



Research at a glance

A Profile of Women Who Sexually Offend

KEY WORDS: *women offenders, women sexual offenders, sex offending*

Why we did this study

Women who have committed sexual offences are an understudied offender population that only relatively recently has become a growing area of interest in research. More recently, research has focused on exploring pathways to offending and developing a descriptive model of the process of female-perpetrated sexual offending (e.g., Gannon & Cortoni, 2010). In collaboration with Theresa Gannon, the Research Branch will seek to reproduce her work using a sample of Canadian women sexual offenders (WSOs).

As an initial phase, the goal of the current study was to provide a descriptive profile of WSOs under CSC jurisdiction and contribute to our general knowledge and understanding of this population.

What we did

All Canadian federal women offenders identified as sexual offenders between January 2001 and March 2010 were included in the sample ($N = 58$). Using the Offender Management System, data were collected concerning offender demographics, risk, and needs; offence, accomplice and victim characteristics; social history; and typology. Data were gathered via automated extraction and manual file review.

What we found

WSOs were most likely to be Caucasian, in their thirties at intake into federal institutions, and under-educated. They presented with high risk and high needs, particularly in the areas of personal/emotional and family/marital needs. Most women had experienced some type of abuse in childhood (70%; most frequently sexual abuse) and/or adulthood (84%; most frequently physical abuse).

72% of WSOs committed their offence alongside at least one accomplice who was most likely to be male and the woman's partner. Victims' ages ranged but victims were most often young children (5-11) or adolescents (12-17).

Typology analyses revealed that over half the WSOs (55%) were male accompanied/coerced offenders; another 19% were identified as angry/impulsive offenders. In comparison to the rest of the WSO sample,

those women identified as male accompanied/coerced offenders presented with significantly higher need in relation to the family/marital domain. Angry/impulsive WSOs, in comparison to the rest of the sample, presented with higher risk and more considerable needs in the domains of substance abuse, associates and personal/emotional.

What it means

Results contribute to our understanding of the unique characteristics, risk and needs of women who commit sexual offences and will assist staff in understanding, treating, and managing these women who present with complex needs. In addition, these results provide early evidence for gender differences in sex offending behavior and thereby provide background for an upcoming, in-depth report examining the pathways to, and processes of female-perpetrated sexual offending.

Finally, these results also provide context for the development and implementation of the Program for Women Who Sexually Offend; a program designed to meet the needs and promote successful community reintegration for federal women sexual offenders.

Reference

Gannon, T., & Cortoni, F. (Eds.). (2010). *Female sexual offenders: Theory, assessment and treatment*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

For more information

Allenby, K., Taylor, K., Cossette, M., & Fortin, D. (2012). *A profile of women who sexually offend*. Research Report R-274. Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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