



Gender-Responsive Supervision and Programming for Women Offenders in the Community

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Women continue to represent a growing percentage of correctional populations nationwide. The vast majority of these women are under community supervision (probation or parole). In 1998, nearly 1 million women were under correctional supervision in the United States. Of those, 85 percent, or over 800,000 women, were on probation or parole (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999a). Between 1990 and 1998, the per capita number of women under probation supervision rose 40 percent and the per capita number of women under parole supervision was up 80 percent (BJS, 1999a; BJS, 1999b).

This significant increase in women under correctional supervision has called attention to their status in the criminal justice system and to the particular circumstances they encounter within the system. There is a growing body of data regarding the characteristics of women in prisons and jails (see Owen and Bloom, 1995; Chesney-Lind, 1997); however, despite the fact that the greatest numbers of women offenders are under community supervision, there is far less information available on their characteristics and needs. Furthermore, little is known about gender-responsive supervision issues and strategies, treatment approaches, and characteristics that contribute to effective programs and promote successful outcomes for women offenders (Bloom, 1998a).

In order to increase the rates of successful completion of community supervision by women offenders and reduce the number of women who are re-arrested and re-involved in the criminal justice system, there is a need to design gender-responsive community supervision and treatment approaches. It is critically important to document approaches that are related to positive outcomes for this population, so that promising supervision and program models can be presented to criminal justice policy makers and practitioners.

Characteristics of Women Under Community Supervision

If we are to design effective supervision and treatment approaches that match women offenders' needs, it is important to consider the demographic and social history of this population, as well as how various life factors impact their patterns of offending.

The characteristics of criminal justice-involved women reflect a population that is triply marginalized by race, class, and gender (see Bloom, 1996).