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Chronological synopsis of comments by the Commissioner of Corrections,
The Correctional Service of Canada, at the ACA workshop in Miami,
August 1981

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Female Correctional Officers -- Canada

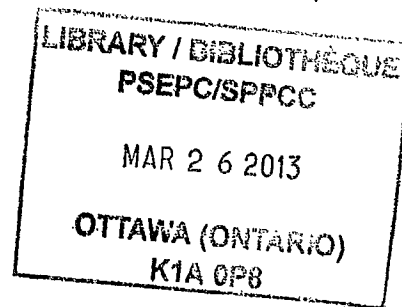
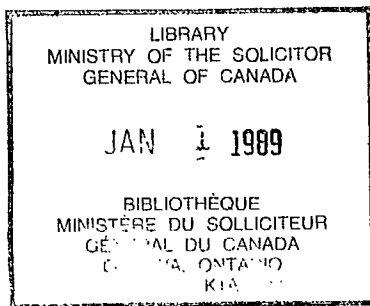
How will staff and inmates react to females working as guards in male institutions?

This was the kind of question facing The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) in the mid-1970s, when the demand for non-discriminatory staffing highlighted the possibility of female guards in male federal institutions.

Women had already marched into the all-male domain of the Ontario provincial police during 1974; had graduated two troops of female officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; and worked in other organizations similar to a corrections institution, such as mental hospitals, military and police forces, and probation and parole services.

So, why not The Correctional Service of Canada!

Armed with success from other units in the American and Canadian criminal justice system, CSC opened the ranks of correctional officers in male institutions to females in 1978. The first female correctional officers, who entered the new maximum-security Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, broke down traditional barriers, which had existed since the beginning of organized corrections in Canada during 1868.



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R53
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Historical Perspective

Females were not employed in federal male institutions in Canada in any capacity prior to 1960. This employment decree changed when female clerks and stenographers began to be employed in male institutions in the early 1960s, setting a precedent which has not been reversed. Later, and only gradually, female nurses, psychologists, and classification officers joined the burgeoning staff in Canada's male institutions. Male employee reaction has been quoted as "strongly adverse," at times even hostile.

During these beginning employment years for females, recourse to a union on grievances was impossible -- there was no formalized bargaining unit recognized as a union, only a voluntary association of teachers working in the institutions. In 1967 two important acts, which affected all areas of employment for penitentiary staff and management relations, were enacted by Canada's federal parliament: the Public Service Commission Employment Act, and Staff Relations Act. Two years later, The Correctional Service of Canada became a visible target of the Public Service Act. The Service was notified under section 12 there should not be discrimination on the basis of sex. Despite these strong words, brought directly to the attention of Canada's federal corrections, the *men only* tradition continued; men only were accepted as guards (correctional officers), although females continued to infiltrate the administrative groups as clerks and stenographers.

Staffing in male institutions came under fire again some five years later, when the Public Service Commission (which oversees staffing in the public service of Canada), intervening on behalf of the Correctional Service, granted an exemption clause to the PSC employment act, permitting the "hire men only" adage to continue for guard recruits in male institutions. The reasons given were based on non-suitability of females in crucial situations, such as hostage-takings and the use of firearms. Because of strong reaction to this exemption, a study

originating with the Public Service of Canada, was started. The report, *Employment of Females in Male Correctional Institutions*, was the outcome of this investigation. Recommendations included a request that federal corrections issue a policy covering its intentions and perspective on the situation affecting "hiring females as guards."

Between 1975 and 1976 a steady stream of complaints from women screened out of competitions, due to sex restrictions, was received by the Anti-Discrimination Board of the PSC. The outcome? Justification for sex restriction became a major study by the PSC early in 1977.

A report emerged later that year called *A Study of the Existing Sex Restrictions in the Correctional Issue*, sub-titled *An Emotional and Controversial Issue*. The three-member board studied existing sex restrictions and other problems ending with a strong recommendation in a 64-page report: Sex restrictions used in filling positions in the correctional group of Canada's federal penitentiaries should be removed, and all positions in this group open to both sexes.

The Board recognized problems such a recommendation would incur, especially due to the over-crowded prisons and turbulence existing at that time. But added, with the construction program underway, and the need for more staff, "hiring of women could be advantageous."

The report also asked the PSC and federal corrections to review selection standards, staffing and training, "to place greater emphasis on experience in dealing with people and on suitability for the work." Further emphasis was placed on a more "career-orientated approach" to the importance of female staffing in guard duties.

Vibrations from this recommendation were felt throughout the institutions, personnel, and staffing procedures, as CSC prepared to formalize the entry of females into guard ranks in male institutions.

But, before the new project became fact, another report opened up the question of female employment in correctional institutions.

In May 1977 a report from the Parliamentary Sub-Committee investigating Canada's prison system was made public. Among its 65 recommendations, number 17 reiterated the findings of the PSC which asked for equitable hiring of males and females in the corrections' system.

"Women should be employed on the same basis as men," stated recommendation 17, adding, "Selection must be according to the same criteria used for men to ensure that recruits have the aptitude, maturity, stability, and self-discipline required for penitentiary work."

Females -- as guards -- had come a step closer to acceptance.

By the beginning of 1978 senior management of federal corrections (CSC), had authorized a pilot project, ensuring careful hiring and integration of females as guards in male institutions. Backing the project were national and regional committees, set up to monitor staffing procedures. Institution staff were also notified of the project. Meetings, known as "sensitizing," were held for managers, to explain CSCs latest recruitment venture.

Twenty-seven females were accepted for training, eight for the new psychiatric centre at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; ten for Mission Institution, a new medium-security complex in British Columbia; and nine for service in the Federal Training Centre, near Montreal, Quebec.

Prior to inauguration of the new project, the Canadian Human Rights Commission qualified it as a special program, under Section 12 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. This step permitted the "reduction or prevention of disadvantages which eliminates improving opportunities of a

group, incurring discrimination." Simply said -- CSC could hire "women only" to improve their status in the employment field without inflaming the thought of discrimination against men. This landmark was followed a month later by an exclusion (exemption) order from the PSC, allowing women only to be hired for the new CSC staffing project.

By the end of 1980, the fledgling pilot project had become a permanent staffing program. Females, as guards (correctional officers), are now regularly seen in medium and minimum-security institutions of The Correctional Service of Canada, patrolling the ranges alongside their male coworkers.

There are now 107 female guards in federal corrections. The majority (75) in the Prison for Women, Kingston, Ontario (where male guards are also employed), and 32 in male institutions. Since the infusion of females into male-guard ranks, a woman has become head of a male, medium-security institution at Warkworth, Ontario. Also, a significant change has occurred in the training program of custodial staff. Three extra days have been added to the compulsory induction course, giving female candidates, and male counterparts, an insight into attitudes and reactions they might encounter from inmates and coworkers. There is also a briefing session with institution staff to acquaint each with job responsibilities, and how to inter-mix in the administration of the institutions.

Endeavoring to foster an understanding and acceptance of the new employment policy authorizing females as correctional officers, CSC published articles and brochures for staff, inmate, and public information.

In *Women as Correctional Officers*, the Service tested four concerns, expressed during initiation of the first female recruits, none of which scared women from entering competitions for correctional officers.

1. Society contends women rely on men for economic support and physical protection. This belief reaches into the corrections system, where male officers believe women make it harder for men to do their jobs properly. There is a feeling women should not come in contact with inmates because they would be easily manipulated, and they lack the physical strength for guard duties.
2. Male officers are suspicious of women as backups, fearing they might overact and contribute to a dangerous situation, even be of little physical help during trouble.
3. Inmate privacy could be threatened by the presence of female officers, especially in showers and toilets. And, would women be able to carry out skin frisks on male inmates?
4. The strongest concern was the possibility of rape and hostage-taking of female officers.

So, the major stumbling blocks to females becoming correctional officers have been faced -- not eliminated. Women do not appear to have a shortage of physical ability or a surplus of emotional vulnerability -- they do have a feeling of over-protectiveness by male staff, and, they are making up for a lack of experience by steadily increasing representation as they form up for inspection parade.

Women, as correctional officers in The Correctional Service of Canada, have won their spurs, now they want full recognition of their role in corrections from male coworkers.

