



Emerging Research Results

Preliminary Assessment of the Social Integration Program for Women Offenders

KEY WORDS: *women offenders, correctional programming, community reintegration*

Why we're doing this study

In recent years, correctional research has focused on the significance of providing gender specific institutional programs that prepare women offenders for successful reintegration into the community. Due to a lack of relevant services and minimal preparation of necessary life skills, women offenders are often marginalized upon release. Accordingly, the Social Integration Program for Women Offenders (SIPW) has been developed and implemented to offer women a holistic and comprehensive approach that encourages behaviours, skills and knowledge that promote a healthy lifestyle in the community.

The purpose of this study is to provide a preliminary evaluation of the SIPW moderate-intensity program. The evaluation consists of 38 federally incarcerated women involved in the pilot program implemented at five federal women's institutions.

What we're doing

The main focus of the research is to assess the need for such a program, the level of support for the program, its organization, and whether or not its objectives are met while serving the target population. As is standard practice in this type of research, qualitative and quantitative information relevant to these issues has been gathered from both the program participants and the program facilitators through the use of pre/post-program questionnaires, a Social Integration Plan (SIPlan), facilitator logs, and Offender Management System (OMS) release data.

What we've found so far

Results indicate that there is a definite need for the SIPW as it addresses an important gap in the programming available for women. A large proportion of participants (70%) state that the overall program has been very successful, while the remaining women are at least somewhat satisfied with the program.

Participants have revealed increases in their perceived self-efficacy in areas such as problem solving and pro-social goal-setting. Most have been

able to engage in observable, pro-social behaviours by taking the necessary steps to prepare for their release (e.g. completing résumés, obtaining health and SIN cards).

Although release data has only been collected for an average release period of five months, none of the women who completed the SIPW and were subsequently released into the community have re-offended.

Despite self-reported improvements in pro-social goal setting, there have been issues with the women's goal setting skills as they have only been moderately in accordance with the goals outlined in the program guidelines. The participants have also stated that there is overlap in the SIPW program material as compared to the content of other correctional programs, and not enough focus on other issues they find to be more relevant to their needs. Facilitators also admit that this interferes with their own workload as the overlap can be problematic and the program contains an extensive amount of work and information that leads to time management issues.

What it means

Preliminary research findings indicate that the SIPW does meet the overall program objectives. Furthermore, it is being well received and supported by both the women and the facilitators. There are, however, implementation and procedural issues that should be revisited and possibly modified in order to enhance the program. Areas of concern include 1) focusing on more pertinent topics while avoiding repetition and overlap; 2) allowing the women to set goals *after* learning the modules rather than at intake to ensure the goals are related to program guidelines; 3) modifying the pre/post-program measures to allow for a more comprehensive assessment.

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