

HIV TRANSMISSION AND PREVENTION AMONG ONTARIO WOMEN IN PRISON: A SERVICE PROVIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

Why HIV prevention for women in prison?

- Ontario women at risk for HIV are diverse with varying prevention needs

- Women in prison
 - ▣ Higher HIV prevalence compared to general population and incarcerated men

- Present study objective:
 - ▣ From the perspective of service providers, understand the HIV prevention challenges that women in prison face

Methodology



- Purposive convenience sampling
 - ▣ Six members of Ontario-based service providers to women in prison recruited

- Semi-structured interviews
 - ▣ Interviews audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed for thematic content

Results:

What do Service Providers Have to Say?

□ Perceptions of HIV Risk

- Not perceived as a direct threat to health
- Not openly discussed
- Risks include: IDU, sexual transmission and tattooing

□ Gender-based Factors

- Most women end up in prison because of prior exposure to violence and poverty

Results:

What do Service Providers Have to Say?



“The majority of the women I have met inside prison, one of the resounding issues that they have in common is sexual trauma... if it’s not sexual trauma then it’s been trauma from violence since an early age.”

Results:

What do Service Providers Have to Say?

□ Racialized Factors

- Aboriginal women and women of colour are over-represented and serve longer, harder sentences

□ Underground Economic Factors

- Women may rely on sex in exchange for drugs, cigarettes and personal care items

Results:

What do Service Providers Have to Say?

□ Structural Factors

- ▣ Discrimination from healthcare and prison staff
- ▣ Inadequate discharge planning

“Lack of release planning is putting women at risk to just offend again...You throw [women] out without any secured housing, without any secured income, without you know, anyone, any support systems whatsoever in the community...of course they are going to offend again.”

Results:

What do Service Providers Have to Say?

- HIV Prevention in Prisons
 - ▣ Irregular access to HIV prevention education and IDU and sexual harm reduction tools
 - ▣ Women in prison need the *same choices* as women in the community

Results:

What do Service Providers Have to Say?

“In terms of women’s vulnerability to HIV, the issue of access isn’t the entire picture...in the landscape of survival...a woman’s ability to negotiate the use of condoms or the use of their own equipment may be limited.

I would like to see...the presence of strong women’s programs that can do HIV prevention but really from the feminist, anti-racist perspective that acknowledges women’s experiences of trauma and violence and power imbalance, because we can keep talking about using a condom, but that doesn’t get to the issue.”

Conclusions



- Multiple factors inside and outside of prison perpetuate HIV susceptibility
- Major barrier to prevention: irregular access to prevention tools
- Provides insight on how HIV prevention challenges for women in prison can be better addressed

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