



Research *at a glance*

Women Offender Substance Abuse Programming & Community Reintegration

KEY WORDS: *women offenders. substance use. treatment outcomes. recidivism*

Why we did this study

WOSAP is uniquely designed, offering a continuum of interventions and services from prison intake to warrant expiry that is matched to the specific needs of women. The program is gender responsive, providing an environment (e.g., program content, staffing and culture) that reflects an appreciation of the realities of women's lives. An essential goal of the program is to reduce return to custody.

Given that substance abuse programming distinctly designed for women is relatively rare it is important to demonstrate its success in helping women offenders remain risk free in the community.

What we did

WOSAP has three institutional treatment modules (Engagement and Education (E&E), Intensive Therapeutic Treatment (ITT), and Relapse Prevention and Maintenance (RPM)). Moreover, Community Relapse Prevention and Maintenance (CRPM), a form of aftercare, is offered to women while under supervision in the community.

We examined the influence of WOSAP on rates of recidivism based on a 52-week post release period. We first compared rates of recidivism among women who participated in the intensive component of the program (ITT-WOSAP), women who participated only in the less intensive components of the program (Other WOSAP) and women who participated in an earlier treatment program for women offenders (Pre-WOSAP). We then examined the association between CRPM participation and recidivism among the women who participated in WOSAP in the institution. Analyses were performed using Cox Proportional Regression.

What we found

Overall, 41% of the sample was returned to custody within 1 year after leaving prison. The findings indicated that WOSAP participation within the institution was not a statistically significant factor, but a trend was evident with the lowest rate of return to custody being among ITT participants (39%), followed by the Other WOSAP group (43%). The

highest return rate was among Pre-WOSAP women (47%).

When CRPM participation was examined for ITT-WOSAP and Other-WOSAP combined, the impact was pronounced. Only 5% of women who completed CRPM were returned to custody in comparison to 38% of those women who did not participate in CRPM.

After controlling for known factors associated with criminality, findings from survival analysis indicated that CRPM was strongly associated with return to custody. Relative to women offenders who completed CRPM, those who did not participate in CRPM were over 10 times more likely to return to custody-

What it means

The findings suggest that intensive substance abuse programming (ITT-WOSAP) may be more beneficial in reducing rates of return to custody than less intensive programming (Other WOSAP and pre-WOSAP) for women struggling with drug abuse. The most striking finding of this investigation was the critical piece that community-based substance abuse treatment plays for women offenders in their transition from the institution to the community. The combination of institutional and community treatment was particularly beneficial in lowering the likelihood of return to custody.

For more information

Matheson, F.M., Doherty, S., & Grant, B.A. *Women Offender Substance Abuse Programming and Community Integration*. Research Report R-202. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service Canada.

<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rsrch/reports/r202/r202-eng.pdf>

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