

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Policy Issues and Practice Strategies

VOLUME II

**Edited by
Russ Immarigeon**



Civic Research Institute

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About the Editor

Russ Immarigeon, M.S.W., received his master's degree from the School of Social Welfare at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He is the co-editor of *Offender Programs Report* and a regular contributor to *Corrections Managers' Report*. He is also editor of *Corrections & Mental Health: An Update From the National Institute of Corrections*. He is coeditor, with Meda Chesney-Lind, of the book series *Women, Crime and Criminology*, published by the State University of New York Press. Mr. Immarigeon is also co-author, with Meda Chesney-Lind, of *Women's Prisons: Overcrowded and Overused* (National Council on Crime & Delinquency, 1991) and co-editor, with Shadd Maruna, of *After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to Offender Reintegration* (Willan Publishing, 2004). He has contributed articles and book reviews to the major criminal justice journals, including *Contemporary Justice Review*, *Federal Probation*, *Prison Journal*, and *Punishment & Society*. Previously, Mr. Immarigeon also edited Volume I of *Women and Girls in the Criminal Justice System: Policy Issues and Practice Strategies* (Civic Research Institute, 2006) and served for 10 years as editor of *Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*.

Introduction

INCREASING POPULATION; INCREASED VISIBILITY

Women and girls have long been invisible components of the criminal justice system. In recent years, however, women and girls have been given greater visibility. For a decade, the bi-monthly *Women, Girls & Criminal Justice* consistently focused on issues relevant to women and girls in the criminal justice system. Other journals, too, have focused on this topic, although often with an even broader range of inquiries that include the work of women police officers, attorneys, other professional groups, and volunteers. In this fashion, publications such as *Women and Criminal Justice*, a quarterly journal which has been in print for over 20 years, and the more recent *Feminist Criminology*, a quarterly publication of the American Society of Criminology's Division of Women and Crime section, have added valuably to our understanding of, and actions on behalf of, women and girls in the criminal justice system.

Still, this new visibility is surprising to witness. Several years ago, for example, the Women's Prison Association issued a report that specifically examined the "dramatic" growth in women's imprisonment in recent decades. Typically, figures on women's imprisonment are missing from, or buried within, overviews of the American prison population, but this report recognized the plight of incarcerated women, whose number had "ballooned" 757%—from 11,212 in 1997 to 96,125 in 2004 (Jacobs & From, 2006). In this report, the Women's Prison Association ably built upon statistics routinely delivered through the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), which usually stands alone in providing a rough quantitative overview of women's imprisonment (Sabol, West, & Cooper, 2009).

But incarcerated women's hard-fought visibility can slip too easily out of sight. More recently, to cite one example, a much publicized report from the Pew Center on the States reported that "one in a 100" American adults were incarcerated, but women were not much in evidence. Beyond an odd chart that seemed concerned only with women between the ages of 35 and 39, women in the nation's prisons were left unreported and unnoticed (Pew Center on the States Public Safety Performance Project, 2008).

In a 2007 report on prison population projections for the United States, the Pew Center on the States, not always absent on these issues, acknowledged recent BJS statistics showing a disproportionate increase in the women's prison population (57% for women, and 34% for men, since 1995) and added that in 25 states (and likely others) the women's prison population would continue to grow faster than the men's prison population (16% versus 12%) (Pew Center on the States Public Safety Performance Project, 2007).

In recent years, other organizations have also missed opportunities to report on the state of women's imprisonment. In 2009, for instance, the American Society of Criminology, which should certainly know better by now, issued a 406-page collection of articles (Frost, Freilich, & Clear, 2010) on a wide range of contemporary criminal justice policy issues, including criminal history records, offender disenfranchisement, economic sanctions, information technology, minimum drinking

ages, marijuana regulation, counterterrorism, immigration and crime, social exclusion, crime hot spots, prostitution, correctional healthcare, prison safety, community sentencing, and reentry programming. Nowhere in this volume, however, is there reference to, not to mention an assessment or serious examination of, the growing level of women's imprisonment.

As another example, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) Information Center website contains nicely laid out data on overall state prison, jail, probation and parole populations and rates, as well as on the cost of corrections, but no data is given on either the number of women incarcerated or on probation or parole, or the rate at which they are confined or supervised (this shortcoming is especially surprising because the NIC is actually very good at raising and addressing issues related to women and girls in the criminal justice system).

OVERVIEW

For 10 years, *Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*, which was published by Civic Research Institute, offered practitioners and policymakers, as well as academics and advocates, a broad range of articles delving into the operation and management, empirical outcomes, and organizational development of policy and program interventions affecting women and girls in the criminal and juvenile justice systems of the United States.

In this volume, 50 of those articles have been updated and are presented in six sections. In Part 1, eight chapters provide national, international, and local information that describes the extent and policy context of women's imprisonment. As it happens, particular chapters in this section focus on the states of California, New Hampshire, and New York, as well as Canada. Several decades ago, I remember hearing prison historian David Rothman speculate, to his surprise I think, that prisons might soon be abolished. Historical developments, particularly in American penology, have demonstrated otherwise, but this may be all the more reason to carefully read British scholar Pat Carlen's thoughts on political, program, and policy barriers to the abolition of women's prisons. In Part 2, a handful of chapters take timely glances at gender- and culture-specific practices. Parts 3 and 4 each provide nine chapters, respectively, about women and girls in the criminal justice system, including excursions into justice systems in California, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Utah, and other places, including Canada and England. In Part 5, 10 articles provide a major emphasis on health care, an often-marginalized topic of significant concern for women and girls in the criminal justice system. Lastly, Part 6 offers 10 chapters covering topics related to community corrections, prisoner reentry, and restorative justice.

TRANSITION

Women, Girls & Criminal Justice recently ceased publication. In its time this periodical built a small but significant audience for the information it communicated to its readers. As it happens, I believe that this reflects the field of practice and policy regarding women and girls in the criminal justice system. Whereas there are important pockets of interest—witness the rise of gender-specific planning, a movement against the shackling of pregnant prisoners, the development of central office staff assigned

tasks related to the management and care of female offenders, the continued presence of state-based female offender commissions or task forces, and expanding concern about incarcerated women and their children—women and girls in the criminal justice system remain either an abstraction, an afterthought, or a secondary concern. I do not believe that women and girls are as ignored or as neglected as they once were, as recently as a few decades ago. Academic researchers, community activists, and corrections practitioners and policymakers have not given them too much attention in recent years. But the present often passes too quickly into the past, and I strongly suspect that this can happen in the case of women and girls in the criminal justice system--unless well-motivated and properly financed efforts continue to pursue the conditions and consequences of the criminal justice system's treatment of women and girls.

APPRECIATION

Women, Girls & Criminal Justice has benefited from more than a hundred authors of articles that have given attention to, or raised concerns about, a broad range of issues relevant to women and girls in the criminal justice system. While I like to think the publication provided comprehensive coverage, I know that many areas of policy and practice were given only cursory treatment, and some no treatment at all. Such is the depth and diversity of the issues confronting women and girls in the criminal justice system, as well as those practitioners who work with them in one capacity or another. It is impressive that, should the publication have continued, there would have been many more authors who would have contributed their observations and thoughts. As I edited this publication, I always made an effort to thank each contributor for his or her contribution. Writing is a time consuming process, and even the "simplest" assignment takes on larger consequences and commitments than anticipated. Accordingly, I want to repeat my appreciation and gratitude to the women and men who contributed their time and efforts to producing valuable chapters in the larger "book" that was *Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*. I would also like to give thanks to those who have lent their articles to this volume, because many of them have had to suffer our requests to further edit this, or update that.

CONCLUSION

In the inaugural issue of *Women, Girls & Criminal Justice*, Tracy Huling, who initially served as co-editor, and I wrote the following:

It is acknowledged by professionals in all disciplines that working with women and girls in the criminal justice system is different than working with men and boys. Advocates, practitioners, scholars, and administrators conclude that many women and girls would be ideal candidates for community-based programs designed to address their specific needs. But there is often disagreement and uncertainty about how to implement alternatives. For those incarcerated, corrections professionals face many issues unique to women and girls that affect all aspects of institutional and program management. . . . Academic and other professional journals often fail to cross the divide between those studying the issues and those working directly with women and girls. While more

has been done in recent years to address the concerns, needs, and challenges of women and girls in the criminal justice and corrections systems, much more is required, and what is done needs to be more widely disseminated and discussed. (Huling & Immarigeon, 2000, p. 1)

Women, Girls & Criminal Justice, I believe, has done a good job of disseminating information. Hopefully it has sparked conversation within those circles wherein programs, policies, and research projects are developed to address the conditions and consequences of women's and girl's involvement in the criminal justice system. Certainly, however, the need for "disseminated and discussed" information remains, as does continued, focused attention on women and girls.

—Russ Immarigeon
January 22, 2011

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Table of Contents

About the Editor iii
Introduction v

PART 1: POLICY CONCERNS RELATED TO WOMEN'S IMPRISONMENT

Chapter 1: Women's Prison Association Report Describes

Extent of Women's Imprisonment in U.S.

by Judith Greene and Kevin Pranis, M.S.

Introduction 1-2
National Prison Population Growth Trends 1-2
 Rate of Growth Greater for Women Than for Men 1-2
 Rapid Expansion in Both Female and Male Populations 1-3
 Widening Gap 1-3
Regional Prison Population Growth Trends 1-3
State Variance in Use of Imprisonment 1-5
 States That Are Toughest on Women 1-5
 States Less Likely to Imprison Women 1-8
New Century Finds Women Leading Two Opposing
 Incarceration Trends 1-8
What Research Tells Us About the Problem 1-9
 Impact of Domestic Violence Policies 1-9
 Effect of Sentencing Laws, Guidelines 1-10
 Role of Personal, Social Problems 1-10
Drivers of Female Prison Population Growth 1-11
 War on Drugs 1-11
 Rise in Arrests for Violent Offenses 1-12
Social Costs of Women's Incarceration 1-13
Policies That Make a Difference 1-14
 Major Law, Policy Reforms 1-14
 Decarceration Efforts Targeting Women 1-14
 Gender-Responsive Program Interventions 1-15
 Coordination of Reentry Services 1-16
Conclusions 1-16
 Incarcerating Women Fails to Solve Underlying Problems 1-16
 Continued Population Growth Not Inevitable 1-17
 Critical Need for Better Understanding of This Population 1-17
 Action Needed to Address Policies, Practices 1-18

Chapter 2: Independent Inspection Challenges Conditions of Confinement at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York State

by the Correctional Association of New York's Women in Prison Project Visiting Committee

Introduction	2-3
Principal Concerns Related to Prison Conditions	2-3
Officer-Inmate Relations	2-5
Deteriorating Overall Relations and Weakening of	
Internal Dispute Resolution	2-5
Excessive Use of Force	2-5
Inconsistent Enforcement of Rules and Policies	2-6
Verbal Harassment	2-6
Abusive Pat Frisks	2-7
Cell Lock And Movement Policies	2-7
Policy and Rationale	2-7
Drawbacks of Policy	2-8
Grievance System	2-9
Rodent Infestation	2-9
Use Of Cameras	2-10
Clothing Policy	2-10
Visiting Process and Family Reunion Program	2-11
Law Library	2-12
Academic and Vocational Programs	2-12
Vocational Programs	2-12
Academic Programs	2-13
Inmate Program Aides	2-13
Feedback from Correction and Civilian Staff	2-14
New York State Correctional Officer and	
Police Benevolent Association	2-14
Public Employees Federation and	
Civil Services Employees Association	2-14
Recommendations Regarding General Prison Conditions	2-15
For the Facility	2-15
For Department of Correctional Services and Facility	2-17
Additional Recommendations	2-17
Encouraging Step	2-17
Mental Health Programs and Services	2-18
Overview	2-18
Gender-Specific, Culturally Sensitive, and	
Trauma-Informed Mental Health Services	2-19
Mental Health Services in Special Housing Unit	2-20
Therapeutic Behavioral Unit	2-21

Phased Model	2-21
TBU Therapy and Care Management	2-22
TBU Impact on Disciplinary Sentence	2-22
Phase III, Discharge.	2-23
TBU Program Evaluation	2-23
Mentally Ill, Chemically Addicted Program	2-25
Evaluation of Mental Health Program.	2-26
Officer Treatment	2-26
Restructuring Needed	2-27

Chapter 3: Analyzing Women’s Imprisonment: Abolition and Its Enemies

by Pat Carlen, Ph.D.

Introduction	3-1
The Enemies of Abolition	3-1
Unwarranted Belief in Transcarceralism	3-3
Effective vs. Ineffective Arguments for Abolition	3-3
Suggested Experiment in Abolition.	3-4
Conclusion	3-5

Chapter 4: The Enduring Prison: Lessons From Prison Reform in Canada

by Stephanie Hayman, Ph.D.

Introduction	4-1
Creating Choices—Focusing Solely on Canada’s Incarcerated Women.	4-2
Model of “Typical Woman Prisoner”	4-2
Call for Creation of Regional Prisons	4-3
Post-Report Reality: Imperfect Implementation	4-3
Edmonton Prison’s Early Problems	4-4
Reassessment of Security Environments	4-4
Benevolence or Oppression?	4-5
Program Focus on Psychological Needs Supposed to Empower Women	4-6
Tracing the Path to Unintended Consequences.	4-6
False Assumption of Common Social Basis to Offending Behavior	4-7
Underestimation of the Power of Prison Itself.	4-7
Conclusion	4-8
Post Script	4-8

Chapter 5: Kinder, Gentler, Gender Responsive Cages: Prison Expansion Is Not Prison Reform

by Rose Braz, J.D.

Introduction	5-1
The Selling of Prison Expansion as “Prison Reform”.	5-2

Myth of Kinder, Gentler Gender Responsive Prisons 5-3
An Alternative Approach: A New Way of Life 5-4
Plans for Increasing Capacity Over Decade 5-4
Opposition to the Plan 5-4
Need to Focus on Reality of the Numbers 5-5
Conclusion 5-5
Author Update 5-5

**Chapter 6: Community Interventions for Women Offenders
Do Not Constitute Prison Expansion**

by Barbara Bloom, Ph.D., Barbara Owen, Ph.D., and Stephanie Covington, Ph.D.

Introduction 6-1
Identifying Options 6-2
Framework 6-2
Benefits of Community-Based Choices 6-2
 Contact With Children 6-3
 Improved Visiting Programs 6-3
Need for Sentencing Reform 6-3
Conclusion 6-4

**Chapter 7: When Child Welfare Policy Collides with the
Incarceration of Women**

by Julie Kowitz Margolies and Tamar Kraft-Stolar

Introduction 7-1
The Hidden Sentencing Term 7-2
Unintended Victims of Incarceration. 7-2
Difficulties in Preserving Family Bonds 7-3
 Impact of Adoption and Safe Families Act 7-3
 Limited Exceptions to ASFA Deadline. 7-3
Mothers' Fundamental Parental Rights Unprotected 7-4
Children's Needs Unmet 7-4
How Those Involved in the System See it 7-5
 Importance of Visits 7-5
 Visiting Conditions 7-5
 Programming 7-6
Recommendations for Change. 7-6
 Child Welfare System. 7-6
 New York State and City Departments of Correction 7-6
 Legal System and Interagency Reforms. 7-7
 New York State Budget Changes 7-7
Addendum—A Change for the Better 7-8

**Chapter 8: How One Community-Based Group Collaborates
With a State Corrections Agency to Provide Leadership Training
for Incarcerated Women**

by Niki Miller, M.S., C.P.S.

Introduction	8-1
Overview of New Hampshire Facility and Programming for Women	8-2
Development of Peer Recovery Support Services	8-3
Leadership Training	8-4
Genesis	8-4
Initial Training.	8-4
Graduation Ceremony.	8-5
Positive Outcomes of Leadership Training	8-5
"Paying it Forward"	8-5
Advocacy for Child Reunification	8-6
Impact on Attitudes.	8-6
Lessons Learned	8-7
Every Recovering Woman Has a Role in Healing the System	8-7
Input Needed for Effective Reforms	8-8
Targeted Prevention for Girls	8-8
Conclusion	8-9

PART 2: GENDER- AND CULTURE-SPECIFIC PRACTICE

**Chapter 9: When Sameness Is Difference: Prisons, Gender,
and Justice**

by Dana M. Britton, Ph.D.

Introduction	9-1
Feminism and Equal Treatment	9-2
Methodology.	9-2
Women, Men, and the Prisons That Hold Them	9-3
Demographic Comparisons	9-3
Institutional Differences	9-3
Dimensions of Difference I: Abuse	9-3
Legal Issues	9-4
Correctional Officers' Views; Resistance to Policies of Difference.	9-4
Dimensions of Difference II: Structure	9-6
General Disdain Among Correctional Officers Toward Working in Women's Prisons	9-7
Belief That Physical Structure Dilutes Effectiveness.	9-7
Where Do We Go From Here?	9-8

Chapter 10: Gender-Informed Correctional Practice: Integrating Gender-Neutral and Gender-Specific/Responsive Paradigms

by Kelley Blanchette, Ph.D., and Shelley L. Brown, Ph.D.

Introduction 10-2

The Risk Principle: Empirical Relevance for Women Offenders 10-2

 Meta-Analytic Review: Findings and Limitations 10-3

 Risk Assessment Tools for Women 10-3

The Need Principle 10-4

 Which Needs Are Criminogenic for Women? 10-5

 Employment and Education 10-5

 Family Relationships 10-5

 Associates 10-5

 Attitudes 10-6

 Substance Abuse 10-6

 Community Functioning 10-6

 Financial Status 10-6

 Personal/Emotional Factors 10-7

 Victimization 10-7

 Reformulating Need Factors as Risk Factors 10-8

The Responsivity Principle and Women-Specific Factors 10-8

 Women-Centered Perspectives 10-9

 Complementary, Not Competing, Perspectives 10-9

 Correctional Treatment Outcome 10-10

Gender-Informed Reformulation of the Responsivity Principle 10-10

Conclusion: A Reconciliation of Approaches 10-11

Chapter 11: Examining Gender Inequities in Classification Systems: Missouri’s Development of a Gender-Responsive Assessment Instrument

by Kristi Holsinger, Ph.D., Emily J. Salisbury, Ph.D., and Patricia Van Voorhis, Ph.D.

Introduction 11-2

Who Are the Women in the Criminal Justice System? 11-2

Inadequate Assessment Tools for Women Offenders 11-3

Systematic Over-Classification of Women 11-4

 Contributing Factors to Over-Classification of Women 11-4

 Infrequency of Misconduct 11-4

 Over-Citation for Minor Violations 11-4

 Excessive Use of Discretionary Overrides 11-5

Unique Needs of Women Ignored 11-5

Missouri’s Efforts to Improve Classification of Women Offenders 11-6

 Growth in State’s Incarceration Rates Drives Change 11-7

 Research Findings on Incarcerated Women in Missouri 11-7

 Current Issues in Assessment 11-8

Missouri as Pilot Site 11-8
 Samples 11-8
 Assessment Instrument Development and Findings 11-9
 Conclusion 11-10

Chapter 12: Female-Responsive Services and Positive Peer Culture: Thoughts for Consideration

by Rebecca Maniglia, Ph.D., and Linda Albrecht

Introduction 12-1
 Defining Modalities: Positive Peer Culture. 12-2
 Issues for Consideration: PPC Precepts and the
 Female-Responsive View 12-4
 PPC: Learning to Be Other-Centered. 12-4
 Female-Responsive View: Valuing Self 12-4
 PPC: Self-Improvement Through Giving and Getting Feedback 12-5
 Female-Responsive View: Relational Intimacy, Mutuality, and the
 Larger Social Environment 12-5
 PPC: Addressing Direct and Immediate Problems. 12-6
 The Female-Responsive View: Understanding the Broader Context
 of Behavior. 12-6
 PPC: Exclusive Power Given to Peer Group 12-7
 Female-Responsive View: A Greater Adult Role 12-7
 PPC: Peer Group Addresses Traditional Adult Monopoly. 12-8
 Female-Responsive View: PPC Sidelines Adults. 12-8
 Questionable Generalizability of
 Ppc Outside Program. 12-9
 Specific Recommendations Regarding Group
 Process With Girls. 12-10
 Specific Recommendations for Programs Using PPC 12-12

Chapter 13: Culturally Responsive Services and the Transitional Needs of Imprisoned Native American Women

by Kimberly Greer, Ph.D.

Introduction 13-1
 Current Study 13-2
 Methods 13-2
 Survey 13-3
 Follow-Up Interviews 13-3
 Population Demographics 13-3
 Living Arrangements 13-3
 Employment History 13-4
 Education 13-4
 Cause of Imprisonment; Sentences 13-4

Identifying Transitional Needs	13-5
Physical Health	13-5
Mental Health	13-6
Reconnecting With Children	13-6
Other Critical Issues	13-7
Housing	13-7
Education, Employment, and Financial Assistance.	13-8
Cultural Traditions and Successful Transitions	13-8
Culturally Responsive Services	13-8
Analyzing Need for Services	13-9
Model for Culturally Responsive Programming	13-10

PART 3: WORKING WITH WOMEN

Chapter 14: When Victims Become Offenders: In Search of Coherence in Policy and Practice

by Judith Rungay, Ph.D.

Introduction	14-1
Types and Effects of Victimization	14-2
Contradictory Dual Identity Impedes Coherent Practice	14-3
Linking Victimization to Offending	14-4
Impact of Abuse on Women’s Psychological Health	14-4
Pathways Into Criminal Lifestyles	14-5
Causality and the Problem of Responsibility	14-6
Cases of Domestic Violence.	14-6
Problems Arising From Single Focus.	14-7
Repentance and Reparation	14-8
Grief and Remorse	14-8
Efforts to Repair Damage.	14-8
Need to Reassert Personal Agency	14-9
Punishment, Responsibility, and Change	14-10
Support Services Are Treatment, Not Reward	14-10
Coercive Element to Treatment	14-11
Provision of Services.	14-11
Policy Implications of Connections Between Victimization and Offending . . .	14-12

Chapter 15: Women in Maximum-Security Describe Links Between Past Victimization and Criminal Behavior

by Dana DeHart, Ph.D.

Introduction	15-1
Research Methods	15-2
Impact of Victimization on Women.	15-2

Involvement in Criminal Activity	15-3
Impairment of Physical or Mental Health	15-3
Disruption of Relationships	15-4
Problems at School and Work	15-5
Cumulative Effects of Victimization Over Lifespan	15-5
Impact of Women’s Victimization on their Children	15-5
Turning Points in the Women’s Lives	15-6
Mitigation Factors	15-6
Buffers or Supports in the Women’s Lives.	15-6
Women’s Self-Identified Strengths	15-7
Implications for Practice and Policy	15-7

Chapter 16: Dignity Denied: The Price of Imprisoning Older Women in California

by Heidi Strupp, J.D., and Donna Willmott, M.P.H.

Introduction	16-1
Investigative Method	16-2
Findings of the Investigation	16-2
LSPC Recommendations	16-3
Reduce the Numbers of Older Prisoners	16-3
Improve the Lives of Older Prisoners	16-4
Addressing a Failed Public Policy.	16-4

Chapter 17: “Who Am I Now?” Exploring Same-Sex Experiences Between Women in an Ohio Prison

by Theresa A. Severance, Ph.D.

Introduction	17-1
Overview of Previous Studies’ Findings	17-2
Women’s Categorization of Same-Sex Activity and Motives for Relationships.	17-2
Need to View Identity and Behavior Within Context	17-3
Current Study—Methods	17-3
Current Study—Findings	17-4
Making Sense of Their Same-Sex Relationships	17-4
Confusion About Involvement	17-5
“Coming Out” to Family, Friends	17-5
Impact of Release on Relationships	17-6
Complexity of Motivations, Unresolved Issues Compound Problems	17-6
Conclusion	17-7

Chapter 18: Working With Incarcerated Mothers and Their Children

by Dee Ann Newell, M.A.

Prelude: New York City, 1971 18-1
 Recent Experience Working With Incarcerated Women in Arkansas 18-2
 Poor Conditions for Pregnant Inmates 18-2
 “Sentenced” to Hostile Childbirth 18-3
 Edith: A Story of Motherhood and Birth in Prison 18-3
 Loss of First Child 18-4
 Birth of, and Separation From, New Baby 18-4
 Related Traumas 18-5
 Change to the Law Is Only Effective Way to Insure Dignified Childbirth. 18-5

Chapter 19: Linking Issues and Challenges Facing Provincially Sentenced Women With Implications for Correctional Practice

by Smita Vir Tyagi, Ph.D.

Introduction 19-2
 Current Study—Purpose and Theoretical Framework 19-2
 Study Population 19-3
 Issues Faced by Study Participants 19-3
 Victimization and Abuse 19-3
 Mental Health Problems 19-3
 Offending Histories of Participants 19-4
 Research Questions and Methods 19-4
 Study Findings 19-6
 Psychological Functioning of Women Offenders 19-6
 Differences and Commonalities Between Recidivists
 and First-Time Offenders 19-6
 Differences Between Revolving-Door Offenders
 and Those Who Offended at a Lower Rate 19-8
 Impact of Disadvantages in Life Circumstances and
 Historical Difficulties on Offenders’ Psychological
 Functioning and Likelihood of Recidivism 19-8
 Implications for Correctional Practice. 19-9
 Recognizing and Addressing Women’s Needs 19-9
 Advocating for Systems-Level Changes 19-10
 Developing Innovative Programs 19-10

Chapter 20: Insights Into Gambling in Jails and Prisons by Female Offenders

by DJ Williams, Ph.D., and Mary Liz Hinton

Introduction 20-1
 Study Purpose and Methods 20-2

Procedure and Instrumentation	20-3
Study Participants	20-3
Categorical-Content Data Analysis	20-4
Study Results	20-5
Gambling Common Among Female Inmates	20-5
Where and Why Female Inmates Gamble	20-5
Gambling for Commissary Items	20-6
Relief From Boredom	20-6
Social Benefits of Gambling Participation	20-6
Gambling for Psychotropic Medications.	20-7
Enforcing Facility Rules Against Gambling	20-9
Negative Effects of Gambling in Jail or Prison.	20-9
Emergent Themes and Practice Implications	20-10

Chapter 21: The Power of Collective Writing by Women Prisoners

by Judith Scheffler, Ph.D.

Introduction	21-1
Extending a Literary Tradition	21-2
Collaborative Texts	21-3
Challenging the Hyperinvisibility of Women Prisoners	21-4
Program Examples.	21-4
California	21-4
Massachusetts	21-4
Connecticut	21-5
New York	21-5
How Women Inmates Experience Writing Workshops	21-6
The AIDS Counseling and Education Program	21-7
The Power of Collaboration	21-8

Chapter 22: College on the “Inside”: Reflections on the Practice and Pitfalls of Teaching in a Women’s Prison

by Lora Bex Lempert, Ph.D.

Introduction	22-1
The College Program.	22-2
Program Development	22-2
Student Demographics	22-3
Class Structure	22-3
Institutional Issues	22-3
University Support	22-3
Corrections Support	22-4
Working Within Antithetical Cultures and Power Structures	22-4
“Us” and “Them”: Binaries in Prison	22-5

Negotiating Boundaries	22-6
Non-Negotiational Boundaries	22-7
How Prison Environment Affects Students' Education Experience	22-8
Change Accrues	22-8
Caveat: Avoid Gratitude and Valorization Pitfalls.	22-9
Final Reflection	22-10

PART 4: WORKING WITH GIRLS

Chapter 23: The Criminogenic Needs of Girls: What Are the Most Important Risk Factors for Delinquency and Are They Different From the Risk Factors for Boys?

by Dana Jones Hubbard, Ph.D., and Travis C. Pratt, Ph.D.

Introduction	23-1
Overview of Earlier Studies	23-2
Construct of Current Study	23-3
Avoiding Pitfalls of Past Studies	23-3
Sample Studied	23-3
Identified Predictors	23-4
Study Results	23-4
Discussion: Implications for Practice	23-5

Chapter 24: Self-Discovery and Empowerment: The *Voices* Program for Girls

by Stephanie S. Covington, Ph.D.

Introduction	24-2
Addressing the Reality of Girls' Lives	24-4
Socialization and Identity	24-4
Culture and Class	24-5
Sexuality	24-5
Violence and Aggression	24-6
Physical and Psychological Risk	24-7
Depression	24-7
Substance Abuse	24-7
Relationship Violence	24-8
Eating Disorders	24-8
Girls in Juvenile Justice Settings	24-8
Teen Mothers	24-9
Gender-Responsive Principles	24-9
Celebrating Strengths	24-10
Safety	24-10
Female Mentors and Role Models	24-11
Developing and Supporting Leadership Skills	24-11

Empowering Girls to Be Forces for Social Change	24-11
Media Literacy	24-12
Physical, Sexual, and Mental Health Information	24-12
Cultural Connections	24-12
Solidarity Between Girls and Women	24-12
Guidelines for Girls' Programs	24-12
Theoretical Foundation for <i>Voices</i>	24-13
Psychological Development	24-13
Attachment	24-14
Resilience	24-14
Addiction	24-15
Trauma	24-16
Environment	24-16
Safety	24-17
Self-Harm	24-17
Program Overview	24-18
Curriculum	24-18
The <i>Voices Journal</i>	24-18
The <i>Facilitator's Guide</i>	24-19
Facilitating <i>Voices</i>	24-20
Facilitating in a Juvenile Justice Setting	24-21
Preparation Prior to the Session	24-21
Helpful Tips for Running a Group	24-22
Reliability Issues	24-22
Style Issues	24-22
Encouraging Group Interaction	24-22
Cultural Awareness Issues	24-23
Special Considerations for Juvenile Justice Settings	24-23
Elements of the Group Process	24-23
Group Membership	24-23
Timing of Sessions	24-23
Safety	24-23
Group Agreements and Ground Rules	24-24
Opening and Closing the Session	24-25
Empowerment	24-25
Guided Imagery	24-25

Chapter 25: “Just Leave Me Alone! I’m So Afraid to Be Alone”: Helpful Lessons From Attachment and Object Relations Theory

by Robin A. Robinson, Ph.D., Psy.D.

Introduction	25-1
Trauma and Attachment	25-2

Conceptual Frameworks of Attachment	25-2
Fear of Annihilation and Abandonment	25-3
Impaired Ability to Modulate Affect Exacerbates Problems	25-4
Development, Adaptation, and Attachment.	25-4
Yearning for Touch	25-5
Policy and Treatment Implications	25-6

Chapter 26: Loss, Violence, and Attachment Among Female Juvenile Offenders

by Judith Ryder, Ph.D.

Introduction	26-1
Theoretical Context	26-2
Developmental Criminology	26-2
Feminist Research	26-2
Attachment Theory	26-3
Trauma Theory	26-3
Current Study.	26-4
Population Demographics.	26-4
Traumatic Events Experienced	26-4
Death of a Loved One	26-4
Physical Absence.	26-5
Psychological Unavailability.	26-5
Violence and Victimization Experience	26-5
In the Home	26-5
In the Community	26-6
Parental Support and Attachment.	26-6
<i>Speaking With Others.</i>	26-6
Feeling Safe and Secure	26-6
Implications for Future Research and Programming	26-6

Chapter 27: Revamping the Altschuler and Armstrong Intensive Aftercare Program for Use With Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

by Judith Ryder, Ph.D.

Introduction	27-1
Best Practices for Girls	27-2
Positive Female Development	27-2
Understanding Gendered Pathways to Crime	27-3
The IAP Model	27-4
Reintegrative Continuum	27-4
Operating Principles	27-5
Overarching Case Management	27-6
Assessment, Classification, and Selection Criteria.	27-6

Individualized Case Planning That Incorporates Family and Community Perspectives	27-7
A Mix of Intensive Surveillance and Services	27-7
Balance of Incentives and Graduated Sanctions	27-7
Creation of Links With Community Resources and Social Networks	27-8
Conclusion	27-8

**Chapter 28: Honolulu’s Girls Court: Lessons Learned From
a Process Evaluation**

by Lisa Pasko, Ph.D., and Meda Chesney-Lind, Ph.D.

Introduction	28-1
The Girls Court Program	28-2
Evaluation Method and Study Participants	28-2
Findings: Positive Results for Girls Court Cohort vs. Comparison Group	28-3
Statistical Findings	28-3
Girls’ Response to Program	28-4
Parents’ Reactions	28-5
Staff Impressions	28-5
Obstacles to Overcome	28-6
Lessons from the Laboratory	28-7

**Chapter 29: “Alternative Educational” School Helps High-Risk
Adolescent Girls Through Supportive, Well-Staffed Program**

by Diana Nicholson, Ph.D., and Sibylle Artz, Ph.D.

Introduction	29-1
Study Participants	29-2
Female Students	29-2
Participating Schools	29-2
Data Collection and Findings	29-3
Links Between Aggression, Violence, and Poor School Experiences	29-4
Alternative School Successes	29-6
Implications for Practice	29-11

**Chapter 30: Road Trip! A Simple Solution for Protecting Girls From
Institutional Abuse**

by Sandra Simkins, J.D.

Introduction	30-1
Scope of the Problem	30-1
Existing Protections Underutilized and Insufficient	30-3
Need for Attorneys to Stay Involved Post-Disposition	30-3

PART 5: HEALTH CARE ISSUES

Chapter 31: Struggling for Health Care on the Inside

by Elaine Rizzo, Ph.D., and Margaret Hayes, Ph.D., RN

Introduction 31-1
Inadequate, Delayed, or Insufficient Medical Care. 31-2
 Medical Services. 31-2
 Mental Health 31-3
Care of Pregnant Inmates 31-4
Dental Care 31-5
Nutritional Concerns 31-5
Hygiene and Communicable Diseases 31-6
Negative Impact of Prison Culture and Infrastructure 31-7
Prison Nurses Point of View 31-8
Long-Term Impact of Neglect 31-9

**Chapter 32: Women, Substance Use, and Pregnancy:
Drug Scares and Practice—Sociohistorical Considerations**

by Susan C. Boyd, Ph.D.

Prologue 32-1
Introduction 32-2
Policy as Outgrowth of Moral Panic 32-2
Maternal-State Conflict 32-3
Effect of Granting Personhood to Unborn Children 32-4
Punishment Versus Care 32-4
Seeing Mother as Adversarial to her Fetus 32-5
Alternative Services for Women and Children Needed 32-5
Epilogue 32-6

Chapter 33: The Health Concerns of Incarcerated Women

*by Brenda V. Smith, J.D., Nairi Simonian, J.D.,
and Jaime Yarussi, M.S.*

Introduction 33-1
Health Status and Outcomes: Little Improvement But
 New Challenges. 33-1
 Prisons Ill Equipped to Treat Women’s Health Issues 33-2
 Barriers to Health Care in Community Exacerbate Situation 33-3
Profile of Incarcerated Women 33-3
 Increased Numbers Relative to Men 33-3
 Offense Profiles and Offender Demographics 33-3
Impact of Women’s Poor Economic Status 33-4

Status Worsened by PRWORA	33-5
Familial Status and Responsibilities.	33-5
Impact of Women’s Histories of Trauma	33-7
Pre-Incarceration Trauma Experiences.	33-7
Abuse in Custody	33-7
Chronic Health Conditions of Incarcerated Women	33-8
Asthma	33-8
Diabetes	33-9
Hypertension.	33-9
Monitoring and Continuity of Care	33-9
Incarcerated Women and Addiction.	33-9
Drug Use and Criminal Acts	33-10
Drug Use and Risk for Disease	33-10
Drug Treatment in Prison	33-10
Incarcerated Women and Pregnancy	33-11
Conditions Co-Occurring With Pregnancy.	33-11
Inadequate Prenatal Care	33-12
HIV and Pregnancy	33-12
Incarcerated Women and Mental Health Problems.	33-13
Alarming High Rates of Mental Illness.	33-13
Mental Health Services Largely Unavailable.	33-13
Inappropriate Medication; Inadequate Monitoring	33-14
Inadequate Staff-Patient Ratios	33-14
Dealing With Communicable Diseases	33-15
Hepatitis A	33-16
Hepatitis B	33-16
Hepatitis C	33-17
Hepatitis Risk Factors	33-17
Recommended Medical Response.	33-17
Sexually Transmitted Diseases	33-16
HIV and AIDS	33-17
Women’s Routes of Infection	33-19
Rates Higher for Incarcerated Women Than for Men.	33-20
Race and Ethnicity of Incarcerated Women	
With HIV/AIDS	33-20
Treatment Deficiencies in Prison	
Health Care Systems	33-21
Health Education Programs Needed	33-22
Tuberculosis	33-22
Treatment Issues of Incarcerated Women	33-24
Conclusion	33-27

Chapter 34: A Truly Vicious Circle: Women Offenders From Prison to Hospital to Prison to Hospital

by Robin A. Robinson, Ph.D., Psy.D.

Introduction	34-1
Case 1: Rachel	34-2
Initial Meeting and Assessment	34-2
Therapy Experience	34-3
An Upgrade in Criminal Charges and Dramatic Decline in Progress	34-3
Case 2: Georgia	34-4
Patient in Need of Restraint and Stabilization	34-4
Therapy Experience	34-5
Outside Pressure to Return to Prison	34-5
Alternative Placement	34-5
Discussion: Policy and Practice Issues	34-6

Chapter 35: Access to Community Health Care for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: Initial Lessons From the Massachusetts Health Passport Project

by Francine T. Sherman, J.D.

Introduction: Gender-Specific Challenges	35-1
Health Care Mandated for Juvenile Justice Populations	35-2
Access to Health Care Upon Reentry to Community	35-3
The Massachusetts Health Passport Project	35-4
Linchpin Role of Advocate	35-4
Evaluation Goals	35-5
Core Program Elements	35-5
Policy and Program Issues	35-6
Health Care Funding	35-6
Gender-Responsive Service Delivery	35-7
Medical Consent and Confidentiality	35-7
A Public Health Imperative	35-8

Chapter 36: Incarcerated Women and Bulimia: An “Alternative” Addiction

by Janet K. Lohmann, Ph.D.

Introduction	36-1
Study Sample	36-2
Study Method	36-3
Focus Groups	36-3
Feminist Methodology	36-3
Psychological Concerns and Disordered Eating	36-4
Feminine Identity and Bulimia	36-5

Control and Bulimia	36-6
Addiction and Bulimia	36-7
Self-Harm/Self-Esteem and Bulimia	36-8
Other Reasons for Bulimia	36-8
Policy Considerations	36-9

Chapter 37: Findings From an Evaluation of the Young Women’s CHOICES HIV-Prevention Program

by Susan Adair, M.A., Elaine Wolf, Ph.D., and Marsha Weissman, Ph.D.

Introduction	37-1
Why Target This Population?	37-2
Foundation of the Program’s Design.	37-3
Youth Development Theory	37-3
Gender-Specific Services	37-4
Peer Education	37-4
Description of Young Women’s Choices.	37-4
Program Mission	37-4
Eligibility Requirements	37-5
Educational and Support Group-Level Intervention	37-5
Program Evaluation	37-6
Evaluation Design	37-6
Program Implementation During Evaluation Period	37-6
Outcomes Reported	37-7
What the Findings Mean for HIV-Prevention Programs for Young Women	37-7

Chapter 38: Women Don’t Check Their Reproductive Rights at the Jailhouse Door

by Lorraine Kenny, Ph.D.

Introduction	38-1
Foundational Court Decisions	38-2
Right to Abortion Generally.	38-2
Right to Abortion in Prison	38-3
Abortion Right Does Not Conflict With Prison	38-3
Passing the “Undue Burden” Test	38-4
Meeting Prisoners’ Medical Needs	38-4
Reproductive Health Care, Incarceration, and the Need for Education	38-5

Chapter 39: Detecting Serious Mental Illness Among Women in the Criminal Justice System

by James A. Swartz, Ph.D.

Introduction	39-1
Current Study: Testing the Accuracy of the K6 Scale for Women	39-2

Study Method	39-2
Study Sample	39-3
Study Measures.	39-3
The CIDI-SF	39-4
The K6 Screen	39-4
Ad Hoc Screens and Past-Year Treatment	39-5
How Analysis Was Conducted	39-5
ROC-AUC	39-5
Percent Correctly Classified	39-6
LR Score	39-6
Youden's Index	39-6
Study Results	39-6
Higher Rates of SMI and Other Disorders for Criminal Justice Involved Women	39-6
Diagnostic Accuracy of the K6 Scale	39-6
Discussion: Encouraging But Preliminary Findings	39-7
K6 a Useful Screen.	39-7
Value of Treatment History Questions for Screening	39-7
Conclusion	39-8

Chapter 40: Service Needs of Substance Abusing Mothers Involved With the Criminal Justice System

by Donna Petras, Ph.D., Carol Rippey Massat, Ph.D., and Elizabeth Lehr Essex, Ph.D.

Introduction	40-1
Key Challenges and Service Needs.	40-2
Current Study.	40-2
Methods and Instruments Used	40-2
Participant Eligibility Requirements and Demographics.	40-3
Findings	40-5
Criminal Justice Involvement	40-5
Substance Abuse History.	40-5
Employment and Earnings	40-5
Residence.	40-5
Health Issues	40-5
Practical Implications of Findings.	40-7
Women Need Assistance Beyond Treatment for Substance Use	40-7
A Need for Multisystemic Services	40-8

PART 6: COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS, PRISONER REENTRY, AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Chapter 41: Challenge to Professionals: Address the Reentry Needs of Women Returning to their Communities

by Jo Kurzmann, M.S.W.

Introduction 41-1
Women’s Reentry Barriers. 41-1
 Housing Issues 41-2
 Employment and Education Issues. 41-2
Typical Reentry Challenges for a Woman. 41-3
Personal Reentry Experience. 41-3
The Challenge to Advocacy and Corrections Organizations. 41-4
Conclusion 41-4

Chapter 42: Improving the Odds for Women in Community Corrections

by Ann L. Jacobs

Introduction 42-1
Forget the “Silver Bullet”—Matrix of Supports Is Needed 42-2
 Using the Matrix Within a Phased Reentry Process 42-2
 Universal Applicability Modeled on Criminal Justice-Involved Women 42-4
Importance of Understanding Trauma When Working With Women 42-4
Importance of Relationships to Women 42-5
Importance of Working in Several Areas Simultaneously 42-5
Importance of Children to Women Under Supervision. 42-6
The Opportunity to Operate More Effectively 42-7

Chapter 43: Focus on “Turning Points” May Prevent Women From Offending

by Dana DeHart, Ph.D.

Introduction 43-1
The Research Study 43-2
Women’s Self-Identified Turning Points 43-2
 Victimization 43-2
 Death or Loss of Loved One 43-3
 Other Family Disruption 43-4
 Pregnancy and Childbirth 43-5
 Finding or Losing a Job 43-5
 Trouble With the Law 43-5
 Finding Religion 43-6

Implications for Practice and Policy	43-7
Focus Interventions on Turning Points.	43-7
Building Strengths Through Structured Programming	43-8

Chapter 44: Drug Overdose Among Women Leaving Prisons and Jails: An Overlooked Risk

by Rachel McLean, M.P.H., and Susan Sherman, M.P.H., Ph.D

Women and Drug Use	44-1
Dramatic Increase in Heroin Overdoses	44-2
Barriers to Prevention of Death From Overdose	44-2
Women’s Overdose Experiences	44-3
The Window Study	44-3
Research Methods.	44-3
Participants’ Backgrounds	44-3
Sociodemographics.	44-3
Arrest History.	44-3
Health and Housing Issues.	44-4
Participants’ Substance Use Experience and Knowledge	44-4
Analysis of Participants’ Overdose Knowledge	44-5
Opportunities for Overdose Prevention and Response Training	44-5
Correctional and Community Settings	44-5
Reducing Fear of Calling for Help	44-6
Conclusion	44-6

Chapter 45: Preparing for Reentry: Challenges and Strategies

by Theresa A. Severance, Ph.D.

Introduction	45-1
Research Methods	45-2
Reentry Concerns Identified by Study Participants	45-2
Basic Needs	45-2
Employment	45-3
Relapse and Recidivism	45-4
Children	45-4
Community Acceptance	45-4
Women’s Anticipated Post-Release Strategies	45-5
Finding Employment	45-5
Getting More Education	45-5
Addressing Substance Abuse Problems	45-6
Finding “Prince Charming”	45-6
Relying on Faith and Prayer.	45-7
Implications for Programming and Practice	45-7
Begin Assistance Before Inmate’s Release.	45-8
Support the Family Reunification Process.	45-8
Conclusion	45-8

Chapter 46: Lessons From a Decade of Research About Women in the Process of Reentry From Prison

by Patricia O'Brien, Ph.D.

Introduction 46-1
 Kansas City Study 46-3
 Illinois Studies 46-3
 Grace House 46-3
 NIJ Study 46-4
 NIDA Study 46-4
 One-Stop Center Study 46-5
 Conclusion 46-6

Chapter 47: Mentoring: A Critical Component of Gender-Responsive Reentry Model for Female Offenders

by Judith B. Fox, J.D.

Introduction 47-1
 Overcoming Women Offenders' Early Exposure to Unhealthy Relationships 47-2
 Negative Impact of Unhealthy Relationships 47-2
 Need to Learn About Healthy Relationships 47-2
 Barriers to Addressing Women's Needs 47-3
 Limitations of Services, Programs 47-3
 Decrease in Informal Community Networks 47-3
 Value of Mentoring Programs 47-4
 Positive Role-Modeling and Motivation 47-4
 Bridge to Community Networks 47-4
 More Research Needed 47-5

Chapter 48: Women's Experiences With Men's Incarceration and Reentry

by Creasie Finney Hairston, Ph.D., and William Oliver, Ph.D.

Introduction 48-1
 Current Study 48-2
 Costs to Women of Maintaining Bonds 48-2
 Sources of Conflict 48-3
 Real or Imagined Infidelity 48-3
 Fathers' Relationships With Their Children 48-3
 Money, Jobs, and a Prison Mentality 48-4
 Managing Conflict and Change Upon Reentry 48-5
 Implications for Programming 48-5

Chapter 49: Criminal Justice in the Mother Tongue: A Feminist Critique of the Promise of Restorative Justice

by Lisa Pasko, Ph.D.

Introduction 49-2
 Restorative Justice—The Promise 49-2

An Alternative to Punitive Justice	49-2
A Departure From Government Control	49-3
The Care Response to Criminal Justice.	49-3
The Necessity of Maintaining Bonds	49-4
Care and Responsiveness	49-4
Understanding and Feeling Responsibility and Obligation to Others	49-4
Care Is Not a Gendered Response to Crime	49-5
Past and Current Use of Restorative Justice Approach.	49-5
The Restorative Justice Process.	49-6
Emotion as Part of the Process Toward Healing and Recovery.	49-6
Restoration of Pride and Trust	49-6
Problems Seen When Restorative Justice Is Viewed	
Through a Masculine Lens	49-7
Different But Equal?.	49-8
Result—Marginalization of “Restorative-Like” Programs	49-9
Application to Youth, Women, and Family	49-9
Issues of Restorative Justice Implementation in	
Unequal Multicultural Societies	49-10
Implications for Policy and Practice	49-11
Conclusion	49-12

Chapter 50: A Feminist Vision of Justice? Problems and Possibilities of Restorative Justice

by Emily Gaarder, Ph.D.

Introduction—Moral Reasoning and Gender Differences.	50-1
Restorative Justice as a Forum for Narrative	50-2
Narratives and Stories Versus the Legal Model	50-2
Creating a Supportive Stage.	50-3
Avoiding the Victimization Label	50-4
Benefits for Women Offenders.	50-4
Restorative Justice as a Forum for Community Responsibility	50-5
Central Role of Community	50-5
The Issue of Problematic Community Norms	50-5
Enhancing Women’s Options	50-6
Problem of Insufficient Resources	50-6
Ensuring Appropriate Application	50-7
Cultural Benefits and Concerns.	50-7
<i>Index.</i>	I-1