

# An examination of offender risk and needs factors: Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders (R-94, 2000)

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Research on Canadian offenders has invariably concluded that Aboriginal and Caucasian offenders have different criminogenic needs. Discussions have primarily centered on assumptions of racial heterogeneity: similarities between individuals are assumed to arise more from racial experience than from shared or common life histories.

This report presents a comparison of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) Offender Intake Assessment (OIA) risk and needs to determine the degree of difference in ratings between Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders in federal custody. Needs ratings measure a variety of interpersonal and personal dynamics in an offender's life. They are used by CSC to indicate the extent of difficulties experienced by offenders, and provide insight into individual life histories, pre-incarceration lifestyles, and programming requirements. The risk rating is an assessment of future probability of re-offending if identified needs are not adequately addressed. Risk and need measurements are used to facilitate program referral as well as guide the case management process.

The findings of this research support that both similarities and differences exist in comparison of the OIA risk and needs ratings of Aboriginal and Caucasian women offenders. It suggests that this be acknowledged in the criminological research field. As well, it suggests that criminological research that forefronts offender race may also need to account for individual life histories, acknowledging potential similarities across racial groupings. Individuals differ due to their racialized experiences but they also resemble one another due to common life experiences. The overall implication is that caution must be exercised in focussing research exclusively on race.

However, it is equally important to acknowledge the similarity between offenders, as revealed in the analyses, and the potential implications for increased understanding in correctional practices. Continued research in this area, including a focus on men offenders, is encouraged by this research. ■