% ($n = 46/55$) experienced abuse as adults. Table 10 presents a more detailed examination of the types of abuse experienced by those women who were abused either in childhood, or adulthood. What becomes evident is the overwhelming number of women who were found to have experienced childhood sexual abuse and adult physical abuse. Of those women who were abused as children, 82% experienced sexual abuse (57% of the total sample for whom childhood abuse could be determined; $n = 32/56$). Of those women who were abused as adults, 85% experienced physical abuse (71% of the total sample for whom adulthood abuse could be determined; $n = 39/55$).

These findings are consistent with previous studies that often find a high prevalence of early age sexual abuse amongst women who have sexually offended (Strickland, 2008). In addition, one of the proposed WSO typologies is that of the *male-coerced* offender which posits that many women participate in sexual offending out of fear or threats of physical (and other) violence from a partner (Mathews, et al., 1989); the high proportion of women who have experienced physical abuse as adults may be suggestive of the same.

⁴ File review could not sufficiently determine whether or not a history of abuse was present in childhood for two women and adulthood for three women.

Table 11

History of abuse: Abuse experienced in childhood and adulthood

Variable	Percent (n)
Childhood abuse	<i>N</i> = 39
Emotional / Verbal	69.2 (27)
Physical	56.4 (22)
Sexual	82.1 (32)
Adulthood abuse	<i>N</i> = 46
Emotional / Verbal	63.0 (29)
Physical	84.8 (39)
Sexual	47.8 (22)

Typology Analyses

Previous studies on women who sexually offend have attempted to disaggregate WSOs into various typologies (e.g., Mathews et al., 1989; Syed & Williams, 1996; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). As displayed in Table 12 below, the highest proportion of WSOs (40%) can be categorized as male accompanied sexual offenders, stipulating that these women actively engage in offending behaviour along with a male accomplice. Furthermore, women who offended with a male co-perpetrator, but who were coerced into engaging in the offending behaviour as a result of fear or threats from their accomplice made up 16% of the sample. Nineteen percent of the sample can be categorized as angry / impulsive sexual offenders. Of the 11 WSOs who fit this category, nearly half (46%; *n* = 5) were convicted of homicide offences, while another third (36%; *n* = 4) were convicted of assault.

Table 12

Typology of women sexual offenders

Typology category	Percent (n)
Male coerced	15.5 (9)
Male accompanied	39.7 (23)
Teacher / lover	6.9 (4)
Angry / impulsive	19.0 (11)
Predisposed	5.2 (3)
Other / cannot categorize	13.8 (8)

Eight of the women could not be accurately fit within one of the aforementioned categories. For the most part, these women did not prescribe to any of the previously derived

typologies of WSOs; however, it can be mentioned that individual cases did arise where women could be placed into a category used in other studies, but not the current. *Mentally-disordered offenders*, a category that has been identified in previous research (Mathews et al., 1989), consists of those women who offend due to severe psychological, mental health problems. This was seen in a limited number of offenders within the current sample of WSOs.

Looking more in-depth at the WSOs identified according to the typology, analyses were conducted to examine whether differences in risk and need appeared for those women who co-perpetrated with a male accomplice (i.e., women identified as either male-accompanied or male-coerced) or for those women who committed offences impulsively or out of anger. As these groups represent those typologies with the highest proportion of WSOs from the current sample, both were identified and compared against the remaining sample of WSOs. Results are displayed in Table 13.

Significant differences emerged in the marital / family need domain for those WSOs who were identified as being either male-accompanied or male-coerced offenders. These women were more likely to be rated as having considerable need in this domain than those women identified as other typologies (84% vs. 56%).

When looking at WSOs who could be identified as angry or impulsive offenders, several differences emerge. In comparison to the rest of the sample, significant differences were found with regard to levels of risk and levels of need in the substance abuse and associates domains⁵. Concerning risk, angry/impulsive women were all found to present with medium or high risk, compared to 83% of the rest of the sample; while concerning needs these women were more likely to present with considerable substance abuse needs (80% vs. 23%) and were slightly less likely to present with no or low associates-related needs (30% vs. 34%). It was also found that women who fit in this category were more likely to be convicted of other offences (murder/manslaughter, assault, robbery), while other WSOs were more likely to be convicted of sex-related offences (interference, touching, exploitation), $\chi^2(4, n = 58) = 31.98, p < .001$.

⁵ Results which emerged concerning the personal / emotional domain should be interpreted cautiously given a) the high proportion of WSOs who identified with considerable need in this domain overall; and, b) the small sample size of the angry impulsive typology.

Table 13

Responsivity needs by typology

	df	χ^2
Male accomplice (<i>n</i> = 25)		
Level of risk	2	.22
Level of need	1	.00
Motivation level	2	2.12
Reintegration potential	2	.31
Need domains		
Employment	3	1.56
Substance abuse	2	4.31
Associates	3	4.40
Attitudes	3	1.09
Community functioning	3	1.17
Personal / emotional	1	.58
Marital / family	2	5.85*
Angry / impulsive (<i>n</i> = 10)[†]		
Level of risk	2	6.21*
Level of need	1	6.39
Motivation level	2	1.56
Reintegration potential	2	2.66
Need domains		
Employment	3	2.50
Substance abuse	2	14.23***
Associates	3	11.09**
Attitudes	3	1.92
Community functioning	3	1.76
Personal / emotional	1	6.83**
Marital / family	2	.86

Note. [†]As a result of the small sample size, expected cell counts were less than 5; results should be interpreted cautiously.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The results presented in this report provide information concerning the characteristics and needs of women federal offenders identified as sexual offenders. Detailed information surrounding types of offences committed and circumstances related to those offences is also presented.

Until recent years, WSOs were an under-researched population and it has only been within the last decade that research in this area has grown (e.g., Gannon & Cortoni, 2010; Gannon & Rose, 2008). Still, research is limited and there remain many gaps in our understanding of this population. There is a need for research which builds on the knowledge base concerning the processes and pathways that lead to sexual offending by women, as well as WSOs' treatment needs and issues related to responsivity. The results of this report provide an up to date first step in understanding the population of WSOs who fall under the Correctional Service of Canada's jurisdiction. The following discussion reflects on these results, current literature in this field and future research initiatives that will be undertaken in this area.

Women Who Sexually Offend

The characteristics of WSOs found in the current study are similar to other studies in which researchers have examined women who commit sexual offences; that is, that WSOs are typically Caucasian women, in their thirties, who are frequently un-, or under-educated (Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman, Bijleveld, & Hendriks, 2010). Additionally, this profile provides further evidence that suggests that WSOs frequently have difficult backgrounds fraught with a childhood often characterized by poor, dysfunctional parental relationships and high victimization rates, including experiences of physical and sexual abuse. Furthermore, it is often found to be the case that many of these women experience unhealthy and abusive relationships not only as children, but also as adults (Gannon & Rose, 2008); with a high prevalence of women experiencing physical and emotional abuse in adulthood, this study reports similar findings.

While about half the general population of women offenders presents with high needs (50%, Kong & AuCoin, 2008), this proportion is even greater amongst the women offender population with nearly three-quarters of WSOs being identified as such. These results provide evidence suggesting that women who commit sexual offences represent a particularly high needs subpopulation of women offenders. Moreover, among the current sample of women who commit sexual offences, an overwhelming proportion of the women presented with considerable needs relating to the personal / emotional criminogenic need domain. That is, there was a high prevalence of women in the current sample who displayed limitations with regard to a variety of

personal attributes. Common needs in this area include difficulties solving interpersonal problems; limited skills relating to conflict resolution, assertion and coping; and, an inability to identify consequences. Similar areas of concern have been noted previously with regard to WSOs (e.g., Elliot, Eldridge, Ashfield, & Beech, 2010; Gannon & Rose, 2008).

A number of these issues and concerns are frequently noted among the overall women offender population. High rates of victimization, limited education and difficulties with regard to interpersonal relationships, emotions management and overall lifestyle are frequently reported in women offender literature (e.g., Barrett, Allenby, & Taylor, 2010; Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). While these issues are common to many women offenders, the prevalence of these issues has often been found to be exacerbated amongst women who have sexually offended (Gannon & Rose, 2008). Rates of past abuse (both physical and sexual) are reported to be even higher amongst WSOs and there is particular emphasis on the high needs of this population, particularly in relation to specific domains (i.e., personal/emotional). For example, while many women offenders display considerable personal emotional difficulties (42% Caucasian, 57% Aboriginal in Dell & Boe, 2000), this proportion is more than double in the current study, with 91% of the women demonstrating considerable need in this domain. While this is a concern for the women offender population, it is particularly the case for WSOs and should be flagged as a significant area of need for this particular population.

It is important to consider population differences in order to ensure that treatment initiatives designed for WSOs appropriately target certain aspects that may be unique to these women. Acknowledging those characteristics and needs that are inherent to the WSO population will assist in ensuring that appropriate programming is developed, implemented and made available. For example, while it is common for women-specific correctional programs to contain elements that focus on the appropriate management and regulation of emotions, it is especially pertinent to include material that focuses on this in programs for WSOs. Additionally, there is benefit in identifying potential responsivity issues that may exist among this population as it can help program developers in including appropriate tools and materials throughout the program, as well as assist program facilitators and therapists while working with women who may manifest specific issues (e.g., limited ability to recognize problems, cognitive limitations) that may effect treatment gains.

Accomplices and Typologies

The majority of women in the current sample were found to have co-perpetrated, typically offending alongside one other person, although some women offended in groups of three to five co-offenders. As mentioned earlier, it is common to find that women sexually offend in the presence of an accomplice, who is frequently a male partner (Gannon et al., 2008;

2010). Current results support previous findings in this area, with the majority of co-offenders being identified as male and nearly two-thirds being identified as a partner. This is further supported in the current study with the highest proportions of women identified through the typology analyses as those who offended alongside a male accomplice (whether that was willingly or coerced).

Identifying the role of accomplices in women's sexual offending patterns is imperative as it highlights the potentially problematic dependency traits of many of these women. This is especially a concern for those women who have been identified as being coerced into offending by male partners. For the offenders who fall into this category, as well as those who engage more willingly in the behaviours with a male partner, it is important to address dependency and other relationship related issues (e.g., assertiveness, interpersonal problem solving skills), through appropriate programs and interventions (Ford, 2010). These women, in particular, were more likely to present with considerable needs in the area of family and marital relationships than other WSO; therefore, there may be a greater need to focus on this area in programming with these women, more so than with others.

Another area of interest that emerged in the results was the number of women who could be identified as fitting within the angry / impulsive category of WSOs. A similar category was not included in original typologies, but was later incorporated to account for those women who could not be classically categorized in the male-accompanied group (Mathews et al., 1989; Syed & Williams, 1996). Typically, when including this category in typology analyses, it accounts for only a marginal proportion of the sample; however, within the current study it was found to be the second most prominent typology category. While this category made up of only 19% of the sample, it was second only to the category of male-accompanied offenders which, if combined with the male-coerced category, is comprised of two-thirds of the entire sample. The other categories (teacher / lover, predisposed) are each represented by only a handful of women. Given the prevalence and atypical nature of the angry / impulsive category, these women were disaggregated for further analyses.

In comparison to the remaining sample of WSOs, women identified as angry / impulsive offenders were found to present with a significantly higher level of risk, as well as with differing needs in relation to substance use and associates. Results also demonstrate that these women may be atypical sexual offenders in that they were more likely to be convicted of violent offences for which sexual elements were incorporated.

Disaggregating WSOs according to a typology can be useful as a first step for directing individual interventions and targeting the specific needs of each woman. As mentioned, it is likely that a woman who willingly engaged in sexual offending with her partner has significantly different treatment needs than a woman who acted impulsively and used sexual violence to

humiliate an assault victim. However, despite the advantage of using typologies to identify subcategories of WSOs, this can be a limitation as well. By placing women into subgroups based on their similarities, typologies do not necessarily account for individual differences that may occur within categories. Aspects such as motivation and attitude are likely to vary by woman and a predetermined typology will not take these individual factors into consideration. Therefore, while there may be benefit in the preliminary use of a typology, it is imperative to take this into consideration along with a variety of individual factors that will need to be incorporated into an effective treatment plan. In other words, using typologies to classify WSOs can assist in guiding directed interventions, targeting needs, and understanding the specific characteristics and risks; however, the limitations that co-exist include possibly overlooking the diversity of WSO groups that cannot (or should not) necessarily be assigned into the predetermined categories.

Limitations

Limitations of the current study include the second source nature of the profile data. While the OMS is a convenient method for collecting information on offender samples, it presents with certain limitations (e.g., missing data, accessible variables). Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that those data pertaining to offence-related variables (e.g., accomplices, victims) may not be entirely reflective of the true nature of the incident(s). These data were manually coded through reviewing offender files and due to this method may present certain limitations. This includes such limitations as: the availability of reports on OMS (e.g., police reports, intake interviews); the accuracy of information reflected by the individual who wrote the reports; and finally, the coder's ability to accurately and consistently capture the data reported within the files.

Another limitation to consider concerns the use of the pre-existing typology. This typology was not developed specifically for use with the given sample; therefore, a number of the women may not be appropriately designated into one of the typology categories given typologies specific to women sexual offenders may be different than those traditionally seen in the literature.

Conclusions and Future Directions

This report provides a basis of knowledge concerning the demographic and offence-related information for women who have committed sexual offences. Furthermore, results capture the risks and needs that afflict this specific subpopulation of federal women offenders.

While women sexual offenders is a topic that has started to gain more ground in academic and correctional literature (e.g., Gannon & Cortoni, 2010), there has largely been a focus on deriving typologies, and understanding the offence, victim and offender characteristics

that pertain to WSOs. This being said, there is much that remains unknown and unexplored, particularly when it comes to theory, assessment and treatment of this particular women offender population (Gannon, Rose & Cortoni, 2010). Future research in this area will be done in attempts to develop pathway model theories to understand women's pathways into committing sexual offences. This research will replicate previous work using a Canadian sample of WSOs, and will aim to build upon the descriptive model of female sexual offending developed by Gannon and her colleagues (Gannon et al., 2008).

In addition, the Women's Sex Offender Program (WSOP) has recently been redesigned and implemented within the Correctional Service of Canada. All women offenders identified as sex offenders participate in this programming as part of their Correctional Plan. The program is designed to target and address such areas as: understanding the context of offending; sexuality, sexual development, and sexual awareness; beliefs, attitudes, and cognitive distortions; healthy and unhealthy relationships; effective emotion management and communication skills; and, self management to prepare for release (CSC, 2010). As part of future research plans, an assessment of the redesigned WSOP will be undertaken.

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