

## CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

## Profile of Offenders Serving Long Sentences

*Offenders serving long sentences comprise a third of the general offender population. Two-thirds of the OSLS population were in custody and a third was in the community. OSLSs in custody were more likely to have higher criminogenic risk and need than those in the community.*

**Why we did this study**

Previous research demonstrates that the offenders serving long sentences (OSLS) population is increasing in Canada.<sup>1</sup> OSLSs are defined as offenders serving indeterminate sentences<sup>2</sup> or determinate sentences of 10 years or more. This study was conducted to examine the prevalence and profile of OSLSs in the federal offender population.

**What we did**

This study examined both in-custody ( $N = 4,495$ ) and community ( $N = 2,669$ ) OSLSs populations<sup>3</sup> using snapshot data from fiscal year 2022 to 2023. Demographic, sentence, and offence information, as well as criminogenic risk and need data were analyzed.

**What we found**

Overall, OSLSs represent 34% of offenders in custody and 32% of offenders in the community.<sup>4</sup> Among the OSLS population, 63% were in custody and 37% were in the community. The greatest proportion of OSLSs in custody and in the community were White (49% and 69%) or Indigenous (30% and 19%). OSLSs in custody were, on average, 34 years old at sentencing and 47 years old at the time of the snapshot. On average, OSLSs in the community were 30 years old at sentencing and 59 years old at the time of the snapshot.

Of OSLSs in custody, 66% were serving their first federal sentence, 61% were housed in medium security, 13% had a dangerous offender designation, and 74% had committed a homicide-related offence. Among OSLSs in the community, 78% were serving their first federal sentence, 2% were designated as a dangerous offender, and 85% had committed a homicide-related offence. Among OSLSs in custody, 27% began their sentence within the last five years. OSLSs were in the community for, on average, five years.

At their initial assessment, OSLSs in custody had high static risk (87%) and dynamic need (87%), low reintegration potential (76%), and medium motivation (64%) and accountability (52%); 56% were engaged in their correctional plan and 27% had a responsivity issue identified. During the

study period, OSLSs in custody were recently reassessed as high static risk (86%) and dynamic need (71%), with low reintegration potential (64%), and medium motivation (57%) and accountability (52%).

Initially, OSLSs in the community were assessed as high static risk (60%) and dynamic need (55%), and medium reintegration potential (36%) and motivation (46%); 88% were engaged in their correctional plan and 12% had a responsivity issue while assessed as high accountability (52%). The most recent ratings<sup>5</sup> for these offenders were low static risk (69%) and dynamic need (72%), and high reintegration potential (66%), motivation (86%), and accountability (52%). The majority (89%) of OSLSs in the community were released on day parole.

For both OSLSs in custody and in the community, personal/emotional orientation, attitudes, and substance abuse are prominent need domains. More recently assessed OSLSs also have needs related to associates.

**What it means**

The results demonstrate that OSLSs in custody have higher risk and need compared to OSLSs in the community which emphasizes the need for access to correctional programming and other interventions. Enhancing the Correctional Service of Canada's understanding of this population's risk and needs may inform management, intervention, and community release strategies. Future research could examine the institutional experiences and community outcomes of OSLSs, as well as women OSLSs in custody and in the community.

**For more information**

Please e-mail the [Research Branch](#). You can also visit the [Research Publications](#) section for a full list of reports and one-page summaries.

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<sup>1</sup> Motiuk, L., & Hayden, M. (2021). Federal offenders serving life sentences: 2015-16 to 2019-20 (RIB-21-08). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> An indeterminate sentence includes offenders serving sentences with no set end date as well as dangerous offenders and offenders serving life sentences.

<sup>3</sup> This study excluded offenders under long-term supervision orders (98 in-custody and 54 in the community).

<sup>4</sup> Overall, 96% of OSLSs in custody were in men's institutions and 4% were in women's institutions. Ninety-five percent of OSLSs in the community were released from men's institutions while 5% were released from women's institutions.

<sup>5</sup> Time from assessment at intake to reassessment varied from three to 28 years (average of 20 years).