

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

CHANGING LIVES. PROTECTING CANADIANS.

Profiling Escapes from Federal Custody 2011/2012 - 2016/2017

Escapes from federal custody are typically non-violent, involve minimum security male offenders, and are most common in the Prairie region. The most common identified motivation for escape is the desire to obtain contraband.

Why we did this study

In Canada, escapes from federal custody have not been systematically examined since Johnson and Motiuk's research on escapes from minimum security institutions in the early 1990s. While the number of escapes from federal institutions has declined over the last 10 years, there remains a need to understand these incidents so that more effective preventative policies and measures can be developed.

What we did

All documented escapes from federal custody between fiscal years 2011/2012 and 2016/2017 for which there was sufficient information were examined, resulting in a total of 91 cases. Data was extracted from Board of Investigation (BOI) reports, situation reports, incident reports, warden situation reports and the Offender Management System (OMS). Information was coded to identify: (1) the circumstances under which escapes occur; (2) the profile of offenders who engage in escape behaviours; and (3) the factors that may contribute to an offender's decision to escape.

What we found

The vast majority (97%) of examined escapes were from minimum security institutions, including healing lodges, and most involved the offender absconding on foot without the use of force. Most offenders who escaped were peacefully recaptured within three days of the incident.

Escapes were most likely to occur in the Prairie region, where 42% of all escape incidents took place. Escapes most often occurred on Sundays, during the evening period (i.e., between 6:00 PM and 12:00 AM) and between July and September. Escapes tended to occur soon after the offender arrived to the institution of escape; more specifically, 73% of escapes occurred within six months of transfer/admission.

The characteristics of offenders who escaped from custody varied by region, however, overall, offenders tended to be male (97%), White (54%) or Indigenous (43%), serving their first federal sentence (71%), often for property-related

offences (57%) and other non-violent offences (66%). Most (78%) escapes involved offenders under the age of 45, with offenders in the 25-34 age category being most likely to escape.

Offenders' motivations for escapes were often unknown, however, the most common identified motivation was the desire to obtain contraband (usually tobacco). This was particularly evident in the Pacific region, where 44% of escapes were motivated by this goal.

What it means

While most offenders in custody do not engage in escape-related behaviours, CSC is committed to learning from these incidents. By identifying the circumstances under which escapes are most likely to occur, the profile of offenders who undertake escapes, and the factors that may contribute to the decision to escape, the findings of this study can assist in the development of more effective and preventative policies.

For more information

McKendy, L. and Keown, L.A. (2018). *Profiling Escapes from Federal Custody 2011/2012 - 2016/2017* (Research Report R-407). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

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