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# Research at a glance

## Study 1 of 3: A Qualitative Examination of Radicalization and Susceptibility to Radicalization

**KEY WORDS:** *radicalization, violent extremists, security threat group, terrorism*

### What it means

Correctional Service Canada (CSC) staff members recognize the complex, multi-faceted nature of radicalization, and are familiar with a wide range of behaviours indicative of radicalization or susceptibility to radicalization. Responses reflected both a familiarity with the literature and unique operational knowledge.

This research underscores the need for increased attention to institutional placement options and examinations of the applicability of current case management, supervision, and intervention strategies for radicalized offenders.

### What we found

CSC staff members demonstrated a broad understanding surrounding the characteristics of radicalized offenders and those susceptible to radicalization. They are nevertheless eager for more information in this regard, as well as more guidance by means of formalized definitions, indicators, and policies specific to radicalized offenders.

The most frequently mentioned indicators of radicalization included possessing certain books or materials, exhibiting a change in institutional associations, having ideological arguments with staff members or other inmates, and congregating in specific areas or participating in informal prayer sessions. Less often noted, but of interest, were behaviours indicative of attempts to recruit new members, increases in the filing of formal grievances, and changes in physical appearance.

Focus group participants often described two distinct subsets of susceptible offenders: vulnerable, unattached, and unskilled offenders recruited to conduct the day to day “dirty work” of the group, and more connected, educated and skilled susceptible offenders, recruited for their specific skills and abilities. Participants indicated that the recruitment of susceptible offenders and the subsequent increase in a radicalized offender population raised several population management concerns.

### Why we did this study

As a partner in the Chemical, Biological, Radiological-Nuclear and Explosive (CBRNE) Research and Technology Initiative (CRTI), the Research Branch, CSC, was tasked with contributing to the level of quantitative knowledge surrounding violent extremists in Canada by undertaking an assessment of the data surrounding violent extremists in federal institutions.

As such, three inter-related studies on radicalized offenders in federal institutions (see also Research at a Glance R-313-2 and R-313-3) were undertaken in an effort to address the knowledge gap surrounding radicalized offenders and inform correctional policy and operations.

### What we did

As one of these three inter-related studies, this study informed ten focus groups with institutional and community staff members in order to gather first-hand information regarding the types of behaviours or indicators staff members observe, record and communicate about offenders that they suspect or know to be radicalized, and the way in which this information is recorded, managed, and communicated. Focus groups were conducted nationally and included front-line and security staff members as well as representatives from partner agencies.

### For more information

Stys, Y., Gobeil, R., Harris, A. J. R., & Michel, S. (2014). *Violent extremists in federal institutions: Estimating radicalization and susceptibility to radicalization in the federal offender population* (Research Report R-313). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, or for other inquiries, please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

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