_____ Research Report _____

The Needs of Women Offenders

under Community Supervision

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2015 Nº R-338

The Needs of Women Offenders under Community Supervision

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January 2015

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Kelly Taylor for all of her guidance and support throughout the development of the project. The help provided by Jaya Patni as well as Nathalie Bigras, Marsha Axford, Brigitte Lavigne, Serge Trouillard and Natacha Kenney was invaluable in the development of the survey. We would also like to thank Aileen Harris, Ashley McConnell and Anne Trinneer for all of their supporting in editing, programming and testing the online survey. We would also like to thank Trina Forrester, Renée Gobeil and Lynn Stewart for their thoughtful feedback throughout the review process. We are also grateful to the Wardens of the Women's Institutions, District Directors, the Parole Officer Supervisors and the parole officers who work with women; without your support and participation the following project would not have been possible.

Executive Summary

Key words: *community supervision, reintegration, parole officers, women offenders*

The vast majority of federally sentenced women will be released on some form of community supervision during their sentence. With a growing population, it is important to ensure that community programs and services are meeting the needs of diverse women offenders to aid in the safe transition to the community. The current research surveyed institutional and community parole officers to ascertain the ways in which the community reintegration needs of federally sentenced women are currently being met, and where improvements could be made.

In January 2013, a total of 57 parole officers who were currently working with women completed an online survey; 12 of the respondents were institutional parole officers (IPOs) and 45 were community parole officers (CPOs). IPOs and CPOs respectively reported on 247 women in custody and 264 women under community supervision, which represents about half the women offender population. Survey questions covered the following 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 while also focusing on the needs of Aboriginal women offenders.

Overall, the findings suggest that a number of areas present continued challenges for women in the community. However, several best practices and improvements were also reported.

Just over one-third of the women were primary caregivers of children in the community. These women had difficulties acquiring services rated by the parole officers as important to their success in the community, such as a family physician. Parole officers reported that just under one-quarter of the women required complex release planning and that planning timeframes were shorter than they needed to complete this task. Many of the women were reported to have at least some mental health needs; however, most of them did not experience disruption in their mental health care when transitioning to the community. Nonetheless, parole officers considered community collaborations and partnerships in the mental health area to be relatively unavailable and inaccessible.

Several barriers to employment were identified by the parole officers, such as having a criminal record, self-esteem issues, 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 residency accommodations. Parole officers also reported that there were a limited number of existing employment-related partnerships with community.

Various options may be available to further facilitate successful reintegration. For example, an increased focus on pre-release development of support networks, particularly for women with children, could be very beneficial. Increased engagement with community partners to facilitate finding employment and residential accommodations for women is also a priority. Although parole officers reported that there have been some improvements since 2010, federally sentenced women continue to face reintegration challenges.

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Introduction

In the last two decades, the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) has undertaken major changes in its approach to addressing the issues and needs of federally sentenced women, with the *Community Strategy for Women Offenders* (CSC, 2010a) being the most recent refinement. Concurrently, the number of women admitted to federal jurisdiction has increased by nearly 70% over the past decade, with 47% of the population currently under community supervision (Public Safety, 2012). Since 2007, there has been a 15% decrease in women on full parole and a 14% increase in women on statutory release, indicating that more women are being released later in their sentences (CSC, 2012).

In tandem with a growing population, the complexity of the women offender population has been increasing over time, especially in the area of criminogenic needs. For example, the percentage of women considered to have high needs grew from 43% to 55% between 1996/97 and 2007/08 (CSC, 2010a). Compared to men offenders in custody, women tend to have substantially more needs, particularly in the areas of employment, marital and family issues, substance abuse, and mental health (CSC, 2009; 2010a). Women under community supervision tend to have needs in these areas; however, the level of need among women in the community was lower than that noted for women in custody (McConnell, Rubenfeld, Thompson, & Gobeil, in press). These findings echoed an earlier community profile of women offenders (Taylor & Flight, 2004).

A review of the current literature specific to the needs of women offenders under supervision in the community is consistent with the above-mentioned needs, and also highlights additional areas relevant to women. In CSC's *Revised Community Strategy for Women Offenders*, the following fields were highlighted for women in the community and are discussed below: caring for children, employability and employment, access to mental health services, release planning for women with complex needs[1], residential accommodations, and the fostering of partnerships with community organizations.

[1] Although not associated with a particular supervision approach, women with complex needs include women who have an overall high static and/or dynamic risk rating (i.e., criminogenic needs), as well as women with mental health issues and/or women who were managed using the Intensive Supervision Strategy. This strategy is a management strategy for women with mental health needs or assessed as presenting particularly high levels of risk.

Women with Children

Women offenders are more likely than men offenders to have been caring for children prior to their incarceration and more often have to – or at least expect to – provide care for children after they are released (Robbins, Martin, & Surratt, 2009). Having child care responsibilities can create stress in and of itself (Shivy et al., 2007). For example, caring for children may either partially or fully impede the women's ability to participate in programming (Shivy et al., 2007), find appropriate housing and employment, and meet the conditions of their parole (e.g., attending meetings with their parole officer; Hartwell, 2001; Robbins et al., 2009). In addition to these difficulties, dealing with custody issues can also be quite stressful for women (Gobeil, 2008).

Release Planning for Women with Complex Needs

The general consensus is that release planning (i.e., discharge or transition planning) is essential considering that the complex risks and needs that some offenders present may provide extra challenges for successful reintegration (Baillargeon, Hoge, & Penn, 2010). It is important that the release plan ensures the necessary resources are in place to support high needs/risk offenders upon release. Furthermore, offenders also view release planning as a crucial component to their success in the community (Gideon, 2009; van Olphen, Eliason, Freudenberg, & Barnes, 2009; Zurhold et al., 2011).

Mental Health Services

Studies have consistently found that mental health issues are over-represented in offender populations compared to the general population (e.g., Adams & Ferrandino, 2008; Archambault, Stewart, Wilton, & Cousineau, 2010; Brink, Doherty, & Boer, 2001; Gabora, 2009; Moloughey, 2004; Stewart et al., 2010) and that, within prison populations, women have a greater incidence of mental health issues than men (Blanchette & Motiuk, 1996; Leschied, 2011). Offenders with mental health issues may find reintegration particularly challenging (Baillargeon et al., 2010). Though a great deal of research emphasizes the need for a continuum of care for offenders with mental health issues (Wolff, 2005), other research notes that such care may not be available after release (see Grella & Greenwell, 2007; Ogloff, Davis, Rivers, & Ross, 2007). In order to assist offenders with mental health challenges reintegrate into the community, CSC developed the

Community Mental Health Initiative[2] (CMHI) in 2005 (CSC, 2008). There is evidence that this initiative is associated with a decreased likelihood of suspension and revocation among men offenders with mental health issues (CSC, 2008; Farrell-MacDonald, Stewart, & Feeley, manuscript submitted). The trends are similarly encouraging for women who participated but, due to small numbers, future research is required to determine the impact of this initiative on women offenders.

Employability and Employment

Offenders who engage in programs and training to prepare themselves for post-release employment are less likely to reoffend (Graffam, Shinkfield, & Hardcastle, 2008) and obtaining stable employment is crucial in deterring offenders from recidivating (Brown, 2011; Gobeil, 2008). However, for many offenders, finding employment once released from a correctional institution is difficult.

A particular challenge to finding employment for women under community supervision is that many employers are not willing to hire individuals with a criminal record (e.g., Brown, 2011; Gobeil, 2008; Graffam et al., 2008). As well, offenders may have little, if any, formal employment experience. Employers may also be reluctant to hire criminal justice involved women due to a history of sudden resignations, interpersonal difficulties, and firings (Shivy et al., 2007). On the other hand, factors which may improve offender employability have also been identified. For example, one survey found that respondents had a positive view of offenders who had completed pre-release employment training (Graffam et al., 2008). Other research showed that employers were more willing to hire ex-offenders if they had completed a college degree, vocational trade, or at least two training programs (Brown, 2011).

To aid offenders in finding employment in the community, CSC implemented Community Employment Centres[3] (CECs) in 2000 (CSC, 2010b). An evaluation of the initiative in 2010 indicated that CECs were in many large municipalities across Canada, services at CECs were being accessed by offenders regularly, and those using CECs were more likely to find

[2] This initiative focuses on maintaining the continuum of mental health care as offenders move into the community.
[3] Over time, this initiative has offered employment services to offenders via job readiness activities such as resume writing and development of interview skills. As of April 1 2012, the focus of this initiative became developing partnerships with employers to create job opportunities for offenders. A research study of this change in practice was conducted by Nolan, Power, Woods & Cousineau (in press) and indicated that new focus continued to be associated with positive employment outcomes among offenders.

work, although these findings were not specific to women offenders (CSC, 2010b).

Residential Accommodations

Women may face extra challenges in accessing residential accommodation upon release. Leverentz (2010) noted women offenders may experience difficulty finding a facility or other residential options that will house them with their children. Similarly, having a criminal record has also been noted as a barrier when trying to secure accommodations (Gobeil, 2008). Older women with mental health issues are proportionately underrepresented in comparison to other groups using Community Residential Alternatives[4] (CSC, 2009). Women offenders have suggested that additional resources for obtaining accessible housing and the use of private home placement could facilitate the reintegration process (Gobeil, 2008).

Partnerships with Community Organizations

CSC partners with many other governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to facilitate successful reintegration of federally sentenced women into the community. The relationship with NGOs is seen as particularly critical as they are likely to provide support for women past warrant expiry when the women are no longer under the purview of CSC (CSC, 2010a). Some evidence also suggests that accessible and proximal community and social services are linked with decreasing the likelihood of recidivism (Hipp, Jannetta, Shah, & Turner, 2011; Hipp, Petersilia, & Turner, 2010). In addition, the women themselves noted that community services were among the protective factors which helped with their successful reintegration (Gobeil, 2008). Thompson, Trinneer, McConnell, Derkzen, and Rubenfeld (in press) found that many of the community organizations offer services that align with the women's needs, such as mental health and/or addiction services, services for housing, and education and/or employment related services.

Overall, these reintegration needs, which have been highlighted for women in the literature, were considered in the development of the *Revised National Community Strategy for Women Offenders* (CSC, 2010a) and the *Community Framework for Women Action Plan* (CSC, 2010/11). The former identified areas of need that have an impact on the effectiveness of the

[4] CSC developed the residential alternatives option to assist offenders requiring enhanced and/or specialized services in reintegration (e.g., older offenders, offenders with mental health issues, women offenders, Aboriginal offenders; CSC, 2009).

community reintegration of women offenders. The latter offered a complement to the *Revised National Community Strategy for Women Offenders* as it provided actionable goals that addressed many of the identified areas of need. In addition to the *Revised National Community Strategy for Women Offenders* (CSC, 2010a) and the *Community Framework for Women Action Plan* (CSC, 2010/11), several research projects[5] have been undertaken to further understand the current needs of women offenders who are or will be supervised in the community at CSC.

Current Study

The current study surveyed institutional and community parole officers to ascertain the ways in which the community reintegration needs of federally sentenced women are currently being met, and where improvements could be made. Parole officers were selected because their direct contact with women offenders provides them with knowledge of the current reintegration needs of this group. Given the more exploratory nature of this study, no specific research questions were outlined; instead, the needs of women highlighted in the *Revised National Community Strategy for Women Offenders* were considered. The study focused on the following areas: women with children, release planning for women with complex needs, mental health services, employability and employment, residential accommodations, and partnerships with community organizations[6]. Information regarding the needs of Aboriginal women and regional differences are discussed where differences were identified.

[5]McConnell et al. (in press) and Thompson et al. (in press) examined aspects of the needs of women in the community.

[6] Although not discussed in the current report, four *Research Snippets* cover a range of needs of women in the community. The topics of these Snippets are: 1) the use of Aboriginal-specific staff for reintegration purposes among Aboriginal women; 2) women offenders' access to community maintenance programs; 3) general reintegration challenges facing women offenders; and, 4) approaches to supervising women offenders in the community.

Method

Procedure

Measures/Material. Consistent with the previously highlighted needs from the *Revised Community Strategy*, the survey was developed by the staff at the Research Branch. A parole officer supervisor assisted in the survey development to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness of the questions and that the terminology was accessible and familiar to parole officers. To ensure operational validity, feedback regarding the final draft of the survey was solicited from CSC's Women Offenders Sector, Community Reintegration Branch, Aboriginal Initiative Directorate, and Mental Health Services. The survey questions were based on the following six themes: (1) supervision of women with children; (2) release planning for women with complex needs; (3) employability and employment; (4) mental health services; (5) residential accommodation; and (6) partnerships. Once the questions were finalized, the survey was programmed using SNAP 10 software.

Given the online nature of the survey and complex skip patterns, a copy of the survey is not provided; however, a description of the style as well as examples of questions included in the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Recruitment. Wardens of the women offender institutions and the District Directors of the community supervision offices across the country were engaged through an initial meeting and follow-up emails in order to promote staff participation in the survey. The wardens and district directors aided in the development of an email contact list through which the appropriate parole officers could be contacted to participate in the survey.

The contact of the parole officers was undertaken as a five stage process over a period of about one month: (1) parole officers were contacted via their wardens and district directors to identify those working with women and to advise the parole officers that the survey was going to take place in the near future; (2) parole officers were provided information about the survey including the areas covered and types of questions used in the survey, the anonymous nature of the data collection, that their participation was supported by their managers, and the dates of the online survey; (3) the identified parole officers were provided an active link to the online survey; (4) a reminder of the online survey was sent along with a link to the survey; and (5) a thank you email was sent to the parole officers with a notification of the closure date for the online survey.

The survey was administered online and data were collected between January 14, 2013 and February 6, 2013.

Participants

A total of 64 parole officers responded to the online survey; however, 7 of the respondents did not currently work with women offenders and were removed from analyses, reducing the total sample to 57. Only 12 of the respondents were institutional parole officers[7] (IPOs), therefore, their responses were not disaggregated from the 45 community parole officers (CPOs) who responded to the survey. The vast majority of respondents were female, white, held an undergraduate degree, and represented all CSC regions (see Table 1). Overall, 88% of the surveys were completed in English and the average time to complete the survey was 50 minutes.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain a reliable estimate of the total number of parole officers across Canada who work with women offenders due to the nature of supervision and the pace at which caseloads can change. It was therefore not possible to estimate a response rate for the survey. However, each of the parole officers reported on the federally sentenced women they were supervising at the time of the survey, which allowed us to determine whether this group of women was representative of the populations from which they were drawn. The total number of currently supervised women reported by the participating CPOs and IPOs was 264 and 247 respectively. Both of these estimates represent about half of the women under community supervision or in custody during the time period of the survey. The women for whom the CPOs were reporting information were representative of the population of women offenders under community supervision; however, the demographic distribution of the IPO sample was different than the general women offender population in custody[8]. Further details regarding caseload and demographics related to the federally sentenced women are presented the first section of the results.

[7] Institutional parole officers were included in the study because they work directly with women being released in the community and are part of the release planning process.

[8] Specifically, Whites were greatly overrepresented in the sample (58%) compared to the general population (47%) at the time of the survey. Furthermore, compared to the general in-custody population at the time of the survey, offenders under 25 years old were overrepresented in the sample (15% vs. 23%) and women over 45 years were underrepresented (26% vs. 15%).

Table 1
Demographics of Parole Officers who Completed the Online Survey

Demographic Characteristic	%	(*n*)
Sex		
Male	21	(12)
Female	79	(45)
Ethnicity		
White	81	(46)
Visible minorities and prefer not to report	19	(11)
Age		
20-29	9	(5)
30-39	38	(22)
40-49	32	(18)
≥50	21	(12)
Years of Experience		
<1	11	(6)
1-2	23	(13)
3-5	23	(13)
6-10	14	(8)
11-15	12	(7)
16+	17	(10)
Highest Level of Education		
Undergraduate degree or less	89	(51)
Master's degree	11	(6)
CSC Region		
Pacific	12	(7)
Prairies	28	(16)
Ontario	19	(11)
Quebec	14	(8)
Atlantic	27	(15)

Note. This information is not disaggregated by type of parole officer to ensure the anonymity of the participating parole officers.

Analytic Approach

All responses were imported into SNAP 10 and exported into SAS 9.2 in order to conduct analyses. Given the descriptive nature of the data collected, frequencies, percentages, and means are presented for quantitative questions (*n* values are provided in footnotes if they do not correspond to a table); however, many of the questions were qualitative in nature. Responses were grouped together under similar themes loosely following thematic analysis (Braun &

Clarke, 2006), but low response rates for some qualitative questions did not require reporting themes. Due to the small number of IPOs, unless otherwise indicated, all numbers reported include both IPOs and CPOs.

Results

Parole officers' caseloads varied significantly according to whether they worked in the community or in an institution. IPOs strictly worked with women offenders and at the time of the survey, the average IPO was supervising about 21 women offenders. CPOs reported a caseload of 7 women on average, as well as a caseload of 7 men.

Demographics and Supervision Characteristics of Supervised Women on Parole Officers' Caseloads

The parole officers were asked to provide demographic information on the women they supervised. The total number of currently-supervised women reported by the participating CPOs and IPOs was 264 and 247 respectively. Over half of women under supervision were white (see Table 2). Aboriginal women accounted for one-quarter of the sample. Half of the women were under the age of 35, with one-third of the women falling within the 26 to 35 year old range.

Table 2

Reported Demographic Information of Currently-Supervised Women

	All		Women Supervised by Institutional Parole Officers		Women Supervised by Community Parole Officers	
Variables	%	(*n*)	%	(*n*)	%	(*n*)
Ethnicity						
White	59	(293)	58	(129)	61	(164)
Aboriginal	24	(120)	29	(66)	20	(54)
Other ethnicity	16	(76)	11	(25)	19	(51)
Unknown	1	(4)	2	(4)	0	(0)
Age						
25 and under	16	(79)	23	(52)	10	(27)
26 to 35	35	(170)	37	(82)	33	(88)
36 to 45	24	(117)	25	(55)	23	(62)
46 to 55	15	(76)	11	(25)	19	(51)
56 and older	10	(48)	4	(10)	15	(38)

Note. In some cases, the total *n* for individual questions does not equal the total number of supervised women due to inconsistent reporting across questions.

Of the women under the supervision of CPOs, the majority were either on full parole without a residency condition or day parole (see Table 3). Most women had a frequency of

contact with their CPO of either two or four times per month. One-quarter of the women had one monthly contact with their parole officer.

Table 3

Reported Supervision Characteristics (Women Supervised by Community Parole Officers Only)

	Supervised Women	
Variables	%	(*n*)
Supervision Type at Release		
Statutory release without residency condition	18	(47)
Statutory release with residency condition	8	(20)
Full parole without residency condition	41	(105)
Full parole with residency condition	1	(3)
Day parole	29	(74)
Long term supervision order without or with residency condition	3	(8)
Frequency of Contact – at least…		
8 meetings per month	1	(4)
4 meetings per month	35	(92)
2 meetings per month	31	(83)
1 meeting per month	25	(67)
1 meeting every two months	2	(4)
1 meeting every three months	6	(15)

Note. In some cases the total *n* for individual questions does not equal the total number of women reported to be supervised by the IPOs and CPOs due to issues with inconsistent reporting across questions.

Supervision of Women with Children

Given that research has outlined the challenges women offenders face with respect to their parenting responsibilities, their needs in this area were examined; in particular, we examined the type of services they may need to access, as well as family support. The majority of women about whom the parole officers reported information were mothers (see Table 4). Of the women who had children, 39% and 56% in the community and in institutions, respectively, were the primary caregiver.

Table 4
Percentage of Women with Children Supervised by Institutional Parole Officers and Community Parole Officers

	All		Women Supervised by Institutional Parole Officers		Women Supervised by Community Parole Officers	
Variables	%	(*n*)	%	(*n*)	%	(*n*)
Number of Children						
None	29	(129)	27	(57)	31	(72)
1 to 2	43	(193)	36	(77)	50	(116)
3 to 4	16	(73)	16	(35)	16	(38)
5 or more children	7	(32)	11	(25)	3	(7)
Unknown	5	(21)	10	(21)	0	(0)

Note. In some cases, the total *n* for individual questions does not equal the total number of women reported to be supervised by the IPOs and CPOs due to issues with inconsistent reporting across questions.

Overall, several services were endorsed as very important or extremely important to aiding the reintegration success of women with children in the community (see Table 5). For example, six items received over 60% of respondents' endorsement. These items included: shelter, family physician, child care services, transportation services, legal assistance for custody issues, and culturally-specific resources. Examples provided of culturally specific resources included interpretation services and parenting programs that are specific to Aboriginal cultures such as support from Aboriginal Elders or Native spiritual services including all-female ceremonies (e.g., sweats). Other cultural supports included support from chaplains, services providing educational material, and mentors for those of African Canadian descent. Only about half of the respondents selected "other services." Examples of "other services" included support (spiritual or mentors) for women not born in Canada, services to assist with obtaining social services, employment, mental health, and additional options for residency other than Community Residential Facilities (CRFs).

It is notable that, regardless of level of perceived importance in aiding in successful reintegration, few of the services were rated as being highly accessible. On average, most services received an accessibility score ranging from 3 to 5 out of a possible score of 10 (with 10 indicating that a service is completely available and accessible in the community). Thus, it appears that many of the services that were reported as important for the reintegration of women

with children were not perceived to be easily accessible for women in the community.

Table 5

Rating of Importance and Accessibility of Services for Women with Children by Community Parole Officers

	Rated Importance				Average Availability and Accessibility Rating[a]
	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Extremely Important	
Services	% (*n*)	% (*n*)	% (*n*)	% (*n*)	
Shelter	4 (2)	16 (7)	40 (17)	40 (17)	5
Family physician	0 (0)	22 (9)	41 (17)	37 (15)	4
Child care services	0 (0)	25 (11)	41 (18)	34 (15)	4
Transportation services	0 (0)	29 (12)	44 (18)	27 (11)	3
Legal assistance for custody issues	4 (2)	25 (11)	48 (21)	23 (10)	4
Culturally specific resources	14 (6)	24 (10)	43 (18)	19 (8)	5
Mother-to-mother mentoring programs	9 (4)	43 (18)	31 (13)	17 (7)	3
Pre- and post-natal counselling	9 (4)	44 (19)	30 (13)	17 (7)	5
Public health nurse	10 (4)	31 (13)	45 (19)	14 (6)	5
Nutrition specialists	14 (6)	42 (18)	30 (13)	14 (6)	4
Companionship/guidance	5 (2)	38 (15)	47 (19)	10 (4)	4
Respite care	22 (9)	54 (22)	19 (8)	5 (2)	3
Other	83 (20)	0 (0)	4 (1)	13 (3)	1

Note. $n = 45$. The number of missing responses varies by item.[a] Rating ranged between 1 and 10, with 10 representing completely available and accessible.

A supportive family can also play a pivotal role in aiding women with children. Some of the CPOs reported most or all their clients had adequate family support systems (13%). According to the parole officers' responses, these women have enjoyed long-term and positive family support.

Nevertheless, the majority (78%) of CPOs[9] reported that only some of the women offenders with children had adequate support systems for their child care needs and 9% reported that none of their clients had adequate family support. For this large group of women, several explanations for the lack of support were provided. For example, many of the women came from

[9] $n = 45$.

families with long histories of dysfunction, had partners who were in a new relationship, or had tenuous relationships due to their over-reliance in the past. Others focused on lack of family ties and resulting difficulties in asking for support. Finally, geographical distance was mentioned as an obstacle to family support for childcare. Some women lived away from their communities and families due to residency in CRFs.

In examining the responses as to why women generally had inadequate support, an additional theme arose outside of the direct question asked. This theme focused on the role of child protection services and the reluctance of mothers who have been incarcerated to try to regain custody after release. Several comments suggested that this was often related to the difficulties that women had initially upon reintegration in obtaining housing (especially housing that can accommodate children) and employment. Some parole officers' comments suggested that regaining custody quickly after reintegration may cause additional stress for women beyond those related to meeting their housing, financial, and programming needs.

Aboriginal offenders with children. Parole officers were also specifically asked about the needs of Aboriginal women with children. Sixty-three percent of parole officers reported that Aboriginal women with children face challenges above and beyond those of non-Aboriginal women with children when reintegrating into the community. Several reasons for these additional challenges were identified by the parole officers, such as the more remote and isolated communities from which Aboriginal women tended to come. This affected their ability to visit with their children while incarcerated, which in turn affected relationships upon release. These remote communities and reserves generally lack services for mothers and children, which can be considered an additional challenge. Often when services were obtained, lack of transportation was a barrier to participation. Aboriginal women also suffered from a greater lack of family support and family dysfunction because of the legacy of residential school issues, intergenerational issues with substance abuse, and poverty. These social history factors led to increased experiences of trauma among Aboriginal women compared to non-Aboriginal women, making parenting more challenging.

Release Planning for Women Offenders with Complex Needs

Women with complex needs (i.e., high risk or needs) may also require more assistance and resources upon release. Thus, understanding the challenges for these women is vital in their successful reintegration. On average, 22% of the parole officers' caseloads were reported to be

women with complex needs. The greatest challenge facing many of the women for whom a complex needs release plan would be required was having significant mental health issues (see Table 6). Parole officers reported that nearly three-quarters of women experienced significant mental health issues whereas residency conditions, being released from segregation, or having long-term supervision orders were less often reported to be a challenge for many of the women with complex needs.

Table 6

Percentage of Caseloads Experiencing Particular Reintegration Planning Challenges

Challenge	%	(*n*)
Have significant[a] mental health issues	71	(79)
Have/will have a residency condition imposed on their statutory release	37	(41)
Are/will be on long-term supervision orders	10	(11)
Are/will be released from segregation	7	(8)

Note. n = 111 women reported to have high risk or needs. [a] Significant mental health issues was defined as mental health creating ongoing disruptions in day-to-day functioning.

Given that these challenges may lead to longer, more involved, release planning processes, several of the survey questions focused on the release process. More specifically, the parole officers were asked about the timeframes associated with the completion of the women's release plans. When referring to women offenders who do not have complex needs, 92% of parole officers reported that mandated timeframes were just right or longer than needed[10]. Yet when referring to women with complex needs, these mandated timeframes appear to be more difficult to meet. Only 49% of the parole officers reported that the timeframes were just right or longer than needed[11]. However, overall, the majority of the parole officers reported that they found complex release planning effective (scoring the process an 8 out of 10 for effectiveness) and that they worked closely with the institutional or community counterparts in completing them (scoring 7 out of 10).

To identify possible best practices in case planning, parole officers were also asked ways to improve case planning. Increasing communication between the institutional and community case management teams and including caseworkers from community services were often noted by the parole officers to improve release planning. Other responses generally supported some of

[10] n = 54.
[11] n = 55.

the previous findings regarding complex case planning such as needing more time to develop the release plan for complex cases, which is not currently accounted for in caseload management. Consistent with the above-noted needs related to residency conditions, accommodations upon release were also something that many parole officers reported could be improved. Specifically, feedback included needing access to more CRFs, and the use of specialized halfway houses for women. In addition to these concerns, the need for community living accommodations was noted by several parole officers; transitional housing such as satellite apartments and access to subsidized houses were suggestions to improve the release planning process. Finally, many of the parole officers noted the need to use mental health resources and discharge planning to ensure the accessibility of community mental health resources. A need for specialized beds for mental health or substance abuse at time of release was also noted.

Mental Health Services

As previously noted, many women offenders have mental health needs. CPOs reported that over one-third of women they supervised had a diagnosed mental illness or significant mental health needs, but no known diagnosis (see Table 7). There was a significant difference between the mental health needs reported by the CPOs and the IPOs. Thirty-three percent of women in custody were reported to have mental health needs but have no known diagnosis compared to 17% for those in the community. Offenders under community supervision were more than twice as likely to not have mental health needs compared to those in institutions (χ^2 (4, n = 441) = 37.79, $p < .001$, $\varphi = -.293$).

Table 7

Prevalence of Women Offenders with Mental Health Needs as Reported by the Parole Officers

	All		Women Supervised by Institutional Parole Officers		Women Supervised by Community Parole Officers	
Mental Health	%	(*n*)	%	(*n*)	%	(*n*)
Known diagnosis of a mental illness or disorder	27	(120)	23	(48)	31	(72)
Significant mental health needs, but no known diagnosis	12	(53)	17	(36)	7	(17)
Some mental needs, but no known diagnosis	24	(108)	33	(68)	17	(40)
No mental health needs	29	(127)	15	(31)	41	(96)
Unknown mental health needs	8	(33)	12	(26)	4	(7)

Note. In some cases, the total *n* for individual questions does not equal the total number of women reported to be supervised by the IPOs and CPOs due to issues with inconsistent reporting across questions.

Use of Community Mental Health Initiative (CMHI) and other resources. Of the women noted to have diagnosed mental health needs or significant mental health needs but no known diagnosis, 24% were referred for CMHI before release and 26% were referred after release according to the CPOs. Although not mutually exclusive categories, CPOs reported that 31% of the women received services as part of CMHI, another 53% of women received some mental health services from CSC (but not CMHI), and another 20% received mental health services outside of CSC and CMHI. For those not using CMHI, parole officers cited the following reasons for non-participation: the initiative was not available in their area, it started after their clients were released, it had long wait lists, women chose to use other community resources instead, or the women did not meet the requirements for participation.

Consistent with the reasons for non-participation in CMHI, CPOs[12] reported that 16% of the women with mental health needs may have benefited from CMHI but were not eligible. Participation could have benefitted ineligible women in the following ways: aiding with the transition to the community through networks and emotional support, monitoring use of medication, referrals to community agencies, and ensuring continuum of care.

[12] *n* = 31.

Transition to the community. When considering women using CMHI, 84% of CPOs[13] reported that none of their clients experienced disruption to their care during the transition to the community. When issues did occur, CPOs cited CMHI services not being available in their area, women not initially meeting eligibility criteria, and a lack of appropriate transitional support as the primary reasons for disruption. For women using services outside CMHI, three-quarters of the CPOs[14] reported disruption during transition. Of those who did report disruptions, long waiting times and interruptions in prescription renewals were cited as common issues.

Lack of an official mental health diagnosis also had an impact on obtaining mental health services in the community. Most parole officers[15] (71%) reported that women without an official mental health diagnosis had difficulties accessing mental health resources in the community for several reasons including, but not limited to, long wait lists, lack of finances for private services, ineligibility for federal mental health assistance because of a requirement of an Axis-1 diagnosis, and lack of access to mental health or justice housing.

Consistent with this finding, CPOs rated the availability of community collaborations and partnership in the area of mental health services as being mostly unavailable and inaccessible (see Table 8). The most available community service reported by CPOs were psychologists, psychiatrists, and services provided by the Elizabeth Fry Society. According to the CPOs, transition to the community can be especially challenging for Aboriginal women due a lack of mental health resources in isolated communities.

[13] $n = 32$.
[14] $n = 31$.
[15] $n = 56$.

Table 8

The Availability of Community Partnerships in Mental Health as Reported by Community Parole Officers

Collaborations and Partnerships in Mental Health	Average Availability and Accessibility Rating[a]
Psychologist	7
Psychiatrist	5
Elizabeth Fry Society	5
Physician	4
Treatment Services	4
Community Social Worker	4
Community Mental Health Nurse	4
Canadian Mental Health Association	4
Clinical Social Worker	4
Personal Support Worker	3
Street Health Clinic	3

Note. n = 45. Missing values varied by item.[a] Rating ranged between 1 and 10, with 10 representing completely available and accessible.

Employability and Employment

Both employability and employment have been noted as particular needs for women in the community.

Employability. Considering the importance of post-release employment, parole officers were asked several questions regarding the resources and barriers to gaining employment for women. Many of the examples of job training provided by the parole officers focused on job-readiness programs that provide assistance in the development of resumes, interviewing skills, and job searching skills offered by community organization such as Elizabeth Fry Society, the YWCA, or the John Howard Society. Others mentioned CSC-specific opportunities and resources such as the use of work release or Community Employment Centres (CEC). Outside of these types of resources, specific programs that the parole officers mentioned include job training for flagging, health and safety, culinary skills including safe-food handling, forklift operator, and other trades. Several programs were available for the women to increase their skills and

capacities in order to become employed. In contrast, however, the parole officers [16] scored the employability of these women as 5 out of 10, with 10 representing being completely employable.

Although the parole officers were able to identify examples of job-training programs, 68% of the parole officers [17] reported that there were not enough job-training opportunities for women in the community. They also noted that many of the programs offered are developed for men. Further compounding access issues, several of the parole officers reported that even when programs were available, there was often no funding for the women to enroll in the program, especially if the women were not assessed as having a high need in the employment domain. Generally, these findings suggest that the opportunity for women to gain the skills and capacities needed for employment could be improved.

Employment. Employment difficulties and opportunities were a consistent issue reported by the parole officers, especially for Aboriginal women. Although CPOs[18] reported that most of their clients found employment within five[19] months of release, over 60% of CPOs cited having a criminal record, emotional concerns, lacking an appropriate skill set, lacking transportation, and not actively searching or lacking motivation among the factors contributing to difficulty securing employment (see Table 9). Parole officers also noted that for Aboriginal women specifically, lower levels of education, including language skills, and a lack of employment history and experience were employment barriers.

[16] *n* = 55.
[17] *n* = 56.
[18] *n* = 35.
[19] Five months was the median length; mean was 6.91 months (*SD* = 5.49).

Table 9

Reasons Women May have Difficulty Securing Employment in the Community Rated According to Importance Rated by Community Parole Officers

	Rated Importance			
	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
Services	% (*n*)	% (*n*)	% (*n*)	% (*n*)
Having a criminal record	2 (1)	32 (14)	39 (17)	27 (12)
Emotional concerns related to obtaining employment, such as low self-esteem or anxiety	0 (0)	16 (7)	59 (26)	25 (11)
Do not have an appropriate skill set for employment	0 (0)	34 (15)	41 (18)	25 (11)
Lack of transportation to and from work	4 (2)	32 (14)	41 (18)	23 (10)
Are not actively searching for employment or lack motivation to secure employment	4 (2)	34 (15)	39 (17)	23 (10)
Lack of care for dependents (e.g., children, infirm relatives) while they are at work	7 (3)	36 (16)	34 (15)	23 (10)
Mental health issues that would interfere with employment	5 (2)	43 (19)	41 (18)	11 (5)
There are no jobs suitable for them in their community	21 (9)	49 (21)	21 (9)	9 (4)
Problems with physical appearance (e.g., visible tattoos, visibly missing teeth)	9 (4)	52 (23)	32 (14)	7 (3)
Lack of appropriate work clothing	5 (2)	58 (25)	30 (13)	7 (3)
Need help with their job search/applications, but are unable to get help	18 (8)	45 (20)	30 (13)	7 (3)
Physical health issues that would interfere with employment	16 (7)	48 (21)	34 (15)	2 (1)
Parole conditions make it difficult to meet work responsibilities	48 (21)	36 (16)	14 (6)	2 (1)

Note. $n = 44$, missing response vary by item.

In addition to the list of challenges in Table 9, CPOs identified other challenges that affect women's search for employment in the community. Funding was a central issue because of lack of funding for CSC-specific programs and programs for the general public can be quite expensive. The kind of employment program was also mentioned as an issue. For example,

hands-on training was preferred to in-class programs. Women-centered programs[20] were also preferred, although difficult to find. Parole officers noted that limiting access to CECs for those with a moderate or high need does not allow low-need offenders to benefit from their services. Beyond these identified issues, Aboriginal women were also reported to face prejudice, racism, and discrimination. Emotional concerns were also frequently noted by the parole officers, including coping with long histories of trauma, low self-esteem, and identification issues. Aboriginal women wishing to return to their communities were considered to have fewer opportunities and resources than those who remained in urban areas. A lack of motivation among the women was also reported as a problem by the parole officers.

Only about half (44%) of parole officers [21] reported that institutions provided skills and experience that aided offenders in gaining employment post-release. Parole officers also commented that even when employment related to their training while incarcerated was secured, these jobs did not provide a living wage, and that previous illegal activities provided a better income than working in these positions. Other parole officers noted that institutions failed to instill the required "real life" accountability that employers expect from employees. Some parole officers emphasized that more trade certificates should be available and reiterated the importance of work experience rather than in-class programs.

CECs and other employment resources. In addition to the general issues related to the employment of women offenders in the community, the use of CECs and other employment resources were considered. Half of the IPOs intended to refer at least one client to a CEC; however, in actuality, only about one-third[22] of all women reported on by IPOs were referred to a CEC. IPOs also reported relatively lower frequencies of involvement between the CEC and women before release (average score of 4; ranging from never (0) to always (10)). These findings suggest that IPOs may not rely on the CECs as a post-release employment resource and that better links should be forged between the community and the institutions.

CPOs[23] who had a CEC in their area (90%) referred 64% of their clients to the CEC. Of those women referred, CPOs estimated that 80% of women actually went to CEC for aid. Furthermore, for those who used the CEC, the CPOs reported that 39% succeeded in finding

[20] Women-centred programs are designed to recognize and respond to the specific needs of women.

[21] $n = 55$.

[22] $n = 10$.

[23] $n = 43$.

employment, although women who secured employment with the aid of CECs represented only 20% of all the women supervised by the surveyed CPOs. The CPOs appear to be making more use of the CECs than the IPOs when the CECs are available in their area. Without using the assistance of CECs, 28% of the CPOs' clients were still able to secure employment.

With regard to employment resources outside of the CECs, parole officers most commonly indicated that the women offenders secured employment using community resources specifically for individuals who have had contact with the law. Examples of the organizations providing employment services included Stella Bury, John Howard, Elizabeth Fry, and Coverdale. Local employment centres were also a popular resource, including services offered by YMCAs and Ann Terry Projects. Aboriginal-specific resources were also recommended by the parole officers, such as First Nations Employment Centres and Native Friendship Centres. Educational resources that the parole officers recommended to their clients include the Ben Calf Robe Society and community colleges. Job training centres were another resource that the parole officers used, such as private companies for flagging certificates and Alberta Jobs Corps. Employment agencies were another option that some parole officers suggested to their clients. Overall, the parole officers had many avenues outside of CEC to recommend to their clients.

Residential Accommodations for Women upon Release

As noted in the literature, obtaining residential accommodations in the community can be a challenge for women, especially those with children[24]. Given this fact, the type of housing for women with, and without, conditions to reside in a CRF, was examined. According to the CPOs[25] surveyed, about one-third of their clients had a residency condition. Of the women with residency conditions, CPOs reported that the most common form of residency accommodation used by their clients were halfway houses. Other forms of residential lodging were rarely used by women with residency conditions.

CPOs reported a much wider range of accommodations for women without residency conditions. Independent living, lodging with family or friends, and halfway houses were the most commonly reported options (see Table 10). CPOs reported that their clients seldom used private home placements, CCCs, or community residential alternatives (< 10%). Consistent with these

[24] Some CPOs also provided a list of residency facilities in their region that accommodate women with children (see Appendix B).

[25] $n = 39$.

findings, CPOs reported that independent living, lodging with family or friends, and halfway houses were the most available housing and shelters. Women-only shelters, private home placement, CCCs, and CRFs were the least available options in their areas. The Pacific Region appears to the best availability of private home placements compared to other regions.

Table 10

Percentage of Community Parole Officers who Have Clients Using Different Types of Residency Accommodation and Availability of Various Accommodation Types

	Women Without Residency Conditions		Availability of Accommodation Type[a]	
Residency Accommodations	%	(*n*)	%	(*n*)
Independent living	67	(30)	69	(31)
With family or friends	58	(26)	76	(34)
Halfway house	40	(18)	73	(33)
Satellite apartment	20	(9)	25	(11)
Women-only shelter	20	(9)	40	(18)
Shelter	18	(8)	42	(29)
Transitional housing	16	(7)	29	(13)
Hostel	13	(6)	20	(9)
Facility that can accommodate women with children	11	(5)	N/A	N/A

Note. n = 45. Missing values vary by item. [a]Availability is for all women, regardless of whether they have a residency conditions.

Overall, the parole officers reported that residency accommodations for women were, on average, moderately accessible and available. The average availability rating score was 4.6, with ten representing the accommodation being completely available and accessible.

Correspondingly, CPOs[26] noted that 30% of the women under community supervision had difficulty obtaining suitable living accommodations post-release. Several reasons were provided for these difficulties (see Table 11), such as a lack of affordable housing, lacking routine rental requirements (e.g., proper identification, credit history, references, or a phone number) or having a criminal record. Few CPOs (< 6%) reported that having a physical disability, being a member of a visible minority, being a younger (under 25) or older (over 50)

[26] n = 43.

offender, lack of bed space, being an Aboriginal offender, having substance abuse issues, and having intellectual disabilities were barriers to finding post-release accommodation.

Table 11

Reasons Reported for Women Having Difficulties Obtaining Residential Accommodations Post-Release

Reasons	%	(*n*)
Lack of affordable housing	91	(71)
Lack routine rental requirements	55	(43)
Having a criminal record	32	(25)
No transportation to view potential places	21	(16)
Mental health issues	9	(7)
Children	6	(5)

Note. n = 26 CPOs reporting information regarding a total of 78 women offenders. Proportion of women experiencing the difficulty exceeds 100% because the reasons for difficulty are not mutually exclusive (i.e., a woman can experience more than one difficulty at a time).

Parole officers indicated that accessibility for residential accommodation was limited in the community; however, several types of accommodations were regularly used by and available for women offenders. The greatest barrier to finding accommodations post-release was lack of affordable housing.

Partnerships

Community organizations provide support for many of the women during and after transition to the community. Thus, any information on partnerships and promoting their development is important to aid in successful reintegration.

Many of the parole officers reported that currently there were few partnerships to aid in reintegration of various subpopulations of women offenders (see Table 12). This shortage was linked to a simple need for more services because the current services often have lengthy waitlists. Two service gaps were mentioned: housing help and services for women with children. Parole officers reported a gap in available services for aiding women offenders with Children's Aid Society and Family Services, particularly in regards to custody issues. The need for a parenting program outside of Family Services was raised because many of the women already have negative experiences with Family Services.

Table 12

Proportion of Parole Officers Reporting a Lack of Community Partnerships

Partnership Service Category	%	(*n*)
Women with mental health issues	85	(44)
Women with children	81	(43)
Younger women (below 25 years old)	71	(37)
Older women (50 years old and over)	70	(37)
Aboriginal women	60	(30)
Women with substance abuse issues	51	(27)

Note. n = 53. Missing values vary by item. Categories are not mutually exclusive.

It is possible that the perceived unavailability of resources could be linked to the level of staff's knowledge of community resources. Most commonly, parole officers reported that they learned about partnerships and services with community organizations through other parole officers as well as through existing partnerships, such as Elizabeth Fry and John Howard Society. Many parole officers made themselves aware of community resources and services through research and networking opportunities (e.g., presentations at the office, workshops, "lunch and learns"). Often, women offenders themselves provided helpful information on services and organizations. Other less common sources included resource directories, newsletters, Women's Supervision Unit, Aboriginal Community Development Officers, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers, and Aboriginal Elders. Generally, parole officers indicated that they frequently initiated the partnerships (51%; see Table 13). Another quarter reported that the partners, organizations, or their supervision district usually initiated partnerships.

Parole officers provided suggestions of potential best practices with regard to dissemination of knowledge about organizations that provide services to women offenders. The most common suggestions were to create a living resource directory that could be updated by parole officers, and would include a breakdown by region and service types such as residency accommodations and day care services. Another suggestion was for a permanent position to be allocated in order to develop new partnerships and update services information.

Table 13

Frequency with which Partnerships are Initiated by Different Individuals Involved

	Frequency					
	None		Some		Most or All	
Initiator	%	(*n*)	%	(*n*)	%	(*n*)
The parole officers themselves	8	(4)	42	(22)	51	(27)
The partner or organization	15	(8)	62	(32)	23	(12)
CSC – Supervision District	28	(15)	49	(26)	23	(12)
CSC – Regional Headquarters	60	(30)	38	(19)	2	(1)
CSC – National Headquarters	64	(32)	36	(18)	0	(0)

Note. $n = 53$. Missing values vary by item.

Additional Comments by Parole Officers

The parole officers were given the opportunity to provide feedback on aspects of reintegration that were not covered in the survey. Many of the parole officers provided lengthy responses. Several parole officers noted that they perceived fiscal restrictions and financial difficulties to be linked with increased staff burden. Some of the parole officers recommended additional support services for women in the areas in which they were struggling. For example, many parole officers stated the need for full-time psychologists rather than part-time positions. Additionally, they suggested providing Dialectical Behavior Therapy in the community. Other parole officers emphasized that the women were quite dependent on parole officers for finding services and aid, and that they needed to be actively encouraged to obtain these resources on their own.

Parole officers also noted a need for greater staff training and education in the area of women offenders. The parole officers indicated that all CSC staff, and particularly parole officers, be provided with regular training in this area. They also suggested more education for the Parole Board of Canada members to aid them in making more informed decisions regarding the uniqueness of women's risks and needs.

Discussion

The detailed responses of the parole officers regarding the manner in which women's needs are met in the community, the use of best practices, and identified areas of need indicated that parole officers were well-versed in the daily lives of their clients and their needs. Although the findings suggest that several areas present continued challenges for women in the community, the parole officers often provided creative solutions and appeared motivated to address the needs of the women under community supervision.

Women with Children

As noted in the literature, many of the women under community supervision were reported to have children, yet only one-third of women with children were primary caregivers in the community. Consistent with findings by Hartwell (2001), Gobeil (2009), Robbins et al. (2009), and Shivy et al. (2007), the difficulties of having childcare responsibilities, such as trying to regain custody, finding housing that accommodates children, and gaining employment for financial stability, were noted as issues for women in the community.

The current study also focused on the services parole officers indicated were available in the community for women with children. Although a handful of services were noted as being very important (e.g., shelters, family physician), few of the services were rated as being highly accessible. In addition to community support for women with children, many of the women lacked family support because of familial history of dysfunction, geographical distance, or simply lack of a relationship with family. These issues may be especially marked for Aboriginal women because of their social histories and the remote geographic locations of their communities. Increased familial support could be beneficial for reintegration. Further development of community partnerships could aid in the successful reintegration of women with children through access to the essentials of daily living and parenting resources. Additionally, having support from family or community may reduce the difficulties associated with the reintegration process, which in turn may aid success.

Release Planning for Women with Complex Needs

As suggested by Baillargeon et al. (2010), the majority of the parole officers reported that they found release planning for complex needs cases effective, although the timeframes imposed

to complete the process may be shorter than required. Just under one-quarter of the women were identified as requiring complex release planning for reasons including residency conditions or mental health issues. Consistent with these reasons, parole officers highlighted the need for CRFs and specialized halfway houses for women with residency conditions. The need for improved access to mental health resources, including mental health or substance abuse community beds, and discharge planning to ensure accessibility of community mental health resources at time of release was also noted.

Mental Health Services

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Adams & Ferrandino, 2008, Brink et al., 2001; Gabora, 2009; Moloughey, 2004; Porporino & Motiuk, 1992), the current study indicated that a relatively large proportion of the women offenders had at least some mental health needs. Congruent with the observation of Wolff (2005), many women, regardless of type of mental health service received in the institution, did not experience a disruption in their mental health care when transitioning to the community. Additionally, the ability of CMHI to meet its goal of promoting safe reintegration appears satisfactory, which is consistent with the general findings of the program evaluation (CSC, 2008). In contrast to this finding, however, and consistent with the arguments and findings of Grella and Greenwell (2007), as well as Ogloff, et al. (2007), the availability of community collaborations and partnerships in mental health was considered by the parole officers to be relatively limited. In addition, the parole officers reported that almost one-in-five women offenders with mental health needs could have benefitted from CMHI if they had been eligible for the program. Issues with accessibility of mental health services in the community continue to exist.

Employability and Employment

Echoing previous research (e.g., Brown, 2011; Gobeil, 2008; Graffam et al,, 2008), employment difficulties were commonly reported by the parole officers, with criminal records being noted as a frequent barrier to employment in the community for many women offenders. As previously indicated by Shivy et al. (2007), the parole officers reported a lack of an appropriate skill set, lower levels of education, lack of employment history, and lack of connection between the employment skills learned in institutions and those required in the community were barriers to employment. Parole officers also indicated that women often

experience other barriers to employment such as a lack of transportation, poor self-esteem, or a lack of funding to access job training programs. It is important to note that many of these barriers were perceived to be a greater issue for Aboriginal women offenders than non-Aboriginal offenders. Additionally, while in the community, Aboriginal women were also reported to be likely to face issues related to prejudice, racism, and discrimination and further difficulty finding employment if they returned to their home communities.

Given previous research indicating that a sample of employers had positive views of offenders and a greater willingness to hire offenders who have some sort of education or employment training (see Graffam et al., 2008; Brown, 2011), it was encouraging to see that several job training programs could be identified by the parole officers. Some findings were less positive, however, such as a relatively low rating of the employability of the women offenders by the parole officers as well as their indication that there were not enough job training programs specific to women. These findings may indicate that job training programs for women continue to be a need in the community.

Similar to previous evaluations of the CECs (e.g., CSC, 2010b), many of the community parole officers recommended their clients to CECs in their area, and approximately one-third of the referred women found employment through this avenue. Interestingly, just under one-third of women who did not make use of the CEC also found employment. This could suggest that women not attending the CECs are more successful than those attending CECs in obtaining employment or that the women not attending the CEC may have been assessed as having low employment needs upon intake and/or were capable of securing employment on their own. Notably, the IPOs referred their clients to these centres much less frequently than CPOs. Overall, it appears that there are still many barriers to employment, although there are several programs focusing on job training, both CSC and non-CSC funded.

Residential Accommodations

Although all released women are able to find residential accommodations (which can include living with family or friends), preferred options (i.e., independent living) were reported to be relatively inaccessible in the community. Even with the option of living with friends and family, about one-third of women experienced post-release difficulties related to housing. Many of the findings in the current study are in contrast to the findings of previous studies. Lack of affordable housing was the greatest barrier to finding accommodations post-release rather than

having a criminal record, as found by Gobeil (2008). In contrast to a previous report (CSC, 2009), that reported that women over the age of 50 with mental health needs underutilized Community Residential Alternatives, we found that women over the age of 50 were not noted to have a particular housing needs compared to other subpopulations of women offenders (although mental health was not jointly considered). Contrary to the findings of Leverentz (2010), children did not appear to be a large barrier for finding post-release accommodations. This finding may be attributed to the fact that only about one-third of women in the current study were reported to be primary caregivers. As suggested by the women participating in Gobeil's (2008) study, personal home placements could be used more in regions outside of the Pacific region as a form of housing.

Partnerships with Community Organizations

Consistent with previous literature, the parole officers endorsed the need for community services; however, they generally reported that more partnerships with community services were necessary to support the needs of the women in the community. Often, relationships between CSC, women offenders, and community organization were initiated by the parole officer, suggesting that these initiated partnerships are likely to be aligned with the needs of the women in the community. This alignment between the needs of women in the community and the services available in the community services was also noted in Thompson et al. (in press).

Implications of Findings

Overall, the findings suggest that there are several options available to CSC to facilitate the successful reintegration of women offenders. These options could occur pre-release, upon release, or post-release.

1. With regard to women with children, an additional focus on the pre-release development of familial relationships, especially those that may provide support upon release to women who will be caregivers of their children, could benefit the these women. More resources, whether CSC-developed or provided by partners, that address the process of regaining custody of children after release, if appropriate, could be useful for many of the women.
2. Release planning for women who have been identified as having complex needs could be facilitated through allowing parole officers more time to develop these plans, especially

when they are attempting to ensure the continuum of care for women with mental health problems.

3. The provision of residential accommodations is another area that may be benefit from improved partnerships and more resources. Ensuring that women have the necessary requirements to qualify to rent accommodations (e.g., identification, references) could increase their likelihood of finding suitable housing on release.
4. Increased engagement of community partners for hands-on employability training may further facilitate finding employment for women in the community. In addition, engaging community organizations that specifically focus on the employment needs of Aboriginal women may be advantageous.

Limitations

Although the findings of this study provide an updated and current overview of the needs of the women in the community, some issues should be noted. Ultimately, the information that was collected appeared to be relatively representative of the women in the community and can be considered reliable and valid, although it would have been preferred to capture data from more of the parole officers who work with women. Second, as with many surveys, some questions were not interpreted consistently by respondents or between respondents and the survey developers. For example, although it is it possible that the distribution of mental health needs could change over time (i.e., from in custody to being in the community), especially when considering issues with institutional adjustment and access to mental health care, it would appear that IPOs and CPOs interpreted the questions regarding the mental health needs of the women offenders they supervise differently. It is often difficult with surveys to know how questions were interpreted and it is fortunate that in the present survey issues of problems in interpretation appear to be minimal, as most data were consistent with previous research or data available from administrative sources. Finally, the study has a relatively narrow focus which may have allowed for other specific needs of women offenders to have been missed; however, the majority of the comments provided in response to the last open-ended question suggest that very few aspects of the needs of women reintegrating into the community were overlooked.

Conclusion

Over time CSC has implemented many initiatives to facilitate the successful transition of

offenders into the community. These initiatives include, but are not limited to, the development of Community Employment Centres, the Community Mental Health Initiative, Community Residential Alternative, the National Employment Strategy (2006), as well as initiatives specific to women such as the development of the Women's Supervision Units. The results indicate that services addressing many areas of need appear to have improved over time; despite this, however, women offenders continue to face challenges on release. The findings can be used to further develop and promote practices that aid in the successful reintegration of women into the community. Moreover, the present findings can be used to assess how the goals of the *Revised Community Strategy for Women Offenders* (2010) may be further met.

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Appendix A: Examples of Survey Questions

The survey consisted of both closed and open-ended style questions. Several styles of closed questions were utilized in the survey: some questions provide categories to which only one choice could be selected whereas others allowed respondents to provide more than one answer to the question.

Example of one-option response style question: "Do you believe that Aboriginal Federal Women Offenders with children face challenges above and beyond that of non-Aboriginal Federal Women Offenders with children?"

Example of multiple-option response style questions: "Which of the following types of post-release accommodations <u>are available</u> in your area for Federal Women Offenders? Please select all that apply."

Several of the questions in the survey requested the parole officers to respond with the total number or quantity of women they were currently supervising who fell into particular categories.

Example of total number response style question: "Please provide the number of women <u>that you currently supervise</u> who fall into each of the categories below, to the best of your knowledge. Number of women <u>that you currently supervise</u> who live in: an urban area, a rural area, on a reserve."

Example of quantity response style questions: "Thinking of the Federal Women Offenders <u>that you currently supervise</u>, please indicate how many: have no credit history (or have a poor credit rating)" with the parole officers choosing between four categories: none, some, most or all.

Respondents were also asked to indicate on a scale of one to ten how available and/or accessible the programs and/or services were relating to each particular theme.

Example: "Please indicate the availability of individuals/programs/services whose roles, either specifically or in part, are to help Federal Women Offenders with mental health needs in the geographical area you supervise (1=Not at all available/accessible; 10=Completely available/accessible)."

Open-ended questions were also included to allow parole officers to expand on their responses.

Example 1.: "Please describe the way(s) in which you find out about, or are made

aware of, partnership organizations and/or services available in your area that provide help for Federal Women Offenders"

Example 2: "If there is anything you would suggest that could make release planning work better to improve the community reintegration of High Risk and/or Needs Federal Women Offenders, please describe it here."

Appendix B: Residence Facilities that Accommodate Women with Children by Region

Region	Reported Accommodations for Women with Children
Pacific	Firth
	Christine Lamb
	Anne Davis House
	Elizabeth Fry
Prairies	Alpha House
	Elpida for Women (CRF)
	YMCA Housing
	Mustard Seed Housing
	Eagles Women's Ledge (CRF)
	McMillan United Church Halfway Homes
Ontario	JF Norwood (CRF)
	Cornerstone Shelter
	YMCA Housing
Quebec	Unspecified CRF
Atlantic	Shelter Nova Scotia
	Barry House
	Adsum House

Note. This list is not exhaustive and is only comprised of facilities reported by the parole officers in the survey.