

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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Indigenous Federal Offenders in Structured Intervention Units and the Mainstream Population

Indigenous Offenders in SIUs distinguish themselves from others in SIUs and those in the Mainstream Population.

Why we are doing this study

In 2019, Bill C-83 transformed federal corrections to focus on rehabilitation and mental healthcare. This legislation also brought about the elimination of both administrative and disciplinary segregation and introduced Structured Intervention Units (SIUs) for those inmates who could not be managed in the mainstream population. In 2020-21, a total of 1,688 (representing 34.8%) Indigenous offenders were admitted to the federal system and at fiscal year-end there were 3,646 (representing 31.0%) in federal custody. Comparing the case characteristics of Indigenous inmates in SIUs with others in SIUs as well as the mainstream Indigenous inmate population may yield some important information especially with respect to providing targeted interventions to these individuals.

What we did

All federal offenders in SIUs were drawn from Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) Offender Management System on February 28, 2021. On that date, there were 91 Indigenous men in SIUs and there were 3,536 in the mainstream institutional population. For those in SIUs, 88% were serving federal sentences for violence offences compared to 82% in the mainstream population. In accordance with the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the reasons for SIU placement were: 38 (or 42%) *jeopardizes the security of the institution or the safety of any person*, 53 (or 58%) *inmate is in danger*, and 0 *interferes with an investigation*. SIU group comparisons were made in relation to the Indigenous SIU, non-Indigenous SIU, as well as the Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream population at that time.

What we found

An intake assessment measure was used to gather criminal history background (Criminal Risk Index or CRI). Analyses revealed that in SIUs, Indigenous inmates were more likely than non-Indigenous to have a high / very high risk of re-offending rating (75% and 72%, respectively). Substantial differences also emerged for the Indigenous SIU population relative to the Indigenous mainstream institutional population with respect to CRI high / very high risk of re-offending (75% and 53%, respectively).

For Dynamic Factors Identification and Analysis (case needs) assessed at intake to federal custody there were considerable differences observed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous inmates in SIUs. Overall, the Indigenous SIU population relative to the non-Indigenous SIU, Indigenous and non-Indigenous mainstream populations were found to be rated as "high needs" (96%, 99%, 81%, and 69% respectively).

Upon closer examination, Indigenous SIU inmates were more likely than non-Indigenous SIU inmates to be assessed as "high needs" in the Personal/Emotional domain (78% and 64%, respectively). Unpacking the Personal/Emotional domain the following were found: being impulsive (93% and 92%, respectively), difficulty solving interpersonal problems (88% and 86%, respectively), and ability to generate choices is limited (86% and 74%, respectively). Also notable, Indigenous SIU inmates were more likely than non-Indigenous SIU inmates to be assessed as "high needs" in the Substance Misuse domain (68% and 46%, respectively).

Albeit lower for the Indigenous SIU relative to the non-Indigenous SIU population, noteworthy is the presence of "high needs" in the Attitudes domain (76% and 79%, respectively). In the Attitudes domain, there were found to be characteristics such as: displays negative attitudes towards the criminal justice system (90% and 89%, respectively); displays negative attitudes supports instrumental / goal-oriented violence (90% and 88%, respectively); and values a substance abusing lifestyle (85% and 73%, respectively).

What it means

These analyses confirm that the Indigenous SIU population distinguish themselves as a group from the non-Indigenous SIU and mainstream Indigenous inmate population in a number of important cognitive-behavioural and attitudinal ways. Overall, Indigenous inmates in SIUs display complex needs and require intensive levels of service. This reinforces that interventions being offered to those inmates placed in SIUs need to be culturally relevant and focused on motivation to change, problem solving, violence prevention and substance use issues. Moreover, these services need to be delivered by well-trained and qualified correctional practitioners.

For more information

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