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Research Snippet

Older Women Offenders

KEY WORDS: *older offenders, women offenders, offender profile*

What it means

The growth in the population of women aged 50 and older underscores the importance of considering this unique group of offenders. Moreover, older women offenders demonstrated increased offending versatility and higher risk and need ratings over time, suggesting that changes in this population could be considered in developing case management and intervention strategies. Future research in the area will allow for a better understanding of older women's changing profiles as well as the differences between older women and men under the supervision of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC).

What we found

First, the growth in the aging offender population was examined. The proportion of the federally-sentenced women offender population comprised of women aged 50 or older doubled from 5% in 2002-03 to 10% in 2012-13. Although older men offenders represent a larger percentage of the total men population than women at both time points (8% in 2002-03 and 14% in 2012-13), the rate of growth in the proportion of older offenders was similar for men and women.

Next, the profile of older women in CSC custody in April 2013 was examined. Almost half of these (48%) were found to have received their first federal sentence after age 50; another third (32%) were also serving their first sentences, but had received their sentence at a younger age and had aged while incarcerated. This distribution was similar to that found in an earlier profile of older women in custody completed in 2008,¹ demonstrating that, although the population of older women is growing, their sentence profile is not changing.

Other characteristics of the older women offender population, however, have changed. In contrast with their 2008 counterparts, fewer older women in custody in 2013 had been convicted of homicide or

attempted murder, but more had been convicted of other violent offences and of drug offences. Women in the more recent cohort were also found to present higher ratings on level of risk and need, although the magnitude of the differences was unclear.

Finally, older women offenders in custody in April 2013 were compared to their male counterparts. Many differences were noted. For example, only one in five older women had previously served a federal sentence while 45% of older men had a previous federal sentence. Women were also much less likely to be convicted of sex offences and more likely to be convicted of drug offences. Compared to men, older women presented less elevated levels of risk and need.

Why we did this study

The population of older offenders in custody has been increasing in the last decades, just as the population of older individuals has been increasing in the general population. The purpose of this study was to examine the growth in the population of women offenders over the age of 50 in CSC and to briefly describe this population.

What we did

Annual admissions to federal custody were examined from fiscal years 2002-03 to 2012-13. In addition, the 87 women aged 50 or higher in custody in a federal correctional facility in April 2013 were examined further, and compared to their male counterparts ($N=3,030$), using data available in CSC's administrative database.

For more information

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

You can also visit the website for a full list of research publications.

Prepared by: Renée Gobeil

¹ Greiner, L. & Allenby, K. (2010). *A descriptive profile of older women offenders* (Report R- 229). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.