

Women's imprisonment and resettlement in Europe

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The characteristics of imprisoned women

- Severe poverty and social exclusion
- Drug and/or alcohol problems
- Physical and mental health problems
- Physical, sexual, emotional victimization as child/adult
- Low educational attainment
- Unemployment or precarious/low paid employment
- Reliance on income from state benefits
- Relatively young
- Mothers of dependent children
- Likely to have been living without a partner

(e.g. Loucks, 2004; Mary-Portas and Contrepois, 2007; Baldry, 2011; Kerr, 2014; Pruin, 2016)

Factors underlying women's offending

- Gendered pathways into crime (Daly, 1998; Leverentz, 2006; Salisbury and van Voorhis, 2009; Scroggins and Malley, 2010; Opsal, 2011)
 - Poverty/financial pressures
 - Substance misuse
 - Emotional/physical pressure – especially partners
 - Cultural pressures (e.g. consumerism)
 - Gaining acceptance/respect
 - Risk taking/excitement

Imprisoned women

- Offences vary but in many jurisdictions poverty and drug related offending predominates
- Because they generally make up a small percentage of the overall prison population, women may be held in female-only establishments some distance from home or in units attached to male prisons where service provision is likely to be influenced by the needs of the dominant (male) population
- While sentence lengths vary, most women are generally serving short sentences of imprisonment which impacts on their ability to access prison based services (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2007; Simpson and McNulty, 2008)

The repeated use of short prison sentences “is a form of serial institutionalisation that is even more disruptive to positive engagement with the community and maintains more chaotic living than a longer sentence” (Baldry, 2011, p. 256)

- Minority women - especially those from marginalized groups such as Roma women – are over-represented in prison (Mary-Portas and Contrepois, 2007; Pozo Gordaliza, 2013)
- The proportion of women held on remand varies across jurisdictions but is generally high: release dates are uncertain and prisoners may not have access to services available to sentenced prisoners

“Throughcare policy and practice for women falsely assumes there is time to develop a case plan in prison, that the date of release is known and that people leaving prison have spent longer in prison than is the case” (Baldry, 2011, p. 258)

The collateral consequences of imprisonment: Relationships

- Dependent children
 - Care arrangements
 - Impact of maternal imprisonment (e.g. Hissel et al., 2011)
 - Maintaining contact
 - Accommodating children in prison (Barbarett, 2014)
 - Travel time and costs (Cruells et al., 2007, Pruin, 2016)
 - Knowledge/stigma (Gray et al., 2016)
- Economic impact of 'matrifocality' (Cruells et al., 2007)
- Lack of supportive family networks (Maidment, 2006)
- Retraumatization – strip searches, excessive regulation and monitoring

The collateral consequences of imprisonment: Accommodation

- Women more likely to lose accommodation because they are less likely to have a partner who can maintain the tenancy/mortgage
- A key resettlement need for women (MacRae et al., 2006; Zurhold et al., 2011)
- Distant location of prisons creates problems in arranging post-release accommodation (Pruin, 2016)
- Homelessness or housing in high crime rate areas may inhibit reintegration and increase risk of recidivism (Baldry et al., 2003; Reid Howie Associates, 2016)
- Settled, suitable accommodation is necessary to:
 - Reunite with children
 - Obtain state benefits
 - Secure employment
 - Avoid return to formerly abuse relationships (Wilkinson, 2004; Cruells et al., 2007)

The collateral consequences of imprisonment: Employment

- Criminalized women severely disadvantaged in terms of marketable work skills and educational level (Maidment, 2006; Cruells et al., 2007)
- Prison based work and training is often feminized and tends not to reflect labour market demands (Cruells et al., 2007)
- Women tend to be located in small units with limited training and educational opportunities (Pruin, 2016)
- Financial stability appears to be a key factor enabling women to reintegrate successfully (O'Brien, 2001) *but*
- Employment may be a lower priority for women who are faced with other post-release challenges (MacRae et al., 2006; Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2007)

The collateral consequences of imprisonment: Health

- Prison based drug services are of variable quality (Zurhold et al., 2011) often failing to recognise the distinctive needs of women (Cruells et al., 2007; MacDonald et al., 2012; Pruin, 2016) and there are often inadequate post release services, especially in rural areas (MacDonald et al., 2012)
- Women may avoid seeking help with drug problems for fear of being labelled an irresponsible mother (Fox et al., 2005; Cruells et al. 2007)
- High levels of distress, self harm and suicide among women in prison often related to retraumatization (Loucks, 2004; Coles, 2013)
- Physical and psychological needs of women may not be recognised and addressed appropriately while in prison (Cruells et al., 2007)
- Lack of continuity of care may mean that any health gains achieved in prison are lost when prisoners are released (Mackie and Thorpe, 2014)

Resettlement and desistance

- Overlap between resettlement needs and factors that increase the risk of post-release offending (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2007)
- Factors associated with successful desistance (McIvor et al., 2009; Rodermond et al., 2016)
 - Care of children and other responsibilities
 - Avoiding use of drugs
 - Resolve to maintain a 'better life' and dissociation from former lifestyle
 - Personal and social stability
- Factors associated with further offending
 - Drug use
 - Unsettled/inappropriate accommodation
 - Personal relationships
 - Boredom
 - Stress
 - Lack of self efficacy

“Those who were less confident about re-offending were those who were facing release without stable accommodation, with little idea about financial stability and were facing the prospect of mixing with their old social networks and isolation from family”

(Gray et al., 2016, p. vii)

Promoting effective resettlement

- Early contact with prisoners during the period of custody
- Involving prisoners in support plans and programmes aimed at meeting their needs
- Consistency in support/key workers to allow a trusting relationship to develop
- Flexibility in work practices allowing workers to respond to issues as they occur
- Maintaining support on release
- Linking prisoners into community based services
- Recognising that the transition process will require different priorities at different points
- Availability of adequate services, resources and family support
- Addressing prisoners' emotional needs (Malloch et al., 2012)
- women “appear to value services that re holistic, accessible and practical and whose staff listen to them, demonstrate empathy, have a sense of humour and believe that the women can change” Gelsthorpe and Sharpe (2007, p. 208-9)

Promoting effective resettlement

UN Handbook for prison managers and policymakers on women and imprisonment (2008) recommends:

- Close liaison between a range of organisations during the sentence
- A planned programme of assistance to prepare for release
- The linking of services and supports pre and post release to provide a continuum of care
- Assistance in relation to housing and employment needs
- Support and treatment in relation to substance misuse and other health problems
- Efforts to support and strengthen family relationships including the use of graduated release mechanisms to ease women's transitions and enable them to re-establish contact with families as early in the sentence as is possible

(Pruin, 2016)

Women's experiences of resettlement

“given [their] unique victimization, mental health, and substance abuse histories, educational/vocational backgrounds, as well as their likelihood of resuming the role of primary care provider to their children following incarceration, women face a number of unique challenges in the journey home from prison.” (Beichner and Hagemann, 2016, p. 93)

- Women often report having received little help in preparation for release (e.g. Trotter et al., 2006; Gray et al., 2016)
- Post-release provision varies widely between and within jurisdictions but is generally limited (Beichner and Hagemann, 2016)
- Available services often are not related to women's post-release needs (Scroggins and Malley, 2010)
- Services operate in isolation of each other resulting in a lack of co-operation and information sharing (Baldry, 2011; Malloch, 2013)
- Services are often subject to short term funding that is particularly precarious in an increasingly outcome focused policy context (Bateman and Hazel, 2014)
- Tensions can emerge between monitoring compliance and providing support in the context of statutory post-release supervision (Baldry, 2011; Bumiller, 2013)

Policy, practice and social justice

“Each woman’s lived experiences – before, during, and after prison – are shaped by the social identities that she embodies and the discrimination and oppression that she faces” (Beichner and Hagemann, 2016, p. 87)

Heightened policy attention to resettlement has occurred in the context of the expansion of surveillance by the state accompanied by cuts in public spending:

- Increasing numbers subject to post release supervision and scrutiny by criminal justice agencies
- Increasing involvement of non-statutory organisations in performing the controlling role of the state (Shaylor and Meiners, 2013)
- Provision of services that are transitory, inadequate and fail to meet women’s needs
- Women held responsible for their predicament rather than the state recognising that offending reflects entrenched disadvantage and social inequality that needs to be addressed to enable women to secure access to social justice
- In the context of diminishing welfare provision prison becomes a mechanism for managing the consequences of inadequate social and health services, poor housing and precarious employment with the result that the criminalisation and imprisonment of already marginalized women is increased (Bumiller, 2013)