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Canada

A PROFILE OF WOMEN WHO COMMIT MURDER AND MANSLAUGHTER

TANYA NOUWENS

Submitted to the Department of Criminology,
University of Ottawa,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.



Tanya Nouwens, Ottawa, Canada, 1992



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter	
I. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
Statement of Problem	3
Purpose of Study	4
Questions to be Answered	4
II. <u>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</u>	8
Murder/Homicide by Women	9
In General	9
Spousal Murder/Homicide	10
Child as Victim	16
Another Female as Victim	22
Violent Women in General	24
Conclusion	28
III. <u>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</u>	30
Research Problem	30
Research Questions	31
Definition of Terms	32
Sample	37
Method	43
Ethics	52
IV. <u>RESULTS</u>	53
Quantitative Analysis	53
Descriptive Profile of Historical Sample	53
Comparison of Profiles by Time Period	67
Comparison of Profiles by Race	76
Comparison of Profiles by Major Offence	87
Qualitative Analysis	91
The Offender	93
The Offence	104
Reconstruction	109
Qualitative Profile of Subjects	114
Conclusion	116

V.	<u>DISCUSSION</u>	120
	Future Research Directions	127
	<u>REFERENCES</u>	130
	<u>APPENDICES</u>	
A.	Information Sheet	139
B.	Introductory Statement	143
C.	Consent Form	145
D.	Interview Schedule	147
E.	Profile Results by Time Period	163

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List of Tables

1.	Federal Female Inmates with First Degree Murder, Second Degree Murder or Manslaughter as Their Major Offence	41
2.	Number of Cases Admitted by Year and Major Offence - 1971 to 1990	56
3.	Breakdown of Place of Sentencing by Province - Sample 1971 to 1990	64
4.	Breakdown of Place of Sentencing by Region - Sample 1971 to 1990	65
5.	Comparison of Profiles by Time Period	68
6.	Comparison of Profiles by Race	86
7.	Comparison of Profiles by Major Offence	88
8.	Comparison of Profiles Developed from Literature Review and from Present Study	117

List of Figures

1.	Number of Cases by Year of Admission and Major Offence	58
2.	Race by Time Period	70
3.	Marital Status by Time Period	72
4.	Major Offence by Time Period	75
5.	Proportion of Native and Non-Native Women by Major Offence	77

I

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have witnessed a new interest in female criminality. As the female crime rate rose during the 1970s and 1980s, and as the position and status of women in society became a focus of more public debate, research interest in female offenders has grown. This is not to say, however, that there is an abundance of literature on female criminality, nor that the quantity of this literature parallels that on male criminality. In fact, there exists a much larger body of research on crime by men and on male offenders.

Despite the increased interest in female criminality, the specific issue of violent crime by women has been discussed relatively infrequently in the literature. Some studies have focused on female criminal violence (e.g., Browne, 1986; Browne, 1987; Goetting, 1987; Goetting, 1988a; Goetting 1988b; Jones, 1980; Mann, 1987; Mann, 1988; Mann, 1990; McClain, 1982; Rosenblatt and Greenland, 1974; Silverman and Kennedy, 1988; Totman, 1978; Walker, 1989; Ward et al., 1969; Weisheit, 1984; Weisheit, 1986; Weisheit, 1988). Often, though, this topic is examined only indirectly or partially. For the most part, this work involves studies of violent crime by men which include a small, anecdotal section on women. Alternatively, when

female criminality is examined, the approach usually involves either a quantitative or a qualitative methodology (e.g., Silverman and Mukherjee, 1987; Rosenblatt and Greenland, 1974); the problem is that the choice of one approach excludes information that may be gathered through the other.

Much of the literature of the 1970s that did consider female criminal violence focused on the psychiatric and psychological state of the subjects and on their sex-role identity. The violence was considered evidence of individual psychopathology or of some abnormal psychiatric or psychological state.

In the 1980s, as domestic violence became a social issue, research on violent women began to address the issues of precipitating factors and motives for violence and of the past experiences of these women.

Nevertheless, there still exists a relative paucity of Canadian literature in this area. The primary Canadian studies on violent crime by women appear to be those of Silverman and Mukherjee (1987), Silverman and Kennedy (1987 and 1988), Wilson and Daly (1986) and Rosenblatt and Greenland (1974). All but one of these studies deal solely with women who have committed homicide. The exception is the research by Rosenblatt and Greenland which deals with female crimes of violence; the sample for this research was small and included only four incarcerated women and 22 women

who were being detained at psychiatric hospitals for crimes of violence. In contrast, the studies by Silverman and his colleagues used large samples of offenders, but information about the offenders and their violent offences is gathered through secondary sources and is limited in scope.

It would therefore seem that further research into violent crime by women, especially with a Canadian focus, is worthwhile. Such research is important to move our understanding of female violence beyond the level of individual pathology. Furthermore, it is important to supplement the scant Canadian information available on women who commit violence. The purpose of this study, then, is to gather information toward the development of a descriptive profile of women in Canada who commit violent crime.

Statement of the Problem

My purpose in this study is to contribute to the development of a descriptive profile of women who commit violent crime in Canada. I will gather and analyze quantitative and qualitative data on women who have committed violent offences in Canada. More precisely, two specific types of violence, namely murder and manslaughter, will be the focus of my research. This study, then, will attempt to contribute to an understanding of female violent offenders and their violence through the development of a descriptive profile of women in Canada who have committed

murder or manslaughter.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to construct a typology or profile of female violent offenders, and to describe female violence through an analysis of the characteristics common to:

- i) the women who commit crimes of violence;
- ii) the victims of this violence;
- iii) the situations in which the violence occurs;
- iv) the life experiences of these women which may contribute to the particular situation presenting itself, and which may influence the decision to react violently to that situation; and
- v) the alternatives to violence that are considered, and the issue of whether the availability of certain other alternatives would have affected the course of events.

Questions To Be Answered

To provide a descriptive portrayal of female violence and the female violent offender in Canada, the following questions will be addressed:

1. What are the demographic and social characteristics common to women who commit crimes of violence? Have these characteristics remained consistent during the

past two decades?

2. Who are the targets of violent crime by women?
3. What are the factors common to the particular situations in which the violence occurred? What is the nature of the situation in which a woman chooses to react violently?
4. What are the life experiences of these women that contribute to the particular situation presenting itself, and which may influence the decision to react violently to that situation?
5. What, if any, alternatives to the violent act did the woman consider, and why were these not chosen? Had other alternatives been available, would the same act have occurred?

The point to be made is that violence should not be explained solely on the basis of background demographic and socio-economic information about women who commit violent offences. This information is important, but not sufficient; investigations into violence must move beyond the level of individual psychopathology as an explanation for violent behaviour. A more complete approach to research on female violence and female violent offenders . must marry quantitative and qualitative research, combining statistical information derived from a large sample size with descriptive information obtained from comprehensive

quality research.

In constructing such a model or approach, I accept that violent behaviour among women is related to certain specific and identifiable characteristics and that these characteristics may remain fairly consistent over time. However, I would also insist that violence by women is a response to a particular problem situation in which the violent act is seen as a viable solution to the woman's perceived problem (Young, 1987). This study represents an effort to locate particular forms of violent behaviour in particular situations which involve a particular offender, a particular victim and certain behaviours on the part of each which may play a part in the resulting course of action. Furthermore, an effort is made to locate the situation itself at a specific point in a woman's life, the characteristics of which may also play a part in the resulting course of action. As noted by Totman (1978) in her study of murder by women:

The events in the person-situation complex at the time of the murder cannot be separated from her prior life experiences. A woman can define a situation in such a manner that murder would be the inevitable result, but her past experiences would, for the most part, determine the way she defines the situation (Totman, 1978: 25).

Blum and Fisher (1978) have also noted the importance of the social context in analyses of violence in making their criticisms of sexist explanations of female murderers:

...they generally presuppose an "individual pathology" approach to violence. That is, they postulate a

"pathology" (particularly in the sexual realm) in the individual to account for murder. Although murder admittedly is uncommon, those who over-emphasize its deviant character and view it apart from its social context present us with a very limited view (Blum and Fisher, 1978: 189-190).

Essentially, then, this study will attempt to describe typical female violent offenders, and to suggest frameworks for explanations of their crimes. It must be noted, however, that this does not imply that the study, while providing explanations for particular violent behaviours, also provides justifications for those behaviours.

II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this review is to determine the current state of knowledge on violent crime by women and to identify gaps in this knowledge. In conducting the literature review, research on male violence was excluded. Various studies have noted differences in the characteristics of violent crime by women and men (see, for example, Wilbanks, 1983; Rosenblatt and Greenland, 1974; Silverman and Mukherjee, 1987; and Barnard et al., 1982). It was therefore felt that applying knowledge about male violence to the phenomenon of female violence could lead to the development of inaccurate assumptions and conclusions.

Similarly, research focused on female offenders in general has not been reviewed for this study. It has been found that most crimes committed by women are property offences, and that violent offences constitute only a small proportion of all offences by women (Adelberg and Currie, 1987: 27). Studies on female offenders in general would therefore typically be biased toward the larger sample of property offenders.

The research that has been examined for this study will be divided, for the purposes of discussion, according to subject area. These subject areas are: (i) murder by women and (ii) violent women in general. The focus of the review

is, for the most part, on information about offender, victim and situational characteristics of female violent crime.

1. Murder/Homicide By Women

a) In General

Silverman and Kennedy (1988) state that:

Women rarely kill. In Canada, when they do, they most often kill their spouse or lover. The second most frequent target for women killers is other family members, including their children (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988: 113).

The available research suggests that female homicide offenders are different from both other female offenders and male homicide offenders. The typical female homicide offender is older, is more inclined to alcohol abuse, is more inclined to choose an intimate as the victim and to act alone in the commission of the offence, and is less likely to have a prior criminal record (Ward et al., 1969; Totman, 1978; Suval and Brisson, 1974).

The results of various studies (Cole et al., 1968; Blum and Fisher, 1978; Suval and Brisson, 1974; Johnson, 1978; Biggers, 1979; Wilbanks, 1983; Goetting, 1988a; Totman, 1978; Ward et al., 1969; Browne, 1986) allow us to compile the following profile of female murderers. The typical female homicide offender is either Black or caucasian¹,

¹ The proportion of female homicide offenders who are Black varies depending upon the area of the United States from which the study sample was taken. For example, studies conducted in Detroit, Michigan, which has a large Black population, will record a higher percentage of Black female homicide offenders than may a study done

approximately 37 years of age, with less than a high school education and an I.Q. of between 90 and 110. She is either unemployed or employed in an unskilled occupation. She is likely married or has at one time been married, has children and resides in an urban area. She has likely never been convicted of an offence, but if she has, it most likely was not a violent offence.

The offence most likely occurred in a domestic setting in the context of an argument, and the woman most likely committed the offence alone. Guns and knives are the weapons most often used, unless a child is the victim in which case the victim usually dies of strangulation, beating or suffocation. Approximately one half of all victims are intimates (spouses or lovers), about one fifth are children and just less than one third are casual acquaintances or strangers². The homicide is usually intersexual and intraracial in nature.

b) Spousal Murder/Homicide

Silverman and Mukherjee (1987) conducted a study of intersexual homicide in three Canadian cities between 1976

in Texas (see, for example, Goetting, 1988a; Johnson, 1978).

². The proportion of victims who are strangers varies depending upon the types of offences included in the study sample. For example, this figure will be higher in studies that look at all homicides, including those that occur during the course of a robbery (see, for example, Cole et al., 1968).

and 1982, using police homicide reports as the data source. About three quarters of the 126 intersexual homicides that occurred during this time period involved some degree of intimacy between the offender and victim (Silverman and Mukherjee, 1987: 42-43).

For the purposes of their study, the relationship between the offender and victim was classified as either domestic-stable (legally married or common-law), domestic-unstable (separated or divorced), other relationship (social or business relationship) or non-intimate (stranger or no known relationship). It should be noted that this type of classification may actually underestimate the number of troubled or unstable relationships because all marriages (legal and common-law) were labelled as being stable regardless of whether there actually were substantial problems in the relationship.

About 40% of the intersexual homicides in the sample were found to involve one spouse (either married, separated or divorced) killing another. As expected, males were the perpetrators in 76% of domestic-stable relationship murders and 81% of murders involving an "other" relationship.

All murders involving a domestic-unstable relationship were committed by men. The domestic-unstable category was found to be clearly different than the other groupings in that a gun was the most common type of weapon used, as opposed to stabbing and beating which were most common in

the other categories. As well, the rate of homicide in this category of domestic-unstable was more than three times that of the domestic-stable group.

Surprisingly, in the "no relationship" category of homicides, about half were perpetrated by men and half by women (52% and 48% respectively). As Silverman and Mukherjee note: "Previous studies would lead us to expect a much lower proportion of females in categories involving no discernible social relationship" (Silverman and Mukherjee, 1987: 43).

Barnard, Vera, Vera and Newman (1982) compared samples of males and females in Florida who had been charged with murdering their legal or common-law spouse. The men were found to be older, less educated and to have more previous arrests and history of alcohol abuse than the women.

More females, on the other hand, were found to have a history of psychiatric treatment and suicide attempts. Most of the women were either unemployed or employed in low-paying positions. Verbal and physical violence and alcohol abuse by their husbands were the most common problems referred to by the females in explaining their behaviour. In this sample, 72.7% of the women were battered by their spouse-victim compared to only 21.7% of the men.

The primary problem mentioned by the males was infidelity and desertion by their spouses. Interestingly, a significant proportion of the men were themselves being (or

at one time had been) unfaithful to their wives.

The victim-offender relationships of the total sample were characterized by frequent arguments and a history of separations. This finding would seem to support that of Silverman and Mukherjee (1987) where domestic-unstable relationships seemed to be the most volatile.

In contrast to Silverman and Mukherjee (1987), whose study was based on Canadian data, the preferred weapon of both males and females in this American study was a handgun (Barnard et al., 1982). The more frequent use of handguns in the American study than in the Canadian study may be at least partially explained by the greater availability of handguns in the United States.

In sum:

Most of the women had previously been physically abused by their husbands. Although there may have been separations, the females remained in the strained marital relationship and endured the spouse abuse. On the day of the alleged crime, either verbal or physical provocation by the husband was the usual precipitating event for the homicidal act (Barnard et al., 1982: 278).

It would seem, then, that physical, verbal or psychological abuse by mates is a significant issue in the phenomenon of murder by women, especially in the case of spousal murder. Browne (1986) compared two samples of women who were abused by their mates; one group had been charged with the murder or attempted murder of their mate and the other group consisted of women who were either still living in the abusive relationship or had been out of the

relationship for less than one year.

The results of the study showed that men in the homicide group had been arrested more often, had used drugs and alcohol more often and battered their mates more often with the resulting injuries being more severe. As well, there was a greater incidence of child abuse by men in the homicide group, and a much higher incidence of rape and other forced sexual activities by these men. More men in the homicide group threatened to kill someone other than themselves; more women in this group threatened to kill themselves or their mate (Browne, 1986: 68-69).

Most of the women in the homicide group had searched for alternative solutions, such as police intervention and leaving their mate. However, searching for such alternatives often resulted in more severe abuse by their husbands. As stated in another study (to be described below):

Most of these women had no prior history of violent or even illegal behavior, yet their attempts to survive with an increasingly assaultive and threatening mate - and their inability to find resources that would mitigate the danger - eventually led to their own acts of violence (Browne, 1989: 80).

Browne concludes that "...data from the majority of empirical studies conducted during the last decade does not support an assumption of personal pathology...." (Browne, 1986: 69).

As a follow up to the 1986 study, Browne (1989) examined the relationship between gender-specific rates of

mate homicide in the United States for the time periods 1976-1979 and 1980-1984. She also examined the availability of legal and extralegal resources for abused women. Such resources included statutes and legislation prohibiting wife abuse (legal resources) as well as shelters and support services for abused women (extralegal resources). Using a sophisticated methodology, the study found that:

...the rate of female-perpetrated homicide is negatively correlated with both indices of resource availability, indicating that the rate of such homicides is lower in those states in which domestic violence legislation and other resources for abused women are available (Browne, 1989: 87).

Specifically, the availability of extralegal resources was found to be significantly associated with a decline in the rate of female-perpetrated mate homicide during 1980-1984 compared to 1976-1979 (Browne, 1989: 91).

By far the most comprehensive study of female homicide offenders is that of Totman (1978). Totman interviewed and conducted file reviews of a sample of 50 women incarcerated in an institution for female offenders in California. Subjects were selected for the sample on the basis of the nature of their offence; 36 subjects had murdered their mates and 14 had murdered their children. The typical mate killer was described as unemployed or marginally employed, socially isolated and subject to physical and/or emotional abuse at the hands of intimates.

Totman states that the women in her sample who had murdered their mates:

...had not fled the situation (either through actual leaving or suicide). They had not become psychotic. They had not continued in the status quo. They had acted in a vigorous fashion to resolve their difficulties, to solve their life problem (Totman, 1978: 66).

Weisheit (1986) responds to this comment in stating that:

While the killing of one's mate as a problem-solving technique cannot be condoned, it is often understandable, particularly when the offender has been a long-term sufferer of abuse at the hands of her mate/victim (Weisheit, 1986: 440).

c) Child as Victim

In a 1988 study of national homicide data from 1961 to 1983, Silverman and Kennedy found that, of all homicides perpetrated by women in Canada, 40% were directed against legal or common-law husbands; approximately 25% were directed against the offender's children; 29% involved either friends, acquaintances or other family members; and 7% of all homicides involved a stranger or there was no known relationship between the victim and offender (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988: 117). American statistics on the proportion of child victims ranges from 8.5% (Wilbanks, 1983) to 28% (Totman, 1978).

A review of the literature on women who have been convicted of murdering children reveals that most of the children die as the result of direct manual action, such as beating or strangulation, and that weapons are rarely used

(Totman, 1978; d'Orban, 1979; Weisheit, 1986; Silverman and Kennedy, 1988). Furthermore the child victims are most often very young (i.e., less than 6 years old) (Totman, 1978; d'Orban, 1979; Silverman and Kennedy, 1988). Some studies have found that there was a known history of child abuse or neglect in a substantial proportion of cases (Totman, 1978; d'Orban, 1979).

Typically, the female offender in cases of child murder has a low level of education, was either unemployed or only marginally employed at the time of the offence, is younger than female murderers in general and has more children, and is often experiencing either marital discord or psychological and/or physical abuse at the hands of their spouse or intimate (Totman, 1978; Weisheit, 1986; Silverman and Kennedy, 1988).

Silverman and Kennedy (1988), in particular, point out that even women who murder their children do not form a homogeneous group of offenders. A number of different explanations have been suggested for female murder of children.

In the case of infanticide³, the women have been found to be younger, less mature and less able to cope with the responsibilities of having a child than other women who have

³. Infanticide is legally defined in Canada as the willful murder of a newly-born child by the mother, by an act of commission or omission, when she is not fully recovered from the effects of giving birth.

murdered children (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988).

In the case of child murder, two hypotheses have been substantiated: (i) mothers who physically abuse children may sometimes do so to the point of killing the child; and (ii) some mothers who beat or abuse their children to the point of death are displacing their anger from the actual source of their distress (usually the marital relationship or family interaction) and are using the child as an available target (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988).

These hypotheses have been generated through other studies that have not made the distinction between infanticide and non-infanticide (see, for example, d'Orban, 1979; Totman, 1978; Weisheit, 1983).

In one study, 71% of non-infanticide mothers were legally married or common-law. This compares with 70% of infanticide mothers who were single. Another significant finding was that non-infanticide mothers tend to beat their children while infanticide mothers tend to use suffocation or strangulation (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988: 124).

Although Native Indian women are involved to some degree in the perpetration of homicides, they have rarely been charged with killing their children (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988; Totman, 1978). The low level of involvement of Eskimos in infanticide is also significant (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988).

D'Orban (1979), in a study of 89 women in England and

Wales charged with the murder or attempted murder of their children, distinguished six types or classifications of maternal filicides (as opposed to delineation on the basis of the two categories of infanticide and noninfanticide).

These classifications, in order of frequency, were:

- i) battering mothers - 40%;
- ii) mentally ill mothers - 27%;
- iii) neonaticides - 12%;
- iv) retaliating mothers - 10%;
- v) unwanted children - 9%; and
- vi) mercy killing - 1%.

Battering mothers were those who killed their children in a sudden, impulsive act resulting from a loss of temper. These women were found to have unstable and often violent home situations. They were also under considerable stress from such factors as housing and financial problems and having significantly more young children under their care. Further, they were more frequently pregnant and experiencing marital violence at the time of the offence.

Mentally ill mothers were older, suffered from more psychiatric stress and were more often married. But fewer of these women experienced marital stress. Two thirds contemplated and/or attempted suicide during the homicidal act. Two thirds of the victims of mentally ill mothers were less than one year old. Most of these women had multiple victims.

Family, social and psychiatric problems were least prominent among neonaticide women (those who had killed or attempted to kill their children within 24 hours of birth). These women were the youngest, and all were either single or separated.

Retaliating women were found to suffer most from high levels of family, social and psychiatric stress factors. Women in this group had displaced the act of violence from the actual source of their anger - their spouse - to their child.

Of the women who made up the "unwanted children" group, three quarters were dependent on drugs. This seems to be a somewhat heterogeneous group in that half the women murdered through direct means whereas the victims of the other half of the group were determined to have died from neglect or abandonment.

Interestingly, Silverman and Kennedy (1988) found that when women kill their spouses, 6% are declared as being mentally ill. When they kill acquaintances or family members, 9% are thought to be mentally ill. However, women are declared mentally ill in 67% of cases where children have been killed (36% for those committing infanticide) (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988: 123).

Indeed, most of the women interviewed by Totman (1978) who had killed children felt that they should have been placed in psychiatric institutions or that they should at

least receive psychiatric care while in prison. Despite this, the more "deviant psychiatric diagnoses" were more often attributed to mate killers (Totman, 1978: 76).

D'Orban (1979), too, found that 27% of the women in his sample of child killers were diagnosed as suffering from mental illness.

Totman (1978) asked her subjects why they had not chosen an alternative to murder. Most indicated that although they knew their situation was serious and that they should do something about it, they had not realized the extent of the seriousness of the situation (Totman, 1978: 78).

Silverman and Kennedy (1988) conclude that:

If uncontained violence is directed against females, they may eventually strike out against their spouses, or they may turn their frustration, anger, and hurt on their children....In a sense, they may transfer their feelings to a convenient and perhaps frustrating target (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988: 124).

Interestingly, Totman (1978) found that it was psychological abuse and neglect, rather than physical abuse, by their spouses that characterized this group of offenders.

Totman's conclusion was that:

...these women appeared to be manipulating or trying to modify with murder other important relationships around them which they were perceiving as inadequate to their needs, or unheeding of their requests for such things as attention, affection and recognition....The killing appeared to be more indirect in terms of dealing with the offending parties (Totman, 1978: 80).

d) Another Female as Victim

A study by Goetting (1988b) focused on the relatively uncommon case of a woman murdering another woman. Based on data for 1982 and 1984, Goetting states that women commit approximately 13-14% of all homicides in the United States. Of the homicides committed by women, approximately 81-85% involve a male as victim. Female-on-female homicide is therefore a rare form of behaviour (Goetting, 1988b: 181).

The typical profile derived from this study of the female murderer of another female is that of a Black woman aged 30 years who is married, has at least one child and was living with her family or lover at the time of the offence. She has completed four years of high school and was unemployed at the time of the offence. Four of the seven women for whom information was available were welfare recipients, and five of the ten women for whom data was recorded had been previously arrested. As Goetting notes, these findings are "...congruent with other studies suggesting that homicide offenders are concentrated in the lower social classes...." (Goetting, 1988b: 182).

Slightly more than half of the victims were adults and the rest were the offenders' children or stepchildren (under the age of 6 years). (Given this information, it may be deduced that females murder other adult females even more rarely than the data on intrasexual homicide would indicate.) The victims ranged in age from 21 months to 66

years. All of the homicides involved victims of the same race as the offender. Typically, the victim was living with the perpetrator at the time of the incident, and was either much older or much younger than the offender.

None of the homicides under consideration involved strangers as victims. Only one fifth of the homicides appeared to be victim-precipitated (i.e., the victim was the first in the homicide situation to use physical force directed against the subsequent offender). Goetting attributes this low incidence to the fact that a substantial portion of the victims were young children (Goetting, 1988b: 184). All but one of the homicides in the study took place in a private residence, and most occurred during the weekend. The majority of offenders remained at the scene of the incident or with the victim until the police arrived.

The profile of the female child murderer is that of a woman who, with her husband, killed her child (who was under the age of 6) through physical beating. The typical profile of cases with adult victims would involve a murder perpetrated by a woman who acted alone and which occurred in the context of either a family quarrel or some type of love triangle. To conclude, Goetting states that:

These are minority women who, for the most part, are living in loosely structured relationships with men, and are poorly equipped to overcome the daily mundane struggles to just get by. They are drastically limited in the educational and occupational resources and in the social skills required to maintain a life of comfort and dignity....(Goetting, 1988b: 186).

2. Violent Women In General

Much of the literature on violent/aggressive women has been heavily based on psychiatric investigations and explanations that have failed to consider victim-offender relationships and the social context of the act of violence. For example, one of the conclusions put forth by Felthous and Yudowitz (1977) in their comparative study of assaultive and non-assaultive female offenders was that:

Three items of higher incidence in the assaultive female sample than in the nonassaultive sample belong to the familiar symptom-triad of enuresis, firesetting, and cruelty to animals....Freud's fire-urine-phallus theory may have to be reformulated in order to account for such empirical findings in females (Felthous and Yudowitz, 1977: 274).

Another study looked at biological determinants, social and psychological factors and the psychoanalytic perspective in considering whether aggressiveness in females is a 'natural' phenomena or an anomaly (Sobel, 1978). The conclusion here was that "...the kinds of assertion and aggression that our female patients can potentially express are limited only by their organizing fantasy about what being female entails and the reality of permissible expression of aggression in a civilized world" (Sobel, 1978: 283).

Although the implications of such findings for social or correctional policy are unclear, some of this research has nevertheless generated interesting results. In one study comparing crimes of personal violence (excluding

robbery) by men and women, a higher incidence of the following factors was found in the sample of women: neglectful or injurious parental punishment, parental alcoholism, early parental abandonment and poor peer relations (Felthous and Yudowitz, 1977). The implication here would be that dysfunctional parental nurturing was a significant factor in the backgrounds of the female sample.

Interesting as well, in commenting upon whether aggression is a female or male trait, Sobel (1978) makes an observation about the "circularity of reasoning" in defining what constitutes a male activity as opposed to a female activity: "Thus, housekeeping skills may be thought of as passive activities, while sitting all day at a desk on Wall Street is thought of as active and aggressive because it is associated with the masculine life world" (Sobel, 1978: 278).

One Canadian project examined female crimes of violence using a phenomenological approach to study the different characteristics of men and women who commit murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, assault and wounding (Rosenblatt and Greenland, 1974). The sample for the study included men and women who were incarcerated in psychiatric institutions or in prisons for crimes of personal violence. Specifically, four incarcerated women and 22 women who were in "mental hospitals" were included in the sample.

It was found that, at the time of the offence, women

were generally older than the men. Most of the women (75%) and less than half of the men were married at the time of the offence. More men than women had previous arrest records. Almost all of the violent crimes committed by the women, as opposed to less than half of those by men, involved other family members as victims. Half the victims of the hospitalized sample of women were children. Most of the crimes by the women, and less than half of those by men, occurred within the home. Both men and women used guns more often than any other means, except in the case of child victims where suffocation, strangulation and drowning were used more often by the women. The motive expressed by many of the women who killed their children was that they wanted to protect their children from the pain and suffering they would otherwise be subject to throughout life (Rosenblatt and Greenland, 1974).

More than three quarters of the women had previous contact with psychiatrists and more than one third of the hospitalized women had expressed their fear or intention of killing members of their families to friends, doctors or other helping agencies (Rosenblatt and Greenland, 1974: 178). Furthermore, more women, in comparison to men, attempted suicide at the same time as they committed the homicide.

In a study by Bunch, Foley and Urbina (1983), a descriptive profile was compiled of a sample of incarcerated

women who had committed a violent crime, including robbery. Half of the women were black, and 40% were caucasian. The mean age was approximately 29 years, again considerably older than that of female offenders in general.

The life experiences of these women involved many pressuring events. More than one third had experienced violence at home; this compares with only 9% of female robbers in a study by Spears et al. in 1977 (Bunch et al., 1983: 72). Almost two thirds of the women had themselves been the victims of crime. Approximately 60% of the women also stated that they had felt the need to get help for their problems.

However, many of the findings cited in Bunch, Foley and Urbina (1983) significantly differed from those of other studies examining female violence. For example, more than half the women were found to be single, only 22.2% acted alone in the commission of the offence (another woman was an accomplice in many cases) and only one third of the women said that they knew the victim well. It was stated that the latter finding may be due to the fact that the sample consisted of an incarcerated population of women and more leniency may in fact be granted in those cases where the victim was a family member (Bunch et al., 1983: 71-72). It is not clear whether this supposition is valid. It may well be that, given the nature of the crime, the inclusion of robbery in the study sample had a significant effect on the

findings.

Conclusion

The literature on women who commit murder and on violent women in general would seem to indicate that the offenders in such cases typically are:

- o older than female offenders in general and than male violent offenders;
- o Caucasian or Black (minority);
- o from a low socio-economic position;
- o married with children;
- o with no prior criminal offence or, if so, a prior non-violent offence; and
- o frequently the victims of psychological or physical abuse by their mates.
- o The victims of such offenders are usually male, typically the woman's mate.
- o The antagonizing factor, even in cases of child murders, is typically the woman's relationship with her mate.
- o The weapon used is either a gun or a knife, and the woman typically acted alone in committing the offence.

The Canadian literature on female homicide offenders and violent female offenders is sparse. Silverman and his colleagues rely on secondary (albeit extensive) data in

their research, and the drawback of such an approach is evident in the lack of qualitative information derived from the study.

A qualitative approach was taken by Rosenblatt and Greenland (1974), but their sample was very small and therefore limits the reliability of the findings. As well, data on the incarcerated women in this sample was only derived from case files. On the other hand, the research approach taken by Totman (1978) involved interviews as well as case file reviews, thereby allowing for a more comprehensive view of the dynamics of female violence.

It therefore seems imperative that Canadian research on violent female offenders be conducted, and that this research apply a methodology that would allow for the collection of detailed qualitative and quantitative information.

III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature has shown that relatively little research has specifically examined female violence. In research that has addressed this issue, the focus of study is typically either the dynamics of the violent situation or the characteristics of the female violent offender. Similarly, the method of inquiry is usually either quantitative or qualitative. To draw on the strengths and benefits of both foci and approaches, this study will combine a quantitative research method (analyzing a descriptive data base on federal female offenders) and a qualitative research method (involving in-depth interviews with federal female offenders who have committed violent crimes).

Research Problem

The underlying purpose of this study is to contribute to an understanding of the dynamics of female violence and to generate information which will contribute to the development of a typology of the female violent offender in Canada. More specifically, this research will focus on the

violent crimes¹ of murder and manslaughter and on women who have committed these offences.

Research Questions

In examining the typical female violent offender in Canada and the dynamics of her violent behaviour, the study seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the demographic and social characteristics common to women who commit crimes of violence? Have these characteristics remained consistent over time?
2. Who are the targets of violent crimes committed by women?
3. What are the factors common to the particular situations in which the violence occurred? What is the nature of the situation in which a woman chooses to react violently?
4. What are the life experiences of these women which contribute to the particular situation presenting itself, and which may influence the decision to react violently in that situation?
5. What, if any, alternatives to the violent act did the woman consider, and why were these not chosen? Had

¹ Those types of violent behaviour that are legally defined as criminal acts are a subset of a larger spectrum of violent behaviour. Not all violent acts (e.g., "spanking" a child as a disciplinary measure) are considered criminal in all circumstances. Definitions of violent behaviour may vary, depending upon one's perceptions and the circumstances of the behaviour.

other alternatives been available, would the same act have occurred?

The literature review has pointed out that adequate explanations of female violence cannot be based solely on the basis of individual characteristics. Violent crime by women generally cannot be explained solely as the result of some individual psychopathology. Rather, it should be seen as a response to a particular problem situation where the violent act is seen as a viable resolution to the woman's perceived problem. This assumption guides the part of this study that examines the dynamics of situations of female violence.

Definition of Terms

This study focuses on particular types of violent crime, namely first degree murder, second degree murder and manslaughter. Although this focus is quite narrow, it was thought necessary for such exploratory research. More particularly, it was believed that limiting the research focus to particular types of violent crime would assist in assuring the quality and specificity of information derived from the study.

Murder and manslaughter were chosen as the focus for this study because they represent the focus of much of the literature on female violent offenders and violent crime by

women. Thus, some of the results of this study could perhaps be compared with those of previous work.

As to the legal definitions of these offences, section 222 of the Criminal Code states, in part, that homicide, where a person directly or indirectly causes the death of another person, is either culpable or not culpable. Homicide that is not culpable is not an offence, while culpable homicide is murder or manslaughter or infanticide.

According to section 229 of the Code, paraphrased here, culpable homicide is murder when: (a) a person who causes the death of another person meant to cause the death, or meant to cause bodily harm that he/she knew was likely to cause death and was reckless whether death ensued or not; (b) a person, meaning to cause death to a human being or meaning to cause bodily harm likely to cause death, by accident or mistake caused the death of another person; or (c) a person, for an unlawful object, does anything that he/she knew or ought to know was likely to cause death and thereby caused death to a person.

Prior to 1976, murder was classified as capital or non-capital.² In 1976, the Criminal Code was amended, and

² Prior to 1967 capital murder included murders which were planned and deliberate, murders by one's own act and murders of police officers and similar persons acting in the course of duty. From 1967-73 capital murder referred only to the murder of a police officer or similar official. In 1973, amendments to the Criminal Code classified capital murder or murders of police officers as murders punishable by death. This was kept until 1976.

From 1967 to 1973, non-capital murder included all murders other than murders of police officers and similar officials. From

murder was reclassified, from capital and non-capital to first and second degree.

Section 231 of the Criminal Code states that murder can be first degree murder or second degree murder. First degree murder is murder that was planned and deliberate. Murder is also first degree murder, regardless of whether it was planned and deliberate, when: the victim was a police officer or similar official acting in the course of his/her duties; the victim was working in a prison acting in the course of his/her duties; death was caused while committing or attempting to commit sexual assault, kidnapping and forcible confinement, hostage taking or hijacking an aircraft.

Section 231(7) of the Code states that all murder that is not first degree murder is second degree murder.

Infanticide (section 233) occurs when, by commission or omission, a woman causes the death of her newly-born child, if at the time she is not fully recovered from the effects of giving birth and her mind is therefore disturbed. Infanticide was not included in this study. It was thought to be an especially unique offence, whereas murder and manslaughter encompass a much greater variety of behaviours. Therefore, if infanticide were to be included in the study, it would have to be considered as an offence grouping on its

1973-76, non-capital murders were associated with the penalty provided by law, and all murders not given the death sentence were considered to be non-capital.

own, and the sample size for women convicted of infanticide was not expected to be large enough to allow for adequate study.³

According to section 234 of the Criminal Code, culpable homicide that is not murder or infanticide is manslaughter. Unlike murders, manslaughters require only a general intent that a person did the act.

As stated, this study looks at individuals who have been convicted of first degree murder, second degree murder and manslaughter. According to section 235 of the Criminal Code, anyone convicted of first degree murder or second degree murder shall be sentenced to imprisonment for life.

For first degree murder, life imprisonment means a minimum of 25 years, during which time the offender is ineligible for release on parole or under mandatory supervision. The exception to this occurs if, after 15 years, a judicial review committee decides that the offender may be released conditionally.

For second degree murder, life imprisonment means a minimum of 10 years before eligibility for conditional release.

³ A glance was taken back into the historical data bases of Canada's federal corrections department, the Correctional Service of Canada. It was discovered that, since data on federal offenders was first recorded electronically (about 1960), only two women have been convicted of infanticide and sentenced to a federal term. Incidentally, the maximum sentence for infanticide is five years; there is no minimum sentence. Some women convicted of manslaughter may have received sentences of less than two years, which would be served in provincial institutions.

Section 236 of the Criminal Code states that anyone convicted of manslaughter is liable to imprisonment for life. The difference here, though, is that life imprisonment is the maximum, not the minimum as with first and second degree murder. The Criminal Code does not stipulate a minimum sentence for manslaughter.

This study will refer to federal female offenders and inmates. This refers to offenders and inmates who are under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Service of Canada, Canada's federal corrections department. Generally, persons found guilty of an offence and sentenced to two years or more will fall under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Service of Canada and serve their time in a federal institution. In some cases, however, these offenders may serve their sentence in a correctional institution operated by the provincial government. This often occurs with female offenders since the number (and capacity) of federal institutions for female offenders is limited. As well, offenders sentenced to a term of imprisonment of less than two years, who would normally serve their sentence in a provincial facility, may sometimes serve their sentence in a federal facility.

Given this, the term "federal inmates" or "federal offenders" hereafter refers to inmates serving a sentence in a federal correctional facility, as well as those who are serving their sentence in a provincial facility but who have

been sentenced to a term of imprisonment of two years or more.

Sample

As this study has two elements, namely a quantitative element and a qualitative element, it also has two samples.

The sample for the quantitative component of the study consisted of all women admitted to federal corrections from 1971 to 1990 for first degree murder, second degree murder or manslaughter.

The pool of subjects for the qualitative component of the study consisted of federal female offenders incarcerated at the Prison for Women, a federal maximum-security institution situated in Kingston, Ontario. More specifically, the sample was drawn from those cases who were currently serving a sentence for first degree murder, second degree murder or manslaughter.

The study samples do not include women who may have committed one of the violent offences in question but were not convicted. It was impossible to identify such persons from the information available. The study relies on a sample of women who have been convicted of a violent offence, as it was felt that this was the only manageable way of selecting subjects.

At this point, it should be explained that potential subjects for each of the samples were identified according

to what the Correctional Service of Canada had identified as their major offence. A major offence is defined as the offence for which an individual received the longest sentence. Of course, an individual may be convicted and sentenced for more than one offence at one time. In the Correctional Service of Canada's national data base on its offender population (called the Offender Information System), information is kept on a number of descriptive variables related to the offender population. This data base does not store information on all offences for which an individual was sentenced. It does, however, record each offender's major current offence.

This national data base was used to identify potential subjects for study. Put simply, for the quantitative aspect of the study, the sample consisted of all female offenders admitted to federal corrections from 1971 to 1990 whose major offence was first degree murder, second degree murder or manslaughter. The sample for this part of the study consisted of 293 cases (or admissions) out of a total of 1,816 female offender admissions from 1971 to 1990; this translates to 6.2% of all female offender admissions during this time period.

Of the total sample (N=293), first degree murder was the major offence in 6.1% (18) of the cases, second degree

murder⁴ in 20.8% (61) of the cases and manslaughter⁵ in 73% (214) of the cases.

For the qualitative component of the study, the Correctional Service of Canada's data base was used to generate a list of female offenders currently serving sentences at the Prison for Women whose major offence was first degree murder, second degree murder or manslaughter.

Table 1 shows that on March 31, 1991,⁶ there were 96 women under federal jurisdiction whose major offences were first or second degree murder or manslaughter. These women comprised 30.3% of the total federal female inmate population on that date.

Table 1 also shows that on March 31, 1991, 53 of the 96 women whose major offences were first or second degree murder or manslaughter were on register at the Prison for Women. These women comprised 34.2% of the inmate population

⁴ For the purpose of this study, to ease the offence groupings, the five cases of non-capital murder in the sample (all admitted to federal corrections before 1976) have been included in the category of second degree murder.

⁵ To ease the groupings of offences, the three cases of murder reduced to manslaughter (section 232 of the Criminal Code) have been included in the category of manslaughter. Murder reduced to manslaughter is culpable homicide that would otherwise be murder except that the person who committed it did so in the heat of passion caused by sudden provocation.

⁶ The most recent report available from the Correctional Service of Canada on its federal female offender population presents information available on offenders on March 31, 1991. This date falls within the interviewing period for this study (February to May 1991) and thus provides a reasonably accurate picture of the pool from which subjects, and potential subjects, were chosen for the study.

at the prison on that date.

The data presented in Table 1 suggest that the sample at the Prison for Women may have been representative, at least on the basis of their major offences, of all federal female offenders whose major offence was first or second degree murder or manslaughter. That is, on March 31, 1991, 4.4% of the total federal female offender population, and 5.8% of the population at the Prison for Women, had first degree murder as their major offence; the proportions are similar. Further, 12.6% of the total federal female offender population, and 15.4% of the population at the Prison for Women, had second degree murder as their major offence; again, the proportions are similar. As for manslaughter, 13.2% of the total federal female offender population, and 12.9% of the population at the Prison for Women, had this as their major offence - once again, similar proportions.

Table 1

**Federal* Female Inmates with First Degree Murder,
Second Degree Murder or Manslaughter as Their Major Offence**

Offence	Total Federal Female Offender Population		Total Female Offender Population at Prison for Women	
	N	%**	N	%**
First Degree Murder	14	4.4	9	5.8
Second Degree Murder	40	12.6	24	15.4
Manslaughter	42	13.2	20	12.9
Totals	96	30.2	53	34.1

* Figures may include provincial offenders incarcerated in federal institutions and federal offenders incarcerated in provincial institutions.

** Percentages are based on the total on-register federal female inmate population (N=317) and on the on-register population at the Prison for Women (N=155) on March 31, 1991.

Source: CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA (1991) Female Offender Population Profile Report - Population on Register 03/31/91, Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada.

The Correctional Service of Canada was asked to generate a list of names of women who were eligible to take part in the qualitative portion of the study.⁷ Eligibility was based on their major offences (i.e., first degree murder, second degree murder or manslaughter). A number of these women were asked to take part in the study. (This will be explained in greater detail in the next section.)

Ten women (out of the 19 who were asked) consented to taking part in the study. However, only six of these women were actually interviewed. There were a variety of reasons for the non-participation of the others: incidents that occurred in the institution, namely an inmate suicide, a hostage-taking exercise and an inmate lockdown, which disrupted the offender population; lack of interest in the study; and lack of time to participate (e.g., having to attend a course or see a psychologist).

The sample for the qualitative aspect of the study, then, was composed of six subjects. Two had been convicted of first degree murder as their major offence, one had been convicted of second degree murder and the major offence of the other three subjects was manslaughter.

It is of course acknowledged that this sample, being

⁷ It should be noted here that the researcher is a staff member with the Research and Statistics Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada. As the researcher is security cleared and has had to deal with protected and secret documents in her work, bureaucratic processes necessary to obtain the list of eligible inmates were minimal.

composed of incarcerated female offenders, is a subset of a larger population of women who commit crimes of violence but who may not have been charged, convicted or sentenced to a term of imprisonment. The conclusions drawn from the study will therefore not be generalized beyond this boundary. The sample used in this study was an "opportunistic" sample, and this fact will necessarily limit the generalizability of the research. In essence, this is an exploratory study, the purpose of which is to generate hypotheses that may allow for more systematic future analyses of violent crime by women.

Method

For the quantitative component of the study, a data set was constructed from the large national data base of the Correctional Service of Canada. The Offender Information System stores current and historical information on all federal offenders dating back to the 1960s. It is only since the early 1970s, however, that the information has been recorded systematically and consistently.

A specific data set was constructed for this study by extracting from the national data base those cases where the major admitting offence was first degree murder, second degree murder⁸ or manslaughter.⁹ The data set includes all

⁸ As mentioned previously, also included in this category are five cases of non-capital murder.

cases admitted from 1971 to 1990 (N=293). It should be noted here that, although this information has been stored for some time, this project represents the first effort to analyze the wealth of information available.¹⁰

The Offender Information System stores information on a variety of factors relating to offenders and to their sentences. Factors examined in this study were chosen from among the factors on which information was available from the system. Because the system was set up to gather information of specific relevance to correctional authorities (e.g., parole eligibility date, day parole eligibility date, admission type), the researcher's freedom to gather information on factors of particular relevance to the research questions was constrained.

Nevertheless, information was available on a number of factors of direct relevance and interest to this project. Furthermore, with some issues of particular relevance to the subject area, though the Offender Information System did not provide the preferred information, an adaptation was possible from other information stored by the system. For example, information on each woman's prior criminal record was not available from the system. There was, however,

⁹ As mentioned previously, also included in this category are three cases of murder reduced to manslaughter.

¹⁰ The Research and Statistics Branch of the Correctional Service of Canada does plan to do additional work in this area in the near future.

information available on whether the offender had previously served a federal sentence. This information was used to relate, albeit loosely, to criminal history.

The following lists the eight factors on which information was analyzed for the entire sample of women who were admitted to federal corrections from 1971 to 1990 and whose major offence was first degree murder, second degree murder or manslaughter:

- i) major offence at admission to federal corrections;
- ii) year of admission to federal corrections;
- iii) aggregate sentence, which was used as an indicator of the sentence received for the major offence;
- iv) race;
- v) age at time of admission to federal corrections, which was used as an indicator of age at the time of the offence;
- vi) marital status at the time of admission to federal corrections, which was used as an indicator of marital status at the time of the offence;
- vii) place of sentencing, which was used as an indicator of the province and region of the country in which the offence occurred; and
- viii) number of previous federal terms.

Information on these factors was used to compile a profile of the female federal offender in Canada who

committed murder or manslaughter.

This data was also subdivided to provide group comparisons. The data was compared by year of admission to federal corrections, by race and by major admitting offence. As to the first comparison, the data was grouped by year of admission to federal corrections. These year groupings were 1971-75, 1976-80, 1981-85 and 1986-90. Information on the variables outlined above was compiled to provide profiles, by time period, of the female federal violent¹¹ offender in Canada. These profiles formed the basis of comparison.

For the second comparison, the data was grouped according to the race of the offender. The race groupings were native and non-native. The native group included North American Indian, Inuit and Métis women. The non-native group includes all other women: caucasian, black, asian and other. Profiles were developed, and compared, of the native and the non-native female federal violent offender in Canada.

In the third comparison, the data was grouped according to the offender's major offence at admission. All those who had committed manslaughter formed one group, while the second group was composed of women who had committed first degree murder or second degree murder. Profiles of the federal female offender who commits murder and the federal

¹¹ Hereafter, the term "violent offender" will refer to women who have been convicted of first degree murder, second degree murder or manslaughter.

female offender who commits manslaughter were then developed and compared. Again, these profiles were based on information on the variables outlined above.

As to the qualitative component of the study, data was collected through in-depth interviews with women at the Prison for Women who had been identified as eligible to participate (based on whether their major admitting offence was first or second degree murder or manslaughter) and who were willing to participate.

The first step in conducting this research was to obtain approval from the Warden of the Prison for Women. A research proposal was sent to the Warden on April 17, 1990. Approval was granted on June 5, 1990. To facilitate the logistics of conducting research in a functioning prison, the support and assistance of the prison psychology staff also had to be obtained. The researcher was informed on December 12, 1990 that the psychology department was prepared to assist. This delay, from June to December, was necessary to allow already ongoing research to finish and to ensure space for private interviews.

Recruiting subjects for the study sample was a difficult process. At the moment (and at the time of the interviews), the Prison for Women is (and was) the only federal institution for female offenders. As such, the institution and the women in it are the focus of much of the research on female offenders in Canada. This research

activity has taken its toll on the staff and inmates of the Prison for Women in that both groups find it difficult to be enthusiastic about yet another researcher asking for their support. This pervasive reluctance to take part in new research projects limited the researcher's ability to contact eligible inmates and to recruit participants.

This researcher visited the Prison for Women on three separate occasions, in February 1991, March 1991 and May 1991. At the institution, the researcher was given a private interview room. Eligible inmates were called individually to the room. Sampling here was primarily done alphabetically, but there was some deviation from this. Deviations were necessary as some eligible inmates were not available on a given day, and so the researcher went on to another eligible inmate on the list.

Inmates who were willing to meet with the researcher were introduced to her and given an information sheet about the project (Appendix A). This information sheet was read to women who preferred this approach. Further, all potential subjects were informed that the researcher worked for the Correctional Service of Canada. This was thought necessary to ensure that all subjects were aware that the researcher had some ties to the organization mandated to monitor their behaviour.

In all, 19 women were asked to take part in the study. Ten agreed to participate, but, in the end, six were

actually interviewed. As mentioned previously, there were reasons other than loss of interest for non-participation in the study. These included scheduling problems and major disruptions in the institution, namely an inmate suicide in February, a mock hostage-taking incident in March, and a lock-down of inmates in May to allow staff to attend a special function. (All of these incidents occurred while the researcher was at the Prison for Women conducting interviews.)

Before each interview, subjects were given an introductory statement about the project (Appendix B), outlining primarily that the questions to be asked during the interview were sensitive and that participants could refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Subjects were then asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix C). Again, the consent form was read to women who felt more comfortable with this approach.

Women who agreed to take part and signed the consent form were subsequently interviewed. The interview typically lasted 90 minutes. Appendix D outlines the comprehensive semi-structured interview schedule that was administered.

Interviews were not recorded. It was anticipated that some subjects would have objected to having the interview tape recorded. It was also anticipated that recording an interview may influence some responses, especially in regard to sensitive questions. To avoid confounding the

methodology and results of the study, the researcher made a written account of the responses.

The mechanics involved in taking written notes made it necessary to construct a somewhat more structured interview schedule than had been originally planned. Nevertheless, the interview schedule still remains relatively unstructured in those areas where structure would limit the detail of the responses, such as in the section regarding the problems and pressures the subject was feeling at the time of the offence.

A number of questions in the interview schedule were adapted from the work of Totman (1978), which has been referred to as "The most thorough study of female homicide undertaken thus far...." (Silverman and Kennedy, 1988: 113). Subjects for Totman's study were selected from an incarcerated population of women who had committed murder. Given the amount of detailed information uncovered by Totman, and the subsequent positive reviews of the study which have been received from other researchers in the same field (indeed, some of these reviews were stated a decade after the original study), it was concluded that Totman's work constituted a valuable example of qualitative research on female violence.

The specific purpose of Totman's research was:

...to identify and describe any process or processes which occur within and to, and are perpetrated by, an individual murderess prior to, and leading up to, her act of fatal violence. The purpose was to determine,

if possible, what common patterns of experiences and events contribute to, precipitate and advance a woman toward the commission of an act of murder (Totman, 1978: 1).

Following this example, the interview schedule for the study sought to uncover information in three primary areas: the offender, the offence and the offender's afterthoughts. These areas are addressed with the following nine variables:

- i) the demographic and social characteristics of the offender;
 - ii) her life experiences and relationships;
 - iii) her personal life situation and support network at the time of the offence;
 - iv) the nature of the violent offence;
 - v) the relationship of the victim to the offender;
 - vi) the situation in which the violent offence occurred;
 - vii) the role played by alcohol or drugs in the offence;
 - viii) the offender's explanation of motive for the offence;
- and
- ix) any alternatives to the violent offence that were considered but disregarded, and any alternatives that would have changed the situation had they been available.

Information on these factors was used to develop a current understanding of the dynamics of female violence.

Ethics

This research project was presented to the University Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Ottawa for their approval. This procedure was necessary because the study involved human subjects. The Committee's approval was granted on February 5, 1991.

IV

RESULTS

Results are first presented for the quantitative part of the study. Information on eight variables is analyzed to give an overall profile of the sample. The profile is based on data on women admitted to federal corrections from 1971 to 1990 whose major offence was first or second degree murder or manslaughter.

Descriptive information will be presented on the entire sample of 293 women. A number of comparisons will then follow. The first comparison examines the profiles of women admitted during specific historical time periods (1971-75, 1976-80, 1981-85 and 1986-90). The second is a native/non-native comparison. Finally, the profile of women whose major offence was first or second degree murder is compared to that of women whose major offence was manslaughter.

I. Quantitative Analysis

A. Descriptive Profile of Historical Sample

i) Major Offence

The majority of women in the sample were serving sentences for manslaughter. Almost three quarters (73% or 214) of the sample had manslaughter as their major offence.

(This includes three women, or 1% of the sample, whose major offence was murder reduced to manslaughter.)

Second degree murder was the next most common major offence, with 20.8% of the sample, or 61 women, having this as their major offence. (As stated previously, 5 women, or 1.7% of the sample, whose major offence was non-capital murder were included in the second degree murder category.)

First degree murder was the major offence for only a small proportion of women: 6.1% of the sample or 18 women.

ii) Year of Admission to Federal Corrections

The sample was divided by year of admission into federal corrections. Yearly admissions were then subdivided by major offence. Table 2 presents these results, and Figure 1 presents them graphically.

As the Table indicates, the number of women admitted to federal corrections each year whose major offence was first degree murder remained low throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with an average of about 1 woman admitted per year.¹ The number of yearly admissions for first degree murder from

¹ Although first degree murder and second degree murder were not added to the Criminal Code until 1976, the number of admissions from 1971 to 1976 have been included in the calculation of average number of yearly admissions. Had there been anyone in the sample whose major offence was capital murder, they would have been included in the category of first degree murder. As it was, there were no such women admitted during the time period under study. There were, however, women admitted whose major offence was non-capital murder; these were added to the second degree murder category.

1987 to 1990 was generally higher than this average. During the last 20 years, the number of women admitted for first degree murder ranged from 0 in 1971-1976 (when first degree murder was just being added to the Criminal Code) and in 1978, 1981, 1985 and 1986, to a high of 4 in 1990.

For second degree murder, the number of admissions peaked and dipped sporadically throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The actual number has ranged from no admissions in 1971, 1972 and 1976 (when it was just being added to the Criminal Code), to 8 admissions in 1985. On average, approximately three women whose major offence was second degree murder were admitted each year from 1971 to 1990. The number of yearly admissions from 1984 to 1990 was generally higher than this average.

As to manslaughter, the number of admissions per year generally increased during the 1980s. The number of admissions ranged from 1 in the early 1970s (1971 and 1974), to 22 in the late 1980s (1988). An average of approximately 11 women whose major offence was manslaughter were admitted each year from 1971 to 1990. However, the number of admissions each year from 1982 to 1989 was generally higher than this average.

Table 2

Number of Cases Admitted by Year and Major Offence -
1971 to 1990

Year	First Degree Murder	Second Degree Murder	Man- slaughter	Total
1971	0	0	1	1
1972	0	0	2	2
1973	0	1*	8	9
1974	0	1*	1	2
1975	0	3*	7	10
1976	0	0	7	7
1977	1	2	13	16
1978	0	5	10	15
1979	1	3	7	11
1980	1	1	14	16
1981	0	5	8**	13
1982	1	3	16	20
1983	3	1	15	19
1984	1	6	10	17
1985	0	8	12**	20
1986	0	4	17	21
1987	2	6	16	24
1988	2	2	22**	26
1989	2	4	19	25
1990	4	6	9	19
Total	18	61	214	293

* All cases of non-capital murder.

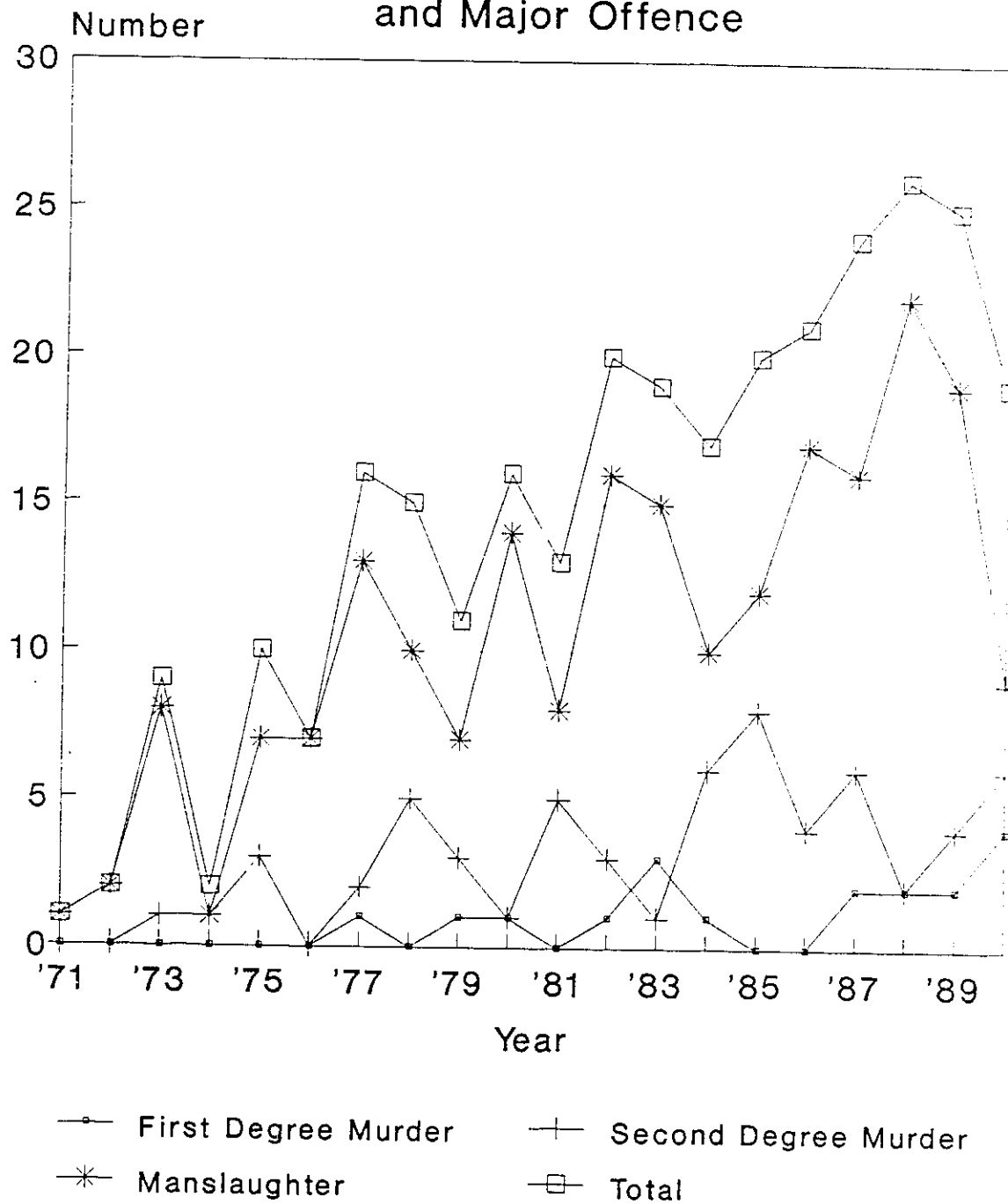
** Includes one case of murder reduced to manslaughter.

The total number of admissions per year has ranged from 1 in 1971 to 26 in 1988, averaging at about 15 women (14.65) each year. Since 1982, the actual number of yearly admissions has been consistently higher than this average.

Looking at Figure 1, we see a general trend toward an increase over time in the total number of women admitted to federal corrections whose major offence was second degree murder. We see a more noticeable increase over time in the number of women admitted for manslaughter. Another way to look at these two patterns is to calculate (based on the figures in Table 2) the number of women admitted for each offence type each year as a percentage of all women in the sample admitted that particular year. In this type of analysis, we see no consistent pattern in the proportion of admissions each year for second degree murder or manslaughter. That is, 30% of admissions in 1975, 6.3% in 1980, 40% in 1985 and 31.6% of admissions in 1990 were for second degree murder; the proportions peaked and dipped sporadically during the past 20 years. As to manslaughter, 70% of admissions in 1975, 87.5% in 1980, 60% in 1985 and 47.4% of admissions in 1990 were for manslaughter; again, the proportions peaked and dipped sporadically.

The Figure shows a stronger trend toward an increase in the total number of women admitted each year during the past 20 years. We do see, however, a striking decrease in the number of women admitted in 1990.

Figure 1
Number of Cases by Year of Admission
and Major Offence



iii) Aggregate Sentence

It should be noted here that the aggregate sentence is defined as the total sentence received for all offences for which an individual was convicted. That is, if an individual was convicted of three offences, the aggregate sentence is the combined total of sentences for the three offences. Thus, it may not necessarily reflect the sentence received for the major offence, in this case first degree murder, second degree murder or manslaughter.

In Canada, it is not possible to sentence an individual to anything greater than a life sentence. Thus, for first and second degree murder, if the aggregate sentence is a life sentence, we can be sure that this was the sentence received for the major offence.

The case of manslaughter is more complex because a life sentence is only the maximum sentence; there is no minimum. Thus, aggregate sentences for persons whose major offence was manslaughter may also include sentences received for other offences. Unfortunately, there was no way to control for this in the study.

However, it may be said that although the aggregate sentence for persons whose major offence was manslaughter may not reflect the actual sentence for manslaughter, it may reflect the seriousness of the case, i.e., longer sentences reflect more serious offences.

Data was first gathered on the number of women

sentenced to life imprisonment. Just over one quarter (25.9% or 76) of the sample had received a life sentence. Only one person in this group had received a life sentence for a major offence of manslaughter. The major offence of the rest of the group was first or second degree murder.

For all other subjects (their major offence being manslaughter), the aggregate sentence ranged from 1 year to 15 years. The mean aggregate sentence was 4.8 years, with a standard deviation of 2.6 years.

Data was not available for one case.

iv) Race

Race was self reported by subjects upon admission to federal corrections.

Most of the 293 women in the sample (180 or 61.4%) were Caucasian. Just over one quarter (25.6% or 75) were North American Indian. The other race groupings were as follows: Métis - 7.5% (22); Inuit - 1% (3); Asiatic - 1% (3); Black - 1.7% (5); and other races - 1.4% (4).

Information was missing on one subject.

These race groupings were collapsed into native and non-native categories. The native group included women who were North American Indian, Métis or Inuit. The non-native group included women of all other races. Collapsed in this way, non-native women formed almost two thirds of the sample (65.9% or 193 women). Native women formed just over one

third of the group (34.1% or 100 women).

v) Age

The mean age of women in the sample at the time of admission was 31 years, with a range from 17 to 68 years. With this range, the standard deviation from the mean was quite large at 10.2 years.

vi) Marital Status

Subjects' marital status (self reported) at the time of admission to federal corrections was recorded.

Women in the sample were most likely to be single at the time of admission; in fact, 44.4% (130) of the sample was single. As to the others, in decreasing order of frequency, 13.7% (40) were legally married; 11.6% (34) were part of a common-law marriage; 10.6% (31) were widowed; 8.5% (25) were divorced; and 7.2% (21) were separated.

Information was not available for 4.1% (12) of the sample.

Some categories of marital status were also collapsed. Legally married women and those who were part of a common-law relationship were combined to form one "married" category. Also, divorced and separated women were grouped to form one "separated/divorced" category. Collapsed in this way, we find that about 25% of the sample was married and about 16% were separated or divorced. The breakdown by marital status, in decreasing order of frequency, was as

follows: single - 44.4% (130); married - 25.3% (74); separated/divorced - 15.7% (46); and widowed - 10.6% (31).

vii) Place of Sentencing

Subjects' place of sentencing was grouped in two ways: by province and by region. Frequency distributions by province and region are provided in Tables 3 and 4.

Women in the sample were most likely to have been sentenced in Quebec (24.6% or 72) or Ontario (24.2% or 71). The next most common provinces of sentencing were Alberta (15% or 44) and British Columbia (12.3% or 36). Together, these four provinces account for more than three quarters (76.1% or 223) of the places of sentencing. This is not surprising, as Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia are Canada's most populated provinces.²

When we compare the proportion of women in the sample sentenced in each province with the proportion of the adult Canadian population residing there,³ we see the greatest differences in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. That is, proportionately fewer women in the sample than expected were sentenced in Ontario (24.2% of the sample versus 36.2% of the adult Canadian population). Conversely,

² Source: Statistics Canada, Census and Household Statistics Branch, Demography Division, "Final Intercensal Estimates for June 1st 1985 to 1987," as cited in Statistics Canada (1991), Adult Corrections Key Indicator Report, p. 73.

³ Ibid.

proportionately more women in the sample than expected were sentenced in Manitoba (8.9% of the sample versus 4.2% of the Canadian adult population), Saskatchewan (7.8% versus 3.8%) and Alberta (15% versus 9%).

As illustrated in Table 4, when place of sentencing is collapsed by region, we find that women in the sample were most likely to have been sentenced in the Prairie region (which is composed of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories). In fact, almost one third (32.1% or 94) of the sample were sentenced in the Prairies. This proportion is greater than would be expected based on the finding that only 17.2% of the adult Canadian population resides in the Prairies.⁴

One quarter (24.6% or 72) were sentenced in Quebec and another quarter (24.2% or 71) in Ontario. The proportion sentenced in Ontario, as mentioned previously, was less than would be expected based on the proportion of the adult Canadian population residing there (36.2%). The Pacific region had a sizeable minority of 13% or 38 of the women in the sample.

Subjects were least likely to have been sentenced in the Atlantic provinces: only 6.1% or 18 of the subjects were sentenced in the Atlantic region.

⁴ Ibid.

Table 3

**Breakdown of Place of Sentencing by Province -
Sample 1971 to 1990**

Province	Frequency (N)	Percent	Percent* of Adult Canadian Population
Newfoundland	3	1.0%	2.1%
P.E.I.	1	0.3%	0.5%
Nova Scotia	12	4.1%	3.4%
New Brunswick	2	0.7%	2.7%
Quebec	72	24.6%	26.2%
Ontario	71	24.2%	36.2%
Manitoba	26	8.9%	4.2%
Saskatchewan	23	7.8%	3.8%
Alberta	44	15.0%	9.0%
British Columbia	36	12.3%	11.6%
Yukon Territory	2	0.7%	0.1%
N.W.T.	1	0.3%	0.2%
Total	293	100.0%	100.0%

* Source: Statistics Canada, Census and Household Statistics Branch, Demography Division, "Final Intercensal Estimates for June 1st 1985 to 1987," as cited in Statistics Canada (1991), Adult Corrections Key Indicator Report, p. 73. Figures are for the year 1985.

Table 4

**Breakdown of Place of Sentencing by Region -
Sample 1971 to 1990**

Region	Frequency (N)	Percent	Percent* of Adult Canadian Population
Atlantic**	18	6.1%	8.7%
Quebec	72	24.6%	26.2%
Ontario	71	24.2%	36.2%
Prairies**	94	32.1%	17.2%
Pacific**	38	13.0%	11.6%
Total	293	100.0%	99.9%

* Source: Statistics Canada, Census and Household Statistics Branch, Demography Division, "Final Intercensal Estimates for June 1st 1985 to 1987," as cited in Statistics Canada (1991), Adult Corrections Key Indicator Report, p. 73. Figures are for the year 1985.

** Regions defined as follows:

Atlantic - Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick

Prairies - Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Northwest Territories

Pacific - British Columbia and the Yukon Territory

viii) Previous Federal Terms

The vast majority (92.8%), or 272 women, were being admitted to federal corrections for the first time. For some (6.1% or 18), this was their second time serving a federal sentence. Three women (1% of the sample) were being admitted to federal corrections to serve their third federal sentence.

Profile - 1971 to 1990

From the information on the nine variables described above, the following profile can be provided of the female offender who committed murder or manslaughter and was admitted to federal corrections during the last 20 years.

She is typically Caucasian, approximately 31 years of age and single. She was sentenced for her offence in either Quebec or Ontario or, if we go by region, in the Prairies. The major offence for which she is currently being incarcerated is manslaughter. This is also the most serious offence she has ever committed. She was sentenced to serve just less than 5 years and was admitted into federal corrections in the late 1980s. This is her first federal sentence.

B. Comparison of Profiles by Time Period

For this part of the analysis, the data set was grouped by year of admission to federal corrections. These year groupings were 1971-1975, 1976-1980, 1981-1985 and 1986-1990. Information on the variables outlined above was compiled to provide profiles, by time period, of the female offender in Canada who committed murder or manslaughter.

For expediency's sake, only a comparison of profiles by time period is presented here. The results are presented in a different format in Appendix E.

Composite profiles, by time period, of female offenders who have committed murder or manslaughter are presented in Table 5. Also included in the Table is the profile for the entire sample (N=293) admitted between 1971 and 1990.

The profile appears to have remained generally consistent during the past 20 years. The female offender who commits murder or manslaughter has typically been Caucasian, single and approximately 31 years of age. She has been sentenced in Ontario or Quebec, or, if we go by region, in the Prairies. Her major offence has typically been manslaughter, for which she has been sentenced to between 4.4 and 6.1 years - her first federal term.

Table 5

Comparison of Profiles by Time Period

Variable	1971-1975	1976-1980	1981-1985	1986-1990	1971 to 1990
Race	Caucasian (75%)	Caucasian (52.3%)	Caucasian (64%)	Caucasian (61.7%)	Cauc. (61.4%)
Age (mean)	29.5	30	29.6	33.1	31
Marital Status	single (45.8%)	single (35.4%)	single (47.2%)	single (47%)	single (44.4%)
Place of Sen- tencing	◊ prov: Que/Alta (29.2% & 29.2%)	◊ prov: Ontario (27.7%)	◊ prov: Quebec (28.1%)	◊ prov: Ontario (28.7%)	◊ prov: Que/Ont (24.6% & 24.2%)
◊ prov. ◊ region	◊ region: Que/ Prairies (29.2% & 29.2%)	◊ region: Prairies (35.4%)	◊ region: Prairies (31.5%)	◊ region: Prairies (31.3%)	◊ region: Prairies (32.1%)
Major Offence	mansl'ter (79.2%)	mansl'ter (75.8%)	mansl'ter (68.5%)	mansl'ter (72.2%)	mans'ter (73%)
Agg. Sentence ◊ for mans'ter (mean)	◊ 6.1 yrs	◊ 4.8 yrs	◊ 4.4 yrs	◊ 4.9 yrs	◊ 4.8 yr
◊ % life sentence	◊ life: 20.8%	◊ life: 21.5%	◊ life: 29.2%	◊ life: 27%	◊ life: 25.9%
Year of Admiss.	1973 or 1975	1977-78 or 1980	1982-83 or 1985	1987-89	late 1980s
Previous Federal Terms	n/a	none (93.8%)	none (89.9%)	none (93%)	none (92.8%)
N	24	65	89	115	293

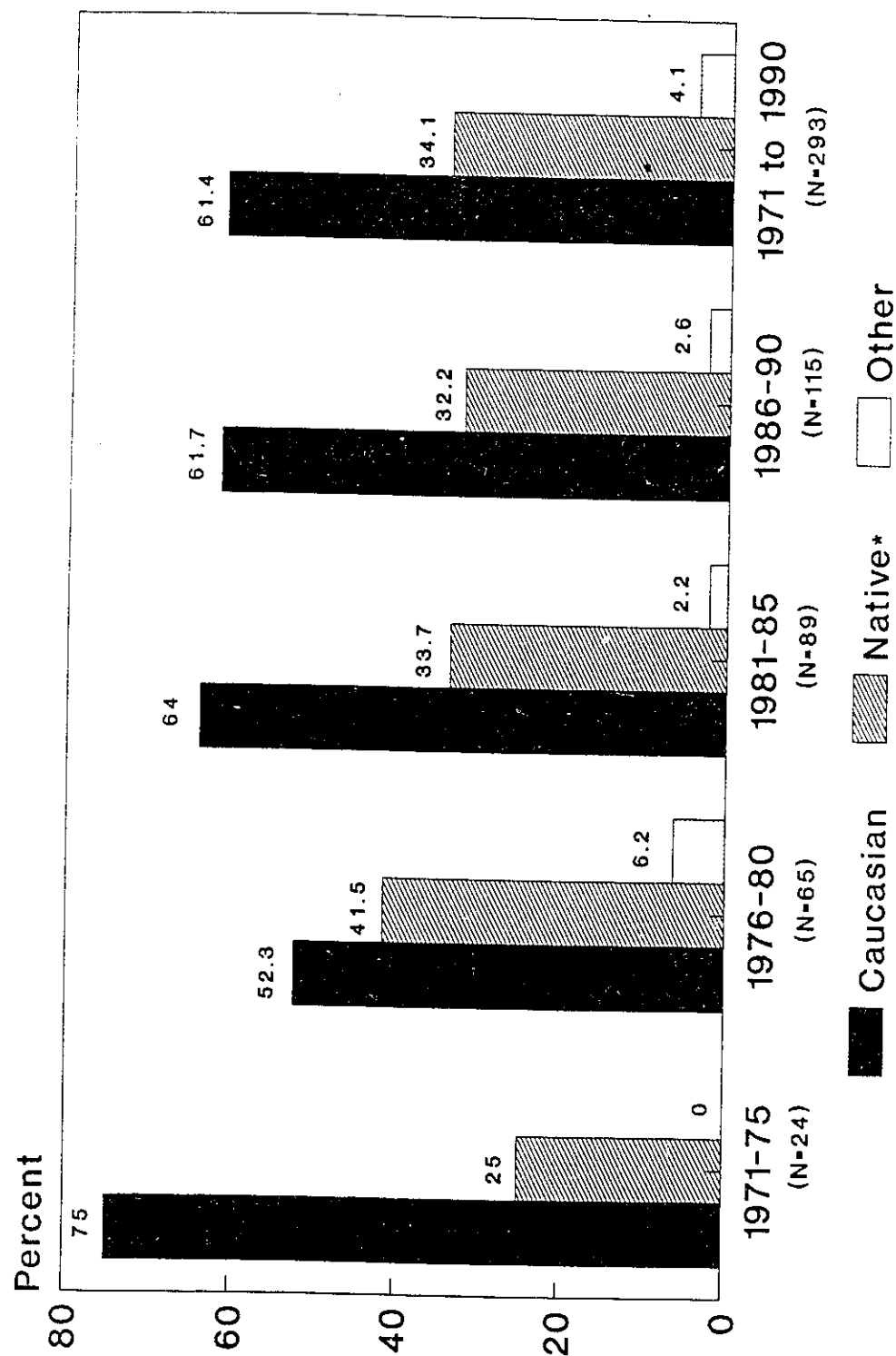
There are, however, some interesting between-group differences, namely in the areas of race, marital status and major offence. These differences are illustrated in figures 2, 3 and 4 respectively. [In comparing these profiles, data on the entire sample admitted between 1971 and 1990 (N=293) is used as the point of comparison.]

As to race, although the Caucasian/Native split from 1981 to 1990 generally remained consistent with the proportions found in the entire sample, distributions during the 1970s deviate from this standard (see Figure 2). More specifically, between 1971 and 1975, a much greater proportion of women than expected were Caucasian (75% versus 61.4% in the entire sample); correspondingly, a smaller proportion than expected were Native (25% versus 34.1%).

For the time period 1976-80, the opposite occurred. A smaller proportion than expected was Caucasian (52.3% versus 61.4% in the entire sample), and a larger proportion was Native (41.5% versus 34.1% in the entire sample).

Thus, during 1971-75, we see a lower proportion of Native women admitted than in any other time period under study, a proportion also lower than that found in the entire sample. During the late 1970s, however, the proportion of Native women jumps dramatically from 25% in 1971-75 to 41.5% in 1976-80, a proportion higher than that found in any other time period and higher than the overall proportion.

Figure 2
Race by Time Period



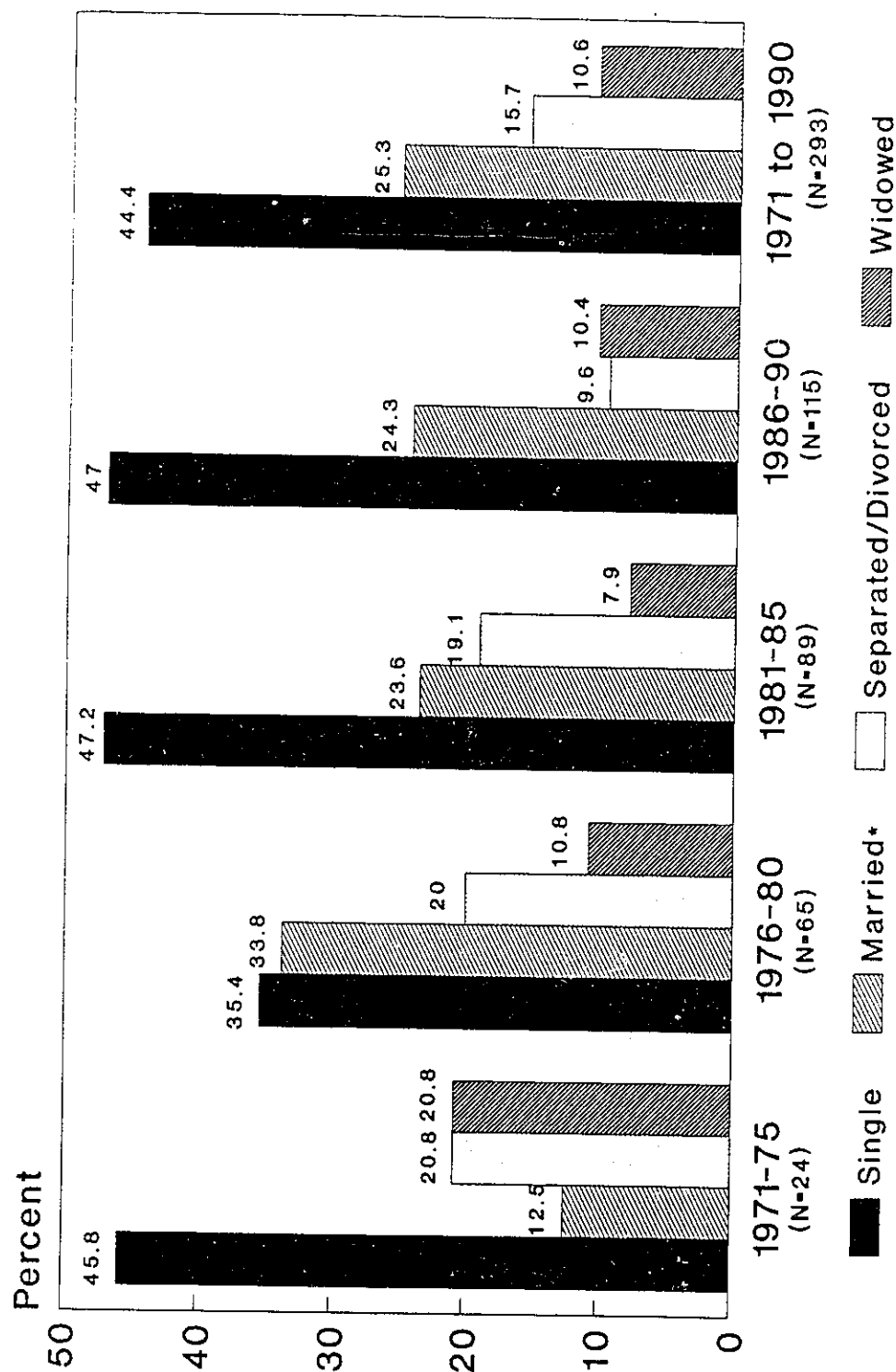
* Includes North American Indian, Métis and Inuit.

From 1981 on, we see a levelling off in the proportion of Native women admitted for murder or manslaughter. However, this levelling off does not return the proportion of Native women to the level it was in the early 1970s.

Differences were also found in the marital status of women admitted during the different time periods (see Figure 3). The proportion of single women admitted for murder or manslaughter during each time period remained fairly consistent with the proportion found among the entire sample (at about 45%). There was one exception, however: the proportion of single women admitted during 1976-80, at 35.4%, was considerably less than expected. Correspondingly, the proportion of married women admitted during this time period was almost triple that of the previous period (33.8% versus 12.5%).

We should perhaps examine the category of married women in greater detail as it presents a pattern similar to that found in the proportion of Native women across time periods. More specifically, the proportion of married women admitted from 1971-75 was about half of the proportion found in the entire sample (12.5% versus 25.3%). Then, in the following time period (1976-80), this proportion almost tripled to 33.8%. In the following time periods, we see a levelling off in the proportion of married women admitted for murder or manslaughter (to about 24%), but this proportion does not return to that found during the early 1970s.

Figure 3
Marital Status by Time Period



* Includes common-law relationships.

The proportion of separated and divorced women admitted for murder or manslaughter also remained fairly consistent, at about 20% of each sample. But again, there was one exception: in the latter part of the 1980s, the proportion of separated or divorced women dipped to a low of 9.6%. This anomaly may have pulled the overall proportion down since, at 15.7%, it was less than the proportion found in the first three time periods.

As to widowed women, the proportion admitted generally kept with the standard for the entire sample (at about 11%). However, in the early part of the 1970s, the proportion of women admitted who were widowed was almost double that of the entire sample (20.8% versus 10.6%). It should be noted, though, that, in absolute figures, the difference is very small.

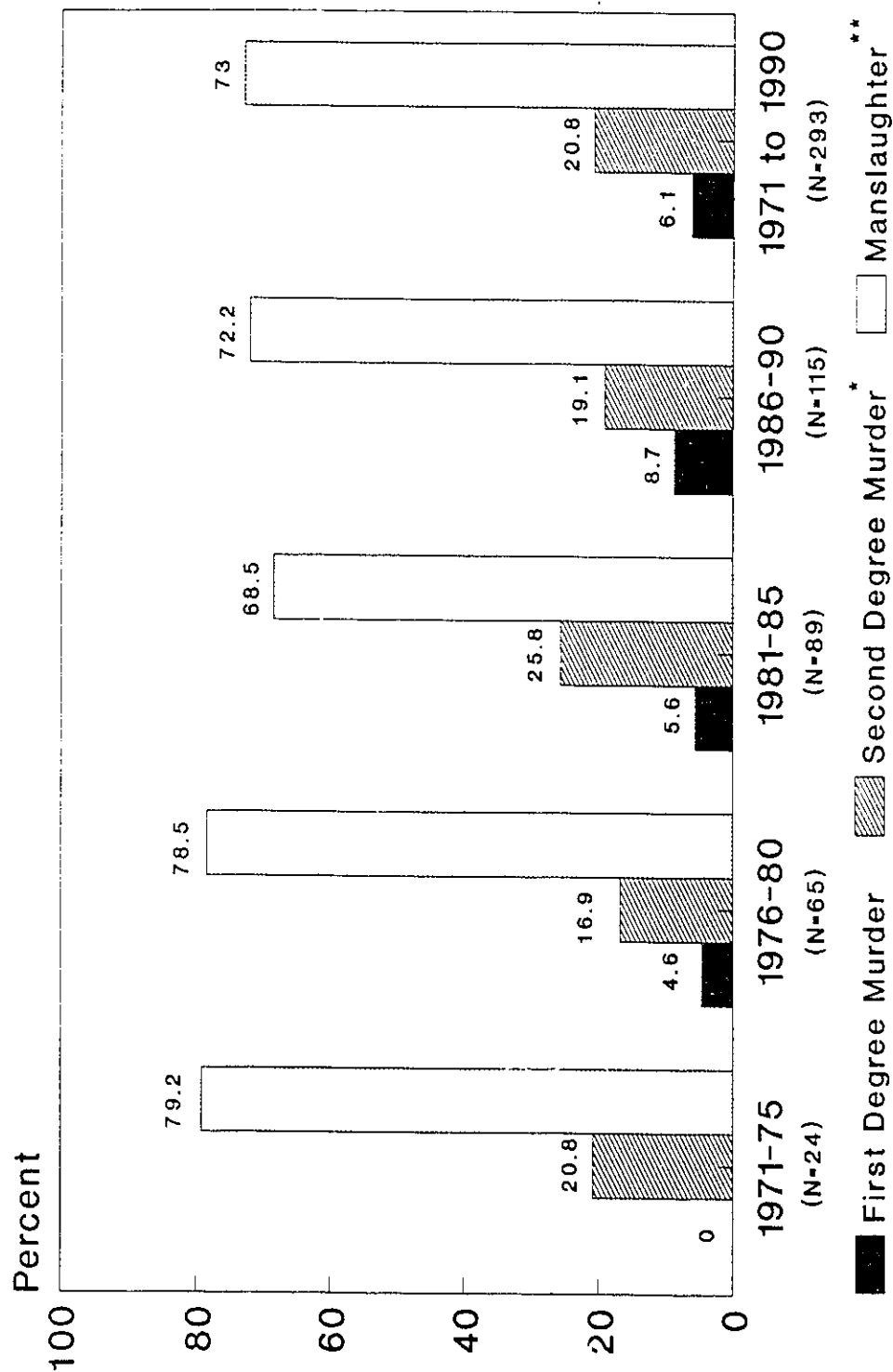
The last variable that seemed to vary to any noticeable degree between time periods was major offence (see Figure 4). About 6% of the entire sample had a major offence of first degree murder. From 1971 to 1990, the proportion of women admitted for first degree murder increased gradually, from a low of 0% in the early 1970s⁵ to a high of 8.7% in the latter part of the 1980s. The first increase in this proportion was not so gradual however, going from 0% in 1971-75 to 4.6% in 1976-80.

⁵ Although first degree murder was not part of the Criminal Code until 1976, capital murder was. There were no women in this sample whose major offence was capital murder.

The proportion of women admitted for second degree murder generally remained consistent at approximately 20%. It has, however, been at a low of 16.9% in the latter part of the 1970s then moved to a high of 25.8% in the early 1980s.

As to manslaughter, 73% of women in the entire sample had this as their major offence. Across the time periods, we see a decrease and levelling off in the proportion of manslaughter cases. This proportion has gone from a high of about 79% in the 1970s (when the proportion of women admitted for first or second degree murder was lowest), to a low of 68.5% in 1981-85 (when the proportion of women admitted for second degree murder was highest). Then in the next time period (1986-90), it moved to a level closer to that found for the entire sample (about 72%).

Figure 4
Major Offence by Time Period



* Includes 5 cases of non-capital murder.

** Includes 3 cases of murder reduced to manslaughter.

C. Comparison of Profiles by Race

For this part of the study, data was grouped according to subjects' race. These race groupings were Native and non-Native. The Native group included North American Indian, Inuit and Métis women. The non-Native group included all other women: Caucasian, Black, Asian and other races. Grouped in this way, almost two thirds of the sample was non-Native (65.9% or 193 women) and just over one third (34.1% or 100 women) were Native.

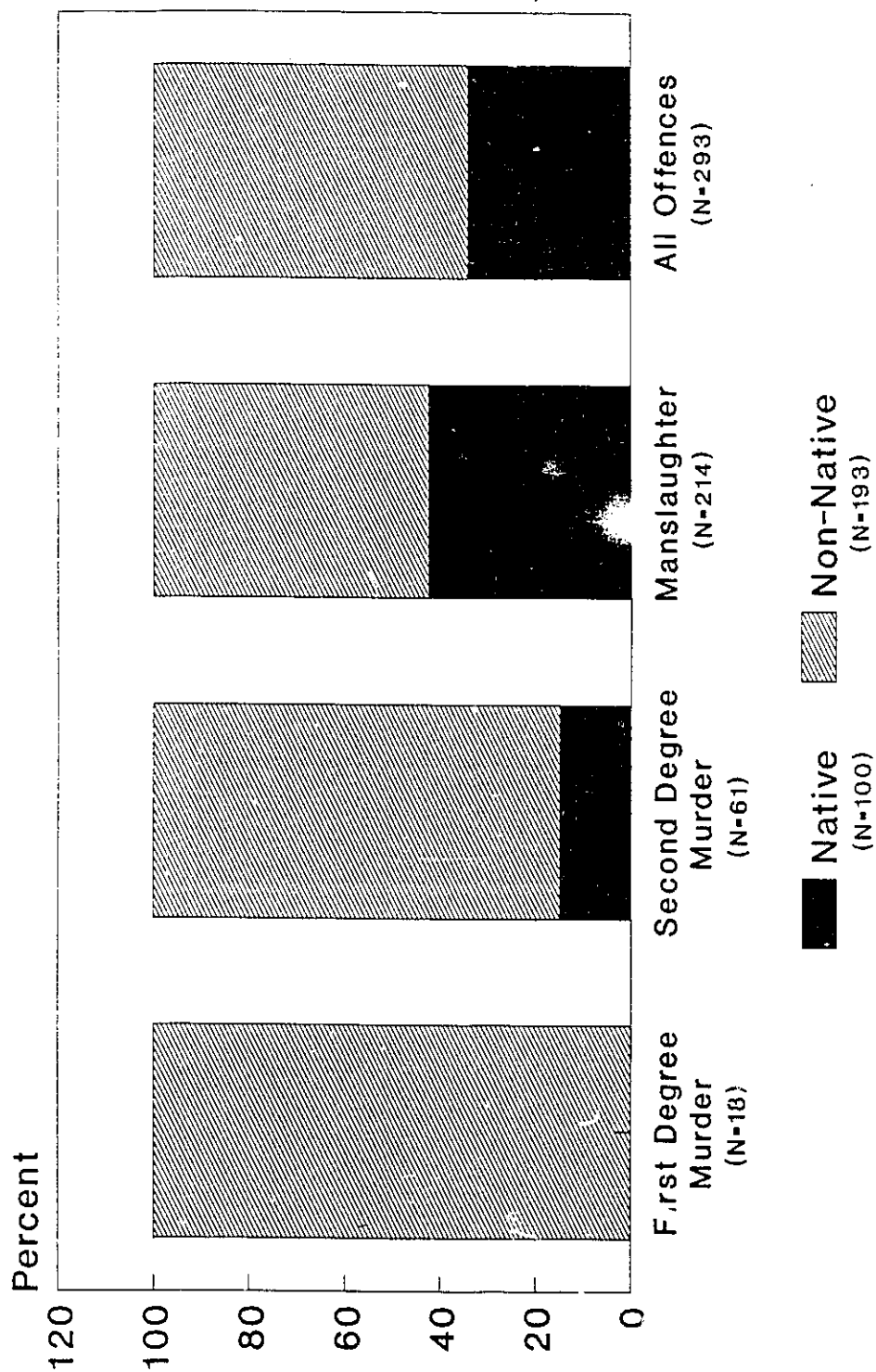
i) Major Offence

Chi-square comparisons revealed a significant difference ($p < .0001$) in the major offence distributions of Native and non-Native women. (See Figure 5 for a graphic display of these differences.)

Although manslaughter⁶ was the major offence of most Native (91%) and non-Native (63.7%) women in the sample, it was significantly more likely for Native women. More specifically, Native women formed 42.5% (91) of the manslaughter group, but only 34.1% of the entire sample population of women admitted during the last 20 years for first or second degree murder or manslaughter. Conversely, non-Native women comprised 57.5% (123) of the manslaughter group, but 65.9% of the entire sample population.

⁶ This includes cases of murder reduced to manslaughter.

Figure 5
Proportion of Native and Non-Native
Women by Major Offence



There were also differences in the distribution of Native and non-Native women in the first degree murder group. While Native women were more likely to have been in the manslaughter group, they were significantly less likely in the first degree murder group. From 1971 to 1990, no Native women were admitted for first degree murder, while 18 non-Native women (9.3% of the non-Native population) had a major offence of first degree murder.

Native women were also less likely to be in the second degree murder category.⁷ Only 9% of Native women were admitted for second degree murder; this compares with 26.9% of non-Native women. Looking at all women (61) admitted for second degree murder from 1971 to 1990, 9 were Native and 52 were non-Native. Thus, while Native women comprised 34.1% of the entire sample population, they comprised only 14.8% of women whose major offence was second degree murder. Conversely, while only 65.9% of the entire sample population were non-Native women, they comprised 85.3% of those admitted for second degree murder.

ii) Year of Admission

During the past 20 years, there was a steady increase in the number of Native and non-Native women admitted for first or second degree murder or manslaughter. Chi-square comparisons revealed no significant differences in the

⁷ This includes cases of non-capital murder.

proportions of Native and non-Native women admitted in each time period (1971-75, 1976-80, 1981-85, 1986-90).

This increase in the number of Natives admitted during the past 20 years was somewhat sporadic. From 1971 to 1975, only 6% (6) of the Native women in the sample were admitted. However, in 1976-80, we see a more marked increase in the number of Native women admitted, from 6 (or 6%) in 1971-75 to 27 (or 27%) in 1976-80. In 1981-85, this number again climbed but this time only slightly, to 30 (30% of the Native sample). In 1986-90, the number of Native women admitted increased to 37 (or 37%).

The number of non-Native women admitted also increased, but less sporadically and generally by greater jumps: from 18 (or 9.3% of the non-Native sample) admitted in 1971-75, to 38 (or 19.7%) in 1976-80, to 59 (or 30.6%) in 1981-85, to 78 (or 40.4%) admitted in 1986-90.

Thus, we can say that the majority of Native (67%) and non-Native (71%) women in the sample were admitted during the 1980s. Only a small proportion were admitted in the early 1970s. Although in the late 1970s a greater proportion of the Native population than the non-Native population was admitted (27% versus 19.7%), this difference was not statistically significant ($p > .4$).

We can compare Native and non-Native admissions by time period another way. While Native women comprised 34.1% of the entire sample population of women admitted during the

last 20 years for murder or manslaughter, they comprised only 25% of all admissions in 1971-75. In 1976-80, however, they comprised 41.5% of admissions. Although these proportions were not expected, based on the fact that Native women formed 34.1% of the sample, chi-square analyses found the differences not significant ($p > .4$). For the other two time periods (1981-85 and 1986-90), the proportion of women admitted who were Native was as expected (33.7% and 32.2% respectively).

While non-Natives comprised 65.9% of the entire sample population, 75% of all admissions from 1971 to 1975 were non-Native women. In 1976-80, however, non-Natives comprised only 58.5% of admissions. Again though, while these proportions were not as expected, chi-square analyses found the differences not significant ($p > .44$). As with Native women, the proportion of women admitted during the 1980s who were non-Native was as expected (66.3% in 1981-85 and 67.8% in 1986-90).

iii) Aggregate Sentence

The mean sentence of Native and non-Native women admitted for manslaughter was compared. A t-test comparison found that the mean sentence of Native women was significantly less than that of non-Native women in the sample ($p < .0001$).

The mean sentence for Native women admitted for

manslaughter was 3.7 years, with a standard deviation of 1.7. Sentences ranged from 1 year to 12 years.

The mean sentence for non-Native women was significantly higher at 5.7 years. The standard deviation was 2.8 years, with sentences ranging from 2 years to 15 years.

The percentage of Native and non-Native women serving life sentences was also compared. Chi-square analyses revealed that non-Native women in the sample were significantly more likely than Native women to receive a life sentence ($p < .0001$). Of the 76 women sentenced to life imprisonment, 88.2% (67) were non-Native while only 11.8% (9) were Native.

Put another way, only 3.1% of the Native sample was sentenced to life imprisonment; this compares with 22.9% of the non-Native group. This finding relates to the fact that Native women were significantly more likely than non-Native women to be admitted for manslaughter, as opposed to first or second degree murder for which a life sentence is the punishment.

iv) Age

Native women were significantly younger than non-Native women admitted during the past 20 years ($p < .001$).

The mean age of women in the Native group was 28.5 years, with a standard deviation of 8.8. Ages of Native

women ranged from 17 years to 63 years.

For non-Native women, the mean age was considerably greater at 32.4 years. The standard deviation was 10.7, with ages ranging from 18 years to 68 years. A t-test found this difference to be significant at the $p < .001$ level.

v) Marital Status

Chi-square analyses revealed no significant differences in the marital status of Native and non-Native subjects. Both Natives and non-Natives tended to be single (47% and 43% respectively). They were next most likely to be married (29% and 23.3% respectively). The next most common marital status category was separated or divorced, into which 13% of Native women and 17.1% of non-Native women fell. Both Native and non-Native women were least likely to be widowed (11% and 10.4% respectively).

Although Native women comprised a slightly larger proportion of the married group (39.2%) than expected (based on the proportion they comprised of the entire sample population - 34.1%) and a slightly smaller proportion of the separated/divorced group (28.3%), the differences were not statistically significant as revealed by chi-square analyses ($p > .09$).

Similarly, although non-Native women comprised a slightly smaller proportion of the married group (60.8%) than expected (based on the proportion they comprised of the

entire sample population - 65.9%) and a slightly larger proportion of the separated/divorced group (71.7%), chi-square analyses did not reveal statistically significant differences ($p > .09$).

Data on 12 non-Native subjects was missing.

vi) Place of Sentencing

For this analysis, places of sentencing were grouped by region: Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies and Pacific.

There were significant differences ($p < .0001$) in the regions of sentencing of Native and non-Native women in this sample. Native women were significantly more likely than non-Natives to have been sentenced in the Prairies. Non-Native women, on the other hand, were significantly more likely than Natives to be sentenced in Ontario, Quebec or the Atlantic region.

For non-Native women, there was a more regional distribution in their places of sentencing. That is, while they were most likely to have been sentenced in Quebec or Ontario (where 35.2% and 29.5% respectively were sentenced), their places of sentencing were not concentrated in any one region. Rather, non-Native women were spread out across the country, with 8.8% having been sentenced in the Atlantic region, 13.5% in the Prairies and 13% in the Pacific region.

Native women, on the other hand, were concentrated in one part of the country, namely the Prairies, where more

than two thirds (68%) of them had been sentenced. Only 1% were sentenced in the Atlantic region, 4% in Quebec, 14% in Ontario and 13% in the Pacific region.

Looking at this another way, we would expect that, with all things equal, of all subjects sentenced in any one region, 34.1% would be Native (because this is the proportion they comprise of the entire sample) and 65.9% would be non-Native. Only in the Pacific region did we see the expected proportions. Non-Native women were more likely to have been sentenced in the Atlantic, Quebec and Ontario regions, comprising 94.5%, 94.4% and 80.3% of all women sentenced in these areas. Native women, on the other hand, were more likely to have been sentenced in the Prairies region, comprising 72.3% of all women sentenced there. Chi-square analyses revealed these to be significant differences ($p < .0001$).

vii) Previous Federal Terms

More Native women than non-Native women in the sample were serving their first federal sentence: 98% (98) of Native subjects and 90.2% (174) of non-Natives had no previous federal terms. Only 1% (1) of the Native women had served one previous federal sentence; this compares with 8.8% (17) of the non-Native sample. In both groups, 1% had served two previous federal terms.

Comparison - Native/Non-Native

Table 6 presents a profile of the Native and the non-Native female offender who committed murder or manslaughter and was admitted to federal corrections during the past 20 years. The discussion below will capture some of the statistically significant differences in the profiles.

The typical Native female offender, at 28.5 years of age, was significantly younger than her non-Native counterpart at 32.4 years of age. Although both the Native and the non-Native female offender were likely to be admitted for manslaughter, it was significantly more likely for the Native female offender than the non-Native offender. The Native woman who committed manslaughter was likely sentenced to approximately 3.7 years, significantly less than her non-Native counterpart who was likely sentenced to 5.7 years for manslaughter. Although neither Natives nor non-Natives were likely to be admitted for first or second degree murder, it was significantly less likely for a Native woman. Thus, Native women were significantly less likely to have been sentenced to life imprisonment. As to place of sentencing, Native women were significantly more likely to have been sentenced in the Prairies region, while non-Native women were significantly more likely to have been sentenced in Quebec or Ontario.

Table 6
Comparison of Profiles by Race

Variable	Native	Non-Native	Chi-Square/ T-Test	p
Major Offence	Manslaughter (91%)	Manslaughter (63.7%)	26.22	***
Year	1986-90 (37%)	1986-90 (40.4%)	2.68	ns
Aggregate Sentence				
. manslaughter (mean)	. 3.7 years	. 5.7 years	6.51	***
. life	. life:3.1%	. life:22.9%	22.67	***
Age (mean)	28.5 years	32.4 years	3.36	**
Marital Status	single (47%)	single (43%)	8.03	ns
Region of Sentencing	Prairies (68%)	Quebec	100.29	***
Previous Federal Terms	none (98%)	none (90.2%)	n/a	n/a
N	100	193		

** p < .001

*** p < .0001

D. Comparison of Profiles by Major Offence

In this third comparison, the data was grouped according to the offender's major offence at admission. Those who had committed manslaughter formed one group, while the second group was made up of women who had committed first or second degree murder.

Information on some of the variables outlined above, namely year of admission, race, age, marital status, region of sentencing and previous federal terms, was compared for the murder and manslaughter groups. (Given the nature of the grouping, it was not appropriate to examine major offences and aggregate sentences.) Table 7 presents the major data on these variables. In the following discussion, only variables on which there were significant differences will be presented.

There were few significant differences between women in the murder group and those in the manslaughter group. On the variables of year of admission, age, marital status and previous federal terms, there were no significant between-group differences.

However, on race and region of sentencing, there were significant differences, partially explained by the racial composition of both groups as established in the preceding section of the chapter. Namely, women in the manslaughter group were significantly more likely to be Native.

Table 7
Comparison of Profiles by Major Offence

Variable	Manslaughter	Murder	Chi-Square/ T-Test	p
Year	1986-90 (38.8%)	1986-90 (40.5%)	2.39	ns
Race	native:42.5% non-native:57.5%	native:11.4% non-native:88.6%	24.87	***
Age (mean)	30.4 years	32.7 years	-1.72	ns
Marital Status	single (45.3%)	single (41.8%)	3.68	ns
Region of Sentencing	Prairies (36.9%)	Que. (27.9%) Ont. (27.9%)	11.47	*
Previous Federal Terms	none (93.9%)	none (89.9%)	n/a	n/a
N	214	79		

* p < .05
 ** p < .001
 *** p < .0001

Of the 214 women admitted for manslaughter between 1971 and 1990, 91 or 42.5% were Native; this was more than expected as Natives comprised only 34.1% of the entire sample population. Non-Natives comprised 57.5% of the manslaughter group, but 65.9% of the entire sample population. Of the murder group, Natives comprised only 11.4%; non-Natives, on the other hand, made up 88.6% of this group. Chi-square analyses revealed these to be significant differences ($p < .0001$).

This difference in the racial composition of the two groups may account for the difference found in the region of sentencing for women in the murder and manslaughter categories. Subjects in the manslaughter group were significantly more likely than those in the murder group to have been sentenced in the Prairies region (36.9% versus 19%). Conversely, women in the murder group were more likely than women in the manslaughter group to have been sentenced in Quebec, Ontario or the Pacific region. These three regions were the place of sentencing for 76.1% of the murder group but only 56.6% of the manslaughter group. Chi-square comparisons revealed these differences to be statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Women who commit murder and those who commit manslaughter differed significantly on two variables: race and region of sentencing. The previous section of this chapter established the inter-relationship between these two

variables and the major offence of manslaughter. More specifically, Native women were significantly more likely to have been in the manslaughter group and to have been sentenced in the Prairies region. The fact that the manslaughter group in this analysis was composed of a disproportionate number of Native women explains the finding that manslaughter offenders were more likely than murder offenders to have been sentenced in the Prairies region. Left to be explained, however, is the fact that Native women were more likely to have been in the manslaughter group and less likely to have been in the group of offenders who committed murder.

II. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative component of this study sought to gather information to supplement the quantitative results by presenting a more detailed, and current, picture of the female offender who committed murder or manslaughter. To do this, information was gathered on nine specific variables through interviews with women currently serving sentences at the Prison for Women, a federal correctional institution. Six women were interviewed, two of whom had been admitted for first degree murder, one who had been admitted for second degree murder and three who had been admitted for manslaughter.

It is acknowledged that the small size of this sample limits the generalizability of the results of this study. The researcher had hoped to be able to include a much larger number of women in the qualitative sample, but a number of incidents at the prison (i.e., an inmate suicide, a hostage-taking exercise and an inmate lockdown) hampered efforts to solicit participation. Additionally, the fact that the women in the institution have been the focus of numerous research projects in recent years has limited their interest in participating in new projects. These two factors contributed to the small sample size. Nevertheless, extensive information was gathered on the six women who agreed to take part.

Essentially, the qualitative part of the study focuses on three areas thought to be crucial to an understanding of the dynamics of female violence: i) the offender, ii) the offence, and iii) reconstruction. The interview schedule was designed to tap into each of these areas.

In the first part of the analysis, a portrait of the women in the sample is presented, describing such social and demographic characteristics as age, race, educational background and work experience. Subjects' past life experiences and relationships are also discussed. Here, the woman's relationships with her mates, children, siblings and parents are described as are her experiences (if any) with physical, sexual or emotional abuse. This portrait is then rounded out with a discussion of subjects' life situations and their support network at the time of the offence (e.g., living arrangements, financial situation, work situation, problems and pressures, status of relationships with friends and family). Examining the life situation and support network of offenders is a step in the attempt to establish the particular problems they were dealing with at the time of the offence, and the resources they felt were available for dealing with these problems. This also establishes a context for the next discussion, which focuses in more detail on the actual offence.

In the second part of the analysis, the offence is described by looking at: the nature of the offence,

including a description of the actual violent act; the relationship (if any) of the victim to the offender; the particular (physical and emotional) situation in which it occurred, including the time and location and the activities of participants at the time of the incident; and the role played by alcohol or drugs in the incident (e.g., whether the offender or victim or both were intoxicated at the time of the offence).

After having presented a portrait of the female offender and her violent offence, the focus shifts to the thoughts of the women in the sample as they now look back on the offence, on their lives at the time of the offence, and on the alternative courses of action either that they had considered but finally disregarded or that they now feel might have prevented the offence from happening.

Results of the interviews are presented here. To facilitate the presentation and discussion of these results, the information will be divided into the three sections outlined above. These sections are further subdivided into specific variables.

A. The Offender

i) Demographic and Social Characteristics

Compared to the mean age of women admitted between 1971 and 1990 for murder or manslaughter, as presented in the quantitative section of this paper, women in this sample

tended to be older. The mean age at admission to federal corrections, was 34.8 years, while the mean age of the 1971-90 sample was 31 years. Ages ranged from 24 years to 44 years.

One half (3) of this sample was Native; of these three, one was part Native and part Caucasian and another was part Native and part Black. Three women were Caucasian.

At the time of the offence, four of the six women were married, one was divorced and another was single.

Women in this sample tended to have little education, at least prior to their incarceration. All women in the sample had taken advantage of the opportunity in prison to upgrade their educational level. At the actual time of the offence, most women in the sample had not completed high school.

Women in this sample also tended to have been employed in low-paying unskilled work, as clerks, waitresses, cleaners or salespersons.

ii) Life Experiences and Relationships

Most of the women in this sample had grown up living with both parents until deciding to start life on their own (either to get married or to find work elsewhere). In one case, however, the woman ran away from her parents' home at the age of 13 and never returned; she had been physically and sexually abused by members of her family. In another

case, the woman had been in and out of foster homes since the age of 6, due primarily to her mother's alcoholism and abusive behaviour (physical, sexual and emotional). In the latter, the mother eventually committed suicide when the subject was 16 years of age.

Like their daughters, the mothers of most women in this sample had little education and, if employed, had low-paying, unskilled occupations. With few exceptions, the women's fathers were the "breadwinners" in the family.

The relationship of women in this sample with their mothers varied. Some women described it as "very good," others as "love/hate," and others as "no good/difficult." In half the cases, these relationships were characterized by some tension and strain, the cause of which was the difficulty the women experienced in communicating with their mothers. As one woman described it, "She came from the old school, you know. She didn't talk about sex and getting beat up."

The women tended to characterize their relationships with their fathers more positively than they did those with their mothers. In one case, however, the woman never really knew her father, having only met him three times. In another case, the woman described her father as "God... always looking down."

In one half of the cases, the women characterized their parents' relationships as mentally and physically abusive,

with their fathers as the aggressors and their mothers as the victims. The other three women described their parents' relationships in generally favourable terms, although one woman, whose parents had been married some 30 years, said "I guess after you've been married that long you just ignore each other."

Most of the women came from fairly large families, having from 3 to 21 brothers and sisters. The women tended to describe their relationships with their siblings in generally positive terms. Two women, however, had been abused sexually and physically by at least one of their siblings.

The women in this sample tended to have children, ranging in age from 2 years to 26 years, and characterized their relationships with their children in positive terms. One woman, however, had no contact with her children since being imprisoned for this offence, and another never had custody of her child since putting him up for adoption.

As stated previously, the marital status of the women in this sample at the time of the offence was as follows: married - 4; divorced - 1; and single - 1. This breakdown does not follow the breakdown of marital status for the entire sample of women admitted for murder or manslaughter between 1971 and 1990, where women tended to be single. One possible explanation for this is the difference in the point at which marital status was recorded. That is, marital

status for the sample of 293 women (reported in the previous section of this paper) was recorded at the time of admission to federal corrections. This may not reflect the women's marital status at the time of the offence, which was the point at which it was recorded for this sample of six women. More particularly, as the literature suggests (see literature review, pp. 9-15), when women commit murder or manslaughter, the victim is most likely to be a mate or spouse. Thus, after the offence, upon being admitted to a federal institution to serve a sentence, these women may no longer characterize themselves as married; some may refer to themselves as single and others as widowed. Some, however, may not yet be prepared to deal with the fact that they have killed their spouse or mate and therefore may continue to refer to themselves as married.

All of the married relationships (4) were characterized by physical and emotional abuse. For two of these women, this was their first experience with physical abuse by a spouse or mate. For the other two women, all previous relationships with men had also involved physical and emotional abuse. As one woman put it, "I just thought that was the way it was supposed to be - just take it as it comes." Another woman said that she thought that violence was normal as she had never seen or felt anything different.

Delving into the women's personal experiences as victims of violence, we see that the women generally had

been victims of physical and psychological abuse (five of the six women) that lasted a number of years. Two of these women had also experienced sexual abuse from the time they were very young children until the late teenage years. The one woman who said she had not been physically abused said that "being hit once is not abuse."

In two of these cases, the women had been victimized by both spouses/mates and family members. In another two cases, the women were abused by family members. One woman had been sexually and physically abused by her husband.

All of the women who were both psychologically and physically abused felt that psychological abuse was "ten times more damaging" than physical abuse.

When asked how they dealt with the effects of this abuse, most women responded that, at the time of the offence, they had not dealt with the emotional damage. Some internalized or repressed their responses to the abuse, not being able to discuss the experience with anyone. Others sought outside advice, but found their audiences unreceptive (e.g., friends and family who said that abuse was "part of the package"; or psychologists and social workers who could not "relate" to the woman's experiences and minimized the effects of the abuse).

Two women left their husbands a number of times to escape the abuse, returning again "because I thought he deserved another chance" or "because sometimes I thought he

really loved me." Another woman took a self-defence course, hoping that would enable her to defend herself against her husband and aggress against him at times as well.

Four of the women in this sample had attempted suicide at some point in their lives. One of these had tried to hang herself while in prison. As to the others, one woman had attempted suicide twice: once at the age of 8 by overdosing on pills (Valium) and once at the age of 21 by slashing. One woman had attempted suicide, by overdosing on pills (Valium), approximately one year before the offence. Another woman had attempted suicide at the age of 17, again by overdosing on pills.

As to the women's prior criminal records, two women reported that they had never before been convicted of an offence, two women each had one conviction for fraud, one had been convicted of possession of a narcotic, and one had three convictions for assault (against her husband).

iii) Personal Life Situation and Support Network at Time of Offence

At the time of the offence, half of the women were not working: one had been laid off and two were between jobs in their seasonal work. Two of these women, one of whom was a single mother, had no other source of income at the time of the offence. The other three women were employed, two in low-paying occupations.

Of the five women who had children, four were living with them at the time of the offence. The children of one woman were adults (in their twenties). The children of the other three women ranged in age from 3 months to 13 years.

Although four women were married, only three were actually living with their spouses at the time of the offence; one woman had recently left her husband (three months before the offence). The divorced woman in this sample was living with her sons, and the single woman was living with friends temporarily (until her job in a bush camp started once again). One woman was also living with a friend.

Four of the six women were living in the Prairies, Alberta to be more specific, at the time of the offence. This ties in with the information presented in the quantitative component of the study where it was found that Native women tended to come from the Prairies region. The other two were living in the Ontario. Only one woman was living in a house that she and her husband owned; the rest were living in rental property.

For three of the women, this had been their living arrangement for some years. For the others, however, living arrangements had been characterized by instability for some time. One woman who was physically abused by her husband had left him a number of times returning just two months before the offence. Another woman had left her husband just

three months before the offence and was living with her children at the time. Finally, one person had grown accustomed to somewhat unstable living arrangements, having grown up in foster homes and working seasonally in a bush camp for some years.

As to the specific problems and pressures the women were feeling at the time of the offence, the women tended to feel trapped somehow in their current situation. Two were afraid of their husbands but did not feel that leaving them was enough to keep them away. One woman felt trapped, because of a lack of financial resources, into living with two people whom she felt were a poor influence on her towards whom she felt some hostility. Another woman felt forced into committing robberies as a matter of survival, as she had no other means of income. These women felt no control over their own personal situation. Two women were depressed around the time of the incident, and two were drinking heavily.

These women tended not to have dealt with their problems. Two were using alcohol abuse as a coping mechanism. Although one woman had sought professional counselling to help her deal with the effects of having been sexually abused, she related that this advice "didn't help," it made "no connection." In her words, the counsellors were telling her to pick herself up and be strong without showing her how to do this. One other woman had seen a lawyer about

getting a separation from her husband; this was how she was dealing with her problems.

With three women, although they saw their husband's violence and substance abuse as the root of their problems, they felt unable to communicate effectively with him about this. One woman said that she and her husband just ended up fighting. Another said that her husband was a "Jekyll and Hyde" when he drank.

When asked whether they had asked anyone else for help with their problems, other than the lawyer and the professional help, no one had thought that anyone would have been able to help them. As one woman put it, "My friends were just as poor as I was." One woman had spoken to her grandfather about the abuse, but "What was he going to do? My husband was twice as strong as he was." One woman felt that it was part of her culture to keep her problems to herself: "I'm a Jew. You keep your problems to yourself. You just don't discuss it."

At the time of the offence, the women in this sample tended not to be on close, personal terms with their family members, having little communication with their mothers, fathers and siblings. (In some cases, this was because the woman's mother or father had already passed away.)

Only one woman had a "fine" relationship with her mother. Two said that their relationship with their mother was non-communicative. Although three women had on-going

relationships their fathers at the time of the offence, two of these characterized the relationships as non-communicative because they "couldn't talk about the abuse."

As to relationships with siblings, half the women said they were no longer in contact with their brothers and sisters around the time of the offence, either because of distance problems (family lived far away) or because there had been a "falling out" in their relationship. Two women characterized their relationships with their siblings as "fine," and one said that, although she had been in contact with her sister, there was no real communication.

Most women described their relationships with their children in positive terms. Only one woman had any reservations about the relationship, admitting that she had been a part-time mother because alcohol was such a major part of her life.

As to friends in each woman's support network, although some women stated that they had friends they felt close to at the time of the offence, there were caveats to this "closeness." One woman was new to a particular community, and her friends were some distance away. Three women did not feel they could rely on their friends or communicate freely with them. As one woman put it, "They were different. [I had] a different life than they knew about and one I didn't want them to know about." Two other women stated that they were too private to be able to discuss

their problems with anyone: "I have always been a sort of private person. I didn't want to burden anyone else." Only two women felt they could rely on their friends for material or financial aid.

B. The Offence

iv) Nature of the Offence

Three of the women were convicted of manslaughter, two of first degree murder and one of second degree murder. The sentences for manslaughter were 5 years, 10 years and 13 years. (With the latter sentence, the woman had also been convicted of a number of armed robberies).

In three cases, a knife was the weapon of use. In two cases, it was a gun, and in one case, the victim was beaten and strangled to death. In four cases, the offence took place in the woman's place of residence, which, for three women, was also the victim's home. In the other two cases, the offence took place in a public place (i.e., on a highway and in a park). All of the offences took place at night, most during a weekend. As to the seasonality of the offences, three took place during the winter months, two during the summer and one in the fall.

In only one case did the woman act alone in committing the offence. Someone else was involved in four other cases; in three of these cases, the accomplice was also charged and convicted of the offence. In addition, one woman maintained

that she had nothing to do with the offence, that her husband had committed the offence and she was sworn to silence to protect her son from him. This woman claimed that her husband, whom she had left just a few months prior to the offence to escape his physical and emotional abuse, came to her house extremely intoxicated and, believing that the woman in the living room was her, beat and strangled her friend. (At the request of this woman, this case will not be discussed in any greater detail in this paper. This case is also not included in the following discussion as, based on her claims, the subject was not involved in its commission.)

After the offence, two women called the police immediately and waited with the body. Two women left the scene, but one went to a neighbour's house, telling her what had happened and then calling the police. One woman reported her husband missing 24 hours after the offence.

v) Relationship of the Victim to the Offender

As to the victims of these offences, three were the women's husbands, one was a stranger (a police officer) and one was a casual acquaintance. All of the husbands who were killed had been physically and emotionally abusive to their wives.

Briefly,⁸ one woman stabbed her husband to death. In another case, the woman arranged for a contract killing of her husband. In two cases, one in which the woman's husband was shot and one in which a police officer shot, although the women did not commit the actual offence, they were implicated as parties to the act. In another, the woman stabbed a casual acquaintance.

vi) Situation in Which the Violence Occurred

One offence occurred as the textbook case of a battered woman fighting back. The woman's relationship with her husband had been particularly poor at the time of the offence; he had been abusing her more frequently and more severely than usual (he had been abusing her for some ten years) and he had been drinking particularly heavily. One night he came home extremely intoxicated. She had expected this and consumed some alcohol and Valium to "prepare" herself. He started "throwing [her] around." She tried to call the police, but he ripped the telephone out of the wall. She went upstairs to get away from him. He kicked the family dog, and she heard a yelp. She came back downstairs. There was a knife on the kitchen table. She

⁸ To ensure that the women in this sample cannot be identified from the information presented in this paper, it is important that these cases not be discussed individually. Thus, in describing the actual offence, the author will be brief. In discussing other details pertinent to the offence, the author will attempt to group the information.

grabbed the knife (she claims she would have grabbed anything, e.g., a bat, whatever was available) and stabbed him to death.

In the other two cases where spouses were victims, the women did not directly commit the actual offence. The husbands in both cases had been physically and emotionally abusive to their wives for a number of years. One woman said she wanted to get rid of him because she "thought he deserved it." In the other case, the woman claimed that although she had not planned the offence, she expected it would happen sooner or later, given the volatility of their relationship. In fact, all three women whose husbands were killed had believed that they themselves would one day be killed by their husbands.

One case involved a sado-masochistic sexual episode gone awry. There were three persons involved and some hostility between the offender and one of these persons. The level of violence (at first pleasing to the victim) increased to a dangerous point at the encouragement of one of the persons involved (not the victim and not the offender). The subject grabbed a knife and one of the persons (a male) was stabbed to death.

The sixth case will not be discussed here in detail as some of the parties involved still have appeals pending. Suffice it to say that the victim was a police officer who was shot, not by the victim, after a series of armed

robberies. The woman never actually committed the murder, but she was involved in the armed robberies. The armed robberies were being done, she claimed, as a matter of survival: she had no source of income (she had been laid off and unemployment insurance had not yet kicked in), and she had no friends or family from which she felt she could ask for help.

vii) Role Played by Alcohol or Drugs

In three of the five cases, the women had consumed some alcohol on the day of the offence. In two of these cases, the women were also under the influence of drugs, to the point of their feeling totally out of control and not remembering much of the incident. One woman who had not consumed alcohol said that "...maybe [I] should have. Seems if you've taken drugs or alcohol, you've got an excuse for getting off lighter."

In three of the five cases, the victims were under the influence of alcohol, and two were also under the influence of drugs. The victims were apparently considerably more intoxicated than the women, some to the point of "falling down drunk."

Four of the women felt that alcohol and drugs played a very significant role in the offence. Three said that alcohol and drugs gave them the courage to carry out the offence. This is quite different from a perception that

alcohol and drugs made them carry out the offence.

Three women stated they had at one time had a problem with alcohol and drugs. Of these three, two had sought treatment for their abuse, one being able to maintain sobriety. However, two women stated that they were dependent on alcohol and drugs at the time of the offence. Referring to the role alcohol played in the offence, one woman said that "If I hadn't been drinking, I probably would have been thinking more clearly - probably would have divorced him instead."

C. Reconstruction

viii) Offender's Explanation of Motive

Three women saw the victim as at least partly responsible for his own death. In all three cases, the victim was the subject's husband. For these women, it was their husband's drinking and abusive behaviour that precipitated the offence. These women tended to see their husband's psychological abuse, and the aggravating role that alcohol plays, as contributing more to the offence than physical abuse. As one woman put it, "It's not even the violence, it's the stress. The violence has very little to do with it. It's the lies, bull shit - psychological stuff."

The women were asked, point blank, how they would explain why this incident happened. Three women attributed it to their alcohol/drug use at the time of the offence (and

two of these also blamed the extended period of alcohol abuse). These women also pointed to the years of physical and emotional abuse they had suffered at the hands of their husbands. One of these women said that it was also the feeling of being in a situation where she was totally in control of a man; she had never had that before and ended up transferring years of frustration towards men (who had abused her all her life) onto this particular man who was under her control physically. One woman attributed the offence to the combination of drugs and alcohol - "Mix it together and you've got one deadly combination.... Things just get out of hand, snowball, and then there's no way to stop it."

ix) Alternatives to the Violence

Women were first asked whether they thought that anything could have prevented the offence from happening. Two women thought that the offence would not have occurred: i) if she had not lost her job or if she had someone she could rely on for financial support; and ii) if she had not been drinking and taking drugs. One woman was convinced that the offence would have happened anyway. In fact, she was surprised it had not happened sooner. Another subject was not sure whether the offence could have been prevented. She said that perhaps she could have left her husband and gotten a divorce, but she had not felt strong enough to do

this on her own. Furthermore, she felt that "Leaving him wasn't good enough. He deserved to die." (This woman was referring to the fact that her husband had been abusive toward her and her children for years.)

In responding to the question of whether they had ever thought about committing this kind of act before, most women said they had not. One woman said she had wished her husband dead before, but she never thought of it as something she would have the courage to do herself. Three women thought that they would be the ones who were killed (by their husbands).

When asked whether they had considered alternatives to committing the offence (e.g., leaving the situation, suicide, divorce), most women stated that they had thought about leaving the situation. In three cases, this meant leaving their husbands; in one case, it meant leaving the friends she was staying with temporarily. One woman thought that all she would have needed to get out of her situation was a job; at the time, she could find no work.

Of the women who had thought of leaving their husbands, two did not leave because they believed that their mates would have found them anyway and then abuse them even more severely, as they had in the past. One of these women had also thought of trying to obtain some financial support from a social worker, but at the time of the offence (during a weekend), social services' offices were not open. One woman

was insistent that her husband should have had to leave her, as opposed to her leaving him. She had thought of discussing her problems with the local priest, "But then all Father [X] would say is patience."

Women were then asked whether they thought the same thing would happen if they were in a similar situation again. All of the women replied that they would not, that they had learned something from this whole experience. As one woman eloquently put it, "I'd be gone - fuck the house, fuck the money. I'd be history. I'd also be more apt to talk about it - it would have relieved some of the pressure." Another woman said that she would never again be involved with someone abusive: "Just hit me once and his bags would be packed."

One woman reported that since the offence, she has been able to restore her relationship with her brothers and sisters. She would now be more willing to open up to them and to count on them for help.

Another said that she has now learned that there are more resources in the community for women who are in trouble. Previously, she had been under the impression that these resources were only for women who were abused or were in trouble with the law. (This point speaks to the need for outreach services.) This woman has since come to realize that there are places (e.g., interval houses, YWCA, Native Sisterhood) for women who need non-specific help. Since

coming to the Prison for Women, this woman has also realized that some psychologists are able to relate to their clients.

When asked why they believe people in general commit violent acts, the women's responses ran along two themes. One is the helplessness, the total lack of control that people sometimes feel over their own personal life situation - "...backed up against a wall and can't see no way out (sic)." The other theme was the significant role played by alcohol and drugs in these situations. They play a role in the evolution of the situation and in the actions of the characters involved. In one woman's words, "It's a split second - you're not you any more."

The women in this sample ended the interview with some strong opinions about the avenues of support and opportunity that women should be offered in prison. Two women thought that education should be mandatory in prison for two reasons: to educate women in what behaviour is "normal" and what is "abnormal," and to give women an asset to assist them in finding a job. Two women felt that psychological counselling in prison was particularly helpful; one went so far as to say that she thought it should be mandatory for inmates to see psychologists. Two women thought that Alcoholics Anonymous was a valuable program. These women also believed in the value of the Native Sisterhood and the sexual abuse program at the prison.

D. Qualitative Profile of Subjects

A profile is presented here, not of the demographic characteristics of women who commit murder or manslaughter (as these were discussed in detail, and with a larger sample size, in the previous section of the paper) but, rather, of the offender's past experiences, her situation at the time of the offence, the offence, and her thoughts about it afterwards.

These women tended to be married, living with their children and, in most cases, with their husbands as well. They had little education and relied primarily on their husbands' income as a means of support. They tended to come from the Prairies.

These women suffered physical and psychological abuse and, in some cases, sexual abuse at the hands of their spouses or family members. This abuse had gone on for a number of years, and its damaging effects had not been dealt with. Either these women felt isolated, with no one they could open up to, or they did not expect to receive any support from their friends or family. In some cases, abuse was considered the norm by her support network. In other cases, the women simply did not feel able to discuss such "private" matters.

More than half of these women had attempted suicide at some point in their lives.

Their relationships with their parents and siblings

were generally fair, although they tended to feel unable to communicate freely with them and ask for help.

The women generally felt isolated and trapped, with no control over their personal situations and problems. Some of these women took to alcohol and drugs (primarily Valium) as a coping strategy. Their husbands also had alcohol and drug problems which contributed to their abusive behaviour. Other women tried to talk to friends, family or professional counsellors but felt that the audience was unreceptive. Other women just kept their problems to themselves.

The victim of the offence was typically someone whom the offender knew. In three cases, it was the woman's husband, and these women had always believed that, one day, they would be the ones who were killed.

Only one woman acted alone in committing the offence. Typically, both the victim and the offender had consumed alcohol and/or drugs on the day of the offence. Usually, though, the victim was considerably more intoxicated than the woman. The offence typically took place in the woman's home, which was also the victim's home. When the woman committed the actual offence (i.e., did the actual killing), the weapon of use was a knife; when someone else committed the actual offence, the weapon was usually a gun. After the offence, the women typically either called the police or told someone who called the police.

The women in this sample tended to see the victims as

at least partially responsible for their own deaths. In presenting their views on what could have prevented the offence from occurring, the women highlighted the importance of having control over their particular life situations: control over drugs and alcohol, control over their financial situation, and control that would enable them to leave their husbands confident that they would not be sought out and punished for leaving.

III. Conclusion

This section will attempt to bring together the findings of the literature review⁹ and the findings of the present study.¹⁰ To do this, the profiles derived from each are presented in Table 8.

⁹ See the conclusion section of the literature review on pages 28 and 29.

¹⁰ Where findings from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study are available for a particular variable, findings from the quantitative part are presented to take advantage of the strength of the large sample size.

Table 8

**Comparison of Profiles Developed from
Literature Review and from Present Study**

Variable	Literature Review	Present Study*
Age	mid to late 30s	early 30s
Race	Caucasian or Black	Caucasian
Marital Status	married	single
Children	yes	yes
Socio-economic Position	low	low
Prior Criminal Record	none (or prior for non-violent offence)	none (or prior for non-violent offence)
Victim of Psychological, Physical and/or Sexual Abuse	yes	yes
Victim	mate/spouse	mate/spouse
Weapon	gun or knife	gun or knife
Accomplices	none	yes

* Where possible, the profile is based on data gathered in the quantitative component of the study to take advantage of the strength of the large sample size.

On three variables, we see differences. The literature review suggests that women who commit violent crimes are in their mid to late thirties, while women in the quantitative portion of the present study were younger, in their early thirties. This difference in ages may actually be greater than it appears. That is, the sample for the quantitative component of the present study reported their age at the time of admission to federal corrections, which may, in some cases, have taken place some time after the actual offence. Thus, women in this study may have been even younger at the time of the offence, which was generally the point at which age was reported in the past research.

As to marital status, the literature review suggests that these women tend to be married. In the present study, the women in the quantitative sample tended to be single; as mentioned previously, though, this may be at least partially explained by the time at which marital status was reported. In past research, marital status was generally reported at the time of the offence, while in the present study, marital status was reported upon admission to federal corrections. If a woman's victim in a murder or manslaughter had been her husband or mate, she may be less inclined to describe herself as married when being admitted to a federal institution. It may be worth noting that, consistent with the literature, women in the qualitative sample tended to have been married at the time of the offence.

The last major difference in the profile derived from past research and that derived from this study is found in the issue of whether the woman acted alone in committing the offence. The literature has suggested that women who commit violent crimes tend to act alone. In the present study, however, there was generally another person involved in the commission of the offence.

Despite the differences on the above variables, the findings of this study were generally consistent with those of previous research on the majority of variables. The profiles generally present a woman who is Caucasian, in her thirties, with children, from a low socio-economic position and with no prior violent offence. She has been the victim of psychological, sexual and/or physical abuse, often by her mate or spouse who was eventually the victim of her crime. A gun or knife was used in the commission of the offence.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In profiling women who commit murder or manslaughter in Canada, this study has presented the picture of a woman, generally Caucasian but often Native (see also Mann, 1990; and Goetting, 1988a), who was abused (physically, psychologically and/or sexually) during her childhood and/or in past relationships with men. She typically did not deal with the damaging effects of this abuse. This, and her perception either that abuse was the norm or that she would never really be able to escape the abuse, contributed to her feelings of isolation, lack of control and being trapped. Not dealing with the effects of past abuse aggravated her anger and resentment.

Being employed in a low-paying or unskilled occupation, she often relied primarily on her mate's income or was barely able to survive on her own. The fact that she was often responsible for two or more children increased her reliance on her mate's financial support.

She often turned to alcohol and sometimes drugs as a coping strategy; another strategy was withdrawal. Often, her mate also used (and often abused) alcohol and drugs regularly.

A situation presented itself where the woman's pent-up feelings of anger and frustration began to emerge, often

triggered by a situation in which she felt particularly trapped (e.g., a particularly abusive act by her mate). The "situation" does not necessarily refer to one moment in time; it more often characterized a period lasting months and even years.

The particular situation in which the violence occurred was also characterized and precipitated by the presence of alcohol and drugs with both the victim and the offender under the influence of one or both substances (and the victim often more intoxicated than the offender). The role played by alcohol and drugs in the evolution of this type of situation was best described by Wolfgang in his 1958 study of homicides in Philadelphia, as cited in Mann (1990: 91):

...whether alcohol is present in the victim or offender, lowered inhibitions due to ingestion of alcohol may cause an individual to give vent more freely to pent-up frustrations, tensions, and emotional conflicts that have either built up over a prolonged period of time or that arise within an immediate emotional crisis.

Rejecting her alternatives as unacceptable or unavailable, the woman's reaction to the situation was a violent one.

Although this descriptive profile is based on the findings of an exploratory study, which had an extremely limited sample size, and although it would be inappropriate to conclude that all women in these circumstances commit homicide, other research has also highlighted the importance of the social, situational and interpersonal

factors that have been noted (see, for example, Barnard et al., 1982; Newman, 1982; Totman, 1978; Weisheit, 1986; Silverman and Kennedy, 1988; and Browne, 1986).

It is important to marry the findings of the qualitative component of the study with those of the quantitative component. The quantitative research highlighted, among other things, key findings related to race and marital status. First, Native women were grossly over-represented in the population of women admitted between 1971 and 1990 for murder or manslaughter. The proportion of Native women admitted for these offences increased dramatically from 1971-75 to 1976-80, levelling off after this but never returning to the level it was in the early 1970s. Furthermore, Native women were significantly more likely than non-Native women to have been admitted for manslaughter (as opposed to first or second degree murder); and of all women who were, Native women received significantly lower sentences than non-Native women.

The other key finding was the dramatic increase in the proportion of married women admitted to federal corrections between 1971 and 1990 for murder or manslaughter: from 1971-75 to 1976-80, there was an almost three-fold increase. Although the proportion levelled off during the next decade, it never decreased to the level set in the early 1970s.

It is hypothesized here that this increase in the proportion of Native and married women admitted for murder or manslaughter reflects broader social problems that were highlighted in the qualitative component of the study. More specifically, the results of the interviews highlighted the significance of several key factors in the evolution of murder and manslaughter: women's past physical, sexual and emotional abuse; abuse in a current relationship; the perception of being trapped and having no control over one's situation; feelings of isolation; and the facilitating role of alcohol and drugs in the development of the violent situation.

Faced with relationships and situations in which these women have typically been powerless, and rejecting their alternatives as either unacceptable or unavailable, these women end up with their "backs against the wall." Here, their position changes (perhaps facilitated by alcohol and/or drugs), from one of powerlessness to one of power within the limits of their "real" options, that is, the options that are "real" to them.

It is speculated here that the increase in the proportion of Native women admitted for murder and manslaughter in the late 1970s, and their continued over-representation in this group, may reflect social deterioration particularly acute for Native people. This deterioration may have been precipitated by clashes between

White and Native culture, pulling Native peoples into two different directions. One aggravating factor may have been (and may continue to be) the widespread use of alcohol on Native reserves.

This social deterioration may aggravate Native women's feelings of isolation and lack of control over their own personal situation, a factor consistently emphasized by the women in this study.

Native women in this study who were admitted for manslaughter received sentences that were significantly shorter than those of non-Native women. It is speculated here that with the proliferation of alcohol and drug use among Native people, their violent offences are more likely than those of non-Natives to involve alcohol and/or drugs. This involvement may have served as a mitigating factor in their sentencing (see Mann, 1990).

As to the increase in the late 1970s in the number of married women admitted for murder and manslaughter, and their continuing high representation throughout the 1980s, we may speculate that domestic violence is a contributing factor. Although the proportion of single women admitted outweighed the proportion of married women, we may propose that the estimations of married women are in fact an underestimation of the number who were married **at the time**

of the offence as opposed to at the time of admission.¹

Past research (e.g., Totman, 1978; Barnard et al., 1982; Newman, 1982; Browne, 1986; Weisheit, 1986; and Silverman and Kennedy, 1988) and the current study, too, have pointed to the commonality of domestic violence among women who commit murder or manslaughter. In the last 15 years, as we have seen as increase in the number of women who come into federal institutions for murder or manslaughter, we have also seen an increase in the amount of social attention given to family violence. One result of this increased attention has been somewhat of a decrease in social tolerance of family violence. Another result has been some, though still not sufficient, increases in the resources available to women who find themselves in domestically violent situations (Browne and Williams, 1989).

One might argue that the combined effect of these two factors should have been a decrease in the number of women who commit murder or manslaughter and an increase in women's use of resources for battered women. Although we can assume with some certainty that the latter is true (with, for example, shelters for battered women opening in new areas and their waiting lists growing), the former is

¹ As the victims of violence by women are most often their mates, the number of women who come to federal corrections as "married" may then be less than the number who were married at the time of the offence.

not supported by the data in this study. It is argued here that although more resources are available for women in these situations, they are not **perceived** as being available nor as being viable alternatives.

It is posited here that the perceptions of women who find themselves "trapped" in particular situations are critical. As the interviews illustrated, the mere presence of such resources as safe houses, women's advocacy groups and social service agencies is not enough to ensure their utilization by those who are in most need of help. Rather, these resources must be presented or "advertised" in such a way that they become known to women who need them.

Furthermore, an evaluation of their ability to meet the needs of women in difficult situations is necessary if we are to offer new choices to women who, given the resources available to them and the alternatives, choose to solve a particular problem violently.

On a final note, there continues to be controversy over whether the women's movement has resulted in an increase in women's participation in crime. Some hold that female violence is directly tied to changing female roles (e.g., Adler, 1975 as cited in Walker, 1989), while others (e.g., Weisheit, 1986) have argued that any changes in women's roles that resulted from the women's movement have by-passed the women who are most likely to fill our prisons. The results of this study would tend to support

the latter hypothesis. Women who are typically admitted to federal corrections for murder or manslaughter are not the women who would benefit most from an increase in the number of managerial positions available in corporations. These are women with little education and few skills, a substantial portion of whom are minority women.

Future Research Directions

This study was limited primarily by two factors: i) the limited sample size in the qualitative component, and ii) the limited information available from the quantitative component. Future work in this area may wish to address these limitations by using a larger sample size and supplementing interviews by reviewing subjects' case files for more detailed information than an electronic data base was able to provide. Totman (1978) provides a good example of this type of research.

This study has fleshed out a number of issues that warrant further inquiry. These include the key findings related to race and marital status, and their link to broader social patterns and problems such as family violence.

The relationship between alcohol and drugs and the actual violent incident seems to be an important area of inquiry, as does the women's reliance on alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism.

Critical also are the issues of alternatives and resources and women's perceptions of their availability and viability. Faced with particular situations in which they have typically been victimized and yet have been powerless to stop the abuse, some women may shift from a passive response to an active response. In essence, they take power of the situation in responding in an active, albeit violent, manner. Important here, as highlighted during the interviews, are the women's perceptions of the resources and alternatives available to them, and, also important, of those acceptable to them. It is essential that research take these perceptions seriously, regardless of their objective validity. For, as Jock Young notes:

It is, of course, not only false ideas which are real in their consequences, but half-understood ideas; ideas which are correct at the moment but do not assess the likely long-term outcomes, ideas with a rational kernel yet an undeveloped or misunderstood context: all are real and contradictory in their outcome (Young, 1987: 349).

An important question for further research, then, is not so much whether the woman's perceptions accurately reflect the "real" situation, but rather what can be done to present alternatives and resources to her that are perceived as both acceptable and available. The answers to this question are important so that when a woman chooses to take an active role in defining her situation, that role may be non-violent yet empowering just the same.

Although the exploratory nature of this study

precluded the detailed examination of these issues, a pathway for future research has been suggested.

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APPENDIX A
INFORMATION SHEET

Research Project - The Dynamics of Violent Crime by Women

Purpose of Study

This study will be carried out for my Master's degree in criminology at the University of Ottawa, Ontario.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to an understanding of violent crime by women. I realize that some research has been done on this topic already, but some of these studies have described violent crime by women as irrational acts by irrational people. I would like to present a different picture of violence by women. I will try to do this by looking at the characteristics of women who have committed crimes of violence, the victims of the offences, and the types of situations in which the violence occurred. I would like to find out how these offences happened and who the people were that were involved. I also want to get a picture of the things that led up to the offence and the things that maybe could have prevented it from happening.

I would like to gather this information by interviewing women at the Prison for Women who have committed first or second degree murder or manslaughter. During the interview, I will ask each woman questions about herself, her past

experiences, and her relationships. I will also ask questions about the offence, who the victim was, why the offence may have happened, and how the woman was feeling around the time of the offence. I realize that some of these questions may be upsetting to the woman being interviewed. I will ask questions about her feelings and about a difficult time in her life. Although I do not want to upset her, I would like to learn more about why violent crime by women happens because I think it is a story that should be told. The interviews will not be taped; I will record the answers on paper.

I cannot offer any reward for participating in this study, and I am interested in talking only with those women who are willing to volunteer to participate. Agreeing to participate or refusing to participate will not affect anyone's situation in the institution.

Time Required

Those interested in this study will be asked to answer questions during an interview that will last about one hour to one and one half hours. Participants can refuse to answer any questions or end the interview at any time.

Confidentiality and Right of Refusal

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate at any time. Your cooperation

in this project and the information gathered through it will not affect the conditions or length of your sentence in any way. All information is being gathered for research purposes only. Information about your case will not be shared with the staff of the institution or with the Correctional Service of Canada. Your name, and those of your family and friends, will not appear in any of the reports produced through this project.

" Your name will only be recorded on the consent form; it is necessary, as part of the process of giving consent, that this be done. However, your name will not be appear anywhere else. Instead, I will assign each participant a subject number.

Consent Form

If you agree to take part in this study, I will ask you to sign a consent form. This is necessary because studies that use human subjects require the written consent of the participants. This does not mean that if you take part in this study, you will be asked to do anything that is risky or embarrassing. The University of Ottawa believes that the people involved in this study should be given the chance to formally say that they will or will not participate, and to be informed of their rights to confidentiality and to participate or not participate, by signing a consent form.

If you have any questions, or if you would like to receive a free copy of the results of this study, you can contact me, Tanya Nouwens, or my thesis advisor, Ross Hastings, by calling (613) 564-4070 and leaving a message or by writing to the following address: Department of Criminology, University of Ottawa, 1 Stewart Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5.

APPENDIX BINTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

I would first like to introduce myself to you. My name is Tanya Nouwens. I am a Criminology student at the University of Ottawa. I am originally from Saint John, New Brunswick, but I came to Ottawa to study six years ago. In order to earn my Master's Degree, I have to complete a major research project.

The topic of my research is violent crime by women. I would like to learn about women who commit crimes of violence, what caused the violence, who the victims were, what the life experiences of these women were, and what types of situations the violence occurred in.

I would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. The questions I would like to ask during the interview will likely bring back memories of a very difficult period in your life. I am going to ask you about the actual offence and about the victim(s). I will also ask questions about your past experiences and relationships and about how you were feeling around the time of the offence.

I realize these questions may upset you, but I do think this study is important because we do not know much about women who commit crimes of violence, what problems they were experiencing, who the victims were, and what types of situations the violence happened in. I realize that some

research has been done on this already, but some of these studies have described violent crimes as irrational acts committed by irrational women. I would like to present a different picture of violent crime by women. I believe that this is a story that has to be told so that we can try to understand why some women commit acts of violence.

If at any time you do not want to answer any more questions, please tell me and we will stop the interview. If at any time you want to discuss a question in more detail, or to skip a certain question, that is all right too.

Do you have any questions? Then I will begin the interview.

APPENDIX CINTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

This is to certify that I, _____, hereby agree to participate as a volunteer in this study.

The purpose of the study is to contribute to an understanding of violent crime by women. To do this, information will be gathered, through interviews, about women who have committed a crime of violence, about the victim(s) of this violence, and about the situation in which the offence occurred.

The purpose and method of the study have been explained to me and I understood the explanation. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and I am satisfied with the responses given.

I understand that I am free to refuse to participate and may refuse to answer any of the questions or end the interview at any time. I understand that there is no reward for participating and no penalty for not participating in the study.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary, and the information gathered will be

confidential and used only for research purposes.

I hereby grant permission to the researcher to make use of the information gathered in the interview for research purposes only:

Yes ____ No ____

I would like to receive a copy of this Consent Form:

Yes ____ No ____

I would like to receive a free copy of the study results:

Yes ____ No ____

Signature of Participant

Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the above to the participant in detail, and to the best of my knowledge it was understood.

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX DINTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Subject No. _____

IntroductionPurpose of Research

To understand violent crime, specifically violent crime committed by women.

Purpose of Interview

To gather information about women who have committed a violent crime and the situations in which the violence occurred.

Can you verify that you committed one of the violent crimes that are being looked at in this study?

What offence were you convicted of?

What sentence did you receive? How old were you when you were admitted here? How long have you been here?

Other than this offence that we're going to talk about, have you ever been convicted for other offences?

no

yes - For what kinds of offences?
 violent -
 property -
 other -

How old were you when you were first convicted of an offence?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONSDemographic Data

1. What is your date of birth?
2. What ethnic group do you belong to?
 - Caucasian
 - Native Indian
 - Métis
 - Inuit
 - People of Colour
 - Asian
 - Other

Employment/Education

3. a) What grade did you finish in school?
 - less than high school -
 - high school -
 - post-secondary -
 - other -
b) Did you get this education in prison or on the street?

prison -
street -
4. a) Have you received any type of vocational training (i.e., welding, hairdressing)?

no
yes -

b) Did you get this in prison or on the street?

prison -
street -
5. Did you usually have a job while you were on the outside?

usually employed
often unemployed - Is this because you didn't want to work or for some other reason?

choice

no jobs available

other

6. a) What kind of work have you usually done on the outside?

- clerical
- retail
- restaurant/bar services
- cleaning/domestic
- industrial manual
- managerial/executive
- student
- housewife
- professional
- other

- b) What kind of work are you involved in here?

Family

I'd like to ask you a few questions about your family and your relationship with them.

Mother

7. Is your mother still alive?

yes

no - How old were you when she died? How did she die?

8. Did you live with your mother while you were growing up?

no

yes - For how long?

9. What kind (level) of education does your mother have?

10. Did your mother work while you were growing up?

no

yes - What kind of work did she do?

11. What was your relationship with your mother like?
(i.e. good/close relationship or difficult/strained)

12. What was your mother's relationship with the men/partners in her life like?

Father

13. Is your father still alive?
yes
no - How old were you when he died? How did he die?
14. Did you live with your father while you were growing up?
no
yes - For how long?
15. What kind (level) of education does your father have?
16. Did your father work while you were growing up?
no
yes - What kind of work did he do?
17. What was your relationship with your father like?
(i.e. good/close relationship or difficult/strained)
18. What was your father's relationship with the women/partners in her life like?

Stepparents

19. Do you have stepparents?
no - (go to # 26)
yes - stepmother
stepfather
20. Is he/she still alive?
yes
no - How old were you when he/she died?

21. Did you live with him/her while you were growing up?
no
yes - For how long?
22. What kind (level) of education does he/she have?
23. Did he/she work while you were growing up?
no
yes - What kind of work did he/she do?
24. What was your relationship with your stepmother/father like? (i.e. good/close relationship or difficult/strained)
25. What was the relationship between your stepparent(s) and natural parent(s) like?
26. a) How old were you when you first moved out of your parents' home?
b) What made you decide to move out when you did?

Siblings

27. Do you have any brothers and sisters?
- no - (go to # 29)
- yes - brothers - no.
age
- sisters - no.
age
28. What was your relationship with your brothers and sisters like?

Children (or step-children under her care)

29. Do you have any children or step-children that you were caring for?

no - (go to # 31)

yes - no.

sex and age

30. What was your relationship with your children like?

Married Life

31. Have you ever been married?

no

yes - How old were you when you were first married?

- How many times have you been married?

Personal Victimization

32. Have you ever tried to hurt yourself or end your life in some way?

no

yes - When?

How many times?

Explain.

33. Have you ever been a victim of violence?

no

yes - Can you describe what happened?

How old were you when this happened?

How many times has this happened? How often and for how long?

Did you know the person who did this to you?

no

yes - How?

How did it affect you, physically and psychologically?

How did you deal with this? (i.e. avoidance, counselling, friends)

Did it work? Did some things help you more than others? Were you able to try and stop it? How did you try?

34. Have you ever been abused by a relative, friend, or mate?

no

yes - What was the nature of this abuse?

physical -

sexual -

psychological -

At what age did this first happen?

How often and for how long did this occur?

What was the relationship to you of the person who did this?

How did this affect you, physically and psychologically?

How did you deal with this?

Did it work? Did some things help you more than others? Were you able to try and stop it? How did you try?

Context

Now, I'd like to talk a bit about how you were feeling and what your situation was around the time the offence happened.

35. a) Were you working at that time?

- yes - What kind of work?

no - How were you supporting yourself?

- welfare

- unemployment insurance
- supported by mate

If any of these, was it by choice or because no other jobs were available?

- other

b) Was your mate working at the time?

yes - What kind of work?

no

36. Were you a single parent at the time of the offence?

no

yes - How long had you been a single parent?

37. How old were you when the offence happened?

Intimate Relationships

38. a) What was your marital/intimate status at that time?

- single
- dating
- married (legal or common-law)
- separated
- divorced
- widowed

b) How long had you been (in this particular status)?

39. If not single or widowed

a) What was your relationship like with your husband, friend, or "ex"?

in general -
at time of offence -

b) Was this relationship like your previous ones or was it different?

similar
different - How was this one different?

Support Network

40. Where were you living at that time?
- city/province -
house/rental -
41. a) Who were you living with at that time?
- spouse or mate/intimate
 - children - number, sex and ages
 - both
 - alone
 - parents/guardians (and children?)
 - other relatives (and children?)
 - friends (and children?)
 - other
- b) How long had you been in this particular living arrangement?
42. At the time of the offence, what was your relationship like with your:
- mother -
father -
stepmother/father -
sisters/brothers -
children -
mate -
43. Did you have any friends you felt close to at that time?
- no
- yes - Did you feel that these friends were "within reach" (such as in the same city) or did you feel they were unavailable for some reason?
- within reach
unavailable - why?
44. At the time of the offence did you have any friends or acquaintances (such as clergy) you thought you could rely on?
- no - Why? Because you did not know many people at

the time or was it for some other reason?

yes - In what ways could you rely on these friends?

- support - i) emotional
- ii) financial
- iii) material
- other

Offence

Now, I'd like to ask some questions about the actual offence if I could.

45. Would you please describe what happened.

46. Means/Weapon Used

- gun
- knife
- beating
- suffocation
- strangulation
- neglect/abandonment
- other

47. At what time of day (approximately) did it happen?

- month
- day
- time

48. Where did it happen?

- subject's home
- victim's home
- subject and victim's home (if live together)
- public place - where
- other

49. Did you act alone in committing the offence or was someone else involved?

alone

someone else - Who? Was he/she convicted or charged?

50. What did you do right after it happened?

- nothing
- called police/ambulance
- tried to help victim
- left the scene
- attempted suicide
- other

Victim

51. Did you know the victim?

no
yes

52. Relationship with victim:

a) How did you know the victim, what was the nature of the relationship?

- spouse (legal or common-law)
- ex-spouse
- other intimate
- child
- sibling
- parent
- other family member -
- close friend
- casual friend/acquaintance

b) What was the age of him/her?

c) What was your relationship with him/her like at that time?

d) Had your relationship changed recently either for the better or worse?

no
yes - How?

e) What kind of person do/did you see him/her as?

f) If a spouse or mate, were other relationships with intimates different or similar?

similar
different - How?

53. Do you see the victim as being responsible in any way for what happened?

no

yes - In what way? How was he/she responsible?

Alcohol or Drugs

54. Had he/she taken drugs or alcohol on the day of the incident?

no

yes - What drugs/alcohol were taken?

When were they taken in relation to the incident?

- just prior to incident
- few hours prior
- long before incident
- other

How intoxicated was he/she?

55. Did you take alcohol or drugs on the day of the incident?

no

yes - Which drugs/alcohol and how much?

When?

- just prior to incident
- few hours prior
- long before incident
- other

How intoxicated were you?

56. Do you think alcohol or drugs played any role in what happened?

no

yes - How? Did it make you do it, or let you do it?

57. Do you think you had a drug or alcohol problem?

no -

yes - Did you get seek treatment?

no - why not?

yes - what treatment?

Do you think you still have an alcohol or drug problem?

Problems/Pressures

58. How were you feeling around the time the offence occurred? What were you thinking?

59. Were you suffering from any particular health problems?

Mental Health: yes no

Physical Health: yes no

If yes, nature of problems?

60. Were you feeling any kind of pressure or experiencing any kinds of problems, related either to the victim or to your life in general?

no

yes -

What were the pressures/problems that you were feeling?

What were the causes or sources of these pressures or problems?

What resources did you feel you had to deal with these pressures or problems?

How were you dealing with these pressures or problems?

Did you feel that the victim was responsible in any way for these problems or pressures?

partly wholly not at all

Explain.

61. Communication with victim:

Did you try to talk about your problems and concerns with him/her?

no

yes - What did you discuss (which problems or concerns)?

Do you think that you were able to get through in telling him/her about your thoughts and feelings?

no

yes -

How did he/she respond to these concerns?

Do you see this reaction or lack of a reaction as being a factor in what happened?

yes

no

Explain.

Requests for Help/Aid

62. Around the time of the incident, were you able to talk about your problems with anyone else?

no - Why not?

yes- With whom?

Did you ask for help with your problems?

no

yes - What response did you get?

How did you feel about this response?

Previous Thoughts of Committing Violence

63. Had you thought about committing this kind of act before?

no

yes - Had you thought of it in connection with other (previous) problem situations?

no

yes - What other problem situations?

Had it ever occurred before?

yes

no - Why not? How did you deal with these thoughts in other situations?

How was this particular situation different from other provoking incidents?

Motives/Provocation

64. How would you explain why this incident happened?

65. a) Do you think anything could have made a difference and perhaps prevented the offence from occurring?

no

yes - What would have made a difference in what ended up happening?

b) Do you think that it would have happened eventually anyway?

yes

no

Explain.

Perceived Alternatives

66. Did you consider other alternatives or ways of dealing with your situation before committing this particular act?

no

yes - What other alternatives (i.e. flight, suicide, divorce, abandonment)?

Why were these other alternatives not chosen?

67. If other options or resources had been available to you, do you think the same thing would have happened?

yes - Why?

no - What other options or resources would have made a difference?

Afterthoughts

68. If you were in a similar situation, do you think you would repeat the offence, or be tempted to repeat?

- repeat

- be tempted to repeat

- no - How would you deal with the situation?

69. Was there anything positive that came out of all this (i.e., did it resolve a problem)?

70. a) Why do you think people in general commit acts of violence?

- b) Do you think men and women commit acts of violence for different reasons?

no

yes - Explain.

71. What has the reaction of family and friends been since the incident took place?

72. Are there any programs that you know of that you would see as helpful to someone who has gone through what you've gone through?

73. Is there anything else you would like to discuss or comment on:

a) about yourself?

b) about the study?

THANK YOU !!!!!!!

APPENDIX EPROFILE RESULTS BY TIME PERIOD**A. Time Period 1971-1975**

From 1971 to 1975, 24 women whose major offences were first or second degree murder or manslaughter were admitted to federal corrections.

i) Major Offence

The major admitting offence of most women in the sample was manslaughter; almost 80% (19) of the sample had this as their major offence. The rest of the sample (20.8%, N=5) were admitted with non-capital murder (otherwise referred to as second degree murder in this study) as their major offence.

ii) Year of Admission

Of the 24 women admitted between 1971 and 1975:

- o 1 was admitted in 1971 - major offence: manslaughter;
- o 1 was admitted in 1972 - major offence: manslaughter;
- o 9 were admitted in 1973 - major offences: non-capital murder (1) and manslaughter (8);
- o 2 were admitted in 1974 - major offences: non-capital murder and manslaughter; and
- o 10 were admitted in 1975 - major offences: non-capital murder (3) and manslaughter (7).

So then, during 1971-1975, we see a jump in the number of admissions for murder and manslaughter in the middle and end of the time period. However, the size of the sample is too small to make any strong inferences.

iii) Aggregate Sentence

Five women, or 20.8%, had been sentenced to life imprisonment. We may assume from the data in the preceding subsection that the major offence of these five women was non-capital murder.

For the rest of the sample (their major offence being manslaughter), the aggregate sentence ranged from 2 years to 15 years. The mean aggregate sentence was 6.1 years, with a standard deviation of 3.4.

iv) Race

Three quarters of this sample, or 18 subjects, were Caucasian. Another five (20.8%) were North American Indian, and one (4.2%) was Métis. Grouped by native and non-native distinctions, three quarters (18) of the sample was non-native and one quarter (6) was native.

v) Age

The age of women in this sample ranged from 18 years to 42 years. The mean age was 29.5 years, with a standard deviation of 7.4.

vi) Marital Status

Women in this sample were most likely to be single. The breakdowns of marital status, in decreasing order of frequency, were as follows: single - 45.8% (11); widowed - 20.8% (5); divorced - 12.5% (3); separated - 8.3% (2); common-law 8.3% (2); and legally married - 4.2% (1). Subjects in this sample were least likely to be married.

When the categories of marital status are collapsed, we find that 45.8% (11) of the sample were single; 20.8% (5) were separated or divorced; 20.8% (5) were widowed; and 12.5% (3) were married.

vii) Place of Sentencing

Women in this sample were most likely to have been sentenced in Quebec or Alberta. More specifically, 29.2%, or 7 women, had been sentenced in Quebec (or Quebec region), and the same proportion had been sentenced in Alberta (or the Prairies region). The next most common place of sentencing was British Columbia, or the Pacific region, where 20.8% (5) of the sample had been sentenced. Ontario (or the Ontario region) was next most common, being the place of sentencing for 16.7% (4) of the sample. Subjects were least likely to have been sentenced in Newfoundland (or the Atlantic region), having been the place of sentencing for only one person in the sample.

It would appear from the percentage figures given above

that there are differences in the likelihood of subjects' having been sentenced in one province/region or another. It should be noted, however, that the size of this particular sample is small (N=24) and that the differences in absolute numbers are very small.

viii) Previous Federal Terms

According to the data, no one in this sample had previously served a federal term. Again, though, for the same reason outlined in the preceding subsection, this data is weak. This variable will therefore not become part of the profile that is developed.

Profile - 1971-1975

From the above information, the following profile can be put forward of the female offender who committed murder or manslaughter and was admitted to federal corrections between 1971 and 1975.

She was a Caucasian woman, approximately 30 years of age and single. She was sentenced in Quebec or Alberta (the Ontario or Prairies region), and her major offence was manslaughter. She was sentenced to serve a little more than 6 years, and was likely admitted to federal corrections in 1973 or 1975.

B. Time Period 1976-1980

Sixty-five women whose major offence was first or second degree murder or manslaughter were admitted to federal corrections between 1976 and 1980.

i) Major Offence

The majority of women in this sample were admitted with manslaughter as their major offence; 78.5% (51) of the sample had manslaughter as their major offence. The rest of the sample were divided among first and second degree murder, with 16.9% (11) having second degree murder and 4.6% (3) having first degree murder as their major admitting offence.

ii) Year of Admission

Of the 65 women admitted between 1976 and 1980:

- o 7 were admitted in 1976 - major offences: manslaughter;
- o 16 were admitted in 1977 - major offences: first degree murder (1), second degree murder (2) and manslaughter (13);
- o 15 were admitted in 1978 - major offences: second degree murder (5) and manslaughter (10);
- o 11 were admitted in 1979 - major offences: first degree murder (1), second degree murder (3) and manslaughter (7); and
- o 16 were admitted in 1980 - major offences: first degree

murder (1), second degree murder (1) and manslaughter (14).

During the period 1976 to 1980, the number of admissions for murder and manslaughter increased dramatically in the second year (1977) and remained at that level with a slight decrease in 1979.

iii) Aggregate Sentence

Fourteen women (21.5%) in this sample, all of whom had committed first or second degree murder, were sentenced to life imprisonment. No one who had manslaughter as their major offence received a life sentence.

For the rest of the sample, their major offence being manslaughter, the aggregate sentence ranged from 2 years to 12 years. The mean aggregate sentence was 4.8 years, with a standard deviation of 2.4.

iv) Race

Just over half of this sample, or 34 women, were Caucasian. Another twenty women (30.8%) were North American Indian, and seven (10.8%) were Métis. Two women (3.1%) were Black, and another two (3.1%) were of other races.

Grouping according to native and non-native distinctions, we find that 58.5% (38) of the sample was non-native and 41.5% (27) was native.

v) Age

The mean age of women in this sample was 30 years, with a standard deviation of 9.7. Ages ranged from 18 years to 64 years.

vi) Marital Status

Women in this sample were most likely to be single. Breakdown by marital status, in decreasing order of frequency, gives the following results: single - 35.4% (23); legally married - 21.5% (14); common-law - 12.3% (8); separated - 12.3% (8); widowed - 10.8% (7); and divorced - 7.7% (5).

Collapsing some of these categories, we find that more than one third of the sample (35.4%) were single; another third (33.8% or 22) were married; 20% (13) were separated or divorced; and 10.8% (7) were widowed.

vii) Place of Sentencing

Women in this group were most likely to have been sentenced in Ontario; 27.7% (18) were sentenced there. Alberta was also a common province of sentencing, with 24.6% (16) sentenced there. The next most common place of sentencing was Quebec, where 16.9% (11) of the sample had been sentenced.

Other places of sentencing, by province and in decreasing order of frequency, were as follows: British

Columbia - 10.8% (7); Manitoba - 7.7% (5); Nova Scotia - 6.2% (4); Saskatchewan - 3.1% (2); New Brunswick - 1.5% (1); and Newfoundland - 1.5% (1).

Grouping the places of sentencing by region, we find that women in this sample were most likely to have been sentenced in the Prairies region; 35.4% or 23 women were sentenced there. Ontario was the region of sentencing for 27.7% (18) of the sample. Quebec was next most common, with 16.9% (11) of the sample sentenced there. Approximately 11% (7) of the sample had been sentenced in the Pacific region. The Atlantic region was the least likely region of sentencing, with only 9.2% (6) of the sample sentenced there.

viii) Previous Federal Terms

The vast majority (93.8%) of women in this sample had never before served a federal sentence. Only 6.2%, or four women, had previously been given a federal sentence; these four had only received one other federal term.

Profile - 1976-1980

The typical female offender who committed murder or manslaughter and was admitted to federal corrections between 1976 and 1980 was a Caucasian woman, approximately 30 years of age and single. She was likely sentenced in Ontario, but, regionally, she was most likely sentenced in the

Prairies. Her major offence was manslaughter, and she was sentenced to serve just less than five years. She was likely admitted to federal corrections in 1977 or 1980. Her major offence, for which she received her first federal sentence, was the most serious offence she had ever committed.

C. Time Period 1981-1985

Between 1981 and 1985, 89 women whose major offence was first or second degree murder or manslaughter were admitted to federal corrections.

i) Major Offence

Just over two thirds (68.5% or 61) of the women in this sample were admitted with manslaughter as their major offence; this includes two women whose major offence was murder reduced to manslaughter. Approximately one quarter (25.8% or 23) had a major offence of second degree murder, and a small proportion (5.6% or 5 women) had first degree murder as their major offence.

ii) Year of Admission

Of the 89 women admitted between 1981 and 1985:

- o 13 were admitted in 1981 - major offences: second degree murder (5) and manslaughter (8);
- o 20 were admitted in 1982 - major offences: first degree

murder (1), second degree murder (3) and manslaughter (16);

- o 19 were admitted in 1983 - major offences: first degree murder (3), second degree murder (1) and manslaughter (15);
- o 17 were admitted in 1984 - major offences: first degree murder (1), second degree murder (6) and manslaughter (10); and
- o 20 were admitted in 1985 - major offences: second degree murder (8) and manslaughter (12).

During the period 1981 to 1985, there was a fairly dramatic increase in the number of admissions for murder and manslaughter in the second year (1982). The number of admissions then remained fairly steady, with a slight decrease in 1984.

iii) Aggregate Sentence

Twenty-six women in the sample (or 29.2%) were sentenced to life imprisonment. This total is less than one would have expected, given the data in the preceding subsection. That is, 28 women had a major offence of first or second degree murder, for which the minimum sentence was life imprisonment, but only 26 women actually received a life sentence. This may be explained by the fact that data was missing on four cases in the sample.

No one who had manslaughter as their major offence

received a life sentence.

For the rest of the sample, whose major offence was manslaughter, the aggregate sentence ranged from 1 year to 9 years, with a mean of 4.4 years. The standard deviation was 2.

iv) Race

Just less than two thirds (64%) of this sample, or 57 women, were Caucasian. Just less than one quarter (23.6% or 21) were North American Indian, 9% (8) were Métis, and one (1.1%) was Inuit. Two women (2.2%) were of other races.

Grouping the sample by native and non-native, we find that about two thirds (66.3%) of the sample was non-native and one third (33.7%) were native (59 and 30 women respectively).

v) Age

Ages of women in this sample ranged from 17 years to 62 years. The mean age was 29.6 years, with a standard deviation of 10.1.

vi) Marital Status

Women in this sample were most likely to be single. Breakdown by marital status, in decreasing order of frequency, was as follows: single - 47.2% (42); legally married - 13.5% (12); common-law 10.1% (9); divorced - 10.1%

(9); separated - 9% (8); and widowed - 7.9% (7). Data was missing on two subjects.

Collapsing some of these categories, we find that almost half (47.2%) of the sample were single; almost one quarter (23.6%) were married; 19.1% were separated or divorced; and 7.9% were widowed.

vii) Place of Sentencing

Women in this group were most likely to have been sentenced in Quebec. More specifically, 28.1% (25) were sentenced in Quebec. Ontario was the next most common province of sentencing: 18% (16) of the sample had been sentenced there.

Other provinces of sentencing, in decreasing order of frequency, were as follows: British Columbia - 13.5% (12); Manitoba - 12.4% (11); Alberta - 10.1% (9); Saskatchewan - 9% (8); Nova Scotia - 3.4% (3); and the Yukon Territory - 2.2% (2). New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland were the least likely places of sentencing, with only one person sentenced in each of those provinces.

Grouping the places of sentencing by region, we find that women in this sample were most likely to have been sentenced in the Prairies region; 31.5% (28) were sentenced there. Quebec was the next most common region of sentencing, with 28.1% (25) of the sample sentenced in that region. Ontario was the region of sentencing for 18% (16)

of the sample. Approximately 15.7% (14) of the sample had been sentenced in the Pacific region. The Atlantic region was the least likely region of sentencing, with only 6.7% (6) of the sample sentenced there.

viii) Previous Federal Terms

The majority (89.9% or 80) of the women in this sample had never before served a federal sentence. Of the rest, 8 (9%) had previously served one federal term, and 1 (1.1%) had served two previous federal sentences.

Profile - 1981-1985

From the above information, the following profile is presented of the female offender who committed murder or manslaughter and was admitted to federal corrections between 1981 and 1985.

She was a Caucasian woman, approximately 30 years of age and single. She was sentenced in Quebec, but, regionally, she was most likely sentenced in the Prairies. Her major offence was manslaughter, and she was sentenced to serve just less than 4.5 years. She was likely admitted to federal corrections in 1982, 1983 or 1985. Her major offence, for which she received her first federal sentence, was the most serious offence she had ever committed.

D. Time Period 1986-1990

Between 1986 and 1990, 115 women whose major offence was first or second degree murder or manslaughter were admitted to federal corrections.

i) Major Offence

The majority (72.2% or 83) of women in this sample were admitted with manslaughter as their major offence; this includes one woman whose major offence was murder reduced to manslaughter. Approximately 19% (or 22 women) had a major offence of second degree murder, and 8.7% (or 10 women) had first degree murder as their major offence.

ii) Year of Admission

Of the 115 women admitted between 1986 and 1990:

- o 21 were admitted in 1986 - major offences: second degree murder (4) and manslaughter (17);
- o 24 were admitted in 1987 - major offences: first degree murder (2), second degree murder (6) and manslaughter (16);
- o 26 were admitted in 1988 - major offences: first degree murder (2), second degree murder (2) and manslaughter (22);
- o 25 were admitted in 1989 - major offences: first degree murder (2), second degree murder (4) and manslaughter (19); and

- o 19 were admitted in 1990 - major offences: first degree murder (4), second degree murder (6) and manslaughter (19).

During the time period 1986 to 1990, there was a slight increase in the number of admissions for murder and manslaughter, peaking in the middle of this period (1988). At the end of this period, however, in 1990, we see the lowest number of admissions since the previous time period (1981-1985).

iii) Aggregate Sentence

Thirty-one women in the sample (or 27%) were sentenced to life imprisonment. This total is again less than one would have expected, given the data in the preceding subsection. That is, 32 women had a major offence of first or second degree murder, for which the minimum sentence was life imprisonment, but only 31 women actually received a life sentence. This may be explained by the fact that data on three cases in the sample was missing.

One woman whose major offence was manslaughter received a life sentence.

For the rest of the manslaughter cases, the mean aggregate sentence was 4.9 years with a standard deviation of 2.8. The shortest aggregate sentence was 1.4 years, and the longest was 15 years.

iv) Race

Most women in this sample (61.7% or 71) were Caucasian. Another quarter (25.2% or 29) were North American Indian, 5.2% (6) were Métis, and two (1.7%) was Inuit. Three women (2.6%) in the sample were Asiatic, and three (2.6%) were Black. Data on one subject was missing.

Grouping the sample into native and non-native categories, we find that about just over two thirds (67.8%) of the sample was non-native and just less than one third (32.2%) were native (78 and 37 women respectively).

v) Age

The mean age of women in this sample was 33.1 years, with a range from 19 years to 68 years. The standard deviation was 10.9.

vi) Marital Status

Almost half of the women in this sample were single. Breakdown by marital status, in decreasing order of frequency, was as follows: single - 47% (54); common-law - 13% (15); legally married - 11.3% (13); widowed - 10.4% (12); divorced - 7% (8); and separated - 2.6% (3). Data was missing on 8.7% (10) of the sample.

Collapsing some of these categories, we find that almost half (47%) of the sample were single; almost one quarter (24.3%) were married; 9.6% were separated or

divorced; and 10.4% were widowed.

vii) Place of Sentencing

Women in this group were most likely to have been sentenced in Ontario (28.7% or 33 women). Quebec was the next most common province of sentencing: 25.2% (29) of the sample had been sentenced there.

Other provinces of sentencing, in decreasing order of frequency, were as follows: Saskatchewan - 11.3% (13); Alberta - 10.4% (12); British Columbia - 10.4% (12); Manitoba - 8.7% (10); Nova Scotia - 4.3% (5); and the Northwest Territories - 0.9% (1).

Grouping the places of sentencing by region, we find that women in this sample were most likely to have been sentenced in the Prairies region; almost one third (31.3% or 36 women) were sentenced in the Prairies. Ontario was the next most common region of sentencing, with 28.7% (33) of the sample sentenced in that region. Quebec was also a common place of sentencing; 25.2% (29) of the sample were sentenced in Quebec. Approximately 10.4% (12) of the sample had been sentenced in the Pacific region. The Atlantic region was the least likely region of sentencing, with only 4.3% (5) of the sample sentenced there.

viii) Previous Federal Terms

The vast majority (93% or 107) of the women in this

sample had never before served a federal sentence. Of the rest, 6 (5.2%) had previously served one federal term, and 2 (1.7%) had served two previous federal sentences.

Profile - 1986-1990

The typical female offender who committed murder or manslaughter and was admitted to federal corrections between 1986 and 1990 was a Caucasian woman, approximately 33 years of age and single. She was sentenced in Ontario, but, regionally, she was most likely sentenced in the Prairies. Her major offence was manslaughter, and she was sentenced to serve just less than 5 years. She was likely admitted to federal corrections some time between 1987 and 1989. Her major offence, for which she received her first federal sentence, was the most serious offence she had ever committed.