

# FORUM

ON CORRECTIONS RESEARCH

January 1994, Volume 6, Number 1

## Featured issues

### Women in Prison

Historical context

Current  
developments

What do we know?

Assessment and  
programming

What do the  
women say?



Correctional Service  
Canada

Service correctionnel  
Canada

FORUM ON CORRECTIONS RESEARCH is published three times a year in both English and French for the staff and management of the Correctional Service of Canada.

FORUM reviews applied research related to corrections policy, programming and management issues. It also features original articles contributed by staff of the Correctional Service of Canada and other correctional researchers and practitioners.

FORUM is prepared and published by the Research and Statistics Branch, with the assistance of the Creative Services Branch, Communications and Corporate Development Sector of the Correctional Service of Canada.

FORUM invites contributions to any section of the magazine from researchers in the field. Please send your contributions to Larry Motiuk, Acting Director General, Research and Statistics Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0P9. Accepted manuscripts are subject to editing for style and length.

**For further information regarding the content of the magazine, please contact:**

Research and Statistics Branch  
Correctional Service of Canada  
340 Laurier Avenue West  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9

**To request copies of this publication, please contact:**

Publishing and Editorial Services  
Correctional Service of Canada  
340 Laurier Avenue West  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9

**Editors:** Tanya M. Nouwens  
Frank J. Porporino

**Assistant Editor:** Ted Murphy

**Distribution Manager:** Les Shand

**Text Editors:** Prosebusters!™

**Design Concept:** Canada  
Communication  
Group

**Layout:** Accurate Design &  
Communication Inc.

Sections of the magazine with no acknowledgement of authorship have been researched and written by the staff of the Research and Statistics Branch, Correctional Service of Canada.

*The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Correctional Service of Canada. Articles may be reprinted as a whole or in part with the permission of the Correctional Service of Canada.*

**Pour obtenir de plus amples renseignements sur les sujets abordés dans FORUM, prière de s'adresser à la :**

Direction de la recherche et  
des statistiques  
Service correctionnel du Canada  
340, avenue Laurier ouest  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0P9

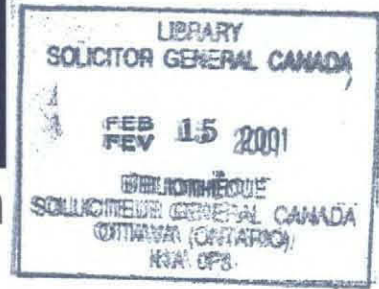
**Pour obtenir des exemplaires supplémentaires de FORUM, prière de s'adresser aux :**

Services de rédaction et de publication  
Service correctionnel du Canada  
340, avenue Laurier ouest  
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0P9



# FORUM

on Corrections Research



## Historical context

- It's about time: The legal context of policy changes for female offenders  
by Marla Marino Vachon ..... 3
- Unintended consequences of feminism and prison reform  
by Kelly Hannah-Moffat ..... 7

## Current developments

- Redesigning corrections for federally sentenced women in Canada  
by Thérèse LeBlanc ..... 11

## What do we know?

- Women in prison: A literature review  
by Margaret Shaw ..... 13
- Creating real choices: A program evaluation of therapeutic services  
at the Prison for Women  
by Kathleen Kendall ..... 19
- Some comparisons of female and male serious offenders  
by Alex Loucks and Edward Zamble ..... 22
- Correlates of delinquency: A look at gender differences  
by Linda Simourd and D.A. Andrews ..... 26

## Assessment and programming

- The psychological assessment of women in prison  
by Karen Scarth and Heather McLean ..... 32
- Opening the window on a very dark day: A program evaluation of the  
Peer Support Team at the Kingston Prison for Women  
by Shoshana Pollack ..... 36
- Women and fraud: Results of a program at the Prison for Women  
by Jill Atkinson and Heather McLean ..... 39

## What do the women say?

- The realities of life imprisonment for women convicted of murder  
by Tina Hattem ..... 42
- Women working in a men's jail ..... 46

# Guide for Prospective Authors

## Submissions

To submit an article to FORUM, send two copies of the article in addition to a diskette copy (in WordPerfect) to

Larry Motiuk, Ph.D.  
Acting Director General, Research and  
Statistics Branch  
Correctional Service of Canada  
4-B, 340 Laurier Avenue West  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9  
Fax: (613) 941-8477

Articles may be submitted in English or French.

## Deadlines

FORUM is published three times a year: January, May and September. In general, articles must be received at least four months in advance. An article to be considered for the September issue, for example, must be submitted by May 15.

## Style

Articles should be written in plain language. Complicated research and statistical terms should be avoided; however, if they are unavoidable, a clear explanation of the meaning of the term should be provided. FORUM reaches about 5,000 individuals in more than 35 countries, including academics, the public, journalists, corrections staff (from front-line staff to senior managers) and members of the judiciary. Our goal is to be able to present reliable research to a **lay audience**.

## Length

Ideally, articles should be 1,500 words in length (six double-spaced pages). Feature articles must be no longer than 3,000 words.

## Figures and Tables

Figures and tables should be on separate pages at the end of the article. When an article has more than one figure or table, these should be numbered consecutively. Graphs, if possible, are preferred over tables.

## References

References will appear as footnotes in published articles, but when submitting an article, do not use the footnote or endnote feature of WordPerfect. Instead, type the footnotes in numerical order at the end of the article. All that should appear in the text is the superscript number of the note. Please note that author-date reference citations, e.g., Andrews (1989), should **not** appear in the text. All references must include the following items:

### Articles

- author's name (with initials only)
- title of the article
- name of the periodical
- volume (and issue number) of the periodical
- date of the volume or issue
- page number(s) of the article

### Books

- author's name (with initials only)
- complete title of the book
- editor, compiler or translator if any
- series, if any, and volume or number of the series
- edition, if not the original
- facts of publication (city where published, publisher and date of publication)
- page number(s) of the particular citation

## Editing Procedure

All articles are edited in two stages. First, articles are edited for content and style, then they are edited for grammar and readability.

Edited articles are sent to authors for final approval before printing.

## Copyright

Articles in FORUM may be reproduced or reprinted with permission from the Correctional Service of Canada (see address above).



# It's about time: The legal context of policy changes for female offenders

by Marla Marino Vachon<sup>1</sup>

Counsel, Legal Services, Correctional Service of Canada

Recently, issues relating to federally incarcerated women have surged to the forefront of corrections, resulting in legal challenges and new and exciting policy changes.

A comparison of the past and present will illustrate the issues being addressed and the gains made so far. This paper will focus primarily on changes in the areas of placement, programming, visits, and relationships with family and friends.

Above all, one will no doubt be struck by the length of time it has taken to achieve policy changes relating to female offenders.

## Placement of female offenders

Perhaps the oldest and most widely debated issue relating to female offenders concerns their placement. In 1835, when no facility for female offenders existed, three women were placed in the infirmary of Kingston Penitentiary. By 1853, a separate ward for women was established. An additional 81 years then passed before the Prison for Women opened its doors in 1934.

But the establishment of the Prison for Women did not slow the debate over where federally incarcerated females should serve their sentences. Not four years after the Prison for Women opened, the Archambault Commission became the first of many commissions to suggest it be closed.

In fact, the 1914 Royal Commission on Penitentiaries had already suggested the federal government make agreements with the provinces to house female offenders so that they could be closer to their home communities.

Despite this early recognition of the need for female offenders to be placed close to their families and home communities, exchange of service agreements with the provinces were not begun until 1973. Although they were a significant step forward, the agreements were limited — not all federally incarcerated women were eligible for transfer to a provincial facility.

The issue of the effect of dislocation on female offenders came to a head between 1989 and 1991, when eight inmates in the Prison for Women committed or attempted suicide. On 15 July 1990, in the case of *The Queen v. Carol Maureen Daniels*, the Saskatchewan Court of Queen's Bench found that Ms. Daniels' section 7 Charter rights to life and security would be violated if she was incarcerated where she would be at a high risk of committing suicide.

In addition, her section 12 Charter right not to be subjected to cruel and unusual punishment would be violated if she was incarcerated in an institution far from her home, family and friends — it would amount to virtual exile.

Following the *Daniels* decision, the Correctional Service of Canada opened a wing in Saskatchewan Penitentiary (a men's institution) to house up to five female offenders. Although the *Daniels* decision was later set aside by the Court of Appeal on technical grounds, the women's wing at Saskatchewan Penitentiary is still open.

To date, no court has determined whether the existence of only one federal prison for women breaches the Charter rights of women in general.

However, this issue may well become irrelevant. In 1990, the Solicitor General of Canada announced that, based on the recommendations contained in the 1990 *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*, five new facilities for women, including a healing lodge for aboriginal women, will be constructed in different regions of the country to replace the Prison for Women.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Marla Marino Vachon, Counsel, Legal Services, Correctional Service of Canada, 4th Floor, 340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

<sup>2</sup> *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).



## Programming

Virtually every royal commission on corrections since 1934 has identified weaknesses in the variety and quality of programming for women.

Further, in 1981, the Canadian Human Rights Commission ruled that female offenders were being discriminated against because they had less access to training and rehabilitation programs than men.<sup>3</sup>

In response to the ruling, the Correctional Service of Canada broadened the scope of its educational and vocational programming for women. A 1988 handbook published by the Service points out the gains made:

"A wide variety of jobs, including institutional services, automated data processing, the inmate publication, and food services is available.... Programs at the institution provide a broad range of assistance to female inmates. They include: educational opportunities... vocational training, social development and individual program plans...."<sup>4</sup>

Despite the marked improvement in opportunities for federally incarcerated women, the *Daniels* decision in 1990 found that unequal programming still existed. The Court ruled that women were being discriminated against in the federal penal system on the basis of gender (contrary to sections 15 and 28 of the Charter) because federal penitentiaries for men have programs superior to those offered to women, and they exist across the country.

This decision echoed the findings of the report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women. The report cited the need for training

and programs to provide female inmates with truly marketable skills.

In addition, the report pointed out that despite improvements in programming at the Prison for Women following the Canadian Human Rights Commission ruling, the situation for women serving their sentence in a provincial institution (through an exchange of service agreement) had not improved.

**Virtually every royal commission on corrections since 1934 has identified weaknesses in the variety and quality of programming for women.**

The original exchange of service agreements accepted provincial standards for programs and services, thereby ignoring the needs of long-term offenders (offenders normally do not serve sentences longer than two years in a provincial institution). Despite the 1981 ruling, when these agreements were revised between 1984 and 1986, programming inequities were, once again, not addressed.

It was not until 1988 and the Burnaby Agreement (an agreement with a provincial facility for women in Burnaby, British Columbia) that the Correctional Service of Canada finally required

provincial institutions to address the specific needs of federal offenders.

Despite this progress, the quality of programming is again being challenged in *Gayle Horii v. Her Majesty the Queen*. In a pending Federal Court action, Ms. Horii alleges that she is being discriminated against as a woman because men receive all the advantages of the federal correctional system, while women receive inferior programming both at the Prison for Women and at the Burnaby Correctional Centre.

This issue too may be resolved with the construction of the new facilities for women. These facilities will be program driven and take a holistic approach. There will be individualized assessment and planning of programs based on each woman's needs. Programs will include spirituality, education, employment, skills training, recovery from abuse and trauma, and other personal development services.<sup>5</sup>

The federal government's commitment to providing more relevant programming for women was further enhanced with the proclamation of the *Corrections and Conditional*

<sup>3</sup> Complaint filed by Brigid Hayes on behalf of Women for Justice.

<sup>4</sup> *Federal Female Offenders -- A Correctional Service of Canada Facts and Figures Handbook* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1988): 78.

<sup>5</sup> Correctional Service of Canada's Federally Sentenced Women's Initiative.



*Release Act* in 1992. Section 77 of the Act states that the Correctional Service of Canada shall “provide programs designed particularly to address the needs of female offenders.” The strength of this commitment will no doubt be questioned in future litigation.

## Personal relationships

The 19th-century female offender had few, if any, visitors and virtually no opportunity for physical contact with male offenders. Although great strides have been made to ensure that all inmates have visits with family and friends, geographic distances have made this difficult for women incarcerated at the Prison for Women.

To combat this problem, in 1989 the institution began entitling female offenders to one 15-minute telephone call per month to their families. In 1990, this was increased to two calls per month.

In 1992, the institution began entitling a woman whose spouse is also federally incarcerated to receive one 15-minute call per week from her spouse. A “private family visiting” program, which funds one visit per year, per inmate, was also put in place in 1992.

With the development of the new women’s regional facilities, the Correctional Service of Canada may well be confronted with a new issue and court challenges regarding the frequency and costs of private family visits where both spouses are incarcerated at a great distance from each other.

Interestingly, during the 19th century, women were permitted to keep newborns with them until weaning. When alternative care was not available, some women were even incarcerated with their young children. Policy was eventually changed to prevent this.

However, this did not make the problem go away.

*Creating Choices* highlighted the difficulties faced by women unable to have their children with them and, in many cases, geographically isolated from them.

**Where it is in the best interest of the child, a mother will even be able to care for her child in the institution until the child is of school age.**

In response, the Correctional Service of Canada has agreed that women with children should have a variety of on-site residential and visiting options when the new facilities are open. Where it is in the best interest of the child, a mother will even be able to care for her child in the institution until the child is of school age.

In the interim, the Prison for Women has dealt with nine pregnant inmates since 1990; Saskatchewan Penitentiary, with one. In most cases, the child was born during the mother’s conditional release. A few babies spent their first days in the institution, however, before being transferred with their mother to a provincial facility.

Recently, one mother was (with the consent of the Commissioner) allowed to care for her child at the minimum-security institution in Kingston. The efforts made to accommodate expectant mothers over the past few years seem to demonstrate the Service’s acceptance of the task force recommendations.

## Staffing

The presence of males in the Prison for Women is still a disputed issue. In fact, the Correctional Service of Canada has been cautious in recent years in the assignment of duties to males at the Prison for Women.

In 1989, however, an appeal was heard under the *Public Service Employment Act* because a competition for the position of correctional supervisor in the Prison for Women was limited to female employees.<sup>6</sup>

The Correctional Service of Canada argued that being female was a “bona fide” occupational requirement because the correctional supervisor would be expected to patrol living areas,

<sup>6</sup> In the matter of M. King, Public Service Commission, 89-21-Pen-11.



possibly conduct a frisk or strip search, and have contact with inmates who had been physically or sexually abused by men.

But the appeal was granted because searching inmates and patrolling living areas were not stated requirements of the correctional supervisor's position. The court further found that the inmates had already adapted to a male unit manager, so the court could see no reason why the inmates would not accept a male correctional supervisor.

The tribunal also pointed to the decision of the Federal Court (Trial Division) in *Weatherall et al. v. Canada et al.* This decision struck down as unconstitutional subsection 41(3) of the *Penitentiary Service Regulations*, which allowed only women to search female inmates.

The 1993 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in *Conway* (1993, not yet reported) adds a new perspective on this issue. Conway, a male inmate, argued that he was being discriminated against because he was subject to frisk searches and surveillance by female officers, whereas female inmates were not subject to the same treatment by male officers.

In rejecting Conway's position the Court found as follows:

Given the historical, biological and sociological differences between men and women, equality does not demand that practices which are forbidden where male

officers guard female inmates must also be banned where female officers guard male inmates. The reality of the relationship between the sexes is such that the historical trend of violence perpetrated by men against women is not matched by a comparable trend pursuant to which men are the victims and women the aggressors. Biologically, a frisk search or surveillance of a man's chest area conducted by a female guard does not implicate the same concerns as the same practice by a male guard in relation to a female inmate. Moreover, women generally occupy a disadvantaged position in society in relation to men. Viewed in this light, it becomes clear that the effect of cross-gender searching is different and more threatening for women than for men. The different treatment to which the appellant objects thus may not be discrimination at all.

### Conclusion

The position and opportunities for federally incarcerated women have greatly improved in recent years. The establishment of five new regional facilities, with a holistic, women-centred approach, should ensure that women's issues will remain at the forefront of corrections in Canada. ■

*The current trend of seeing women as victims — exploited by society economically, and as individuals physically and sexually — while powerful in terms of many women's experiences, runs risks of substitution and oversimplification. It also denies any element of choice on the part of individual women. Some women have chosen at some time in their lives to use violence, to pursue a criminal career.*

M. Shaw,  
"Issues of Power and Control:  
Women in Prison and Their Defenders,"  
*British Journal of Criminology*,  
32 (Autumn 1992): 438-452, p. 449.



# Unintended consequences of feminism and prison reform

by Kelly Hannah-Moffat<sup>1</sup>

Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto

**W**e need not be trapped in inherited answers. An awareness of the causes and implications of past choices should encourage us to a greater experimentation with our own solutions."<sup>2</sup>

*The treatment of women in the criminal justice system, particularly in prisons, has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Many of these changes can be attributed to the tireless advocacy of, and challenges posed by, women concerned about incarcerated women.*

*Advocates of women<sup>3</sup> in prison have worked with the Canadian government to guarantee the rights of women prisoners, to address the needs and experiences of women inmates, and to close the notorious Prison for Women in favour of "women-centred facilities."<sup>4</sup>*

*In general, these changes have been portrayed as progressive developments in corrections for women, but they also present a number of challenges<sup>5</sup> and in many ways obscure some deeper concerns.*

**W**omen's penal regimes have been influenced by three types of feminist thought: maternal or social, formal equality theory and substantive equality theory. These three types of feminist thought have led to two strategies for dealing with the female offender: 1) to treat men

and women equally in corrections and policy; and 2) to treat them differently in a semi-separate system.

I will briefly describe and explore the impact these two strategies have had on policy and, to some extent, practices in Canadian prisons for women.

I will also argue that even though some changes have occurred in women's corrections, feminists have not questioned or challenged the meaning of punishment or the use of prisons as a solution.

## The maternal or social approach

Organizations such as the University Women's Club, the Local Council of Women and later the Elizabeth Fry Society played a major role in women's prison reform.

Women's initial involvements concentrated on the deplorable conditions of women's prisons. Maternal feminists argued that women required equal but different treatment under the law and in public institutions. These women lobbied for change and succeeded in having new prisons for women built and in having them governed by matrons.

Reformers identified women's lack of skills and proper socialization as the primary problems of women prisoners, and they embarked on the task of resocializing and educating prisoners. They argued that the primary aim of corrections should be rehabilitation and not punishment. Subsequently, their focus was on improving prison conditions and developing new vocational, educational and treatment programs.

## Formal equality theory

A few decades later, feminist reform efforts were influenced by liberal feminist ideas that advocated sexual equality within existing social,

<sup>1</sup> Kelly Hannah-Moffat, Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto, 130 St. George Street, Room 8001, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1.

<sup>2</sup> O. Rothman, *Conscience and Convenience* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971): 292.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see L. Stewart, *Women Volunteer to Go to Prison: A History of the Elizabeth Fry Society of British Columbia, 1939-1989* (British Columbia: Orca Publishers, 1993). And see E. Freedman, *Their Sister's Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> K. Hannah-Moffat, "Creating Choices or Repeating History: Canadian Female Offenders and Correctional Reform," *Social Justice*, 18, 1 (1991): 184-203.



economic and political structures. In corrections, these ideas translated into attempts to attain equal rights and equal treatment for male and female offenders.

During the 1970s, feminists began to challenge the sexist assumptions that informed corrections for women while continually highlighting the inadequate living conditions in women's prisons. The primary goal of liberal feminist reformers was to ensure that policies and practices were based on gender-neutral standards. In some instances this led to an endorsement of co-correctional facilities.

In keeping with the equality objective, the 1976 Clarke Report<sup>6</sup> recommended that "the federal *Prisons and Reformatories Act* should be revised to eliminate all provisions that discriminate on the basis of sex or religion."

In addition to publicizing the conditions in women's prisons, feminists concentrated their effort on the courts. They attempted to abolish official conceptions of difference and unequal treatment through the use of litigation and equal-rights legislation. In Canada, this struggle focused on programming and services, alternative housing, parole, geographical disparity, classification and inadequate facilities.

The success of liberal feminist advocacy and subsequent policy reforms cannot be easily determined. There is little research on the relationship between reform, policy and actual

institutional practices. However, several official reports<sup>7</sup> adopted liberal feminist rhetoric and advocated that female and male prisoners be treated with parity. Further, a review of the history of programs in women's prisons indicates that additional programs and services were implemented. The extent to which these programs adhered to their goals is, however, another consideration.

**By not challenging the standards on which programs are based, equality doctrines tend to forsake more fundamental changes and, in some cases, worsen the situations of federally sentenced women, who can no longer claim they are being treated unequally according to existing standards.**

The main complication with the feminists' advocacy of equality in women's prisons was their failure to acknowledge that even though administrators can recognize disparity and concede the need for change, they may not have the resources to make the necessary provisions and structural alterations.

Those pursuing equal rights also failed to recognise that the standard by which equality is measured is based on a male norm. Thus, women's programs are brought up to par with men's, instead of being designed at the outset to meet the needs of women.

By not challenging the standards on which programs are based, equality doctrines tend to forsake more fundamental changes and, in some cases, worsen the situations of federally sentenced women, who can no longer claim they are being

treated unequally according to existing standards. Thus, some accomplishments in the name of equal rights have led to substantive inequality, wherein women are only given access to programs for men designed by men.

### Substantive equality theory

In contrast to the liberal reformers, substantive feminists focus on situational diversity. They argue that male and female inmates are different and need to be treated differently; programs, services and facilities should be designed to meet their specific requirements.

Substantive feminists believe that recognizing the disparities between men and women is an expression of power and necessary for the

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Committee on the Female Offender* (Clarke Report) (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1976): 43.

<sup>7</sup> Evidence of liberal feminist ideas appears in the following federal reports: *Needham Report: Report of the National Planning Committee on the Female Offender* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1978); and *Chinnery Report: Report of the Joint Committee to Study Alternatives for the Housing of Federal Offenders* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1978).



empowerment of women. This belief challenges and rectifies approaches that have used women's differences to perpetuate their subordination.

Substantive feminists also oppose attempts to deny differences between men and women in the pursuit of a neutral gender equality. Instead, they declare that we need to take a more woman-centred approach to corrections. They consider previous correctional methods, which ignore women's reality, to be deficient and unable to rehabilitate women.

Claims about women's uniqueness presented in feminist literature<sup>8</sup> indicate that women respond differently (from men) to their incarceration and in situations that lead to criminal justice intervention. Correctional practices and policies must be restructured and redefined to accommodate the different experiences of men and women.

One consequence of this thinking was *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*. This 1990 report proposed some radical changes in the treatment and management of federal female offenders.

The interest in developing new reforms was shared by the Elizabeth Fry Society and aboriginal organizations. Trends and events, such as criticism of the existing system, demands from aboriginal communities for more control over justice for

their people, Charter challenges, repeated recommendations for the closure of the Prison for Women, rethinking of the Correctional Service of Canada's mission statement, and tragedies at the Prison for Women, led to an overwhelming consensus that fundamental reform was urgently needed.

Like the role they played in earlier reforms, feminists played a key role in developing proposals for change. Feminists were actively involved at all stages of *Creating Choices*, and they were publicly recognized as official representatives of the interests of women.

*Creating Choices* reiterated many of the problems, perplexities and recommendations arising from preceding reports and task forces. The report recommended that the Prison for Women be closed and that five smaller regional facilities be opened, one of which would be an aboriginal healing lodge. Classification systems and security measures would be revised, women-centred programs would be introduced, and staff would receive better and specialized training.

These recommendations were based on the belief that a holistic approach to the treatment of female offenders was necessary to address historical problems. The report was also based on feminist principles of empowerment, meaningful choices, respect and dignity, supportive environments and shared responsibility. *Creating Choices* emphasized

the necessity of women's recovery from past traumas and the development of self-esteem and self-sufficiency through programs and services designed to respond to women's needs as they define them.

These premises are ideal articulations of a substantive feminist theory of corrections and are an excellent example of how feminist theory has influenced the policy-making process and,

**Substantive feminists also oppose attempts to deny differences between men and women in the pursuit of a neutral gender equality. Instead, they declare that we need to take a more woman-centred approach to corrections. They consider previous correctional methods, which ignore women's reality, to be deficient and unable to rehabilitate women.**

<sup>8</sup> K. Daly, "Criminal Justice Ideologies and Practices in Different Voices: Some Feminist Questions about Justice," *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 17 (1987): 1-16. See also F. Heidensohn, "Models of Justice: Portia or Persephone? Some Thoughts on Equality, Fairness, and Gender in the Field of Criminal Justice," *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 14 (1986): 287-299.



to some degree, correctional practice. *Creating Choices* was endorsed by the federal government, and changes are under way.

### The challenge for feminism

It is useful to place the developments in women's imprisonment and feminist participation in a wider context. One needs to acknowledge the continual tensions between feminist, political, administrative and institutional agendas.

These tensions are reflected in the inconsistent application of feminist ideas and can be attributed to the incompatibility of the goals and responsibilities of often well-intentioned correctional administrators, who must control and manage daily operations and prioritize concerns. More often than not, the needs of prisoners are compromised for the sake of security and managerial concerns (budget, staffing, space) inherent in prison operations. Consequently, a reform can be systematically undermined by managerial and other pragmatic goals. The result is a compromised version of the original reform.

Feminists need a critical understanding of their role in this process as agents of reform and producers of ideology. They need to appreciate the consequences of their proposals and conceptualizations, the limitations of the current system, and the ways in which feminist rhetoric is used to justify and legitimate unsatisfactory and repressive ends. Pat Carlen notes that "little has been said about alternatives to prison and why prisons continue to exist, despite the plethora of publications which in the last ten years have borne witness

to the waste of women's imprisonment and the inappropriateness of penal custody for all but a tiny minority of female offenders."<sup>9</sup>

This quotation raises a compelling question about feminist participation in prison reform: Why have Canadian feminists supported the maintenance and expansion of prisons for women in the face of such intense scrutiny and disillusionment? In fact, feminist advocacy of law-and-order regimes and well-intentioned attempts to improve prison conditions have resulted in the implicit and explicit reinforcement of existing theories of punishment and the expansion of women's prisons.

Feminists' failure to challenge the meaning of punishment has amounted to a mere tinkering with a complex institutional network that does not, and cannot, adequately meet women's requirements. Feminists need to devise a concrete understanding of punishment and not simply attempt to compensate existing methods and definitions of punishment, like incarceration, that encompass a number of inherently contradictory goals.

Feminism can play a crucial role in the reform process, and we are only beginning to understand the significance, power and authority of this role. Before we continue the struggle for the reform of prisons, we need to ask ourselves what expectations a feminist theory of punishment would have and then devise methods to meet these expectations. ■

**Feminists' failure to challenge the meaning of punishment has amounted to a mere tinkering with a complex institutional network that does not, and cannot, adequately meet women's requirements.**

<sup>9</sup> P. Carlen, *Alternatives to Women's Imprisonment* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990): 6.



# Redesigning corrections for federally sentenced women in Canada

by *Thérèse LeBlanc*<sup>1</sup>

Warden, Truro Federal Women's Facility (Atlantic region)

Historically, female federal offenders have been one of the most neglected segments of the Canadian correctional system. The sole prison for women was located in Kingston, Ontario, forcing many female offenders to be incarcerated far from their families and communities, separated not only by walls and bars, but by a great geographical distance. In a sense, these women were exiled.

Further, although this was a prison for women, most of its organization, structure and programs merely reproduced those designed for prisons for men.

In a nutshell, the correctional system was attempting to meet the needs of generic offenders, not female offenders, and clearly that was not sufficient.

In 1990, action was taken to address this failing. The Solicitor General of Canada announced that, based on the recommendations of *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*, the Prison for Women would be replaced by five correctional facilities for women all focusing on community-based programs.<sup>2</sup>

Featuring the new Atlantic regional facility, this article examines how the new facilities will attempt to provide treatment, programs and, in essence, a correctional experience relevant to and appropriate for women.

## Where will the new facilities be located?

Using approved location-selection criteria, the Correctional Service of Canada carefully

chose the sites for the new facilities. In the end, the following communities were chosen:

**Truro, Nova Scotia**,  
for the Atlantic regional facility;

**Kitchener, Ontario**,  
for the Ontario regional facility;

**Joliette, Quebec**,  
for the Quebec regional facility;

**Edmonton, Alberta**,  
for the Prairies regional facility; and

**Maple Creek – Nekaneet, Saskatchewan**,  
for the Healing Lodge for aboriginal women.

The Burnaby Correctional Centre, already in existence in **Burnaby, British Columbia**, will serve as the Pacific regional facility.

## Profile of federally sentenced women

Identifying the needs of federally sentenced women was our first priority. *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* provided the following profile of federally sentenced women.<sup>3</sup>

There are approximately 300 women incarcerated at any one time in Canadian federal and provincial institutions, serving sentences of between two years and life. Their ages range from 19 to 74. Approximately 15% are aboriginal women, and two thirds of the women are mothers — often the sole supporters of their children.

The women have a limited education and few marketable skills, and they either are receiving social assistance or have low-paying jobs.

An appalling majority of the women have been victims of sexual and physical abuse (75% of non-aboriginal offenders and 85% of aboriginal

**The objective will be to have the women's daily living experiences mirror, as closely as possible, life in the community.**

<sup>1</sup> Thérèse LeBlanc, Warden, Truro Federal Women's Facility, 46 Inglis Place, Suite 5, Truro, Nova Scotia B2N 4B4.

<sup>2</sup> *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*.



offenders), two thirds were misusing alcohol or drugs at the time of their offence, and 59% have engaged or are engaging in self-injurious behaviour. The suicide rate of this population is considerably higher than average — there were seven suicides in the last three years at the Prison for Women (within an average population of 115).

Perhaps most importantly, the majority of the women are serving their first federal sentence — more than a third have no previous convictions.

### Operational model

To meet the unique needs of the women described by this profile, the Truro Federal Women's Facility has developed an innovative program model. Programming, and the entire facility for that matter, will be community-oriented, holistic, woman-centred, culturally sensitive, supportive of autonomy and self-esteem, and oriented toward release.

The facility will provide both on-site and off-site programming, with the emphasis on participation in off-site programs — when the offender does not pose a risk to the community. Overall, programs will be aimed at helping women learn to make informed and meaningful decisions about their lives.

### Treatment programs

Treatment programs will focus on the areas of physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, suicide prevention and the prevention of self-injurious behaviour. Additional programs will address parenting, prenatal and postnatal care, personal development, and other needs identified as the facility grows and progresses.

More traditional programs will focus on living skills, spirituality, education, employment, vocational training, and recreation or leisure.

The objective will be to have the women's daily living experiences mirror, as closely as possible, life in the community.

### Children's program

Perhaps one of the more innovative and controversial aspects of the new facility is the multi-faceted children's program: some children will have temporary visits with their mothers, while others will actually live with their mothers at the institution.

Child care for children living in the facilities will permit the mothers to continue participating in programs.

The primary criterion for admission to, and ongoing participation in, the children's program will always be the best interest of the child.

We also hope to work in partnership with the community and appropriate government agencies to develop an active foster-home network for those children not living in the facility but wishing to live near their mother.

**In general, the security policies and procedures will be based on the fact that few of these women are high-risk offenders.**

### Security

The facility will have a 21-bed capacity (phasing up to 30), and the security practices will always be a balance of supervision and sound programming within a supportive environment. Security will be essentially dynamic; therefore, all staff will be correctional staff.

In general, the security policies and procedures will be based on the fact that few of these women are high-risk offenders.

### Conclusion

The challenge will be to provide the women housed in the regional facilities, particularly in the smaller regions, with all the required programming, despite their small numbers. If we fail, they could end up more disadvantaged than they are now, and this is certainly one of their fears.

These new facilities will help the Correctional Service of Canada meet the many needs of federally sentenced women. The challenge is to put theory into practice. ■



# Women in prison: A literature review

by Margaret Shaw<sup>1</sup>

Research Associate, Concordia University, Montreal;  
Research Consultant in Crime and Social Policy

One of the most remarkable things about crime is the gender gap. On the whole, crime is something that men, not women, become involved in. Why, then, has so little consideration been given to understanding the differences between men and women who find themselves in prison?

## A brief mention...

The history of women's imprisonment has been remarkably similar in most countries. Small numbers of women have been housed in often unsuitable accommodations, under regimes stressing the domestic role of women in society and providing little access to programs or training.

The women were usually regarded either as too sunk in criminality to be reformed or as childlike creatures who needed to be taught their maternal and domestic duties.<sup>2</sup> The women sometimes received a brief mention at the end of reports of committees of inquiry into prison conditions.

Studies of women in prison have also been limited. They have tended to mirror trends in the study of prisons for men.<sup>3</sup> On the whole, it was felt that there were too few women to be of

major concern.<sup>4</sup> Only since the 1970s, with the re-emergence of feminism, has there been a determined concern about not only the **conditions** of women's imprisonment, but also the **reasons** why women have ended up in prison.

This approach has revealed that men and women do not receive comparable services and programs and that stereotypical views of women's role in society have guided approaches to female prisoners. It has been argued that women are subject to power and controls over their behaviour that affect them from childhood to adulthood, in the home and in the workplace.<sup>5</sup>

## Canadian situation

Canada was no exception to this pattern until the mid-1970s. There was almost no information available about the conditions or circumstances of women in prison, apart from occasional government reports.<sup>6</sup> It was not until the development of the victims' movement and broader recognition of the extent of violence against women in society that attitudes toward the treatment of women in the correctional system began to be questioned.

<sup>1</sup> All correspondence should be directed to Margaret Shaw, 3425, avenue de Vendôme, NDG, Montréal (Québec) H4A 3M6.

<sup>2</sup> N.H. Rafter, "Hard Times: Custodial Prisons for Women and the Example of the New York Prison for Women at Auburn 1893-1933," *Judge, Lawyer, Victim, Thief*, eds. N.H. Rafter and E.A. Stanko (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the United States, the study of "prisonization" or modes of adaptation to prison in the 1960s focused on the family roles of women in prison. See R. Giallombardo, *Society of Women: A Study of Women's Prison* (Chichester: Wiley, 1960). Such studies bear little relationship to women's prisons in Canada or the United Kingdom. See M. Shaw, *The Federal Female Offender: Report on a Preliminary Study* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Hence the title of the first Canadian book on female offenders, published as recently as 1987: E. Adelberg and C. Currie,

eds., *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Much of this work has been published since the 1980s. See Rafter, *Hard Times: Custodial Prisons for Women and the Example of the New York Prison for Women at Auburn 1893-1933*. See also N.H. Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women's State Prisons 1800-1935* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985). And see P. Carlen, *Women's Imprisonment: A Study in Social Control* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983). And see F. Heidensohn, *Women and Crime* (New York: New York University Press, 1985). And see R.P. Dobash and S. Gutteridge, *The Imprisonment of Women* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> The Nickle Commission of 1921 was the only government inquiry specifically concerned with federally sentenced women until the Clarke Report in 1977. See S.D. Cooper, "The Evolution of the Federal Women's Prison," eds., Adelberg and Currie, *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law*.



The initial focus was on the lack of programs and facilities for women in the federal correctional system and, more recently, on differences in the experiences and needs of female offenders (compared with men) — especially in the light of their experience of sexual and physical abuse. In short, the question raised is whether the correctional model used for the majority male population is appropriate for women.<sup>7</sup> The particular problems faced by aboriginal women in the correctional system — both as non-whites and as women — have also at last been recognized.<sup>8</sup>

Such concerns resulted in the appointment of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women whose report *Creating Choices*, published in 1990, established a very different approach to the imprisonment of the female federal offender population.<sup>9</sup>

However, it is worth noting that while women in prison in most countries have tended to be ignored, there are two major factors that have helped to camouflage their existence in Canada. The enormous size of the country and the separation of responsibility for imprisonment between the provinces and the federal government have created particular problems for women.<sup>10</sup>

## A uniquely Canadian problem

The great majority of women remanded or sentenced to prison are housed in provincial institutions. In 1991, some 13,500 women under sentence and about 8,500 on remand were admitted to provincial or territorial prisons.<sup>11</sup>

These women represented just 9% of all offenders receiving a provincial sentence, a relatively tiny group in comparison with men, although their numbers have increased over the past 20 years. In practice this has meant that women are often housed very far from their homes, or in very small numbers, in a variety of jails or prisons across the provinces and territories. In Ontario, for example, women may be housed in as many as 32 different jails or detention centres.<sup>12</sup>

Far fewer women (about 141 in 1991) receive a federal sentence of two years or longer.<sup>13</sup> The total population of federally sentenced women amounts to about 350 women, compared with 12,000 men. In other words, women represent 2% of the federal offender population.

For many years women receiving federal sentences were housed only in the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario.<sup>14</sup> But, since the 1970s up to a third of federally sentenced women

**The enormous size of the country and the separation of responsibility for imprisonment between the provinces and the federal government have created particular problems for women.**

<sup>7</sup> L. Berzins and S. Cooper, "The Political Economy of Correctional Planning for Women: The Case of the Bankrupt Bureaucracy," *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 24, 4 (1982): 399–416. See also E. Adelberg, *A Forgotten Minority: Women in Conflict with the Law* (Ottawa: Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, 1985). And see L. Berzins and B. Hayes, "The Diaries of Two Change Agents," eds., Adelberg and Currie, *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law*.

<sup>8</sup> F. Sugar and L. Fox, *Survey of Aboriginal Women in the Community*, Companion Volume to *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> All sentences of less than two years are the responsibility of the provincial correctional systems; those over two years are the responsibility of the federal correctional system.

<sup>11</sup> See H. Johnson and K. Rodgers, "Getting the Facts Straight: A Statistical Overview," eds., E. Adelberg and C. Currie, *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, in press). In the figure of 13,500, some women will be counted twice, since some will be sentenced more than once in a year.

<sup>12</sup> *Annual Report*, Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services, 1990–1991.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson and Rodgers, *Getting the Facts Straight: A Statistical Overview*.

<sup>14</sup> The history of the imprisonment of federally sentenced women up to the 1970s is outlined in Cooper, *The Evolution of the Federal Women's Prison*.



have been allowed to stay in provincial prisons in their own province. The recommendations of *Creating Choices* will eventually result in the closing of the Prison for Women and the housing of most federally sentenced women in five new regional federal facilities.<sup>15</sup>

The fact remains, however, that the great majority of Canadian women serve their sentences in provincial institutions, where facilities and programs are often minimal. Further, in many cases the women are housed in an institution with a much larger male population.

The overcrowding in some local provincial prisons and the pressures they are under to provide services to the courts and to manage intake and release procedures for short-term sentences all inhibit the development of programs for those women spending more than a few weeks in prison.

Compared with other countries that have similar offending patterns or justice systems, such as England and Wales or Australia, Canada appears to make far greater use of imprisonment for women. While it is always difficult to compare countries, the use of short-term sentences in Canada seems to account for this difference.<sup>16</sup>

The great majority of provincial sentences for women in Canada are six months or less, and almost 40% are 14 days or less.<sup>17</sup> For women in Canada, imprisonment appears to be used in

preference to, or in the absence of, alternatives. There have been too few to think about.

## A profile of women in prison

The small number of women receiving a prison sentence, compared with men, reflects the less serious nature of their offending as well as their lower incidence of offending overall. On average, women receive shorter sentences than men, and they are also less likely to re-offend or to breach the conditions of their parole.<sup>18</sup>

More than 25% of women admitted on sentence to a provincial prison are sentenced for property offences, such as shoplifting or fraud. Others are sentenced for "moral" and public-order offences, drinking offences, traffic offences or drug offences. Only 9% have committed violent offences, and these are primarily minor assaults.<sup>19</sup>

Three out of every 10 are admitted for failure to pay a fine; others are admitted for breaches of court orders or probation orders that do not involve a further offence. Overall, their offences involve fairly minor infractions and present little threat to public safety.

Many of the women are in prison for the first time, but around a quarter of them have been sentenced to prison repeatedly for minor offences involving drinking, prostitution, theft

**The great majority of provincial sentences for women in Canada are six months or less, and almost 40% are 14 days or less. For women in Canada, imprisonment appears to be used in preference to, or in the absence of, alternatives.**

<sup>15</sup> These will be in Kitchener, Ontario; Truro, Nova Scotia; Joliette, Quebec; and Edmonton, Alberta; for aboriginal women there will be a Healing Lodge in Maple Creek – Nekaneeet, Saskatchewan. Women in British Columbia, Newfoundland and the territories will continue to be housed in provincial facilities.

<sup>16</sup> Sentences of two years and longer appear to be proportionately similar in the female offender populations of England and Wales and Canada. But far more women in Canada receive sentences of less than two years (even allowing for double counting). The overall use of imprisonment in Australia is also considerably lower than in Canada. See Shaw, *The Federal Female Offender: Report on a Preliminary Study*. See also L. Axon, *Criminal Justice and Women: An International Survey* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Johnson and Rodgers, *Getting the Facts Straight: A Statistical Overview*.

<sup>18</sup> Sixty-six percent of women admitted to provincial custody in 1989–1990 received sentences of 30 days or less, compared with 40% of men. See "Women and Crime," *Juristat*, 10, 20 (December 1990). Reconviction differences between men and women are discussed in C. Canfield, *The Parole Process and Risk upon Release for the Female Offender*, User Report (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1989). And see Shaw, *The Federal Female Offender: Report on a Preliminary Study*.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson and Rodgers, *Getting the Facts Straight: A Statistical Overview*. See also M. Shaw, *Ontario Women in Conflict with the Law: A Survey of Women in Institutions and under Community Supervision in Ontario* (Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services, in press). The Ontario survey found that of those in institutions, 32% had been charged with property offences, 22% with drug offences, and 19% with violent offences. It should be noted that this is a survey of the population, rather than of admissions to prison, and is likely to under-represent women serving very short sentences.



or fraud. Their offences rarely become more serious, and their short sentences do little to change that behaviour or deal with the reasons that lead to it.<sup>20</sup>

The small number of federally sentenced women includes all those convicted of more serious offences, such as murder or manslaughter (some of these offences were committed in response to abuse by a partner). It also includes those convicted of persistent offences involving robbery, drugs, theft or fraud.

These women are, however, less likely than those under provincial sentence to have been in prison before. In 1989, 36% of women sentenced federally had no prior convictions, half had never been in prison before, and 87% had received their first federal sentence — a much higher proportion than for federally sentenced men.<sup>21</sup>

Compared with their numbers in the population as a whole, aboriginal women are much more likely to receive a prison sentence than non-aboriginal women. They are also more likely to be imprisoned for non-payment of fines.<sup>22</sup>

Aboriginal women are also over-represented in the prison population to a greater extent than aboriginal men. In 1989–1990, aboriginal women accounted for as many as 33% of provincial admissions, compared with 17% for aboriginal men.<sup>23</sup> The numbers of aboriginal women in the federal offender popula-

tion is similarly high, with up to 20% of federally sentenced women being of aboriginal origin.

### Who are these women?

Although many women in prison in Canada come from backgrounds similar to those of men in prison, there are a number of important differences. Like women outside prison, these women have fewer economic resources, poorer

prospects of earning a living on release, and much greater child-care responsibilities than men. They are also more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol and drugs, tend to have more physical health problems, and are more likely to have experienced both physical and sexual abuse.

The ability of most women in prison to earn a reasonable living is severely limited. Many have been living in poverty. They are likely to have few job skills, little training or few qualifications, and low educational attainment.<sup>24</sup> Only about a third of federally sentenced women had good work experience prior to their offence.

Further, the availability of well-paying jobs for women in the community is more restricted than for men, and women usually have domestic responsibilities that limit

their capacity to train or work full time without strong financial support to pay for child care.

At least two thirds of women in prison have children, and up to two thirds of these mothers are likely to be single parents.<sup>25</sup> Women with

**The challenge is not to develop alternatives under the shadow of the prison walls, but to develop programs in their own right — to stop seeing prison as an appropriate sentence for many women.**

<sup>20</sup> Shaw, *Ontario Women in Conflict with the Law: A Survey of Women in Institutions and under Community Supervision in Ontario*. The Ontario survey found that of those in institutions, 41% had never been in prison before, 22% were first offenders, but 26% had accumulated five or more sentences.

<sup>21</sup> M. Shaw et al., *Paying the Price: Federally Sentenced Women in Context* (Ottawa: Ministry of Solicitor General, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> C. La Prairie, "Native Women and Crime in Canada," eds., Adelberg and Currie, *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law*.

<sup>23</sup> See Heidensohn, *Women and Crime*. In 1989, 23% of federally sentenced women in prison were of aboriginal origin. And see Shaw et al., *Paying the Price: Federally Sentenced Women in Context*.

<sup>24</sup> M. Shaw et al., *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women: Report to the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Ministry of Solicitor General, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> L. Macleod, *Sentenced to Separation: An Exploration of the Needs and Problems of Mothers Who Are Offenders and Their Children* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1986). In the federal population, in 1989, two thirds had children and half had children younger than 16. See Shaw, *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women: Report to the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*. In Ontario, 71% of women in institutions had children; of these women, 53% had been living with their children prior to their sentence. In addition, 81% said they had been a single parent for all or part of their children's lives. See Shaw, *Ontario Women in Conflict with the Law: A Survey of Women in Institutions and under Community Supervision in Ontario*.



children tend to have fewer supports in the community than fathers in prison.<sup>26</sup>

About half of the mothers were living with a child before their sentence. Many of them, therefore, have to make special arrangements for the care of their children. In some cases, the children are placed in care; this presents their mothers with the problems of regaining custody after release.

Few prisons have facilities that are designed for family visits or encourage interaction between the mothers and their children. Many jails and detention centres do not allow contact visits. The long-term costs of separation for both the women and their children are far greater than those of the period of imprisonment itself, and this applies to young and adolescent children as much as infants. Separation from their children and the inability to deal with problems concerning them are major anxieties for women in prison.<sup>27</sup>

About two thirds of the women in prison have a serious problem with drugs or alcohol, and substance abuse (alcohol, prescription drugs, street drugs or a mixture of substances) is associated with their offending in some way.<sup>28</sup> Often, they have a long-term addiction that is not likely to be dealt with by a sentence of imprisonment.

Substance abuse, as well as their life style, makes women in prison more susceptible to a wider range of physical health problems than men. These women are particularly susceptible to gynaecological problems.<sup>29</sup> Access to good and appropriate health services is, therefore, of great concern to women in prison.

Eating disorders are also prevalent, as well as other mental-health problems, such as depres-

sion, sleep disorders and high anxiety levels, in part a consequence of being in prison. Slashing and self-injury have also been a problem among women in the federal prison population. A recent study at the Prison for Women suggests a link between self-injury and prior sexual abuse.<sup>30</sup>

Many of the women in prison have experienced physical and sexual abuse in both childhood and adulthood. The range of this type of experience is considerable: some women have suffered single or minor episodes of abuse; others have suffered severe, prolonged and very damaging abuse.

Estimates of the proportion of women in prison populations who have experienced physical or sexual abuse either in childhood or as adults vary, partly because of differences in willingness to talk about it. Sixty-eight percent of women serving federal sentences in 1989, however, said they had experienced physical abuse; 53%, sexual abuse. These figures were much higher among aboriginal women (90%, physical abuse; 61%, sexual abuse), and the abuse was often more prolonged and extensive. Comparable levels of abuse were experienced by provincially sentenced women and, significantly, by those under community supervision.

### How women experience prison

Many of these problems overlap, and the experience of imprisonment adds considerably to the difficulties the women face. Women who have been abused are also likely to have substance-abuse problems, poor education and job experience, physical- and mental-health problems, and little support in the community.

Women serving long federal sentences have expressed the need for specific programs and

<sup>26</sup> A survey in England and Wales found that 90% of fathers in prison left their children in the care of their partner, but only 23% of mothers in prison could do so. See R. Walmsley, L. Howard and S. White, *The National Prison Survey 1991: Main Findings*, Home Office Research Study 128 (London: HMSO, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Macleod, *Sentenced to Separation: An Exploration of the Needs and Problems of Mothers Who Are Offenders and Their Children*. See also S. Wine, *A Motherhood Issue: The Impact of Criminal Justice Involvement on Women and Their Children*, User Report 1992-03 (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1992). And see Shaw et al., *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women: Report to the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*.

<sup>28</sup> Sixty-nine percent of federally sentenced women in 1989 said substance abuse was related to their offending. See Shaw et al., *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women: Report to the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*. See also L.O. Lightfoot and L. Lambert, *Substance Abuse Treatment Needs of Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> J. Resnick and N. Shaw, "Prisoners of Their Sex: Health Problems of Incarcerated Women," *Prisoner's Rights Sourcebook*, ed. I. Robbins, vol. 2 (New York: Boardman, 1980)

<sup>30</sup> J. Heney, *Report on Self-injurious Behaviour in the Kingston Prison for Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).



for plans to meet these needs.<sup>31</sup> There are few halfway houses or support programs for women returning to the community.

For aboriginal women, the experience of poverty, the breakdown of families, the loss of children, substance abuse, and violence and racism is very damaging.<sup>32</sup> Six aboriginal women at the Prison for Women have committed suicide since 1989.

### Issues for the future

Women coming into the criminal justice system have different experiences and needs from the majority male population, and there is a need for programs that take these differences into account.

Remedies include encouraging interaction between mothers and their children and providing women-centred programs to give support to women dealing with experiences such as substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and poverty.<sup>33</sup> Such women-centred programs are being developed at the Prison for Women and elsewhere.<sup>34</sup>

There is also a need for aboriginal programs and approaches that are sensitive to different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and that involve people from those cultures.

Finally, there is a need to develop regimes that provide support to women, rather than punitive responses, as *Creating Choices* underlines. This means recognizing that the majority of women currently receiving prison terms in Canada are not a risk to the public and that less costly alternative sentences would allow the women to deal with their offending.

This implies the use of community-residential accommodation for the majority of women now

given short-term sentences with no supportive programming. Such an approach has been accepted in Nova Scotia on the basis of the 1992 report *Blueprint for Change*,<sup>35</sup> which recommended building community residences to replace the use of the correctional centre for women.

Women currently serving both short and long sentences need community programs that focus on the range of problems they face.

### Conclusion

In Canada, the biggest challenge for the next century is not assessing how far programs for women can be developed within prisons, although that still remains important, but assessing how far alternatives to the 19th- and 20th-century prison model can be developed in a community setting, and in a way that does not replace that model with an apparently benign but as controlling a system.<sup>36</sup>

The challenge is not to develop alternatives under the shadow of the prison walls, but to develop programs in their own right — to stop seeing prison as an appropriate sentence for many women.

Apart from mere buildings, as *Creating Choices* and *Blueprint for Change* stress, the challenge also lies in developing programs for women that account for their experiences and that approach the consequences of their offending in a supportive rather than punitive way.

However, at a time of increasing concern about violent crime (to which women contribute very little) and increasing poverty (which tends to affect women more than men), women are at great risk of being swept up in any penal policies designed to tighten the correctional system. ■

<sup>31</sup> Shaw et al., *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women: Report to the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*. See also Shaw, *Ontario Women in Conflict with the Law: A Survey of Women in Institutions and under Community Supervision in Ontario*.

<sup>32</sup> Shaw et al., *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women: Report to the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*.

<sup>33</sup> Sugar and Fox, *Survey of Aboriginal Women in the Community*.

<sup>34</sup> *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*.

<sup>35</sup> *Blueprint for Change: Report of the Solicitor General's Special Committee on Provincially Incarcerated Women* (Province of Nova Scotia, 1992). See also the research described by K. Kendall in this issue of *Forum on Corrections Research* on feminist programs for women.

<sup>36</sup> *Blueprint for Change: Report of the Solicitor General's Special Committee on Provincially Incarcerated Women*. Some of these problems were raised in 1989 by federally sentenced women on conditional release in the community. See M. Shaw et al., *The Release Study* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1991).



# Creating real choices: A program evaluation of therapeutic services at the Prison for Women

by Kathleen Kendall<sup>1</sup>

Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

This article discusses some of the findings of a program evaluation (conducted between May 1992 and March 1993) of therapeutic services at the Prison for Women.<sup>2</sup> The evaluation followed the publication of *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* and coincided with the resulting setup of new regional correctional facilities.<sup>3</sup>

The findings and recommendations were intended to help provide direction for the development and implementation of programs in the new regional facilities, as well as to assist with program efforts inside the Prison for Women.

## Why focus on therapeutic services?

This focus on therapeutic services was consistent with the findings of a number of previous reports emphasizing the need for program evaluation at the Prison for Women<sup>4</sup> and other studies identifying mental-health and substance-abuse services as critical programming areas for federally sentenced women.<sup>5</sup>

Numerous reports also highlighted severe inadequacies in the number and type of programs offered at the Prison for Women.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, a 1990 Board of Inquiry investigating the attempted suicide of an inmate at the Prison for Women recommended that external consultants be hired to assess the strength of the prison's programs.

In fact, six inmates committed suicide at the Prison for Women between December 1988 and February 1991.<sup>7</sup> All but one of these inmates were aboriginal women. A seventh woman, also aboriginal, died in 1992 following an earlier suicide attempt from which she never regained consciousness.

## Methodology

The program evaluation followed a qualitative design and included interviews, observations and document analysis. Initial interviews with 72 inmates, prison staff and program providers determined key questions and concerns.

The issues identified in this first phase of research were addressed in subsequent interviews with 40 prisoners and 20 staff members.

<sup>1</sup> All correspondence should be directed to Kathleen Kendall, Department of Social Policy and Social Work, Faculty of Economic and Social Studies, University of Manchester, Manchester, M13 9PL, United Kingdom. This discussion is based on findings from an evaluation conducted under contract to the Correctional Service of Canada. However, the views expressed are completely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Correctional Service of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> For the full report see K. Kendall, *Program Evaluation of Therapeutic Services at the Prison for Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> M. Evans, *A Survey of Institutional Programs Available to Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1989). See also R. Ross and E. Fabiano, *Correctional Afterthoughts: Programs for Female Offenders* (Ottawa: Solicitor General of Canada, 1985). And see *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*.

<sup>5</sup> L. Berzins and S. Dunn, *Federal Female Offender Program 1978 Progress Report* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1978). See also Elliot and Morris, "Behind Prison Doors," *Too*

*Few to Count*, eds. E. Adelberg and C. Currie (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1987). And see J. Heney, *Report on Self-injurious Behaviour in the Kingston Prison for Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990). And see L. Lightfoot and L. Lambert, *Substance Abuse Treatment Needs of Federally Sentenced Women: Technical Report 1* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1991). And see M. Shaw et al., *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women: Technical Report 1* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990). And see M. Shaw et al., *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women on the Prison Survey* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> L. Berzins and S. Cooper, "The Political Economy of Correctional Planning for Women: The Case of the Bankrupt Bureaucracy," *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 24, 4 (1982): 399-416. See also *Report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General on Its Review of Sentencing, Conditional Release and Related Aspects of Corrections* (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1988). And see F. Sugar and L. Fox, *Survey of Federally Sentenced Aboriginal Women in the Community* (Ottawa: Native Women's Association of Canada, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> One of the suicides is under investigation as a possible assisted suicide or homicide.



## Counselling

The evaluation demonstrated that among prisoners, staff and program providers there were conflicting views of counselling and its role in the Prison for Women.

Staff generally recognized the benefits of counselling: stabilizing effects on the prison environment, easier adjustment of inmates, and crisis prevention. Yet, a number of those interviewed wondered whether counselling practices were leading prisoners to engage in self-injury, suicide or volatile behaviour.

In fact, there had been some speculation that the suicides at the Prison for Women were linked to a recent increase in the number of therapeutic services provided within the prison.<sup>8</sup>

There was a perception among staff that prisoners were pushed into dealing with issues before they were ready — a “Pandora’s Box” of painful memories was being opened during counselling sessions.

When asked about this, 92% of inmates stated that they were ready to deal with the issues they worked on during counselling. If they felt that they were not prepared to confront specific problems, they simply advised their counsellors of this and discussed options that included moving on to other issues or temporarily withdrawing from counselling.

The remaining 8%, who reported confronting issues for which they were unprepared, stated that their experiences had occurred a number of years ago and with different counsellors.

Indeed, prisoners reported overwhelming support for the counsellors at the Prison for Women.<sup>9</sup> This high degree of satisfaction may be partially explained by the general philosophy and approach used by counsellors, which are rooted in feminist therapy and informed by the most recent literature on trauma and recovery.

**Women are not simply victims — they can, and do, move beyond survival to take self-determined actions that are the least harmful and most empowering.**

Much of the current research and practice endorses such an approach as the most appropriate for female inmates.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, the counselling practices reflected what prisoners identified as most helpful to them: assistance in taking control of their own lives, the opportunity to value and be valued by others, and space just to be themselves.

These elements reflect the key principles of feminist therapy: personal autonomy and a mutually respectful relationship with others.

### The feminist approach

Feminist therapists frame the experiences of individuals within the broader social environment and

help people connect their own experiences and actions and the circumstances that define their lives.

In particular, feminist therapists recognize the close connection between women’s marginalized status (as a result of, for example, poverty, abuse, sexism and racism), the offences they are charged with, and their consequent imprisonment.

One of the main thrusts of feminist analysis is an acknowledgment that many women have suffered as a result of others enforcing power and control over them.

However, feminists also acknowledge women’s ability to resist and survive violence in its various forms and to find creative ways of coping, even in the most oppressive conditions. Women are not simply victims — they can, and do, move beyond survival to take self-determined actions that are the least harmful and most empowering.

Rather than viewing issues in isolation, a feminist approach attempts to view them in context. Within this framework, personal accountability and agency are not denied or

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, A. Kershaw, “Inmate Suicides Linked to Counselling Programs, Warden Fears,” *Kingston Whig Standard*, 14 February, 1991, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> The high regard for counselling staff at the Prison for Women is consistent with an earlier study by M. Shaw et al., *Survey of Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Ministry of the Solicitor General, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> See K. Kendall, *Literature Review of Therapeutic Services for Women in Prison*, Companion Volume I to *Program Evaluation of Therapeutic Services at the Prison for Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993).



diminished; they are enhanced. As women develop a deeper awareness and understanding of their experiences and of their own strengths, agency and various options, they begin to take greater control over their own lives.

However, this approach also extends accountability to a much broader societal level that includes our communities and the institutions we construct, such as the criminal justice system. This dynamic model allows for much more comprehensive description and analysis.

For example, feminist analysis reveals the contradiction between appropriate and effective intervention and current correctional practices and policies. Feminist therapy is premised on helping women see their own power so they can resist harm and take self-determined action. But prisons generally remove whatever autonomy women have left in their lives by enforcing rigid control over inmates: restrictions on movement, space, schedule, activities and communication.<sup>11</sup>

Such control, coupled with often arbitrary enforcement and application of rules, merely reproduces the sense of powerlessness and unpredictability present in the lives of many women prior to their imprisonment.

It was the rigid control imposed over them that the women identified as the most damaging. Women described the experience as one in which they were stripped of their own selves — their identities as individual women were replaced by the label and stereotype of “prisoner.”

Accordingly, the women felt that any move they made, either inside the prison or upon release, was judged in relation to their status as a prisoner.

Further, despite the almost non-existent opportunities for taking autonomous action and making real choices, women stated that correctional staff and the Parole Board expected them to make positive pro-social choices and decisions.

This contradiction between what women were told to do and what they were actually allowed to do creates an impossible paradox for the women and is often reminiscent of earlier abusive experiences.

**It was the rigid control imposed over them that the women identified as the most damaging. Women described the experience as one in which they were stripped of their own selves — their identities as individual women were replaced by the label and stereotype of “prisoner.”**

### What can be done?

The women did provide examples of measures that could reduce the hardship of imprisonment. A dignified planning process, the freedom to safely express emotions, and increased access to programs and people in the community were suggested as ways of reducing the hardship of imprisonment.

The importance of counselling was emphasized but was said to be helpful only if women could choose whether to take part. The women emphasized that the existence of mutually respectful relationships underscored the value and benefit of everything else. Such relationships were described, for example, as “people looking beyond labels of prisoner or guard.”

While institutional efforts to foster such relationships could be encouraged, both staff and inmates stated

that the potential for mutually respectful relationships inside a prison was seriously restricted because prisons were designed to create an unequal distribution of power between staff and inmates.

### Discussion

The evaluation of therapeutic services at the Prison for Women indicated that the creation of real choices for women lies not in building new prisons but in providing genuine alternatives to incarceration.<sup>12</sup> Such initiatives would have, at heart, a commitment to mutually respectful relationships in which women are treated as equals and their individuality is respected. ■

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, M. Eaton, *Women After Prison* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993). See also Heney, Report on Self-injurious Behaviour in the Kingston Prison for Women. And see M. Velimesis, “Sex Roles and Mental Health,” *Professional Psychology*, 12, 1 (1981): 128–135.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, P. Carlen, *Alternatives to Women’s Imprisonment* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990).



# Some comparisons of female and male serious offenders

by Alex Loucks<sup>1</sup>

Eastern and Northern Ontario District Parole Office, Correctional Service of Canada  
and Edward Zamble

Department of Psychology, Queen's University

Public attention is periodically drawn to the female offender, usually as a result of media focus on a sensational incident. Many statements about the characteristics and needs of this population have been made, but until very recently, female offenders have been "empirically invisible." Only in the last few years have social science researchers begun to gather a systematic body of data on female offenders.

We recently conducted a study comparing samples of male and female offenders on the basis of their social and familial background, criminal history, and personal or emotional adjustment. Our goal is to see whether any of these factors can help to predict female recidivism and violence. In this article, we present some preliminary results of this research.

Not only is the available research on female offenders sparse, but much of it has been concerned with limited ranges of behaviour or narrow and unrepresentative subpopulations. Sociological investigations have primarily centred on the social structure of women's prisons and styles of adaptation to incarceration.<sup>2</sup>

Criminological studies have focused on such areas as gender differences in crime rates,<sup>3</sup> court processing or sentencing.<sup>4</sup>

Often, other studies have had a limited focus. Studies of phenomena such as deviation from stereotypical gender roles,<sup>5</sup> departure from a heterosexual orientation,<sup>6</sup> allegedly abnormal physiological changes associated with normal reproductive biology,<sup>7</sup> and physical characteristics thought to reflect masculinity<sup>8</sup> represent, in various ways, a concern with deviation from stereotyped femininity.

Most investigations attempting to isolate factors causing criminality have been restricted to highly select groups of offenders. Often, earlier researchers selected prostitutes as the study group, and some explanations of female criminal behaviour have been based entirely on generalizations taken from data on prostitution.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, very little research has focused on the full spectrum of female criminality with anything approaching the range of variables of proven predictive value used for male offenders. For example, there is almost no information on factors associated with the origin or maintenance of female criminal behaviour, but there is a sizeable amount of such literature on male offenders.

<sup>1</sup> Address correspondence to Alex Loucks, Eastern and Northern Ontario District Parole Office, Correctional Service of Canada, 920 Princess Street, Suite 203, Kingston, Ontario K7L 1H1.

<sup>2</sup> E. Heffernan, *Making It in Prison: The Square, the Cool, and the Life* (London: Wiley, 1972). See also D.L. MacKenzie, J.W. Robinson and C.S. Campbell, "Long-term Incarceration of Female Offenders: Prison Adjustment and Coping," *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 16 (1989): 223-238.

<sup>3</sup> A. Morris, *Women, Crime, and Criminal Justice* (New York: Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> L.H. Bowker, *Women, Crime, and the Criminal Justice System* (Toronto: Lexington, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> B.D. Townes, J. James and D.C. Martin, "Criminal Involvement of Female Offenders: Psychological

Characteristics among Four Groups," *Criminology*, 18 (1981): 471-480.

<sup>6</sup> C.S. Campbell, D.L. MacKenzie and J.W. Robinson, "Female Offenders: Criminal Behavior and Gender-role Identity," *Psychological Reports*, 60 (1987): 867-873.

<sup>7</sup> C.E. Climent, "Epidemiological Studies of Female Prisoners. 4: Homosexual Behavior," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*, 164 (1977): 25-29.

<sup>8</sup> P.T. D'Orban and J. Dalton, "Violent Crime and the Menstrual Cycle," *Psychological Medicine*, 10 (1980): 353-359.

<sup>9</sup> J. Cowie, V. Cowie and E. Slater, *Delinquency in Girls* (London: Heinemann, 1968).



## The method

A review of the scarce published research on factors contributing to recidivism and violence among female offenders suggests that there might be both similarities<sup>10</sup> and differences<sup>11</sup> between male and female populations. Therefore, we carried out a study that looked at both factors linked with future offences in men and factors that might differ with gender, in a female offender population. The study focused on criminal and violent behaviour (including self-injury and suicide), as well as other types of behaviour problems within an institutional setting.

Over an 18-month period, 100 adult female offenders participated in the study; all were imprisoned at the federal Prison for Women. The researchers reviewed institutional files to extract information such as criminal history, community and institutional involvement in mental-health treatment, previous suicide attempts and self-injuries, and various aspects of social, familial, educational, occupational and marital history.

A structured interview was used to measure variables such as psychopathy<sup>12</sup> and coping efficacy,<sup>13</sup> which have a demonstrated value in predicting subsequent (mis)behaviour in males.

A series of 12 questionnaires (including two developed specifically for this study) provided information on areas such as current emotional functioning and historical data. We also assessed the magnitude and nature of sexual and physical abuse in childhood, in adolescence and in adulthood; recent literature suggests that these variables may be powerful predictors of female recidivism and violence.<sup>14</sup>

Our aim was first to provide descriptive information on all of these factors and also to assess their usefulness in predicting a number of outcomes related to institutional and community behaviour, such as a woman's violence toward herself and others.

Although comprehensive data analyses are not yet ready for publication, we can now provide some interesting initial comparisons between the present sample and a random sample of male inmates included in an earlier study along similar lines.<sup>15</sup> Measurements had been done longitudinally at several times for the male sample, but to maximize comparability we used the values measured about 1.5 years after the start of sentences.

It should be noted that the data on the women were taken about eight years after the data on the men, and the male data are outdated in some respects (for example, the racial distributions do not reflect those of current inmate populations). By design, the male data also included a low representation of sex offenders. However, the methods and measures of the two studies were similar enough that we can easily make comparisons.

## The sample

The breakdown by race for the female offenders was as follows: 74% were Caucasian, 12% were Aboriginal, and 14% were Black. In the male sample, 88% were Caucasian, 6% were Aboriginal, 4% were Black, and 2% were Asian.

On average, the women were 34 years old at the time of the study, and the men were 30 years old.

Most of the women in the sample (71%) had children, and one third were caring for young children at the time of their arrest. Figures are not available for the male sample.

<sup>10</sup> L.R. Lambert and P.G. Madden, *The Adult Female Offender: Before, During, and After Incarceration* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> J.H. Pantone, "Personality Differences between Male and Female Inmates Measured by the MMPI," *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 1 (1974): 332-339.

<sup>12</sup> R.D. Hare, L.M. McPherson and A.E. Forth, "Male Psychopaths and Their Criminal Careers," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56 (1988): 710-714.

<sup>13</sup> E. Zamble and F.J. Porporino, *Coping, Behavior, and Adaptation in Prison Inmates* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> G.A. Roundtree, A.D. Parker, D.W. Edwards and C.B. Teddlie, "A Survey of the Types of Crimes Committed by Incarcerated Females in Two States Who Reported Being Battered," *Corrective and Social Psychiatry and Journal of Behavior Technology Methods and Therapy*, 28 (1982): 23-26. See also G.T. Long, F.E. Sultan, S.A. Kiefer and D.M. Scrum, "The Psychological Profile of the Female First Offender and the Recidivist: A Comparison," *Journal of Offender Counseling Services and Rehabilitation*, 9 (1984): 119-123.

<sup>15</sup> Zamble and Porporino, *Coping, Behavior, and Adaptation in Prison Inmates*.



## The results

### Social and familial background

While these two samples were far from identical, there are obvious similarities. For example, both the men and the women seem to have had relatively disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds: 15% of the women and 33% of the men grew up in poor families. However, the differences from national averages are hardly overwhelming, and these sample populations represent the full range of Canadian society.

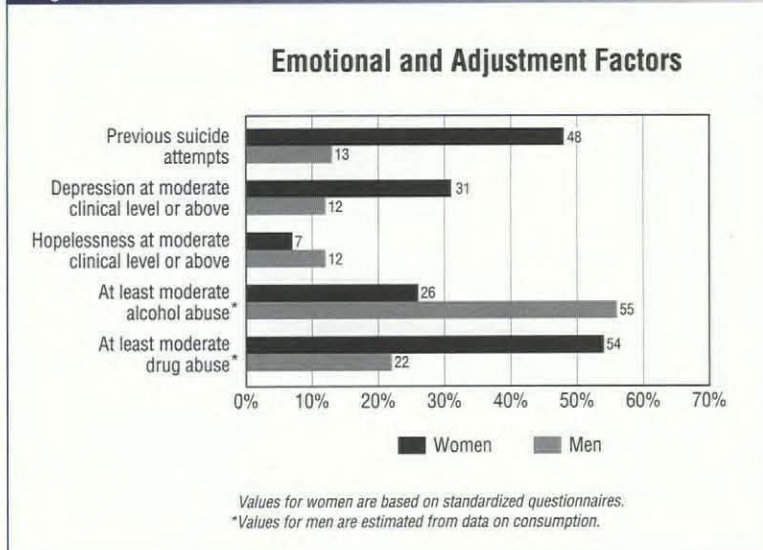
A substantial proportion of both the men and the women spent the first years of their lives with adults other than their parents. From birth to age five, about 1 in 5 of the women and 1 in 10 of the men were living with adoptive parents, with foster parents or in an institution. Between the ages of 6 and 11, these proportions increased to about 1 in 4 for women and 1 in 5 for men.

Further, both male and female offenders showed evidence of difficulties in their personal histories. On average, they had dropped out of school early (at about age 16) and were poorly trained for employment. They also had high levels of unemployment and poor work histories. Half of the women were unskilled or unemployed, and another 30% were employed in a semiskilled trade or the equivalent. About one third of the men were unskilled or unemployed, and about half were employed in a semiskilled trade or the equivalent.

### Emotional factors and adjustment

Similarly, there was evidence of emotional maladjustment, from substance abuse to suicide attempts. The measures of these characteristics are shown in Figure 1. Our assessment of their coping skills put these

Figure 1



people in the range of "minimally effective." That is, they generally attempted to deal with problems but were very deficient in their ability to resolve them.

### Criminal history

We would expect such emotional difficulties to be associated with criminal behaviour, and certainly both women and men had histories of serious and repeated antisocial acts. Most had substantial criminal records starting about a decade before our studies (at age 22 or 21). On average, the women had 10.8 previous convictions, while the men had 12.6.

The women had served longer times on their current sentences (on average, 27 months for women compared with 16 months for men), and while this may affect some between-sex differences, the longitudinal study of the male sample showed relatively little change in most behaviours after a year or so in prison.<sup>16</sup>

Overall, there was no evidence that the crimes that resulted in penitentiary terms for women were any less serious than the offences of male penitentiary inmates. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of both populations by principal current offence.

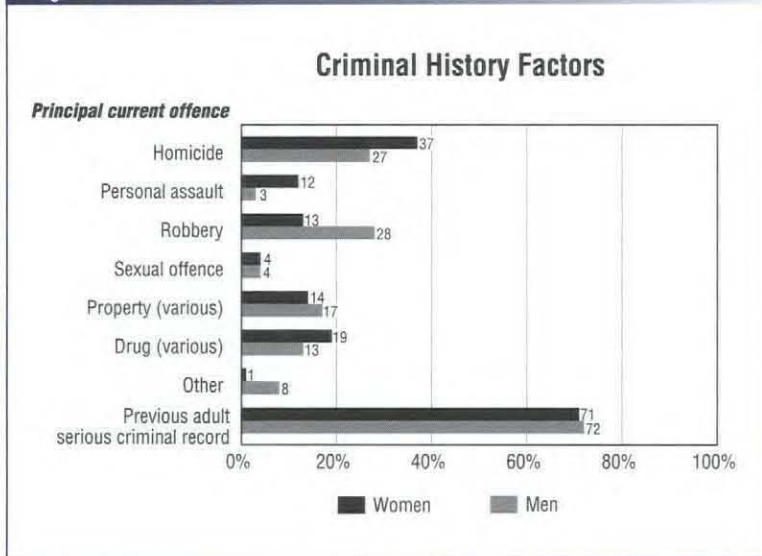
### Discussion

While the similarities are evident, there are also some very clear differences between the two groups of offenders. The women had much

<sup>16</sup> Zamble and Porporino, *Coping, Behavior, and Adaptation in Prison Inmates*. See also E. Zamble, "Behavior and Adaptation in Long-term Prison Inmates," *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 19 (1992): 409-425.



Figure 2



higher levels of depression, and given the differences in the histories of suicide attempts, this probably had been the case for many years.

There are also some very interesting differences related to substance abuse. The women

were only half as likely as the men to report at least moderate alcohol abuse and twice as likely to report at least moderate drug abuse.

There are also differences in the distribution of offences. Far more men were imprisoned for robbery; more women were imprisoned for non-fatal assaults.

Of course, these data are not representative of female offenders as a whole, because the sample population included only those convicted of the most serious crimes. However, the similarities between this group and the much larger group of serious male offenders are quite interesting, and the differences

may give some clues to the determinants of offending for each group.

Analyses of these data are continuing, and we hope that further reports will be available soon. ■

*We participate in research projects because we hope it will help change things. We hope that somebody will finally listen to us and realize that we are women living in a situation that affects us mentally, morally and physically every minute of the day, whether we like it or not. That's the worst part. We are not blind — we see, we understand these effects — but there is little we can do about it.*

*That's why we want to suggest the following ways of improving research projects. These changes would make us feel more comfortable and more able to talk freely with you:*

- *Researchers should offer written guarantees of anonymity.*
- *Don't assume that we are aware of, or understand, your affiliations and objectives — explain them.*
- *Tell us about yourself, professionally and personally. Let us see a piece of your life before asking about what is most personal to us — our feelings.*
- *Wait a suitable, and flexible, amount of time before starting to ask our questions so we can begin to feel at ease.*

*In the end, this should help produce more accurate research results for you and allow our voices to be better heard.*

*Female inmates (Tanguay prison)  
on researchers [translation]*



# Correlates of delinquency: A look at gender differences

by Linda Simourd<sup>1</sup> and D.A. Andrews<sup>1</sup>  
Department of Psychology, Carleton University

Contemporary research on delinquency is challenging fundamental assumptions regarding female delinquency made by early theorists and researchers. As a result, correctional theory and research appears to be at a crossroad in terms of gender issues.

One important issue is the identification of risk factors for female youth. The apparent social bias of early female-delinquency theories suggests that exclusive reliance on personal and familial problems in the assessment of female risk may be inadequate. Yet, the relevance of male-based risk factors has not been fully evaluated.

Our study attempted to fill this gap through a systematic review of research that has examined the same risk factors for male and female youths separately. It should be noted here that our research and its findings focused on youth criminality (delinquency) rather than on adult criminality.

Female delinquency has historically been perceived as relatively rare and less serious than male delinquency.<sup>2</sup> Early research using police and court records showed that for each female delinquent, there were three to seven male delinquents.<sup>3</sup> In terms of offence type, female youths were perceived as committing relatively minor offences, such as running away, truancy and sexual acting out, while male youths were perceived as committing a much wider and more serious range of offences.<sup>4</sup>

Early female-delinquency theories were also dramatically different from those developed for male youths. Personal maladjustment was viewed as a fundamental cause of problem behaviour in female youths. Psychological problems, inadequate performance of the proper sex role, and a problematic home life were some of the proposed explanations for female deviance.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, early male-delinquency theories focused on more external risk factors, such as peer group, lower social class, and lack of educational or occupational resources.<sup>6</sup>

Within the past 20 years, research has challenged some of these traditional views. Contemporary self-report studies, for example, have suggested a more accurate gender ratio of no more than three male delinquents to each female delinquent.<sup>7</sup> Recent studies have also found that female youth are involved in a broad range of criminal behaviours, not just minor offences. One exception to the similarity of offences is the use of physical aggression; here, female involvement remains lower than that of male youths.<sup>8</sup>

To explain and predict delinquency, contemporary research has expanded its scope to consider personal factors (such as behaviour, personality, and cognition), interpersonal factors (such as

<sup>1</sup> Linda Simourd and D.A. Andrews, Department of Psychology, Carleton University, Loeb Building B-542, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6.

<sup>2</sup> R. Canter, "Family Correlates of Male and Female Delinquency," *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 20 (1982): 149-167. See also P. Richards, "Quantitative and Qualitative Sex Differences in Middle-class Delinquency," *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 18 (1981): 453-470.

<sup>3</sup> R. Canter, "Sex Differences in Self-report Delinquency," *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 20 (1982): 373-393.

<sup>4</sup> Canter, Sex Differences in Self-report Delinquency.

<sup>5</sup> P. Giordano, "Girls, Guys and Gangs: The Changing Social Context of Female Delinquency," *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 69 (1978): 126-132.

<sup>6</sup> Giordano, Girls, Guys and Gangs: The Changing Social Context of Female Delinquency.

<sup>7</sup> The precise ratios are 1.2:1 to 2.5:1 as reported in Canter, Sex Differences in Self-report Delinquency.

<sup>8</sup> I. Gomme, "Predictors of Status and Criminal Offences among Male and Female Adolescents in an Ontario Community," *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 27 (1985): 147-159.



family and peers), and structural factors (such as school and church). Although the tendency to omit female youths continues, there has been an emerging interest in female involvement in delinquency. Increasingly, studies on risk are including male and female youths in their research samples. Until now, these studies were never examined as a group.

## Our study

The primary goal of our research was to review this portion of the delinquency literature. Specifically, we looked at published and unpublished studies conducted over the past 30 years. This review gave us an opportunity to comprehensively examine female youths on a wide range of risk factors. It also allowed us to examine risk factors not typically investigated among male samples. We sought answers to two basic questions:

- What are the important risk factors for **each** gender? For example, does associating with criminal peers place male youths at risk for delinquency, and does this factor also place female youths at risk?
- Are specific risk factors **more important** for a particular gender? For example, are family problems more strongly related to female delinquency than to male delinquency, and are school difficulties more strongly associated with male delinquency than with female delinquency?

We used a technique called “meta-analysis” to conduct this review.<sup>9</sup> One of the main advantages of meta-analysis over the traditional (narrative) form of literature review is that meta-analysis summarizes large bodies of literature and reaches more definitive conclusions. This quantitative approach combines numerical information (actual data) from selected studies and computes an

Table 1

### Risk Factors

- Lower social class
- Family structure or parental problems (broken home, marital problems)
- Personal distress (anxiety, low self-esteem, apathy)
- Minor personality variables (empathy, moral reasoning)
- Poor parent-child relations (attachment, supervision)
- Educational difficulties (poor grades, dropout)
- Temperament or misconduct problems (psychopathy, impulsivity, substance use)
- Antisocial peers or attitudes

average result for each risk factor for males and females separately. This information then indicates the degree of association between delinquency and a particular risk factor.<sup>10</sup>

Each study included in this review met three criteria:

- Male **and** female youths were sampled.
- Each gender was examined on the same risk factor.
- The data for each gender were reported separately.

These criteria ensured that male-female comparisons were based on the same delinquency and risk measures, thus eliminating biases that could result from using different measures for each gender.

Sixty studies met these requirements and provided 464 correlations between delinquency and risk factors. We then grouped the risk factors examined within these correlations into eight general risk categories based on previous reviews and common themes in the delinquency literature.

Table 1 lists the eight risk factors and provides a brief indication of their content. Some factors will be familiar to FORUM readers, as a previous issue on delinquency highlighted some of these risk areas.<sup>11</sup>

What risk factors are most important for delinquency in each gender?

<sup>9</sup> For a complete discussion of meta-analysis see R. Rosenthal, “Meta-analysis: A Review,” *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 53 (1991): 247-271.

<sup>10</sup> Measures of variability are available from Linda Simourd; however, they are not discussed in this paper.

<sup>11</sup> See T. Nouwens and F. Porporino, eds., *Forum on Corrections Research*, 3, 3 (1991).



Table 2

**Average Correlations for Eight Risk Factors**

Risk factor	Female youths <i>r</i> ( <i>n</i> )	Male youths <i>r</i> ( <i>n</i> )
Lower social class	0.07 (19)	0.06 (19)
Family structure or parental problems	0.07 (17)	0.09 (17)
Personal distress	0.10 (14)	0.09 (14)
Minor personality variables	0.18 (9)	0.22 (9)
Poor parent-child relations	0.20 (41)	0.22 (41)
Educational difficulties	0.24 (34)	0.23 (34)
Temperament or misconduct problems	0.35 (45)	0.36 (45)
Antisocial peers or attitudes	0.39 (53)	0.40 (53)

*r* = average correlation; *n* = number of correlations that contributed to that average

Table 2 provides a clear indication of the combined results of these 60 studies. Correlations of 0.15 or larger would be of substantive interest.

For female youths, the most important risk factors in descending order were antisocial peers or attitudes, temperament or misconduct problems, educational difficulties, poor parent-child relations, and minor personality variables. Personal distress, family structure or parental problems, and lower social class did not appear to be strongly related to delinquency.

A similar pattern emerged for the male youths: that is, the first three risk factors in the table were not strongly related to male delinquency, and the last five factors were important.<sup>12</sup>

### Are specific risk factors more important for a particular gender?

A comparison of the two columns of correlations in Table 2 indicates there were no differences in the risk factors across gender. Statistical tests supported this seemingly obvious finding. In other words, the general risk factors that were important for male delinquency were also important for female delinquency.

### Practical importance

In practical terms, these data suggest that knowing a youth's socioeconomic status or family structure would provide little information about his or her risk of delinquency.

However, information indicating difficulties in the area of family relations, conduct or peers would provide valuable information about that individual's risk of delinquency. These findings are consistent with social psychological models of criminal conduct that suggest that a variety of factors are associated with delinquency.<sup>13</sup>

### Control variables

The next step in our research process was to assess whether particular aspects of these 60 studies contained systematic bias. For example, would the numbers in Table 2 change dramatically if we took into account the source of the information — that is, whether delinquency was measured by self-reports from the delinquents or by officials from the justice system? Would it matter if the sample consisted of high-school students or a group of offenders?

We considered 15 aspects related to the studies and their samples.<sup>14</sup> While certain aspects did influence the size of the correlations in Table 2, the overall ranking of factors did not change. That is, despite taking into account various study characteristics, the data on social class, family structure or parent problems and personal distress still provided little information

<sup>12</sup> The findings for minor personality variables should be viewed with caution, given the small number of correlations representing this factor and fluctuations noted within this category.

<sup>13</sup> D.A. Andrews and J. Bonta, *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (Cincinnati: Anderson, in press). See also M. LeBlanc, M. Ouimet and R.E. Tremblay, "An Integrative Control Theory of Delinquent Behaviour: A Validation 1976-1985," *Psychiatry*, 51 (1988): 164-176.

<sup>14</sup> These were 1) sample, 2) design, 3) sample size, 4) period of data collection, 5) gender focus of study, 6) predominant ethnicity, 7) source of delinquency information, 8) source of risk information, 9) retrieval source, 10) gender of author, 11) psychometrics of risk measure, 12) social class, 13) type of delinquency, and 14) nature of delinquency.



about an individual's risk for delinquency. Parent-child difficulties and school problems remained important. Finally, temperament or misconduct problems and antisocial peers or attitudes remained the factors most significantly related to delinquency, regardless of study characteristics.

To summarize, this meta-analytical review yielded three conclusions with respect to eight general risk factors:

- The general risk factors that were important for female youths were also important for male youths. Further, no risk factor was more important for a particular gender.
- The most important risk factors for both genders, in descending order, were antisocial attitudes and peers, temperament or misconduct problems, educational difficulties, poor parent-child relations, and minor personality variables. In contrast, lower social class, family structure or parental problems, and personal distress were not strongly related to delinquency.
- When various sample and study characteristics were taken into account, the general pattern of results remained the same.

### Other risk factors

Although this review suggests that the same risk factors are important for men and women, some might argue that gender differences may exist for other factors not captured by the eight areas we examined.

To explore this possibility, we grouped 96 correlations not captured by the eight general risk factors into 10 additional risk areas and assessed them for possible gender differences. Table 3 lists these factors and the number of times each factor was found in the studies examined. Undoubtedly more research has been conducted within each area; however, recall that we selected the studies based on three criteria listed earlier.

Since only a total of 96 correlations pertained to these 10 categories, we treated this set of findings as exploratory. A few highlights will be mentioned.

Two very promising categories of risk were lack of attachment to convention and sexual behaviour. Lack of attachment to convention pertained to an individual's lack of affiliation with prosocial people (such as parents and teachers) or institutions (such as family, school and church). Because these measures assessed attachment to multiple individuals or institutions, they could not be incorporated in any of the earlier categories, such as education or parent-child relations.

The data indicated that lack of attachment to convention was associated with delinquency for each gender (male average correlation = 0.23; female average correlation = 0.22). This was to be expected given that our earlier analysis found that lack of attachment to specific institutions (such as educational difficulties) and people (poor parent-child relations) were important risk factors.

Although the data for sexual behaviour were obtained from only three studies, there was

**The general risk factors that were important for female youths were also important for male youths. Further, no risk factor was more important for a particular gender.**

Table 3

#### Other Risk Factors

- Victimization (1)
- Illegitimate opportunity (2)
- Lack of legitimate opportunity (3)
- Sexual behaviour (3)
- Lack of hobbies or involvement (4)
- Accommodation problems (4)
- Self-concept issues (6)
- Race (7)
- Sex-role orientation (8)
- Lack of attachment to convention (10)



consensus about the importance of this factor. The lowest correlations for male and female youths were 0.35 and 0.26, respectively. What remains unclear is whether gender differences exist — one study found large gender differences, another found minor differences, and the third found none.

The significance of sexual behaviour as a correlate of delinquency may be somewhat surprising, given current rates of sexual activity among teenagers. However, these three studies were conducted between 1966 and 1971. Sexual behaviour in those days may have served as an indicator of an individual's tolerance of rules or norms. An interesting question is whether the same degree of association would be noted for high-school students in the 1990s.

Two less promising categories were race and sex-role orientation. The issue of race refers solely to Black versus Caucasian samples, as no other racial comparisons were reported. The information from seven studies suggests no link between race and delinquency (male average correlation = -0.02; female average correlation = 0.03).

Sex-role orientation (masculinity or femininity) was also found to be unrelated to delinquency (male average correlation = 0.05; female average correlation = 0.07). There may be a minor association of delinquency with sex-role orientation when lack of feminine traits (communal traits, such as sharing and caring) are examined. A narrative literature review of research in this area found similar results and concluded this line of research should be abandoned.<sup>15</sup>

The jury is still out for the six remaining risk categories. For these factors (victimization, illegitimate opportunity, lack of legitimate opportunity, lack of hobbies or involvement, accommodation problems, and self-concept issues), either too few studies were obtained or

various study characteristics made interpretation of the findings difficult. Victimization, for example, was only measured by one study, which asked students between the ages of 12 and 16 whether they personally were a victim of five types of crimes ranging from theft of unguarded possessions to attack and assault.<sup>16</sup> The correlations, based on overall victimization, not on victimization specific to violence, yielded no gender difference (male correlation = 0.14; female correlation = 0.16). Given the growing clinical interest in sexual abuse and victimization, particularly for females,<sup>17</sup> future gender research should examine this issue empirically.

Another category, accommodation problems (e.g., crowding, high-crime neighbourhood), was assessed by four studies, whose results varied across sample and design, thus making interpretation difficult. The two cross-sectional studies indicated no association between accommodation problems and delinquency in male youths, but a minor association between them for female youths. The longitudinal study reported a significant association for men but not for women. Finally, the offender versus non-offender sample found accommodation problems to be a significant risk factor for both genders, although more important for women.

More questions are raised than answered when variation occurs to this extent in the data. Clearly, for these six categories, more research must be gathered before any conclusions can be drawn.

In summary, our conclusions about the 10 categories described in this section are limited by the small number of correlations and the sometimes varying results. Future research could examine some of these factors for their use as risk factors and for possible gender differences.

<sup>15</sup> N. Naffin, "The Masculinity-Femininity Hypothesis: A Consideration of Gender-based Personality Theories of Female Crime," *British Journal of Criminology*, 25 (1985): 365-381.

<sup>16</sup> R. Mawby, "Sex and Crime: The Results of a Self-report Study," *British Journal of Sociology*, 31 (1980): 525-543.

<sup>17</sup> J. Darke and H. McLean, "Invisible Women: The Treatment and Research Needs of Female Offenders," *The Treatment of*

*Female Offenders*, ed. A. Loucks, Symposium conducted at the annual meeting of the Canadian Psychological Association (Ottawa: May 1990). See also A. Einbender and W. Friedrich, "Psychological Functioning and Behaviour of Sexually Abused Girls," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 57 (1989): 155-157.



## Conclusions

The results of this literature review are clear. The risk factors that are important for male delinquency are also important for female delinquency. Of the risk factors examined, the most important are antisocial peers or attitudes, temperament or misconduct problems, educational difficulties, poor parent-child relations, and minor personality variables. In contrast, lower social class, family structure or parental problems, and personal distress are not strongly related to delinquency for either gender.

These results support recent social psychological models of criminal conduct that suggest a variety of personal, interpersonal and structural factors are related to delinquent behaviour in males and females.

However, our results seriously challenge the value of early delinquency theories. Most importantly, notions of female delinquency as exclusively symptomatic of personal distress or familial difficulties have been shown to be inadequate. Early male theories, which focused on lower social class as a major route to criminal behaviour, can also be questioned. Others previously challenged this social-location perspective, and a contemporary understanding of male delinquency has moved beyond this limited view.<sup>18</sup>

Several challenges remain for researchers and scientist-practitioners. First, these results do not eliminate the possibility that other factors are associated with delinquency in one or both genders. Future research could investigate, for example, the role of some of the less frequently measured factors explored in this study. Weaker personality variables, sexual behaviour, and sexual abuse and victimization are a few areas worthy of further consideration.

Second, these findings should lead to reformulated ideas and directions about theory and

research on female delinquency. Those interested in female delinquency should learn from male-delinquency literature that has progressed beyond the early reliance on social class as the major explanation of male deviance. It is time to set aside antiquated ideas and to consider a larger group of factors as causes of delinquency. Our review examined gender differences and similarities in the correlates of delinquency, so the next step is to examine causal factors for individual female and male youths in the context of their experiences. That research would inform us of the need for gender-specific or gender-neutral theories of delinquency.

In conclusion, for some, the results of this review may simply state the obvious. For years, a small portion of the literature on delinquency has examined the same risk factors for male and female youths and independently, yet repeatedly, found the same results across gender. This review of the literature has pulled those results together in a quantitative fashion, and the similarity across gender can no longer be ignored. The factors examined to date suggest a unique set of correlates may not be required for female delinquency.

Future research will inform us about the role gender plays with respect to predictors and theories of criminal conduct. Consistent with this approach is the need to incorporate gender into the research design and to present the male and female data separately. Only then can a clearer understanding of the similarities and differences across gender be obtained. ■

## Coming up in *Forum on Corrections Research* . . .

*The theme of the next issue of FORUM is "Special Needs Offenders"*

<sup>18</sup> This conclusion is consistent with that of a study conducted by C. Tittle and R. Meir, "Specifying the SES/Delinquency Relationship," *Criminology: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 28 (1990): 271-296.



# The psychological assessment of women in prison

by Karen Scarth<sup>1</sup>

Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario

and Heather McLean<sup>1</sup>

Prison for Women, Kingston, Ontario

Considerable discussion has been devoted to the sexism and scientific error of generalizing and applying to female offenders the research literature, assessment instruments and therapeutic programs developed for male offenders.<sup>2</sup>

It has been more difficult to solve this problem in the field of corrections (compared with other disciplines) because of the comparatively small number of women in prison — only 7% of provincially sentenced and 2% of federally sentenced offenders are women.<sup>3</sup> Because of these small numbers, relatively little research information on female offenders has been available.

In Canada, correctional planning and programs have attempted to address the problem. For example, *Creating Choices: The Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*<sup>4</sup> is having a major effect. In addition, there is now more literature available on programs and therapy for women in prison — a recent literature review had 394 references.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, despite this increase in information, there is still relatively little discussion or development of appropriate assessment methods and instruments for use with female inmates. Progress in this area has been limited to a general call for more appropriate tools and methodology<sup>6</sup> and the very occasional example of an assessment instrument used with incarcerated women.<sup>7</sup>

## Psychological assessments

The psychological assessments completed at the Prison for Women in Kingston have, in practice, been based on a file review, an assessment interview, and psychometric testing using instruments validated and “normed” on community samples of women (rather than men).

Areas typically assessed by these instruments include those generally identified as relevant to women's offences: interpersonal and relationship issues, aggression, assertiveness skills, depression, alcohol and substance abuse, post-traumatic and dissociative problems, and symptoms of sexual abuse or assault.

However, this process and some of these instruments are still traditional in approach. This is a problem because they focus primarily on identifying problem areas and place the psychologist or professional in the role of expert on the life experiences of another individual.

<sup>1</sup> Karen Scarth and Heather McLean, Psychology Department, Prison for Women, Correctional Service of Canada, P.O. Box 515, Kingston, Ontario K7L 4W7.

<sup>2</sup> E. Adelberg and C. Currie, eds., *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1987). See also L. Berzins and S. Cooper, “The Political Economy of Correctional Planning for Women: The Case of the Bankrupt Bureaucracy,” *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 24, 4 (1982): 399–416. And see C. Currie, *Developing Tools for the Study of the Female Offender: A Review of the Literature* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1986). And see K. Kendall, *Program Evaluation of the Therapeutic Services at Prison for Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993) and its companion volume, *Literature Review of Therapeutic Services for Women in Prison*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993). And see R. Ross and E. Fabiano, *Correctional Afterthoughts: Programs for Female Offenders* (Ottawa: Solicitor General of Canada, 1985). And see *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Adelberg and Currie, *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law*. See also *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*. And see K. Hatch and K. Faith, “The Female Offender in Canada: A Statistical Profile,” *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 3, 2 (1989): 432–456.

<sup>4</sup> *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*.

<sup>5</sup> Kendall, *Literature Review of Therapeutic Services for Women in Prison*.

<sup>6</sup> Currie, *Developing Tools for the Study of the Female Offender: A Review of the Literature*.

<sup>7</sup> L. Lightfoot and L. Lambert, *Substance Abuse Treatment Needs of Federally Sentenced Women — Technical Report 1* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1991).



As a result, the process is often viewed negatively by the women it is supposed to help. In addition, this approach contradicts a basic tenet of feminist therapy — equalizing power between the assessor or therapist and the client.<sup>8</sup>

### Current approach

At the Prison for Women, two psychological reports are normally written for most women: an intake needs assessment and a National Parole Board report. These reports have somewhat different functions.

The intake assessment should, ideally, provide women with some personal insight and should be useful to anyone who works with that individual, either therapeutically or from a case-management perspective.

The assessment should, therefore, be written to provide background information on the inmate, as well as to create some understanding of her current concerns and of the personal and social context surrounding her offence.

Although approximately 88% of women want to work with a counsellor,<sup>9</sup> many will experience a lengthy waiting period between the intake assessments and the start of therapy. It is important, therefore, to view the intake assessments as a form of short-term intervention that can be useful in and of itself.

Parole Board assessments, on the other hand, address the needs of the woman related to her risk of reoffending once she is released into the community.

### Skills and Needs Inventory

In an effort to shift the focus of assessment from simply problem identification toward a more holistic model of women's strengths and needs, the "Skills and Needs Inventory" was developed (an example of this inventory is included here). Its use is currently being piloted.

<sup>8</sup> M. Greenspan, *A New Approach to Women and Therapy* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1983). See also L. Rosewater and L. Walker, *Handbook of Feminist Therapy: Women's Issues in Psychotherapy* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Kendall, Program Evaluation of the Therapeutic Services at Prison for Women.

### Skills and Needs Inventory

Please answer the following questions on blank paper. This is your opportunity to explain in your own words what your strengths and skills are, as well as what things you may want help with.

If you have a prior criminal history, please answer questions 1–7. Otherwise, answer questions 4–7 only.

- 1) Describe one or two times in your life in which you did not offend for a period of one year (e.g., when, where).
- 2) During these one (or more) year periods, describe what was happening with
  - relationships (spouse, partner, children, parents)
  - work/school
  - money
  - substance abuse (drugs, alcohol, prescription drugs)
- 3) How did you feel about yourself (positive and negative) during these times in which you were not experiencing legal problems?
- 4) List the ways in which you have coped (positive and negative) in the past with
  - conflict with others
  - substance use (drugs, alcohol, prescription drugs)
  - money
  - work/money
  - depression
  - anger
  - family
  - racism (if applicable)
- 5) List three things you like about yourself.
- 6) List three things you feel you need to work on or need help with.
- 7) List the ways you feel you can best manage to avoid reoffending. What help would you like to accomplish this?

The inventory is a series of questions related to coping strategies (positive and negative) used while in and out of conflict with the law. It asks women to describe their needs and strengths and the type of help they would like to receive. The inventory can be completed by an interviewer when a woman has a low level of literacy.

This approach provides women with a greater opportunity for direct input into the assessment report by allowing them to use their own words. It also recognizes their expertise on their own experience. Sections of the woman's writing can be incorporated into the report, quoted directly or appended in full along with the psychologist's report.



Because the assessment addresses coping strategies, it is perceived as constructive and is therefore likely to be more useful to the women themselves. This approach contrasts with one in which women are provided with a summary of the traumas they have survived and their resulting personal problems. The inventory can provide the more rounded picture many women expect from a psychological assessment.

Further, when traditional assessments are made of women in prison — several of whom have experienced many personal traumas along with economic, social, gender and racial discrimination — over-identification of individual problem areas too easily becomes the focus.<sup>10</sup>

Many authors<sup>11</sup> warn psychologists and other workers involved with incarcerated women to be aware of the biases present in the traditional model of “pathologizing” or evaluating women in prison as deviant, abnormal or mentally ill<sup>12</sup> because their behaviour has violated gender-role norms.

It is vital, therefore, that the assessment address links between social, cultural and economic factors and the individual woman’s life experience.

For example, self-destructive and self-limiting behaviours are often present in survivors of

extensive abuse, and these are better looked at as coping strategies and are best understood within this larger, background context.<sup>13</sup>

The Skills and Needs Inventory allows for a description of such coping strategies, along with other adaptive strategies. This can help the women and correctional and therapeutic staff focus on strengthening the women’s adaptive skills to reduce the use of self-destructive strategies.

### Discussion

So far, feedback on the Skills and Needs Inventory and its method has been extremely positive, and psychologists have benefited from a wealth of material that might not have been gleaned from assessment interviews.

It may be that the opportunity to privately sit, think and write about oneself results in richer, more detailed and more insightful information than would be possible from just an interview.

As well, the perceived need of many women to defend themselves from attack, criticism or abuse is heightened by many of the processes they encounter in the criminal justice system.

With this method, the experience is more under the woman’s control, arouses less anxiety, and therefore may produce more useful and relevant information.

**This approach provides women with a greater opportunity for direct input into the assessment report by allowing them to use their own words. It also recognizes their expertise on their own experience.**

<sup>10</sup> M. Shaw, “Issues of Power and Control: Women in Prison and Their Defenders,” *British Journal of Criminology*, 32, 4 (1992): 438–452.

<sup>11</sup> Shaw, Issues of Power and Control: Women in Prison and Their Defenders. See also J. Burnes, “Mad or Just Plain Bad? Gender and the Work of Forensic Clinical Psychologists,” *Gender Issues in Clinical Psychology*, eds. J. Ussher and P. Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1982). And see P. Carlen, *Women’s Imprisonment: A Study in Social Control* (London: Routledge, 1983). And see S. Edwards, “Neither Bad Nor Mad: The Female Violent Offender Reassessed,” special issue: *Women and the Law, Women’s Studies International Forum*, 9 (1986): 79–87. And see L. Walker, *Terrifying Love: Why Battered Women Kill and How Society Responds* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> D. Brownstone and R. Swaminath, “Violent Behaviour and Psychiatric Diagnosis in Female Offenders,” *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 34 (1989): 190–194. See also A. Daniel, A. Robins, J. Reid and D. Wilfley, “Lifetime and Six-month Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders among Sentenced Female Offenders,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 16 (1988): 333–342. And see W. Hurley and M. Dunne, “Psychological Distress and Psychiatric Morbidity in Women Prisoners,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 25 (1991): 461–470. And see S. Strick, “A Demographic Study of 100 Admissions to a Female Forensic Center: Incidences of Multiple Charges and Multiple Diagnoses,” *Journal of Psychiatry and the Law*, 17 (1989): 435–448.

<sup>13</sup> J. Heney, *Report on Self-injurious Behaviour in the Kingston Prison for Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).



In fact, writing about one's life experiences and background has been widely used as therapeutic treatment for survivors of abuse<sup>14</sup> and as a therapeutic program for incarcerated women.<sup>15</sup>

The use of a woman's own words and recognition of her as the expert on herself are also widely accepted in feminist and participatory research<sup>16</sup> — specifically for battered women<sup>17</sup> and women in prison<sup>18</sup> — and generally inform feminist theory and practice.<sup>19</sup>

It is our hope that this general approach and this philosophy will be applicable to assessment procedures as well. The benefits of using the woman's own words to inform counsellors, case-management officers, parole officers and National Parole Board decision makers will have to be examined as the practice becomes more frequent. The method may also be useful to those involved in other assessment roles with women in conflict with the law.

The Skills and Needs Inventory will likely undergo revision when more feedback is available. As well, the use of the inventory or

similar methods does not preclude the use of more standard instruments and traditional methodology.

In fact, to conform to the widely accepted standards and procedures for psychological assessments, we will still require psychometric scales and instruments with norms and validity data for women, verification and review of file information, and the psychologist's clinical assessment.

It is also anticipated that as we obtain more knowledge of female offenders, assessment tools will change to reflect new developments. In the meantime, the Skills and Needs Inventory gives clinicians at the Prison for Women a tool to further understand women in prison, while at the same time giving those women an opportunity to voice their self-knowledge.

This brings us closer to matching the assessment process with the prevailing tenets of feminist therapy and with the spirit of the Task

Force on Federally Sentenced Women. ■

**It may be that the opportunity to privately sit, think and write about oneself results in richer, more detailed and more insightful information than would be possible from just an interview.**

<sup>14</sup> E. Bass and L. Davis, *The Courage to Heal* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> M. McCormack, "A Road Taken: The Prison Experience," *Sisters Today* (June/July 1982): 592-597.

<sup>16</sup> L. Stanley and S. Wise, *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> P. McGuire, *Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts — Centre for International Education, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Currie, *Developing Tools for the Study of the Female Offender: A Review of the Literature*. See also Kendall,

*Program Evaluation of the Therapeutic Services at Prison for Women*. And see Kendall, *Literature Review of Therapeutic Services for Women in Prison*. And see *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*. And see Heney, *Report on Self-injurious Behaviour in the Kingston Prison for Women*. And see S. Pollack, *Opening the Window on a Very Dark Day: A Program Evaluation of the Peer Support Team at Prison for Women*, M.S.W. thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario.

<sup>19</sup> Rosewater and Walker, *Handbook of Feminist Therapy: Women's Issues in Psychotherapy*. See also Stanley and Wise, *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research*. And see S. Sturdivant, *Therapy with Women: A Feminist Philosophy of Treatment* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1980).



# Opening the window on a very dark day: A program evaluation of the Peer Support Team at the Kingston Prison for Women

by Shoshana Pollack<sup>1</sup>

Psychology Department, Prison for Women

Although some research on the effectiveness of peer-counselling programs has been conducted within men's prisons, there is little literature available on the effectiveness of peer counselling with women in prison. Of the few studies that do exist, however, there is a strong suggestion that prisons for women provide fertile ground for peer-counselling programs.<sup>2</sup>

A recent evaluation of the Peer Support Team at the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario, corroborated these findings. The evaluation used both qualitative (interviews with peer counsellors) and quantitative (a survey distributed to the inmate population) methods of assessment. According to the results, both the prisoners trained as peer counsellors and the prisoners who themselves received peer counselling felt more self-confidence, empowerment and self-efficacy.

## The Peer Support Team

Co-ordinated by the Psychology Department at the Prison for Women, the Peer Support Team program has two central components: a six-week training session for prospective peer counsellors, and the actual peer-counselling sessions that take place between the trained peer counsellor and a woman in distress.

## What the counsellors said...

Interviews were conducted with 12 women who had completed the peer counsellor training.

These women said the emotional, psychological and behavioural effects of childhood sexual abuse and domestic violence were the predominant mental health problems faced by prisoners at the Prison for Women. As well, these women highlighted the difficulty of healing emotionally in a punitive setting.

Those interviewed said the Peer Support Team training session helped to address these problems through both the educational aspect of the training (topics include sexual abuse, domestic violence, anger, sexism, racism, homophobia, self-injury and suicide) and the discussion component of each session.

Most participants said not only did the peer-counselling training help them develop the skills necessary to help others in distress, but they also personally benefited from the program. The group discussions were about topics intimately related to the participants' lives, so peer counsellors learned they were not alone in their struggles, and thus they felt less isolated.

This finding is perhaps one of the most significant because, as research on trauma and recovery has highlighted, breaking the silence surrounding experiences such as childhood sexual abuse and realizing that others too have survived similar abuses are central to healing from traumatic experiences.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shoshana Pollack, Psychology Department, Prison for Women, Correctional Service of Canada, P.O. Box 515, Kingston, Ontario K7L 4W7.

<sup>2</sup> D. Wilfrey, C. Rodon and W. Anderson, "Angry Women Offenders," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 30, 1 (1986): 41-51. See also E. Genders and E. Player, "Women in Prison: The Treatment, the Control and the Experience," *Gender, Crime and Justice*, eds. P. Carlen and A. Worrall (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1987). And see D. Layton MacKenzie, J. Robinson and C. Campbell, "Long-term Incarceration of Female Offenders: Prison Adjustment and Coping," *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 16, 2 (1989): 223-238. See also L. Inowlucki and J. Mai, "That It Comes from Us Alone and

Not from Someone Who Stands behind Us and Says You Must — A Discussion of Contradictory Experiences with Stopping Drug Use in Jail," *Kriminologisches Journal*, 12, 4 (1980): 271-282. And see J. Clark and K. Boudin, "Community of Women Organize Themselves to Cope with the Aids Crisis: A Case Study from Bedford Hills Correctional Facility," *Social Justice*, 17, 2 (1990): 90-109.

<sup>3</sup> J. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). See also D. Howard, ed., *A Guide to Dynamics of Feminist Therapy* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1986). And see T. Laidlaw and C. Malmo, eds., *Healing Voices: Feminist Approaches to Therapy with Women* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1990).



Interview participants also found the Peer Support Team training, both in its philosophy and in its structure, to be a welcome contrast to some of the damaging effects of both their life experiences and the prison environment itself. The women pointed to the inconsistency, distrust and lack of safety that had pervaded their lives and the prison setting. In contrast, the training provided a consistent, safe space focused on mutuality and trust, and it demonstrated that staff trusted the peer counsellors by giving them responsibility for counselling women in distress. This gave the participants increased feelings of self-worth.

Over the past decade, researchers and clinicians have outlined the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse,<sup>4</sup> the effects of violence on the battered woman,<sup>5</sup> and the psychological trauma resulting from sexual and physical violence in general.<sup>6</sup> Among the most common repercussions are an impaired sense of safety and personal boundaries, feelings of overwhelming powerlessness and immobility, difficulties with trust, and self-hatred.

Prison intensifies the psychological effects of being subjected (as a child or as an adult) to sexual or physical assault. The controlled and punitive setting replicates the dynamics of any abusive relationship where the victim is without power or dignity.

In contrast, the training session offered an atmosphere of trust, mutuality and respect and encouraged the participant's sense of autonomy and self-efficacy.

**In contrast, the training provided a consistent, safe space focused on mutuality and trust, and it demonstrated that staff trusted the peer counsellors by giving them responsibility for counselling women in distress.**

## What the consumers said...

In addition to the interviews, a survey was used to gather information on the use of the peer support service within the general prisoner population.

According to the survey, 81% of the 53 respondents valued the existence of the Peer Support Team even if they had never used a peer counsellor in a crisis situation. The most

frequently cited reasons for requesting to see a peer counsellor were feelings of depression (33%), self-harm (22%) and flashbacks of abuse (22%). (Most respondents gave more than one reason for wanting to see a peer counsellor.)

Respondents who had received peer counselling said the peer support helped to ease feelings of isolation and depression and helped them feel better about themselves. For example, respondents said they felt validated by the peer counsellor.

Their comments showed how much they valued the counsellors:

- "She let me know it's not entirely my fault."
- "This place seems to spur people to use abuse towards each other. And it was nice to know that there are peers who don't feel that way."
- "I felt safe."

The average rating for helpfulness of peer counsellors was 4 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest possible rating.

## Recommendations

Peer counsellors and survey respondents also recommended improvements to the overall Peer Support Team service. These recommendations fell into five categories:

1. Prisoners who completed the training session requested that its length be extended [from six weeks] to give them more time to explore the topics. Many women felt that because the training covered so many topics relevant to their lives, they needed more time to assimilate the information.
2. Survey respondents asked that inmates be better informed of the existence of the team

<sup>4</sup> A. Browne and D. Finkelhor, "Impact of Child Sexual Abuse: A Review of the Research," *Psychological Bulletin*, 99 (1986): 66-77. See also S.E. Blume, *Secret Survivors: Uncovering Incest and Its Aftereffects in Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990). And see Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

<sup>5</sup> A. Browne, *When Battered Women Kill* (New York: The Free Press, 1987). See also K. Yllo and M. Bograd, *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse* (London: Sage Publications, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> L. Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). See also Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.



service. They felt that upon incarceration, it would be useful to be told of the service because this initial adjustment period is generally the most difficult. (Since this study was conducted, the psychology department has implemented this recommendation by telling each new prisoner about the Peer Support Team and the other psychological services available.)

3. Both interview participants and survey respondents appreciated the correctional officers who have been asked to join the Peer Support Team as "honorary" team members. Participants requested that this process continue.
4. Participants in the study requested that ex-addicts and former prisoners be asked to conduct training workshops. Women felt the involvement of these individuals, rather than "professionals," would help strengthen their ties to the outside community and to people with whom they have more in common.
5. Interview participants expressed the need for a formal Peer Support Team to be established for women once they leave the Prison for Women.

### Summary

Recently, it has been recognized that the vast majority of federally incarcerated women in Canada are survivors of childhood sexual abuse and need services to help them work through abuse and related issues.<sup>7</sup> Recent studies conducted at the Prison for Women attest to the overwhelming need for programs that "empower women to make positive lifestyle changes within a context of education, support and recovery."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> L. Axon, "Model and Exemplary Programs for Female Inmates — An International Review," report prepared for the Solicitor General of Canada, 1989. See also E. Adelberg and C. Currie, eds., *Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1987). And see N. Deschepper, *Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law: Current Issues and Perspectives* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1989). And see J. Heney, "Report on Self-injurious Behaviour in the Kingston Prison for Women," unpublished report, Correctional Service of Canada, 1989.

In addition, a study of female prisoners in Colorado corroborates evidence of the high number of abused women who are incarcerated and emphasizes the importance of addressing imprisoned women's emotional needs so they can return to, and remain within, the mainstream community.<sup>9</sup>

**The results of this study show that, despite the overall punitive climate of a prison, Peer Support Team training helped create an atmosphere in which team members felt accepted and empowered.**

The participants in this study described how the prison setting recreates the power imbalance, sense of insecurity, degradation and fear that are inherent in most abusive relationships and that can impede the healing of a woman's emotional scars. As the recent literature on trauma and victimization has clearly illustrated, an atmosphere of safety in which a woman can develop feelings of self-efficacy is crucial to overcoming traumatic experiences.

The results of this study show that, despite the overall punitive climate of a prison, Peer Support Team training helped create an atmosphere in which team members felt accepted and empowered. The team members' approach to peer counselling also reflected an awareness of the long-term psychological effects of severe abuse. This awareness guided their attempts to help restore equilibrium and control to the prisoners they were trying to help.

A firm understanding of the dynamics and psychological effects of violence and an attempt to provide restorative experiences of empowerment are rare in prison programming. The Peer Support Team stands as an innovative and powerful model of peer support programs and as a model for theoretical and practical treatment for incarcerated abuse survivors. ■

<sup>8</sup> Deschepper, *Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law: Current Issues and Perspectives*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> S.E. Moss, "Women in Prison: A Case of Pervasive Neglect," *Women in Therapy*, 5, 2-3 (1986): 177-185.



# Women and fraud: Results of a program at the Prison for Women

by Jill Atkinson<sup>1</sup> and Heather McLean<sup>1</sup>  
Psychology Department, Prison for Women

Although there is much literature on group programs for women in prison,<sup>2</sup> little is known about the effect of such programs on recidivism. Most studies show differences in measures of self-esteem, institutional behaviour, alienation, and trust in others before and after treatment.<sup>3</sup> Only a handful of studies have followed their participants to determine effects on recidivism. Of these, one failed to find differences between control and experimental groups,<sup>4</sup> one had a follow-up period of only 90 days,<sup>5</sup> and one used an inadequate measure of recidivism (parole officers' estimates of recidivism over seven years).<sup>6</sup>

There are a few published reports of group programs for women convicted of shoplifting and theft. These, however, are fraught with the same problems noted above: they show no treatment effectiveness, use no objective measures, or have inadequate or no follow-up.<sup>7</sup> Finally, there is no published literature on the treatment of fraud offenders.

The following is a brief report on a group program for female federal fraud offenders offered by the Psychology Department at the Prison for Women. This report is based on findings from the first three groups participating in the program, conducted between August 1991 and October 1992.

## Why a program specific to fraud offenders?

The impetus for the program came in part from the women themselves, who voiced concern that their needs were not being met by regular psychological services. Because most of these women neither created institutional difficulties nor had much need for crisis intervention, few received individual counselling.

In addition, group programs dealing with anger control, substance abuse, cognitive skills and educational or vocational training, while designed to meet the needs of many women, are not appropriate for most female fraud offenders, who are more likely to be educated, drug-free, socially skilled, stably employed and of average to above-average intelligence.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, these women pose a significant problem — their fraud is typically chronic and results in multiple incarcerations. The costliest of property crimes, fraud is also the fastest growing offence in Canada for both men and women. While receiving only 17% of all

<sup>1</sup> Jill Atkinson and Heather McLean, Psychology Department, Prison for Women, Correctional Service of Canada, P.O. Box 515, Kingston, Ontario K7L 4W7.

<sup>2</sup> For a review see K. Kendall, *Literature Review of Therapeutic Services for Women in Prison*, Companion Volume 1 to *Program Evaluation of the Therapeutic Services at the Prison for Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> R.J. Homant, "Ten Years After: A Follow-up of Therapy Effectiveness," *Journal of Offender Counseling, Services, and Rehabilitation*, 10 (1986): 51-57. See also F.E. Sultan and G.T. Long, "Treatment of the Sexually/Physically Abused Female Inmate: Evaluation of an Intensive Short-term Intervention Program," *Journal of Offender Counseling, Services, and Rehabilitation*, 12 (1988): 131-141.

<sup>4</sup> Homant, Ten Years After: A Follow-Up of Therapy Effectiveness.

<sup>5</sup> D.W. Edwards and G.A. Roundtree, "Assessment of Short-term Treatment Groups with Adjudicated First Offender

Shoplifters," *Journal of Offender Counseling, Services, and Rehabilitation*, 6 (1981): 89-102.

<sup>6</sup> J.W. MacDevitt and G.D. Kedzierzawski, "A Structured Group Format for First Offense Shoplifters," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 34 (1990): 155-164.

<sup>7</sup> Sultan and Long, Treatment of the Sexually/Physically Abused Female Inmate: Evaluation of an Intensive Short-term Intervention Program. See also Edwards and Roundtree, Assessment of Short-term Treatment Groups with Adjudicated First Offender Shoplifters. And MacDevitt and Kedzierzawski, A Structured Group Format for First Offense Shoplifters.

<sup>8</sup> D. Zietz, *Women Who Embezzle or Defraud: A Study of Convicted Felons* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981). See also J.L. Atkinson and H. McLean, "Women and Fraud: The Prison for Women's Treatment Program for Female Federal Fraud Offenders," unpublished manuscript, Prison for Women, Kingston, Ontario.



charges in Canada, women account for 27% of all fraud charges.<sup>9</sup>

Given the unique needs of fraud offenders, their growing numbers and our limited resources, a short-term group program was chosen as the most cost-effective intervention.

### The program

According to clinical assessments, female federal fraud offenders differ from other federally incarcerated women. Using these clinical data, the Psychology Department at the Prison for Women developed a model of the historic or familial development of chronic fraud, as well as the current functional relationships that maintained the behaviour. The curriculum was based on the principles used in relapse-prevention programs for people with addictions as well as on the tenets and process guidelines of feminist therapy. However, the model of feminist therapy was expanded to incorporate the history of the participants because many had not been abused by men, but virtually all had been abused by their mothers.

A more detailed description of the curriculum, model, homework assignments, group objectives and related materials is available.<sup>10</sup>

### Program parameters

Three groups were conducted at approximately six-month intervals. In all, 19 women attended: 6 in the first group, 8 in the second, and 5 in the third. One woman did not complete the sessions because of an untimely transfer; thus 18 women completed the program.

The program was initially designed as eight sessions but was expanded to nine for the first group. Subsequent groups attended 10 sessions, each lasting two hours.

The women signed consent forms so that we could use pre- and post-test data for research. The women were also informed that they would be contacted discreetly for follow-up information 6, 12 and 18 months after the program was completed, but they could decline to participate in that phase.

### Program evaluation

We hypothesized that, as a result of the fraud group program, the women would improve their assertiveness and self-efficacy. To assess this, we administered two psychometric measures before and after the program. One was the Interpersonal Behavior Survey,<sup>11</sup> which samples subclasses of assertive behaviours. This survey is useful in outcome evaluation because it measures change. The second measure was the Subjective Rating of Likelihood to Reoffend Scale, which samples participants' sense of self-efficacy in avoiding reoffending. It is a single seven-point scale that participants use to rate the likelihood of their reoffending.

To obtain family background and demographic information, we administered two measures before the first session. One was the Parental Bonding Instrument,<sup>12</sup> which measures parental care and overprotection in childhood. We used this instrument to test our hypothesis that female fraud offenders would describe their mothers as cold and overly concerned with appearances. The second measure was a Background Information Questionnaire, which records demographic variables such as age, race, number of children, number of offences, educational attainment and marital status.

Finally, after completing the program, women filled out a Program Evaluation Questionnaire, which rates the program's curriculum and relevance, as well as the performance of the group leaders.

<sup>9</sup> A. Hatch and K. Faith, "The Female Offender in Canada: A Statistical Profile," *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 3 (1989): 432-456.

<sup>10</sup> Atkinson and McLean, *Women and Fraud: The Prison for Women's Treatment Program for Female Federal Fraud Offenders*.

<sup>11</sup> P. Mauger, D. Adkinson, S. Zoss, G. Firestone and D. Hook, *The Interpersonal Behavior Survey (IBS)* (Los Angeles: Western Psychological Services, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> G. Parker, H. Tupling and L.B. Brown, "A Parental Bonding Instrument," *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 52 (1979): 1-10.



## General findings

The results from the three groups participating in the fraud program were mixed. While group one showed reliable treatment gains, the two subsequent groups did not. When data on the measures of assertiveness and likelihood to reoffend were combined across all three groups, however, treatment effects were evident: women showed significant improvements in assertiveness and increased confidence in their ability to avoid reoffending.

On the measure of parental bonding, participants rated their mothers as significantly more rejecting and controlling than community norms for women.

On the Program Evaluation Questionnaire, women rated their satisfaction with, and the usefulness of, the program as very high. Many women commented, however, that the program should be longer.

## Longitudinal follow-up information

The women were contacted at 6- and 12-month intervals after completing the program. We collected information on reoffending and then compared the scores of women who reoffended with those of women who did not. None of the pre-program, post-program or change measures discriminated between recidivists and non-recidivists at any point after release.

Although there are several possible explanations for this failure to show treatment-related reductions in recidivism, three seem particularly plausible. First, 10 sessions is likely not intensive enough an intervention for repeat federal offenders without follow-up sessions in the community.

Second, group one, which showed the greatest treatment gains, was the most homogeneous group: all of the women had histories of fraud offences only. Some of the women in groups two and three, however, had committed other offences as well to sustain a drug habit.

Third, the failure to find a treatment effect could have been due to the general nature of the measures used. To explore the latter possibility in future research, we added a test before group three to assess how well the women could apply the course content to their own offence patterns, identify their individual high-risk situations, and think of alternatives to criminal behaviour. This knowledge-acquisition test is similar to those currently used in the evaluation of relapse-prevention programs.

Unfortunately, we are presently unable to determine whether the recidivism rates for participants were lower than recidivism rates for other female fraud offenders with similar chronic histories. If and when recidivism data for female offenders become available by offence, the recidivism rates of women who participated in the fraud program could be compared with those of similar women who did not.

The absence of recidivism data for female offenders presents a serious

obstacle to an evaluation of any group program for women in prison. It is likely, however, that this problem will be resolved by current Canadian efforts to obtain these data, at both the federal and provincial levels.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

The Women and Fraud program at the Prison For Women has generated new information about the dynamics of women's fraud offending. The program was useful to the women themselves and an exciting step forward in gathering knowledge about a specific subgroup of incarcerated women. ■

**When data on the measures of assertiveness and likelihood to reoffend were combined across all three groups, however, treatment effects were evident: women showed significant improvements in assertiveness and increased confidence in their ability to avoid reoffending.**

<sup>13</sup> Jim Bonta of the Policy Branch, Public Security Canada, is completing a database for federally sentenced women. Grant Coulson and Verna Nutbrown of the Vanier Correctional Centre for Women have developed a provincial database for female offenders.



# The realities of life imprisonment for women convicted of murder

by **Tina Hattem**<sup>1</sup>

Senior Research Officer, Corrections Research, Ministry Secretariat, Solicitor General Canada

The 1990 *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*,<sup>2</sup> recommended fundamental changes in the way federally sentenced women are dealt with. Perhaps most importantly, the report suggested that models based on support replace models of correctional intervention and management based on control and punishment.

*The experiences of women serving life sentences serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of this principle. In a study based on interviews with female "lifers," respondents spoke more about the way they were treated than they did about any other facet of their experience.*

*Their accounts of serving a life sentence were largely about the severe restrictions on their autonomy and personal initiative, their subordinate position, and their difficulty in exercising control over their lives.*<sup>3</sup>

*The women's experiences also demonstrated that this lack of control cannot be remedied by simply providing more appropriate programs and services. The women did raise issues they wanted to address, but they also spoke about being pressured to take programs — whether or not they felt they needed the programs or the programs were suitable for them — further emphasizing the restrictions on their ability to make choices.*

## Methodology

This article is based on research<sup>4</sup> begun in 1988, prior to the publication of *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women*. Biographical interviews using non-directive and retrospective techniques allowed women serving life sentences for murder to express their experiences from their own perspective and in their own words.<sup>5</sup>

Interviews were conducted with 18 women: 16 were inmates at the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario, and 2 were incarcerated in provincial detention facilities in Quebec.<sup>6</sup>

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 10 administrators, case-management officers and mental-health staff in the institutions where the women were incarcerated. Topics discussed included their experiences with women serving life sentences for murder, their understanding of these women's realities and needs, and current policies and practices for sentence management.

## Understanding what happened...

Many observers have been reluctant to consider the issue of women's involvement in violent offences, except in terms of the women's own

<sup>1</sup> All correspondence should be directed to Tina Hattem, Corrections Research, Ministry Secretariat, Solicitor General Canada, 11E-340 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P8. Please note that the views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily express those of the Ministry.

<sup>2</sup> *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: Correctional Service of Canada, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of these issues, see T. Hattem, "Vivre avec ses peines : les fondements et les enjeux du contrôle et de la résistance saisis à travers l'expérience de

femmes condamnées à l'emprisonnement à perpétuité," *Déviance et Société*, 15, 2 (1991): 137-156.

<sup>4</sup> This research was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

<sup>5</sup> The following statement was used to set the theme for the interviews: "I know you're serving a life sentence. I'd like you to tell me how it's been for you, starting from the beginning up until now."

<sup>6</sup> This represented approximately one third of the women serving life sentences for murder at that time.



victimization.<sup>7</sup> This reluctance was not shared by the women interviewed. In fact, most raised the issue of their offence themselves, and all but one acknowledged their involvement in a homicide.<sup>8</sup>

The women spoke of their attempts to make sense of what happened, sometimes turning to books or persons inside or outside the prison in their quest for understanding. Their explanations — varied and complex as they sometimes were — typically referred to the broader context of their lives.

However, whatever the circumstances of those lives — being sent to institutions or foster homes, living on the street, being involved in substance abuse, or experiencing physical or sexual abuse — they were not used by the women to minimize or excuse what happened or to absolve themselves of any responsibility.

Even so, such circumstances did make what happened more understandable and moderated the women's image of themselves as "murderers."

Putting the women's behaviour in context can also broaden the range of explanations for, and our responses to, such behaviour. Such an approach is likely to result in constructive responses to past violence: addressing the root causes of the violence and attempting to alleviate some of the damage that has been done.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of these issues, see M. Shaw, "Confronting Violence by Women," paper presented at the Canadian Law and Society Association Conference, Carleton University, Ottawa, June 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Of the 18 women interviewed, 9 had never been in conflict with the law before and 14 were serving their first prison sentence.

<sup>9</sup> At the time of writing, only one woman had applied for judicial review of parole eligibility. Her period of parole ineligibility has been reduced from 25 years to 15.

## "Doing Life"

As the women interviewed pointed out, they were not just serving a sentence, they were serving a **life** sentence. Unlike inmates serving "time [calculated] in years," there is technically no limit to the number of years they could be detained before release into the community.

Although inmates serving minimum sentences of 15 years or more without parole eligibility may apply to the courts for a review of their eligibility after 15 years, the outcome of this process is unpredictable,<sup>9</sup> as is that of the parole process itself. More importantly, the women are likely to be supervised long after they leave prison. As many of the women said, a life sentence means that "the system will own you until the day you die."

The women interviewed also spoke of being denied access to programs or privileges (they might otherwise have been entitled to) because of their sentence. Eligibility for certain institutional programs and privileges is often determined by an inmate's security classification. According to current policy, the security classification of inmates serving life sentences can only be reduced after a certain number of years have been served,

even when the inmate does not present a risk according to institutional staff.

In part, as staff interviews suggested, this policy paces the granting of privileges so that "the top of the system" is reached close to the inmate's parole eligibility date.

However, in the view of one staff member, such a policy can also contribute to lifers feeling powerless to improve their situation:

"I think most [lifers] just get lost in the system.... They're in this system and they will [not] be processed [until] they meet certain dates, regardless of what they do."

**However, whatever the circumstances of those lives — being sent to institutions or foster homes, living on the street, being involved in substance abuse, or experiencing physical or sexual abuse — they were not used by the women to minimize or excuse what happened or to absolve themselves of any responsibility.**



## The overuse of psychotropic medication<sup>10</sup>

While much attention is paid to offenders' alcohol and illicit drug use, very little is paid to the overuse of prescribed, psychotropic medication. Nevertheless, half of the women interviewed in the study reported that they had used such medication over a period of months, or sometimes years, either prior to the events that resulted in their conviction, immediately following these events, or at some time later.<sup>11</sup>

Often, high demand is given as an explanation for the overuse of psychotropic medication by women and, more particularly, by women in prison. Yet, this explanation ignores the role of medical ideology and practices in the prescription of psychotropic medication.<sup>12</sup> Several studies have revealed differential prescribing practices for men and women based on assumptions about their needs.

In addition, this explanation fails to consider how the women's realities can contribute to demand. Some women serving life sentences had come to view medication as a means of dealing with stress, anxiety and the constraints of prison life.

According to Claudine,<sup>13</sup> who was serving a minimum sentence of 10 years, female inmates'

**Some women serving life sentences had come to view medication as a means of dealing with stress, anxiety and the constraints of prison life.**

use of such medication stems from the rarity of alternative outlets for pent-up emotions:

"The normal things are not allowed in prison: the normal kind of exercise, the normal solutions to stress and anxiety that exist outside."

Pressures to conform to institutional expectations, as described here by Claire, also led some of the women to resort to psychotropic medication to maintain their self-control:

"You can't speak your mind in prison. You can't show any kind of anger. You can't release your frustrations. Either you get charged or you get thrown in Seg[regation]. So it makes it hard for a person. I personally don't think the administration can understand what a person goes through when they're living in an environment like this."

However, many interviewees said they felt that, in the long term, medication limited their ability to deal with their situation, so they stopped taking it. The limitations of psychotropic medication are further

revealed by the women's descriptions of its effects.

According to Claire, who took psychotropic medication periodically over 10 years while in prison (including 4 years of continuous use), the drugs so reduced her awareness of her situation that she was unable to think or act:

psychotropic medication is prescribed to women at least twice as often as to men, usually in the form of tranquilizers. See R. Cooperstock and J. Hill, *The Effects of Tranquilization: Benzodiazepine Use in Canada* (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1983). The limited available data indicate that the difference in use between male and female inmates is even greater. See *Enquête de la Commission des droits de la personne du Québec à la prison Tanguay, Montréal* (Montreal: Commission des droits de la personne du Québec, 1985). See also J. Resnik and N. Shaw, "Prisoners of Their Sex: Health Problems of Incarcerated Women," *Prisoners' Rights Sourcebook: Theory, Litigation and Practice*, ed. I. Robbins, vol. 2 (New York: Clark Boardman, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> See N. Stoller Shaw, "Female Patients and the Medical Profession in Jails and Prisons," *Judge, Lawyer, Victim, Thief*, eds. N.H. Rafter and E.A. Stanko (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> All of the names used are fictitious to protect identity. Quotations originally in French have been translated.

<sup>10</sup> The term "psychotropic medication" generally includes medication prescribed by a doctor or psychiatrist that acts on the nervous system. Common examples are sleeping pills, tranquilizers and anti-depressants. For a further discussion of the issues surrounding psychotropic medication, see T. Hattem, "Vivre avec ses peines : les fondements et les enjeux de l'usage de médicaments psychotropes saisis à travers l'expérience de femmes condamnées à l'emprisonnement à perpétuité," *Criminologie*, 24, 1 (1991): 49-61.

<sup>11</sup> The use of psychotropic medication was rarely mentioned in interviews conducted for a previous study on the experiences of men serving minimum sentences of 25 years in Quebec penitentiaries. See T. Hattem, *Condamnés à 25 ans minimum : expérience vécue et perspectives d'avenir*, rapport de recherche inédit, Université de Montréal, Centre international de criminologie comparée, 1987. The extensive use of psychotropic medication by women is well known. Studies in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom almost invariably show that



"I was like a zombie. I didn't know what I was doing half the time. I didn't know whether I was coming or going."

Similarly, Lorraine, who took various tranquilizers and sleeping pills in the six years prior to the events that led to her conviction (as well as during her trial), claimed that the medication reduced her self-control:

"It just takes the edge off your senses so that you're never really on top of things, never really in complete control."

The issue of prolonged use of psychotropic medication by female inmates was also raised by one of the staff members interviewed, who worked with women to reduce dependency and restore some sense of personal power, however limited that power may be in prison:

"When one of my goals is to increase sense of self-control and sense of personal power, it's working at odds with medication."

Neither this staff member nor the women interviewed wished to see all psychotropic medication prohibited, but they did point out the risks and limitations of its use. They maintained that it should be used only as a temporary measure

in combination with a search for alternative solutions to underlying problems.

## Conclusion

This analysis is not intended to portray women sentenced to life imprisonment as helpless victims or to suggest that all of their difficulties stem from the way they are treated in prison. Such a conclusion would be contrary to what was said by the women interviewed.

However, if the principle of empowerment put forward in *Creating Choices* is to be achieved, we must examine what we expect of federally sentenced women in prison and on conditional release.

We must also recognize that these women are capable of understanding their own needs and allow them more decision-making power in determining what programs and services they require and are best suited to them. The ability to exercise choice is crucial to all women (and men) in prison, whatever the length of their sentence or the range of options available to them. ■

*There was a change in the points of view of men, once the women (female prison officers) entered the prison and worked alongside them. According to a questionnaire administered...to measure whether there was a difference in degrees of support, liking and acceptance of the initiative before and after women prison officers were employed in the prison, all but two of the 10 [male] respondents...shifted either from a very negative or negative attitude to a neutral or positive attitude.*

Pleasance Hanson,  
"The Integration of Women Prison Officers into  
Auckland Maximum-security Prison,"  
*Criminal Justice Quarterly*, 4 (1993): 26-27, p. 27.



# Women working in a men's jail

**W**hen you think about a correctional officer (prison guard) in a men's prison, what image comes to mind? Burly, "no-nonsense" men? A man with a gun standing in a sentry tower? Whatever your image (accurate or otherwise), it probably does not include women, because the majority of correctional officers in prisons for men are men.

Nevertheless, many women do work in correctional institutions — all Canadian federal prisons have included female guards since 1983.

Like most women working in male-dominated professions, female correctional officers must deal with problems and barriers rooted in sexism. In fact, the perception of working in a non-traditional workplace for women is intensified in prisons for men: not only is most of the staff male, but the focus of the job is the care and control of men.

A recent study attempted to present a detailed picture of what it is like to be a woman working as a correctional officer in a jail for men. If nothing else, it revealed that female guards in men's jails find themselves in a confusing position.

On the one hand, to be female is to be different, an outsider. On the other hand, female guards have much in common with, and are sympathetic to, their male peers as a result of their shared job experience.

## Methodology

**T**he research site was a modern, urban Canadian jail (where the author formerly worked as a correctional officer), which houses 150 men awaiting trial or bail. The institution was designed to accommodate women as correctional officers — the inmates' shower stalls and toilets were enclosed, and there were separate change facilities for female correctional

officers. With the exception of one post requiring "skin frisks," women were assigned to perform all duties within the jail.

In 1990–1991, in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 female guards (approximately half the number of women who have ever worked as guards in the jail), 17 women working in jobs traditionally held by women in a jail (nurses, clerks, librarians), and 6 correctional

managers. Numerous informal discussions were also conducted with male and female correctional officers and former inmates.

The average age (at the time of hiring) of the correctional officers interviewed was 24. Of the 21 female guards, 6 had a university degree and all but 2 had some post-secondary education.

## Working styles of male and female guards

Most of the female correctional officers said they performed the job with a less aggressive style than men, not necessarily out of preference, but because of different life experiences and physical limitations. Most women are smaller than men, and women are socialized to fulfil helping rather than aggressive roles.

Therefore, the female guards used different skills than the men. By relying heavily on verbal skills and intuition, the women were able to get the inmates to co-operate and were more likely to talk out problems and perhaps diffuse potential violence.

Another indication that women perform their job differently is that the female guards relied more heavily than men on the internal disciplinary procedure. This suggests that female officers may be

**By relying heavily on verbal skills and intuition, the women were able to get the inmates to co-operate and were more likely to talk out problems and perhaps diffuse potential violence.**



more likely to rely on established and legitimized means of discipline than to bully or threaten.

The skills employed by men and women therefore complement each other. Women may humanize the workplace in small ways by establishing less aggressive relationships with inmates. As well, if issues are resolved by negotiation rather than by force, there is less chance of injury to either inmates or staff.

By and large, the respondents felt that male guards believe female guards competently perform the day-to-day tasks of the job. But the respondents also reported that many men expressed concerns that women would not be able to back them up in a crisis situation. At this point, the men feel the job becomes real "men's work."

It is important here to note that the use of force in a jail is the exception and that officers do not respond to dangerous situations alone. In fact, guards spend hours practising a unified response to an emergency because in crisis situations the individual size and strength of the officer are not as important as the discipline and co-ordination of the group.

But the female correctional officers reported that in emergency situations some men adopt a protective, chivalrous attitude toward them. The women resented this treatment, feeling that they are seen as a liability and that the male officers place themselves in danger by not concentrating fully on the situation at hand.

Physical prowess and a willingness to enter into physical confrontations are also a way of generating esteem and peer acceptance. When women are kept out of crisis situations, they are denied a crucial means of gaining peer acceptance.

### **Personal and sexual harassment**

Most of the women reported that they did not personally experience unwanted touching or suggestions (sexual harassment in the narrowest sense). When asked if sexual harassment was a problem, many replied, "not for me."

The same women then went on to describe "other harassment" (from male peers), which included physical assaults, threats, unfounded graphic sexual rumours about individual women, and daily doses of demeaning remarks from peers, inmates and supervisors.

Although some women did describe dramatic episodes of harassment, they most often referred to an undercurrent of sexism and inequality.

One form of sexual harassment involves rumours about female correctional officers, primarily speculation about their sexual orientation or sex lives. For example, many female correctional officers reported that they are assumed to be lesbians by people both inside and outside the criminal justice system.

Women are also frequently rumoured to be sexually involved with both supervisors and inmates.

Further, one of the main social activities for correctional officers is to go out drinking after work. But if women go out and drink with the men, they are often assumed to be promiscuous; a favourite myth among men is that loose women get what they deserve, like harassment.

Harassment from inmates was not reported to be a big problem. Inmates were said to be generally favourable or neutral toward women's employment in prisons. Inmates reported that female guards treat them better than men, as the women are less confrontational and more willing to carry out requests. As such, the prisoners have much to gain by ensuring that women remain.

Female correctional officers also have more direct and effective options for dealing with the harassing behaviour of inmates. They can simply charge the inmate with a disciplinary infraction.

However, most women don't complain about harassment from staff. Harassment is seen as normal in the male culture of the jail, so it becomes customary and is viewed as having little importance. It is also assumed to be inevitable and the price women have to pay for working in a jail.

**But the respondents also reported that many men expressed concerns that women would not be able to back them up in a crisis situation. At this point, the men feel the job becomes real "men's work."**



Most important, the burden of dealing with harassment is placed squarely on the shoulders of the victims. They can either tolerate it or face even worse problems if they report it. The women expressed a real fear of being isolated if they were to complain. They would almost certainly be ostracized, blamed and accused of overreacting.

### Why?

Prisons have a strong subculture, and this creates a great deal of pressure to remain loyal to other officers. Guards have a code of behaviour that strongly prohibits informing or "ratting" on one's peer group — a "rat" is despised and isolated for his or her disloyalty to the group.

As well, the women reported that the most significant consequence for the "harasser" would be a transfer to another institution, where he would be free to harass again. The likely outcome of a complaint would be merely a reprimand or a short suspension.

In a nutshell, women don't complain about harassment because it is a no-win situation. The costs of complaining simply outweigh the benefits.

### Coping in the men's world of the jail

To cope, most of the women simply accepted what they felt they could not change. They sought male approval and endured the difficulties of the job without protest. It seems most female correctional officers try to maintain harmonious relationships with their male peers and not draw attention to themselves, hoping to be left alone to do their jobs.

The women also dealt with the difficult working environment through some form of withdrawal. This could mean taking stress leave, becoming apathetic or emotionally detached, refraining from unnecessary social contact with colleagues, or even quitting.

Other women found a set of "sympathetic others" in the workplace, who provided moral support, acceptance and feelings of being a normal person because they shared both the experiences of the job and the sense of isolation.

### Recommendations

The study found that female correctional officers see themselves as competent on the job, but with a less aggressive manner of carrying out their duties than some of their male peers. Yet, they receive unwanted paternalistic protection that devalues them in the correctional organization. Female guards also experience both personal and sexual harassment, which becomes normalized and accepted by both men and women.

Female guards cope with the challenges and frustrations of their jobs by either gaining some measure of acceptance in the workplace, simply tolerating difficulties (including personal or sexual harassment), or somehow withdrawing from the workplace.

Considering this, the study recommended that 1) managers and guards undergo training to sensitize them to the problems of women working in prisons; 2) strong policy prohibiting sexual and personal harassment — with mechanisms for complaints existing outside the paramilitary chain — be established, with significant consequences for "harassers"; and 3) job candidates be screened for their ability and willingness to develop

relationships built on mutual respect with female colleagues. ■

**However, most women don't complain about harassment from staff. Harassment is seen as normal in the male culture of the jail, so it becomes customary and is viewed as having little importance. It is also assumed to be inevitable and the price women have to pay for working in a jail.**



