


Alberta Facts

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In Justice to Women

March 8th is International Women's Day. The day has come to symbolize women's struggles throughout history. It was chosen in remembrance of the famous March 8, 1857 strike in New York when women textile workers stopped work and marched through the streets to protest poor working conditions. Many women were unjustly and brutally beaten and trampled upon by the police force.

Almost 150 years later women continue to face the force of the law. As victims, as the accused, and even as lawyers, women are subject to a male-dominated legal system.

In justice to the women of Alberta we take a look at some of the facts.

- In Alberta on any given day there are 200 women awaiting trial or serving sentences in correctional centres.

- Women make up about eight per cent of all admissions to provincial/territorial correctional facilities in Canada. In Alberta women make up seven per cent of admissions to custody. Women account for about 17 per cent of all admissions to probation. In 1990 18 per cent of all youths charged with criminal code and other federal statute offences were female.

- Since 1986 the number of female youths charged by police has increased by 29 per cent.

- In Canada (1989/90) about one-quarter of all female admissions to provincial/territorial correctional facilities were from Alberta.

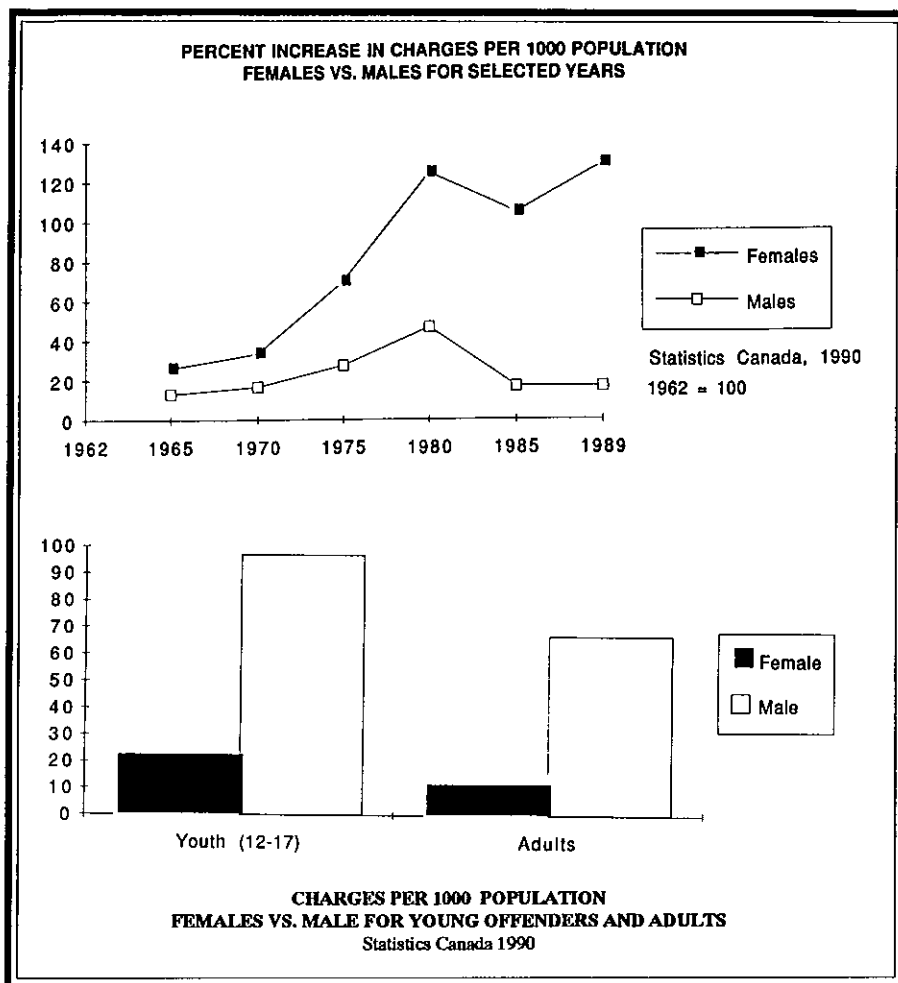


- Of the total female admissions in Canada, 30 per cent were for fine default. Alberta recorded the second-highest proportion of female inmates admitted for fine default (39 per cent). Only Saskatchewan topped that proportion with 47 per cent.

- Generally, women are charged with less violent and less serious offences than men. For example, in

1989/90 almost 40 per cent of all charges laid against women were for shoplifting. Of women admitted to provincial custody, 63 per cent were sentenced to 30 days or less, compared to 40 per cent of men.

- About 45 per cent of Alberta women admitted to custody are native. In Edmonton 70 per cent of women in custody are native. The native population



- 82 per cent of federally sentenced women have been sexually or physically abused compared to 72 per cent of provincially sentenced women and 90 per cent of all aboriginal women in custody.

- 69 per cent of women prisoners interviewed for the Creating Choices report stated substance abuse had played a major part in the offence. Two-thirds of the women have children mostly under the age of 16. About 25 per cent of the women interviewed had kids under the age of five. Two-thirds of the women had not completed high school or did not have any training or educational qualifications beyond high school.

- A 1993 study of the employment and training needs of federally and provincially sentenced women indicated that children are most often left in the care of the spouse/partner or another family member,

in Canada is about four per cent of the total population. Nationally one in seven aboriginal offenders admitted to provincial/territorial facilities were women whereas one in 14 non-aboriginal offenders were women. "As it stands now, an aboriginal woman is more likely to go to prison than she is to go to university. This is a reality we will not accept for our future." (A quote from a native woman included in the 1990 Creating Choices - the report of the task force on federally sentenced women.)

- The majority of charges against aboriginal women include fine default, failure to appear and failure to comply with a court order.

- Alberta accounts for more aboriginal women admitted to custody than any other province or territory(39 per cent) compared to Saskatchewan (25 per cent), Ontario (19 per cent), B.C. (seven per cent), Manitoba (six per cent), Quebec (two per cent), and Northwest Territories (one per cent) and the Yukon (one per cent).

while the mother is in prison; less than 11 per cent had their children placed in government care.

- Almost half of federally sentenced women are not repeat offenders. One-third of female youths appearing in youth court had prior convictions compared to almost half of the male youths.

- The first female inmate in a Canadian Penitentiary System dates back to 1835 when a female unit was established in the North wing of the newly open Kingston Penitentiary. In the early 1900s a separate women's building was built within the perimeter of the penitentiary and in 1925 construction began on the women's prison a short distance from the Kingston Penitentiary.

- 44 per cent of women in federal prison are between 20 and 30 years of age; 37 per cent 30-40; 13 per cent 40-50; three per cent 50-60; one per cent over 60 and one per cent under 20 years of age.

in Alberta the Fort Saskatchewan Correctional Centre has 96 beds for mostly long-term female offenders; Bow River Correctional Centre has 16 beds, Lethbridge Correctional Centre has 28 beds and Belmont Correctional Centre has another 25 beds. There are 99 beds for females available altogether at four remand centres (Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat and Red Deer).

of lawyers are women. The University of Alberta law school student population has 42 per cent women.

• A survey by the Law Society of Alberta had over half the women respondents say they had experienced discrimination from other lawyers on the basis of sex (51 per cent of active society members responded to the survey). While full time female and male lawyers worked the same number of hours, women earned considerably less. The survey

•••Women as victims of crime•••

•1988 General Social Survey by Statistics Canada found young men between the age of 15-24 are most likely to be the victims of violent crime (214 per 1,000 population), however, when marital status is taken into consideration, the highest rate is among separated and divorced women (265 per 1,000 population).

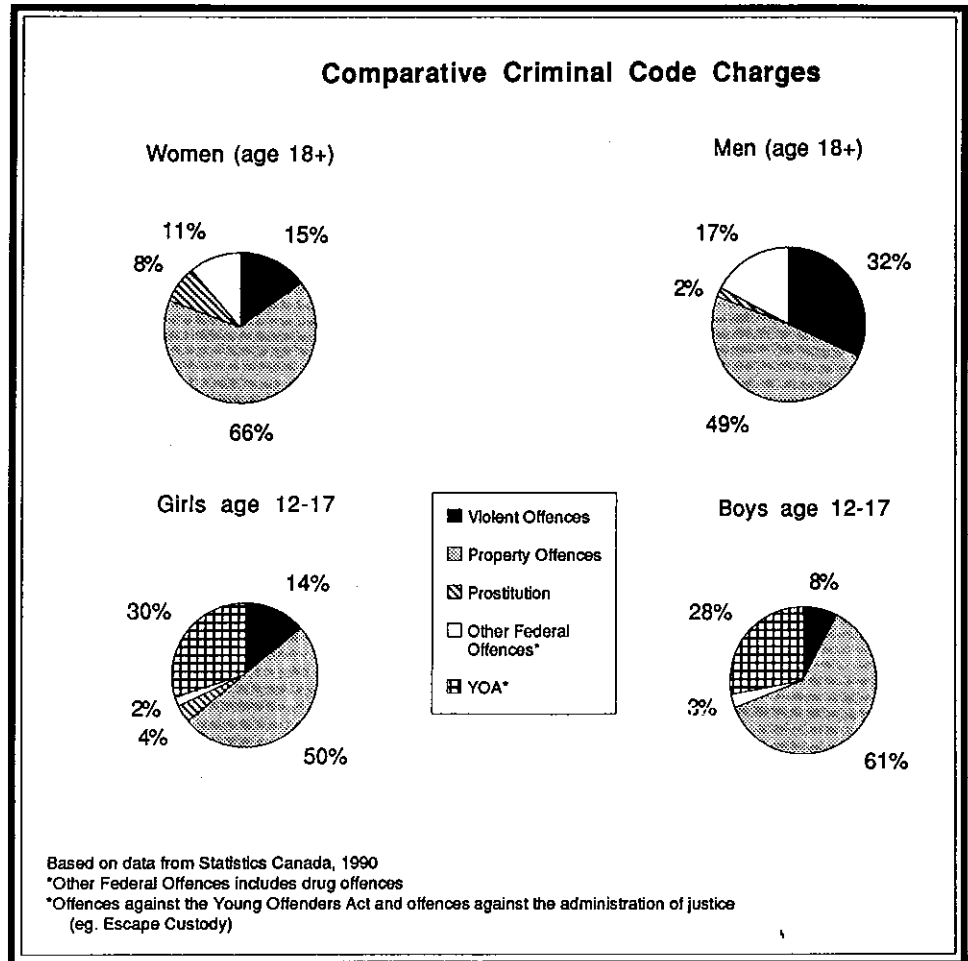
•In 1988 57 per cent of all female homicide victims were killed by a family member, compared to 24 per cent of males.

•From 1962 to 1986 the incidence of rape has gone from 3.1 per 100,000 population to 10.3 per 100,000 population an increase of 290 per cent. The increase in the incidence of indecent assault has also risen over the same time period by 62 per cent.

•The family violence committee of the Mayor's Task Force on Safer Cities reported on average that four men are charged every day in Edmonton for assaulting their spouse. City police estimate that only 10 per cent of assaults are reported.

•••Women in the legal profession•••

•In 1991, 38 per cent of people admitted to the Alberta bar were women. In Edmonton 22 per cent



also found over 80 per cent of women experienced unequal opportunities for career advancement; only 53 per cent of female respondents had children and the average age of respondents was 35.

•Women are increasing their representation in the police forces, from less than one per cent in the early 1970s to five per cent by 1988. The RCMP announced a goal of having 20 per cent women by the year 2013.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues

Telephone: 422-0668

Identify issues and provide information to public.

Alberta Family and Social Services: Family Court Services

Telephone: 427-8343
Family Court Service assists people who want to make an application to family court for custody or access, spousal or child maintenance, etc.

Alberta Human Rights Commission Telephone: 427-7661
Promotes understanding and compliance with the Individual's Rights Protection Act.

Alberta Status of Women Action Committee

Telephone: 421-0306
Provides advocacy and referral.

Alberta Women's Secretariat Telephone: 422-4927
Provides information to women regarding legal, social, cultural, public and personal rights and responsibilities.

Dial-a-Law Telephone: 1-800-332-1091 (Toll Free)
Offers pre-recorded tapes which contain general information about the law, legal rights and legal procedures. (Some topics available in Spanish, Polish, Vietnamese, Cantonese, and Punjabi.)

Edmonton John Howard Society Telephone: 428-7590
Services to offenders, ex-offenders, their families, and those at risk of being in conflict with the law.

Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton Telephone: 421-1175
Offers support to individuals (especially women) in conflict with the law.

Lawyer Referral Service Telephone: 1-800-661-1095 (Toll Free)
Assists people in finding a lawyer when they are financially able to retain one but do not know where to call.

L.E.A.F. (Women's Legal Education and Action Fund)
Telephone: 462-5172
Promotes equality for women through public education and litigation.

Legal Aid Society of Alberta Telephone: 427-7575
Provides legal services for eligible low income people. Fees vary depending on legal aid, tariff and work involved.

Legal Resource Centre Telephone: 492-5732
1-800-232-1961 (outside Edmonton)
Provides legal education, information, referrals, speakers bureau, and library for the general public.

Native Counselling Services of Alberta
Telephone: 423-2141
Provides legal information and counselling services for Native and non-Native people.

Police Service, Victim Services Unit
24 hour crisis callout 421-2213
North Division 478-2107
South Division 428-4447
West and Downtown Division 428-3320
Provide assistance to victims of crime or tragedy.

Salvation Army Correctional and Justice Services
Telephone: 424-4527
Provide support to those affected by the justice system.

Student Legal Services of Edmonton
Telephone: 492-2226
Provide free legal assistance as agents in Criminal and Civil Court to people who do not qualify for Legal Aid and are not able to afford a lawyer.

The Support Network (was Community Connections)
Telephone: 424-3242
Crisis intervention services, suicide prevention services, information/resource line and directory.

W.A.V.E.S. Women Against Violence Establishing Support Telephone: 428-9393
Provides support for women and their children, including legal advocacy and support through the judicial system.

A number of these organizations have offices outside Edmonton. Check in your local directory.

This issue of Alberta Facts was compiled and written by Alison MacDonald, Sheila Kushniruk, Ivone Martins and Pearl Bennett of the Edmonton Social Planning Council. Assistance was provided by the Elizabeth Fry Society the Alberta Law Society, the Legal Resource Centre and the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues. For more information about the Edmonton Social Planning Council, its regular publication First Reading and Alberta Facts, or other publications, please contact:

Edmonton Social Planning Council
#41, 9912-106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 1C5
Telephone: 423-2031
FAX:425-6244

