



Research at a glance

Aboriginal Social History Factors in Case Management

Aboriginal social history factors are consistently documented in security classification and discretionary release recommendations, and there is no evidence that they are being misperceived as risk factors.

Why we did this study

Aboriginal Canadians are over-represented in correctional populations. The Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged this over-representation in a landmark 1999 ruling where they interpreted the Criminal Code of Canada to require that judges consider the years of systemic disadvantage of Aboriginal peoples in reaching sentencing decisions. Following this ruling, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) incorporated this principle into its policy. CSC has implemented policy requiring that Aboriginal social history is reflected in correctional case management decision-making and offered all parole officers two days of related training in 2013-14.

What we did

This study was undertaken to examine the extent to which Aboriginal social history factors were considered in assessments for decision relating to both security classification and discretionary release. A total of 618 assessments for decision were coded to examine the extent to which these factors were incorporated in recommendation rationales.

In addition, a matched sample of assessments for decision corresponding to non-Aboriginal offenders was included. Comparisons allowed for an examination of whether Aboriginal social history factors were associated with recommendations after accounting for the variables on which the groups were matched.

What we found

Aboriginal social history was documented in 98% of assessments reviewed. That said, there may be room for improvement in the extent to which these factors were explicitly linked to the resulting recommendations. Recommendations for Métis offenders were slightly less likely to be linked to Aboriginal social history factors.

Overall, it did not appear that Aboriginal social history factors influenced decisional recommendations. There was no evidence that, as some have worried, Aboriginal social history factors were misperceived as risk factors. The lack of association between these factors and recommendations may be partly explained by the broader context in which parole officers formulate recommendations; it was impossible to disentangle the relative effects of Aboriginal social history factors and other priorities, such as public safety.

What it means

Clearly, CSC's parole officers are complying with policy with respect to the inclusion of Aboriginal social history factors in assessments for decision relating to security classification and discretionary release.

Future iterations of training on Aboriginal social history factors may benefit from a focus on how to ensure these factors are explicitly linked to recommendations, as well as on certain domains that seem to be less well understood. In addition, training could also perhaps be enhanced by including further direction on how to consider both Aboriginal social history factors and other priorities – in particular, public safety – concurrently.

For more information

Keown, L. A., Gobeil, R., Biro, S., & Beaudette, J. N. (2015). *Aboriginal social history factors in case management* (Research Report R-356). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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