



WOMEN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

SOME FACTS

In Canada, over 2.5 million men and over 600,000 women have criminal records. On average there are over 31,000 adults imprisoned in Canada each day.

FACT WOMEN ARE A SMALL MINORITY OF THOSE SERVING A PRISON SENTENCE.

A woman can be charged under the criminal code, other federal statutes, provincial statutes, and municipal by-laws.

When charged, a woman is formally accused of having acted in a way defined by our laws as socially unacceptable. A charge may lead to bail in the community or detention (custody) at a remand centre prior to trial. Custody can run from a few days to years depending on the charges. Trial may result in acquittal, or up to two years in prison (provincial time), or two or more years (federal time). Non-incarceration alternatives include fines, probation, community service orders or other community programs.

In 2005/06, according to Correctional Service Canada, only 3% of those serving a federal sentence were women. In 2006/07 the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services reported that women accounted for 11% of those serving a provincial sentence.

Most women sentenced to two years or longer serve time in one of the federal prisons for women across Canada. Correctional Service Canada reported that in 2005-06, there were 420 women serving federal sentences, as compared to 13,143 men. Probation and parole allow women to live in the community under supervision instead of being confined in an institution. According to the National Parole Board of Canada in 2005-06, of the 250 federal female offenders who completed their day parole, 205 or 82% were successful. Of the 121 women who completed their full parole, 94 or 77.7% were successful.

FACT WOMEN'S CRIMES SELDOM INVOLVE VIOLENCE

Social, economic and political realities still prevent women from having equal opportunities in our society. This is reflected in the types of crimes for which women are charged, convicted and sentenced:

- Statistics Canada reports that women account for approximately 16% of those charged with violent offences.
- The same source states that approximately 44% of all property related charges against women are for shoplifting.
- Correctional Service Canada reported that as of September 2007 of all crimes that women were serving federal time for, 18.1% were drug-related. Many of these charges were for drug trafficking brought about most often due to severe financial hardship.

The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services in Ontario revealed that as of March 31, 2007, of the 3,941 women who were sentenced to provincial jails:

- 418 (10.6%) were drug related
- 1,017 (25.8%) were admitted for theft and fraud
- 226 (5.7%) were for prostitution related offences
- 408 (10%) offences were for minor assault offences
- 98 (2.5%) were for homicides and other serious violent offences.

FACT EACH WOMAN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW IS A UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL WHOSE LIFE EXPERIENCE AND CURRENT SITUATION RESULT IN NEEDS - AND OPPORTUNITIES – THAT ARE SPECIFIC TO HER.

For many women in conflict with the law, arrest, conviction and imprisonment, are the culmination of poverty, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, racial discrimination, family breakdown, limited education, unemployment, and drug/alcohol difficulties.

- According to the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, 87.5% of women sentenced to provincial imprisonment in 2006-07 received a sentence of 3 months or less. The average sentence to provincial time for a woman was less than two months. But even a short sentence can cause a woman to lose her job, her home and her children.
- According to the same source, of adult women sentenced and admitted to a provincial prison in 2006-07, 66% were between 20-39 years old, with the highest number being in the 25-29 age group.
- Of women who are serving federal sentences, according to Correctional Service Canada, 34% were between 21-30 years and 85.4% are serving their first federal term. As of September 2007, of the 480 women serving federal sentences, 78 (16.3%) are serving life sentences. Many are there for killing their abusive male partners.
- As of September 2007 native women made up 31.7% of federally-sentenced women and 11.5% of provincially sentenced women, although native people represent only 3% of Canada's population. According to the National Parole Board, aboriginal offenders are less likely to be granted full parole than non-aboriginal offenders.

FACT WOMEN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW NEED COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE.

Correctional Service Canada informs us that the average cost of keeping one federally sentenced woman in prison for one year in 2005-06 was \$170,684. To house one federally sentenced woman on parole at the Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto halfway house for one year costs \$34,462.

Imprisonment often leaves a woman no better prepared for life in the community. In fact, when women are returned to society from prison, punished but without new skills or resources and with the stigma of a criminal record, they often find themselves trapped in the same painful and wasteful cycle that can lead them once again into conflict with the law.

More release programs and community-based alternatives to incarceration are needed to help resolve the personal and societal issues that bring women into conflict with the law.

Community support is essential to help women integrate into the community and achieve a life that is personally productive and beneficial to family, friends, co-workers and our society.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WOMEN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW CALL THE ELIZABETH FRY SOCIETY OF TORONTO AT (416)924-3708.

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