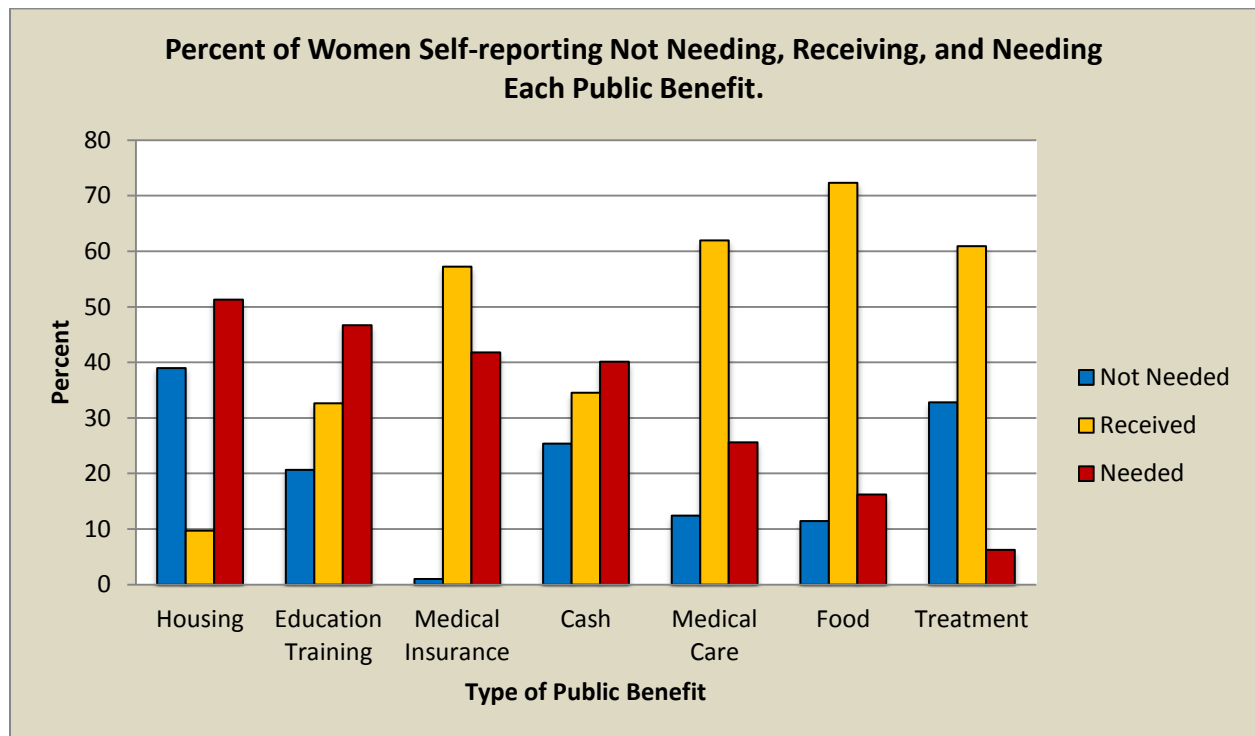


Women on Probation and Parole: Access to Crime Reducing Benefits and Programs

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Benefits and Services Relevant to Reducing Recidivism. Past research has shown that when women receive benefits and services that meet certain needs, they have less recidivism. These needs are for substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, financial assistance, education and job preparation, and safe affordable housing.

Benefits Needed and Received by Michigan Women. For a sample of 402 Michigan women on probation and parole, the highest proportions of women had unmet needs for housing, education and training, medical insurance, and cash assistance. Much smaller proportions had unmet needs for medical care and food assistance. Few lacked needed mental health or substance abuse treatment. In fact, 61% received one or both types of treatment.



Compared to women on probation, those on parole had more unmet needs for housing, cash, medical insurance, and medical care assistance.

Women's Capacity to Obtain Needed Benefits and Services. A validated assessment tool and census-tract indicators of neighborhood conditions confirmed that women understood their own needs. Their personal sense of being able to achieve their goals (self-efficacy) did not explain women's unmet needs, and qualitative data based on extensive interviews with women suggests that barriers to access rather than personal traits prevented them from getting their needs met.

Barriers to Obtaining Needed Benefits and Services

- **Uncertainty about eligibility.** Almost a third of women with unmet need for food assistance did not know if they were eligible. Women also found it difficult to determine their eligibility for housing assistance, and they often lacked information about help with education and training.
- **Programs closed to offenders.** Subsidized or public housing was the benefit that women most often said was unavailable due to their criminal histories.
- **The shrinking safety net for the poor.** Many women could not obtain cash assistance, food assistance, or housing assistance because of statewide cutbacks in services for low-income women and outstanding debts, programs restricted to people supporting young children, long wait times, and rules.

Results of Unmet Needs

- Some women with unmet housing and financial assistance needs felt they had to live with and rely on abusive men.
- Women lacking medical insurance received no care for serious illnesses, for example diagnostic tests for suspected cancer, brain surgery, or medication.

Helpful Policies in Michigan

- Except for public assistance with housing, Michigan has limited “collateral consequences” that block women in need from receiving benefits and services.
- The Michigan Department of Corrections policies, budget lines, and practices ensure that nearly all women needing mental health and substance abuse treatment receive it.

Needs for Change

- Efforts to reduce support for the poor undermine state priorities to reduce incarceration and crime for the many poor women on probation and parole. Sanctions within the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program may intensify this problem.
- The national and state shortages of affordable, safe housing restrict many women to high-crime areas, thereby exposing them to victimization as well as peers who break the law.
- Outreach efforts would inform women of potential benefits and services, including those that come through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, but resources are needed to supplement the efforts of already burdened supervising agents.

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