



Research at a glance

Offenders Serving Life and Indeterminate Sentences: Snapshot (2009) and Changing Profile (1998 to 2008)

KEY WORDS: *Life imprisonment, Lifers, Dangerous Offenders, CSC Offender Population Trends*

Why we did this study

There is a growing number of offenders sentenced to terms of life imprisonment or indeterminate sentences, such as Dangerous Offenders (both groups were called “Lifers” in this study). These offenders now represent 22% of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC or the Service) population. To develop interventions that best address the needs of these offenders, and the risk that they pose, we must better understand their demographic and offence related characteristics: an important task given that they will be supervised by the CSC for the rest of their lives.

What we did

Data was drawn from the Offender Management System (OMS) to develop a profile of the 4,774 CSC Lifers on March 31, 2009. The characteristics of these offenders were also compared to Lifers incarcerated in 1998 to identify changing trends.

What we found

On March 31, 2009:

- Almost two-thirds of Lifers (64%) were residing in institutions, while the remaining offenders were supervised in the community on a conditional release. The proportion of Lifers residing in the community on March 31, 2009 (36%) was greater than in 1998 (32%).
- Since 1998, the Lifer population grew by an average of 96 offenders each year. If that trend continues, there will be over 5,700 Lifers in the CSC population in 2019.
- Lifers were overwhelmingly male (97%), Caucasian (72%), and had been convicted of a homicide offence (76.5%).
- Offenders sentenced to indeterminate terms were more likely to have been convicted of a sexual offence. They were also older at sentencing, had more prior convictions, and were admitted with higher risk and lower motivation to change.
- The average Lifer was 49 years of age in 2009, up from 44 years in 1998. The number of Lifers 61 years and over had increased by 149% since 1998.

- Over two-thirds of Lifers had a substance abuse problem, over 60% had not finished high school, and 26% had a current or past mental health problem. Lifers typically had higher risk than offenders in the general CSC population.
- The proportion of Aboriginal Lifers (17%) closely approximates their representation in the CSC population. Aboriginal Lifers had higher levels of risk and need than Caucasian Lifers.
- There was a 37% increase in the number of women Lifers between 1998 and 2009, which was nearly 50% greater than the growth rate for male Lifers. If that trend continues, there will be over 210 women Lifers by 2019.

What it means

Lifers represent a significant proportion of the CSC population. The growing Lifer population has implications for the development and delivery of correctional programs or services and has significant long-term cost and resource implications for the Service.

For more information

Young, M., Broom, I., Ruddell, R. (2010) *Offenders Serving Life and Indeterminate Sentences: Snapshot (2009) and Changing Profile (1998 to 2008)*. Research Report R-231, Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada.

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