

A Time for Incarcerated Women to Develop a Health Action Strategy

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Background – What are incarcerated women’s health needs?

This research project was informed by the development of 9 health goals that emerged from surveys and qualitative data undertaken by the research team at Alouette Correctional Centre for Women (ACCW):

1. Improved relationships with children, family and partners
2. Improved peer and community support
3. Safe and stable housing
4. Improved access to individualized primary health care
5. Increased job skills, training, and relevant employment
6. Improved health (physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental)
7. Improved dentition and oral health
8. Improved access to health education and increased health knowledge
9. Increased ability to contribute to society

Challenges and opportunities in working with women who have previously been incarcerated

1. Locating participants interested to be interviewed
2. Maintaining contact with participants
3. Research team members at different cities
4. Honoring and respecting diverse people’s experiences



Study objectives

1. To determine the impact of women’s ability to meet their health and social needs during the year following release from prison on the success of their re-integration into the community vs reincarceration.
2. To identify individual and community-level barriers to re-integration experienced by women within one year of release.
3. To develop a predictive model for recidivism based on health indicators and compare its validity and accuracy with that of the Corrections Branch Needs Assessment (CRNA) tool that is currently used to identify individuals at high vs. low risk for recidivism.
4. To foster and evaluate community-based peer support of released women.
5. To engage study participants, health authorities, regional/ provincial government and prison officials in translating the research into a health action strategy for incarcerated and transitioning women.

Study methods

This study is a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design.

Participants: Women who are released from a provincial prison in BC during the study period.

Invitation to participate: Posters, brochures, word of mouth, and community-based research team.

Procedures: On release from ACCW, women are met at the bus stop and invited to learn about the study, and, if interested sign a consent form. Participants then have a baseline interview with a community-based researcher, that is, a women trained in interviewing who herself has had experience with incarceration.

Women are asked about their health, education, job skills, family, support, housing and other issues in accordance with the nine health goals.

The community-based researcher will contact the participants for follow-up interviews at 3, 6, 9 and 12 months.

Study outcomes

1. Identification of factors impacting the ability of participants to meet their health and social needs during the year following release from prison
2. A predictive model for recidivism based on health indicators
3. Comparison of this model with the Corrections Branch Needs Assessment (CRNA) tool and other standardized tools in current use for predicting recidivism.
4. A health action strategy for incarcerated and transitioning women.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

PAR began in response to the distrust of study participants towards research for researcher’s benefits and not that of the community.

Participants “own” the research process and are supported to use the results to improve the quality of their lives.

3 critical attributes: (1) collaboration through the research process; (2) mutually rewarding educational experience for researchers and community members; (3) tangible action based on research results.

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