



Revealing Research & Evaluation Newsletter

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This issue provides an overview of incarcerated women, including a profile of women in custody with BC Corrections, and highlights the BC Corrections Thinking Leads 2 Change program for women.

A publication of the BC Corrections Performance, Research & Evaluation (PREv) Unit, Strategic Operations Division

Inside This Issue:

- Incarcerated Women 1
- Women in BC Corrections: 2013-2023 2
- Spotlight: Indigenous Women in BC Corrections 3
- TLC: Thinking Leads 2 Change 4

If you have comments, questions, or ideas about this publication, please contact:

Leigh Greiner, Ph.D.,
Director, Research and Strategic Planning
Email: Leigh.Greiner@gov.bc.ca

Incarcerated Women

Justice-involved women are among the most vulnerable and unique groups of clients due to their often-complex histories and risk/need profiles. Incarcerated women experience a disproportionately high number of social disadvantages, including low socioeconomic status, low education levels, increased likelihood of unemployment, and being a primary parent.^{1,2}

Compared to incarcerated men, women clients typically have greater specialized medical needs, including maternity care, pre-existing serious mental or physical health issues, traumatic histories including significantly high rates of childhood abuse, and substance use disorders.^{3,4}

In terms of offences, women are more often incarcerated for less serious crimes compared to men, with property crimes accounting for the highest proportion of crimes among women in Canada (35%).^{5,6,7}

Although women are the fastest growing incarcerated population in Canada, they still represent a small proportion of individuals in custody overall. As of 2023, women make up 6% of individuals in provincial custody in BC, which is consistent with the latest federal statistics (2019) indicating that women account for 6% of individuals in federal custody nationally.⁸ As such, they are often overlooked in policy and research. However, overlooking the distinct experiences of incarcerated women can have serious consequences to their welfare. Recognizing and understanding the complexity and uniqueness of justice-involved women is essential for effectively addressing their needs and enhancing their overall well-being.

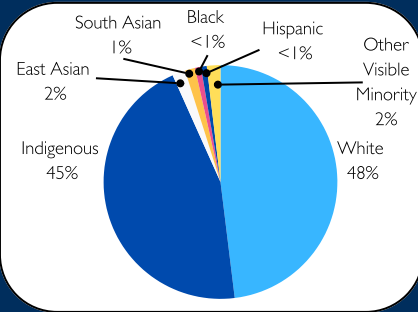


Spotlight: Trans and Gender-Diverse Individuals in Custody

Research from Canada shows that transgender (trans) and gender-diverse individuals experience disproportionately high rates of incarceration alongside risk for victimization while incarcerated. As such, calls for specialized policies have been made to safeguard and address the needs of this population.⁹ In 2015, a shift to BC Corrections policy allowed for accommodation of individuals to be housed in centres according to their gender rather than their assigned sex at birth.¹⁰ Additionally, policy is designed to help ensure trans individuals receive access to appropriate supports and services while in custody. Since criminal justice-based statistics are often collected and reported on in the gender binary (men vs. women) it is difficult to disentangle and highlight the unique needs or characteristics of justice-involved trans and gender-diverse people. The PREv team is committed to promoting the adoption of the 2023 BC Gender and Sex Data Standards to ensure improved data collection and reporting.

Women in BC Corrections: 2013-2023

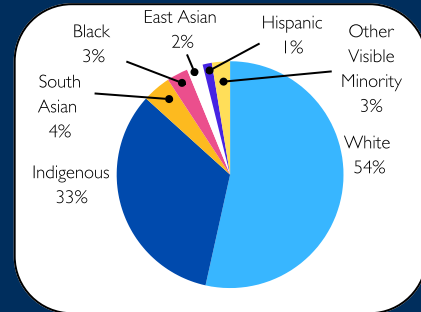
The following profile of women in custody with BC Corrections was collected from correctional data taken from 2013-2023 representing 1,632 women and 22,623 men clients. Percentages and numbers represent the average proportion of each group over the ten-year period.



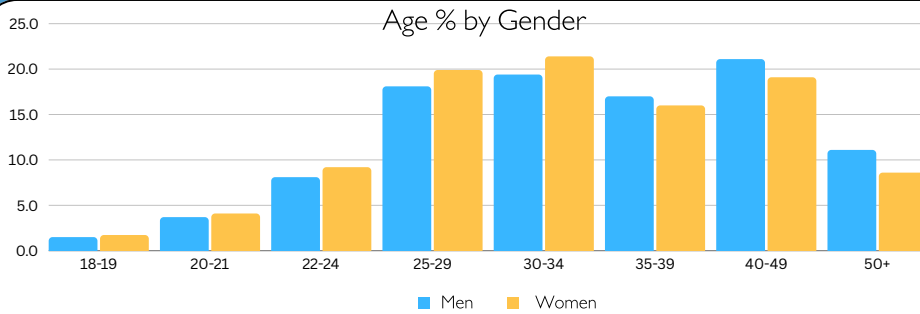
Women

Race and Ethno-Cultural Breakdown

Although the majority of clients in custody are White, Indigenous women make up the fastest growing population among BC Corrections, accounting for nearly half of all women in custody.



Men



Age

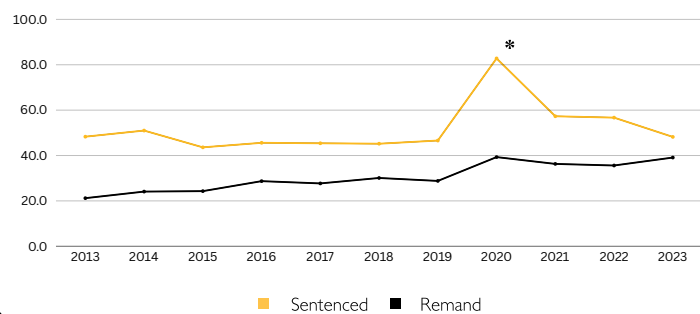
The most prevalent age group for women in BC Corrections custody is 30-34. Among men, the most prevalent age is 40-49.

Length of Stay in Custody

The ratio of individuals in remand to those who have been sentenced is the same for men and women (65% remand vs. 35% sentenced). However, the average length of stay for remand (30.5 vs. 44.7) and sentenced (51.9 vs. 72.9) is lower for women than men.

*Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the 2020 length of stay average for sentenced women clients spiked as less women were incarcerated overall and clients with more significant sentences became overrepresented in the population.

Average Length of Stay (Days) for Women



Centre Locations for Women



1. Alouette Correctional Centre for Women (ACCW)
2. Prince George Regional Correctional Centre (PGRCC)
3. Okanagan Correctional Centre (OCC)
4. Nanaimo Correctional Centre (NCC)

ACCW in Maple Ridge is the main provincial correctional centre for women in BC. Other centres including PGRCC (Prince George), OCC (Oliver), and the newly renovated NCC (Nanaimo) can also accommodate women for shorter stays.

Women in BC Corrections: JSAT Profile (2009-2017)

The **Jail Screening Assessment Tool (JSAT)** is a structured interview conducted at intake by healthcare staff with all individuals in custody. It is designed to identify mental health problems, along with risk for suicide, self-harm, violence, and victimization. JSAT data from 2017 onwards is held by Correctional Health Services, who took over the screening in late 2017.



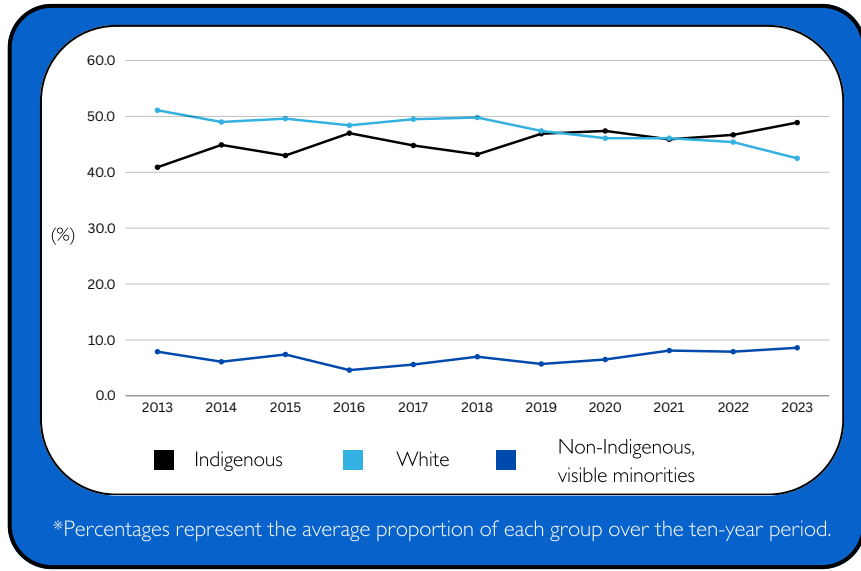
- Upon admission to BC Corrections correctional centres*¹¹**
- **67%** of women were identified as having **children**.
 - **84%** of women were **unemployed** compared to 56% of men.
 - **61%** of women were on **government assistance/disability**, compared to 32% of men.
 - **24%** of women reported being **homeless**, compared to 14% of men.
 - **48%** of women had **mental health needs**, compared to 35% of men.
 - **63%** of women had a **substance use disorder**, compared to 47% of men.

*This data is based on JSAT screenings from 5,229 Women and 38,191 Men from 2009-2017

Spotlight: Indigenous Women in BC Corrections (2013-2023)

Across Canada, the significant overrepresentation of Indigenous women in custody remains “one of Canada’s most pressing human rights issues and is evidence of public policy failures over successive decades”¹². In provincial correctional facilities, Indigenous women are the most highly overrepresented population. As of 2020/2021, BC was the fourth highest in terms of overrepresentation of Indigenous women amongst five examined provinces (ON, AB, BC, NS, SK).¹³

Highlighting the Significant and Growing Overrepresentation of Indigenous Women in BC Provincial Correctional Centres



In BC Corrections, the percentage of Indigenous women in custody is increasing, despite an overall decrease of women who are incarcerated provincially [from an average daily count of 179 to 117]. As of 2023, 49% of women in provincial custody in BC were Indigenous, compared to 41% in 2013.

A core priority of the 2022 Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General mandate was to make progress on the “continu[ed] work to implement the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls” (MMIWG) as well as the BC First Nation Justice Strategy.¹⁴

Recently, the BC First Nation Justice Council has drafted the Indigenous Women’s Justice Plan aimed at implementing recommendations from various federal reports, including the MMIWG Calls to Justice. The plan outlines several lines of action, such as identifying and developing alternatives to corrections for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ peoples.¹⁵ BC Corrections is presently engaged in supporting and executing these lines of action through efforts to address the corrections-specific suggestions including to enhance cultural programs both within custody and for community corrections.

ACCW’s Indigenous Liaison Program

The Indigenous Cultural Liaison (ICL) supports Indigenous women in custody by identifying their needs and offering tailored supports and programs. Culturally relevant supports provided include activities such as smudging, drumming circles, spiritual guidance, and therapeutic circles aimed at healing.

NOTE: Indigenous refers to the combined groups of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit identifying clients.



TLC: Thinking Leads 2 Change

The Thinking Leads to Change (TLC) program for women was developed by BC Corrections in 2016 based on the combined understanding that cognitive-behavioural, gender-responsive, and trauma-informed approaches are fundamental to improved outcomes for justice-involved women. The program was designed to increase competency in the areas of conflict resolution, problem solving, self-regulation, effective communication, and boundary setting.

The program consists of 12 sessions, delivered by a trained facilitator. To date, the TLC program has been completed over 700 times across custody and community divisions.*.

As an evidence-based organization, BC Corrections carries out program evaluations to remain consistent with its commitment to practice “what works,” and to develop and improve programs to meet the needs and goals of clients under their supervision. A formative evaluation completed in

2018 explored ongoing feedback and program progress since inception. Results highlighted program successes and areas for improvement including in program referral, completion and information management.

The 2024 summative evaluation assessed immediate pre-post program changes in program targets and compared recidivism and desistance outcomes between program participants and a matched control group.

Results suggest that TLC did not reduce rates of recidivism, as the program alone is insufficient to address the complex needs of justice involved women. However, program participants did show improvement in problem-solving, motivation to change, self-efficacy, and mindfulness, along with a reduction in pro-criminal thinking suggesting the program is having an impact. Notably, custody participants exhibited greater improvements compared to those in the community, possibly due to differences in motivation and engagement.

Lessons learned from the summative evaluation of TLC (2024) led to the following recommendations:

1. Continue program delivery with **updated content** to increase **cultural relevance** and align language and concepts with **cognitive-based therapy** tools.
2. Incorporate **incremental markers of success** into future program evaluations by exploring metrics beyond recidivism to adequately capture program impact.
3. Identify and **address barriers** faced by community participants to improve engagement and completion rates, with a focus on **mitigating gender-specific obstacles** to program attendance.
4. Identify programs that address the full spectrum of women's needs and **explore options for additional targeted programming** with TLC considered as the first step.
5. Investigate whether **programs or primers** could be developed to prepare women for programming and increase their motivation to engage.

*This number accounts for the fact that individuals may take this course more than once.

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