

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

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Characteristics of Assaults on Staff and Inmate-Related Violence

Individuals with assaults on staff experienced higher rates of use of force, more complex mental health needs, and higher rates of previous involvement in institutional incidents compared to those with inmate-related violence.

Why we did this study

As part of a larger study examining the characteristics and predictors of institutional incidents of violence, incarcerated individuals who committed assaults on staff emerged as having potential differences in profile from those committing other types of violent incidents. This study was conducted to explore the characteristics of individuals who committed assaults on staff compared to individuals who committed assaults on inmate or engaged in inmate fights.

What we did

Individuals in federal custody who instigated an assault on staff, assault on inmate, or inmate fight between April 1, 2018 and March 31, 2024 ($N = 7,663$) were included in this study. The sample was restricted to those identified with the role of instigator in the incident and an involvement qualifier of “committing” the incident, and the last incident during the study period was selected for analysis. The table below presents a breakdown of incident types at men’s and women’s institutions.

Table 1. Incident Types in Men’s and Women’s Institutions

Incident types	Men’s (%)	Men’s (n)	Women’s (%)	Women’s (n)
Assault on staff	7.5	534	5.1	29
Assault on inmate	45.2	3,203	36.8	215
Inmate fight	47.3	3,354	57.3	328

Note: Men: $N = 7,091$; Women: $N = 572$.

What we found

Incarcerated individuals committing assaults on staff at men’s institutions had lower reintegration potential, higher Criminal Risk Index ratings, and higher need for improvement in the community domain but lower need for improvement in the associates domain. There were no differences between groups at women’s institutions. Notably, individuals with assaults on staff from both men’s and women’s institutions had lower rates of accountability, motivation, and engagement, but those at men’s institutions also had higher rates of responsivity.

Severity of substance use was similar between individuals with assaults on staff, assaults on inmate, and inmate fights from both men’s and women’s institutions. However, individuals committing assaults on staff from men’s

institutions were more likely to have some (21.0%) or considerable (21.7%) mental health needs compared to those with assaults on inmate (15.4% and 5.5%) or inmate fights (16.4% and 10.6%). At women’s institutions, individuals committing assaults on staff were more likely to be assessed with some or considerable mental health needs (58.6%) than those with assaults on inmate (22.3%) or inmate fights (25.0%).

Incarcerated individuals with assaults on staff from men’s institutions had higher rates of previous involvement in institutional incidents (85.6%) than those with assaults on inmate (78.8%) or inmate fights (71.8%), a difference that was not present in individuals from women’s institutions. This included incidents of assault (80.3% vs. 72.4% and 64.2%), property damage (33.9% vs. 15.0% and 12.8%), and self-injurious behaviour (36.9% vs. 14.3% and 14.4%). Those committing assaults on staff were also more likely to have any minor (78.7%) or any serious (71.9%) disciplinary charge than those with assaults on inmate (66.0% and 63.3%) or inmate fights (63.7% and 56.0%).

At both men’s and women’s institutions, individuals with assaults on staff experienced use of force more frequently (52.4% and 55.2%) than those with assaults on inmate (24.9% and 8.4%) or inmate fights (31.1% and 22.9%). Those at men’s institutions were also more likely to have filed any type of grievance (73.8%) than individuals with assaults on inmate (65.9%) or inmate fights (66.7%).

What it means

Incarcerated individuals committing assaults on staff differ from those committing assaults on inmate or engaging in inmate fights in the areas of use of force, grievances, risk and need, mental health needs, and prior institutional behaviour. These differences highlight opportunities for targeted, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive interventions to better support individuals involved in assaults on staff and improve institutional safety.

For more information

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

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