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# Research at a glance

## The Needs of Women Offenders under Community Supervision

**KEY WORDS:** *community supervision, reintegration, parole officers, women offenders*

### What it means

The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has implemented many initiatives to facilitate the transition of federally sentenced women to the community such as the Community Mental Health Initiative, Community Residential Alternatives, the National Employment Strategy, and the development of the Women's Supervision Units. The results of the current study confirm that, while accommodating many areas of need appears to have improved over time, women offenders in the community continue to face challenges. Narrowing gaps in the availability and accessibility of some community services and promoting best practices identified by parole officers may improve reintegration success and ease of transition for women in the community. In addition, a greater focus on pre-release solutions and planning could improve women's success rates in the community.

### What we found

The findings suggest that women offenders continue to face challenges on their release to the community. Women with children had difficulties acquiring services that were rated by the parole officers as important to their success in the community, such as finding a family physician.

Women with mental health issues represented the largest proportion of women with complex needs; however, the majority of these women were not reported to experience disruption in their mental health care during transition to the community. Nonetheless, apart from mental health services provided through CSC parole officers stated that community collaborations and partnerships in the mental health area were relatively unavailable and inaccessible.

Several barriers to employment were identified by the parole officers, such as having a criminal record, low self-esteem, and lacking appropriate skills. In contrast to previous research, a lack of affordable housing, rather than having a criminal record, was identified as the primary difficulty in obtaining accommodation.

Parole officers also reported that employment-related partnerships with community organizations specific to women were limited.

### Why we did this study

The vast majority of federally sentenced women will be released on some form of community supervision during their sentence. This research examines the ways in which the community reintegration needs of women offenders are currently being met and where improvements could be made. Parole officers' in-depth knowledge of women's reintegration needs and the availability and accessibility of community resources makes them excellent sources of information.

### What we did

In January 2013, 57 community and institutional parole officers completed an online survey regarding the women whom they currently supervise, or women soon to be released from an institution. The Parole officers who participated provided information regarding approximately half the women under community supervision ( $n = 264$ ) and in custody ( $n = 247$ ). Survey questions covered six topics: the needs of women with children, release planning for women with complex needs, mental health services, employability and employment, residential services, and partnerships with community organizations.

### For more information

Thompson, J., Lutfy, M., Derkzen, D., & Bertrand, M. (2015). *The needs of women offenders under community supervision* (Research Report R-338). Ottawa, Ontario: Correctional Service of Canada.

To obtain a PDF version of the full report, or for other inquiries, please e-mail the [Research Branch](#) or contact us by phone at (613) 995-3975.

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