

Indigenous Youth: The Tragic Crisis of Crime and Education in Canada

A Statistical Research Analysis

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Introduction

In the past two decades, the number of individuals imprisoned in Canada has decreased but the number of Indigenous people in prison continues to rise (Ahmad, 2023). Within the Canadian society, the persistent issue of mass incarceration among Indigenous populations reflects a complex interplay of historical injustices and socioeconomic risks. This research essay examines the interconnected dimensions of Indigenous mass incarceration in Canada, exploring literature related to social disorganization theory and risk factors for crime. The following essay will argue lack of educational attainment is a key risk factor that influences crime trends amongst Indigenous youth. In the pursuit of understanding and rectifying these disparities, the following essay emphasizes the critical need for policies that go beyond funding allotments and increased access to resources. Policy recommendations coincide with UNDRIP recommendations for increased collaboration between federal governments and Indigenous schools to establish education standards. This essay aims to contribute to a framework that fosters collaboration and ultimately works towards improvement of education quality and access to combat the overrepresentation of Indigenous individuals within the Canadian justice system.

Literature Review

Over two decades ago, the Supreme Court emphasized the alarming overrepresentation of Indigenous individuals in Canadian prisons, deeming it a crisis within the criminal legal system (R. v Gladue, 1999). In subsequent years, this crisis has significantly worsened (Ahmad, 2023). As of December 2021, the proportion of Indigenous individuals in prisons reached an unprecedented high, constituting 32% of the federal prison population (Canada Senate, 2022). In contrast, Indigenous people make up only 5% of Canada's total population (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2022). Similarly, in 2021, male Indigenous youth represented 48% of

youth male admissions to custody, while female Indigenous youth represented 62% of youth female admissions to custody (Statistics Canada, 2022). Due to these staggering statistics, the following research paper will emphasize the importance of research into Indigenous youth criminality. The challenge of Indigenous youth incarceration is a focal point in numerous criminological, sociological, and anthropological discussions (Manning, 2018). Yet, there exists a gap in understanding and policy that address causes of this problem. This research incorporates a thorough review of pertinent literature, presenting qualitative results from thematic coding of research findings obtained from a variety of academic and government resources.

Risk Factors

The problem of over-incarceration among Indigenous communities extends as far back as 1977 indicating that Indigenous juvenile delinquency was three times higher than the national youth average (Manning, 2018). Despite the Youth Criminal Justice Act that was implemented in 2002, that intended to divert youth from incarceration, Indigenous individuals consistently face elevated levels of imprisonment (Manning, 2018). Longitudinal studies on the 'age-crime curve' indicate that engagement in criminal activities reaches its highest point during teenage years then gradually declines into adulthood (Rieger et al, 2020). In contrast to non-Indigenous peers, Indigenous individuals face increased challenges across different aspects and tiers of the justice system. This includes lack of community supervision, overrepresentation in maximum-security facilities, increased likelihood of recidivism, and higher risk/need assessments (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2022; Gutierrez & Chadwick, 2020).

Research has suggested criminogenic tendencies are linked to Indigenous backgrounds and socioeconomic status (Perley-Roberston et al, 2016). Indigenous individuals report more instances of negative childhood histories, including employment barriers, abuse, poor education,

and behavioural learning difficulties (McCuish & Corrado, 2017; Perley-Roberston et al, 2016; Rieger et al, 2020). Risk factors have highlighted the relationship between criminogenic trends and domains such as family circumstances, education, personality, and attitudes (Dellar et al, 2022; Rieger et al, 2023). These risk domains have been shown to have a disproportionate effect on Indigenous youth in comparison to non-Indigenous, specifically within the areas of education, and family circumstances (McCuish & Corrado, 2017; Dellar et al, 2022; Rieger et al, 2020; Perley-Robertson et al, 2019). These risks suggest Indigenous disadvantage begins early in life, severely altering their future (Perley-Roberston et al, 2016). Gaining insight into the criminogenic risks associated with Indigenous youth is a crucial starting point in formulating policy (Dellar et al, 2022).

Social Disorganization Theory

Many studies have exhibited that community characteristics are linked with crime and victimization (Gilbert & Wright, 2023). Commonly, research in this area is grounded in social disorganization theory (Gilbert & Wright, 2023; Nielsen & Robyn, 2003). Social disorganization theory hypothesizes that crime and deviance are significantly influenced by the environment in which individuals live (Shaw & McKay, 1942). The theory suggests that certain neighborhoods or communities characterized by social disorganization, marked by factors such as poverty, residential instability, and a lack of social cohesion, are more prone to higher crime rates (Daoud et al, 2017). According to Shaw and McKay, these environmental factors weaken informal social controls and contribute to the breakdown of community structures, creating an environment conducive to criminal behavior (Shaw & McKay, 1942). This theory offers a valuable framework to explore the link between education and crime among Indigenous individuals. Within this context, lower levels of education is considered a factor to criminogenic tendencies

because of its intrinsic link to the overall social fabric of a community. Inadequate education opportunities can contribute to a breakdown in social cohesion, leaving individuals with fewer positive social bonds and opportunities for advancement (Gilbert & Wright, 2023). Limited access to education may hinder socialization processes, weaken community bonds, and potentially increase the likelihood of criminal behavior (Gilbert & Wright, 2023). The following research will highlight the significance of education and its connection to crime through a provincial comparison of custodial admissions and educational attainment.

Description of Strategies to Decrease Crime

School Based Crime Prevention Programs

There are a total 49 crime prevention projects in Canada geared towards Indigenous individuals (Cortes & Dunbar, 2021). Most of them include programs such as the Leadership and Resiliency Program, Youth Inclusion Program, Pathways to Education, Reconnecting Youth, and Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (Cortes & Dunbar, 2021). These initiatives are nation-wide with a concentration of programs in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba (Cortes & Dunbar, 2021). Around one-third of the projects were situated in Northern Canada, with half of them in remote or isolated communities (Cortes & Dunbar, 2021).

The programs uphold a significant presence in schools (33%) and community, recreation, and youth facility settings (37%) (Cortes & Dunbar, 2021). The service elements encompass mentoring, counseling, parenting support, educational services, substance use education or treatment, and individual case management (Cortes & Dunbar, 2021). Many of these programs are focused on the risk factors listed from previous literature and attempt to provide remedies to the impact of colonial history on Indigenous communities. The challenges encountered in implementing these programs included school reluctance, high staff turnover, difficulty

integrating project components into the education curriculum, weak formal relationships, and a limited understanding of the program (Cortes & Dunbar, 2021). Solutions to these challenges were stated to include building trust and positive communication between the government and Indigenous leaders and schools (Cortes & Dunbar, 2021).

Funding and Educational Investments

The Canadian federal government has made substantial financial commitments to enhance primary and secondary education on reserves, allocating \$2.6 billion over five years from 2016 to 2021 (Parliament of Canada, 2019). This funding encompasses various initiatives such as language and cultural programs, literacy and numeracy programs, and special needs education. Moreover, in the 2019 federal budget, an additional \$334 million was earmarked over five years to "preserve, promote, and revitalize" Indigenous languages (Parliament of Canada, 2019). In the 2020-2021 fiscal year, around \$2.3 billion was allocated for elementary and education programs (Indigenous Services Canada, 2021). Then in 2021, the Government of Canada announced an additional \$1.7 billion over five years to improve education on reserves, supporting First Nations' control over education for students (Indigenous Services Canada, 2021).

Despite these investments, the First Nations Education Capital Needs Assessment of 2020 highlights a pressing need for further support. Over the next five years, First Nations are projected to require \$2.14 billion in capital funding for new school construction, and \$824 million for investment in teacherages (Assembly of First Nations, 2020). Despite extensive funding throughout the past 10 years, there have been minimal improvements in graduation rates. The following research will advocate that funding must be allotted alongside federal supervision of schools so curriculum and access can be improved in a sustainable way.

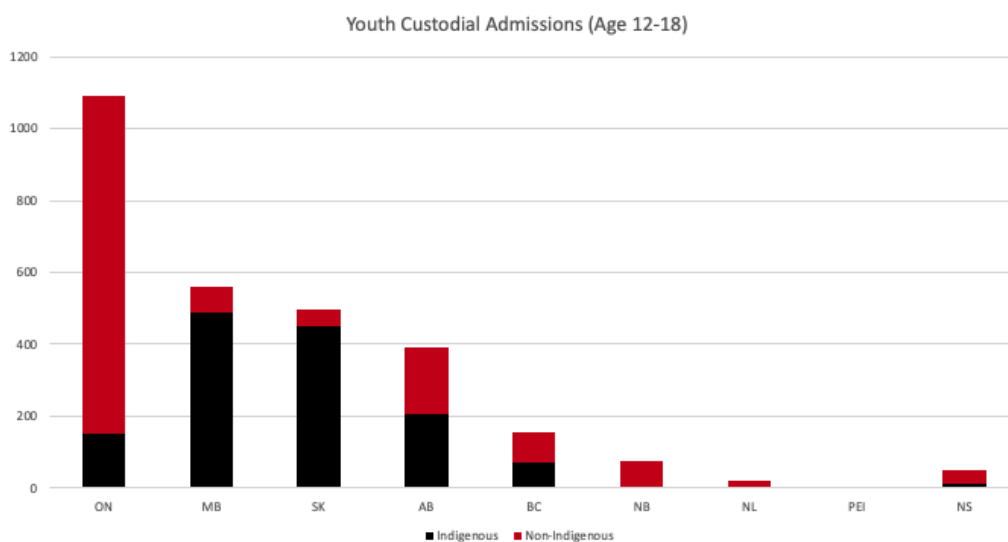
Methodology

The methodology employed in this analysis relies on government-backed research, with a primary focus on provincial variations between educational attainment and custodial admissions. Key variables include youth (12-18) and adults (19+), Indigenous status (specifically registered and treaty Indians) and non-Indigenous, and distinctions between education on and off reservations. The analysis also considers age as a significant variable influencing custodial admissions and criminogenic tendencies, acknowledging the typical peak in crime during adolescence (Rieger et al, 2020). Custodial admissions data for the fiscal period 2021/2022 are derived from various sources compiled within a Statistics Canada report (Statistics Canada, 2022). Total custodial admissions track the entry of individuals into various forms of custody or community supervision within the fiscal year. However, the same person could potentially be counted multiple times if they transition between legal statuses or re-enter the system during that period (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Indigenous education rates, collected from census data in 2021, were analyzed based on respondents with a high school diploma or equivalency and those without a high school certificate. Using the following calculation:
$$\left(\frac{\text{Total High School Diploma or Equivalency}}{\text{Total High School Diploma or Equivalency} + \text{No High School Certificate}} \right) * 100 = \text{Graduation Rate}$$
 This calculation was conducted provincially and for the overall sample of treaty status indigenous individuals living on and off reservations. For non-indigenous education rates, data from the 2019/2020 fiscal year was utilized, drawing from the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program. SPSS and Excel were used as the analytical tool to examine and establish the relationships between the variables under investigation.

Descriptive Statistics

After analyzing the results, the data reveals significant provincial variations in custodial admissions for Indigenous youth aged 12-18, ranging from a minimum of 0 admissions in Prince Edward Island (PEI) to a maximum of 487 in Manitoba (Statistics Canada, 2022). Recidivism rates among Indigenous across Canada are notably high at a rate of 69.8% (Statistics Canada, 2022). Comparatively, non-Indigenous youth show lower custodial admissions, with a minimum of 5 in PEI and a maximum of 938 in Ontario, accompanied by a recidivism rate of 45.9% (Statistics Canada, 2022).



In terms of graduation rates for the Indigenous population there is a range from 47% in Manitoba to 75% in PEI. The average education rate for Indigenous youth is 49% on reserves and 67% off reserves. Graduation rates for non-Indigenous youth vary between 82% in Manitoba and 94% in PEI (Statistics Canada, 2022). The average education rate nation-wide for non-Indigenous youth is notably higher at 85% (Statistics Canada, 2022). These findings highlight both the disparities within Indigenous populations across provinces and the distinctions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in terms of custodial admissions, recidivism, graduation rates, and education rates.

Results

Indigenous Youth Custodial Admissions and Education

Upon conducting a regression, a substantial correlation emerged between Indigenous education and custodial admissions. The results highlight a highly significant relationship, denoted by a p-value below 0.001, indicative of a connection unlikely to be attributable to random chance. Consequently, the analysis concludes that the impact of education on criminal involvement within the Indigenous community is statistically significant. The unstandardized B coefficient of -19.454 elucidates that an increase in education is associated with a decrease in custodial admissions, indicating a negative relationship between the two variables. These findings stress the pivotal role of educational interventions as potential mitigators of crime among Indigenous populations.

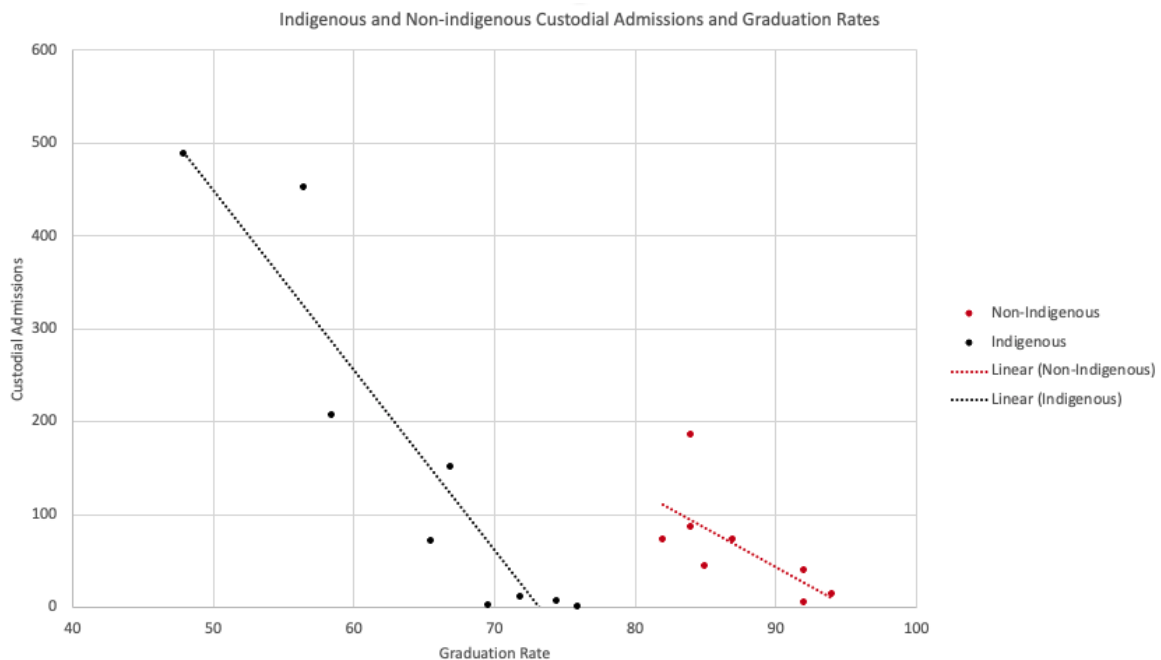
Indigenous Adult Custodial Admissions and Education

Through a correlation, a statistically significant relationship at the 0.01 significance level was identified between Indigenous adult custodial admissions and graduation rate. This signifies that education exerts an influence on custodial admissions regardless of age. These findings substantiate the assertion that educational attainment plays a consequential role in reducing adult custodial admissions. Although incarceration proportions are higher for the Indigenous youth population, it is important to note that education has an effect of criminogenic trends even into adulthood.

Non-Indigenous Youth and Custodial Admissions

Following a correlation analysis, the examination of non-Indigenous youth offending, and education revealed lack of statistical significance with a value <0.05 . This suggests the presence of other influential factors contributing to non-Indigenous crime. The absence of a relationship

between these variables suggest Indigenous individuals are disproportionately affected by education. Notably, substantial disparities in education rates and offending were observed between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Youth. This relationship is visualized in the following graph, highlighting the gap in education rates and higher proportion of Indigenous custodial admissions.



The research reveals a substantial correlation between Indigenous education and custodial admissions among both youth and adults. This suggests a significant influence of education on reducing criminal involvement within the Indigenous community, emphasizing the potential effectiveness of educational interventions. The stark differences in education rates and custodial admissions between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous youth underscore the importance of prioritizing education, particularly for Indigenous individuals, as a crucial factor in reducing crime.

Limitations

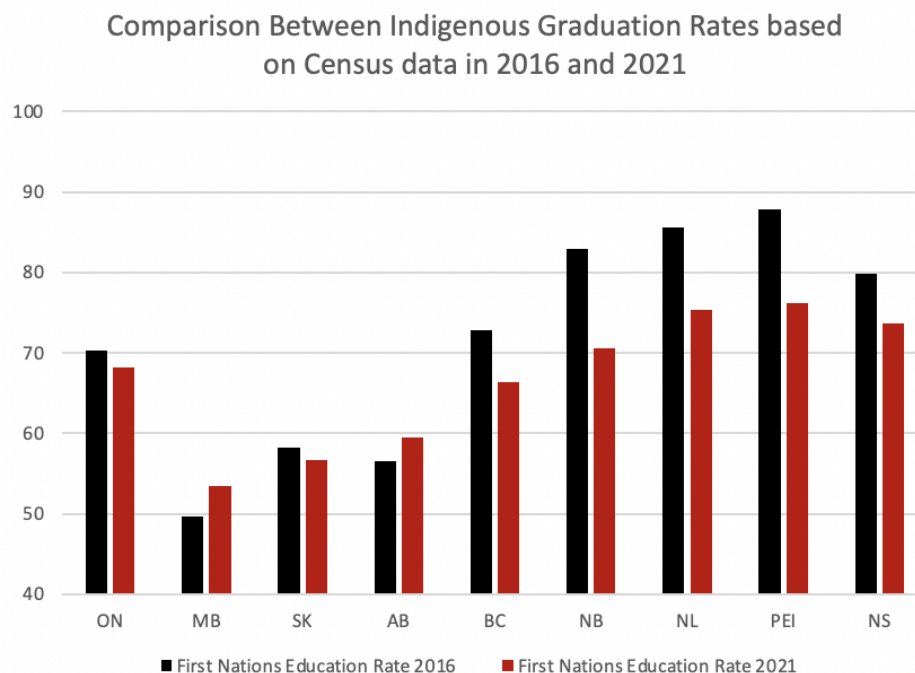
Through the analysis of this relationship between Indigenous crime and education rates, it is important to note there are some limitations associated with the data framing this research. Social disorganization theory is an effective way to frame Indigenous crime and victimization. However, other variables including education must be at the forefront of research to effectively understand the impact communities have on crime rates. Firstly, the use of custodial admissions provides data that could be skewed due to the variable double counting individuals that have been repeatedly admitted to the justice system. However, in terms of social disorganization theory, the readmissions still play an important role of explaining how much delinquency and crime occurs within a given area.

Secondly, the census data collected in 2021 was during the global COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that nation-wide, COVID-19 had an impact on education and individuals' access to resources. With many Indigenous communities lacking access to remote learning opportunities, this consequently could have affected the proportion of graduates in the 2020-2021 year. However, the data used was compiled from the entire census population. This means, COVID-19 would have a minimal effect on the overall proportion of high school diplomas attained within the data gathers. The students failing to graduate in the one-year eligibility (2020-2021) would have a small effect outside of the proportions that were researched. Due to these limitations, it is important the federal government extensively monitors graduation rates outside of census data. Rather, research needs to be conducted on a yearly basis to effectively analyze how graduation rates are fluctuating with the increased funding and social programs being implemented within Indigenous communities.

Policy Recommendations

Despite substantial investments in the establishment and upkeep of Indigenous schools, there persist significant shortcomings in enhancing graduation rates. Proposed policy recommendations call for heightened federal oversight in both curriculum development and infrastructure management for these schools. In evaluation of graduation rates between 2016 and 2022 census data, it is apparent that substantial spending has had a negative effect on graduation rates. In 2016, Statistics Canada outlined that the provincial average of First Nations graduation rates was 71.53% (Layton, 2023). However, in 2021, census data revealed for the same population, graduation rates declined to an average of 66.65%.

As shown in the following graph, budgetary allotments to Indigenous communities require oversight so improvements can be made and implemented through partnerships. This concept is reinforced from the challenges government crime reduction programs have faced including, school reluctance and difficulty integrating project components into the education curriculum, weak formal relationships (Cortes & Dunbar, 2021).



Policy also entails the establishment of schools in regions lacking educational access, accompanied by incentivizing educational attainment. This approach needs to prioritize certain provinces that are struggling both with high criminal activity and low educational success, including Manitoba and Saskatchewan. These policy recommendations align with the United Nations Framework for the State of the World's Indigenous Peoples (2021) by adopting a holistic approach to education:

1. Indigenous Partnerships with Government:

- Encourage collaborative partnerships between government entities, Indigenous communities, and educational institutions to create sustainable funding models (United Nations, 2021).
- Work partnerships between Indigenous schools and the federal and provincial governments to adopt frameworks for education incentives and better development of curriculum to help retain students and increase graduation rates.

2. Understanding Barriers to Education Access:

- Conduct comprehensive research to identify and understand the specific barriers Indigenous individuals face in accessing education, considering factors such as, socio-economic status, and systemic discrimination (United Nations, 2021).
- Develop provincially targeted policies and initiatives aimed at eliminating identified barriers, ensuring equitable access to quality education for Indigenous students.

3. Cultural Relevance in Education:

- Implement policies that mandate the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, languages, and histories in mainstream educational curriculum (United Nations, 2021).

- Develop culturally sensitive teaching materials and training programs for educators to ensure a more inclusive and respectful learning environment.

Conclusion

The results of the statistical analysis emphasize the essential role of educational interventions in mitigating crime among Indigenous populations. The stark disparities in education rates and custodial admissions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth underline the urgency of prioritizing education for Indigenous individuals as a crucial factor in reducing crime. The policy recommendations, aligned with the United Nations Framework for the State of the World's Indigenous Peoples (2021), advocate for a holistic approach to education. They emphasize the need for collaborative partnerships, removal of barriers to education access, and the infusion of cultural relevance into mainstream educational curriculum. The research emphasizes the significant impact of education on crime which inform policy recommendations that contribute to building a foundation for a more equitable and just society for Indigenous communities in Canada.

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