

Alicia Chouinard
 Kieran McVeigh
 28 April 2015

Introduction

There are many transitional issues that individuals face when they leave state and county correctional facilities; these issues can manifest themselves differently for females and males, and may be associated with recidivism. This review of literature will outline such issues including: employment opportunities, education, substance abuse, familial connections and relationships. These issues will be further explored as they pertain to female offenders and recidivism. An exploration of the Transition from Prison to the Community Initiative (TPCI) and gender-responsive programming will provide a framework of issues to be addressed prior to release to maximize the success of reentry. This research aims to benefit the Citizen's Advisory Board for the New Hampshire State Prison.

Review of Literature

Reentry of recently incarcerated individuals into the community must be recognized as a process involving successfully overcoming obstacles. A variety of reentry challenges are gender neutral; some of these include: employment opportunities, lower levels of education, lack of financial stability, and poor housing options.¹ There is increasing data suggesting that negative factors – including any offender-partner conflict, mental health problems and suicidal considerations, behavioral aggression such as violence or threats, and alcohol abuse – make transitions into community more difficult for offenders.² Further, some transitional challenges are a by-product of a specific crime. For example, drug crime convictions can have long-term consequences for social service provision and offenders who are convicted of a felony have limited ability to receive any welfare benefits for themselves or their families.³ This has devastating effects on particular races, including African-Americans and Hispanics, because their population is already disproportionately represented in the welfare system.⁴

Though these transitional issues are gender neutral, a number of these concerns affect men and women differently; women have a different sensitivity and rate of exposure to certain factors of delinquency than men.⁵ Men tend to have more extensive and serious criminal histories than females who are more often classified as lower risk.⁶ Also, a study of 148 girls and 140 boys

1 Kristy Holtfreter, and Katelyn A. Wattanaporn, "Transition from Prison to Community Initiative: An Examination of Gender Responsiveness for Female Offender Reentry," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 41 (2014): 42.

2 Elaine Gunnison, "An Examination of Female and Male Work Release Offenders: Risk Factors, Needs, and Recidivism," *Journal of Community Corrections* 21, no. 4 (2012): 27.

3 Beth M. Huebner, Christina DeJong, and Jennifer Cobbina, "Women Coming Home: Long-Term Patterns of Recidivism," *Justice Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2010): 244.

4 Huebner et al, "Women Coming Home," 244.

5 Jacob C. Day, Margaret A. Zahn, and Lisa P. Tichavsky, "What Works for Whom? The Effects of Gender Responsive Programming on Girls and Boys in Secure Detention," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 52, no. 1 (2015): 96.

6 Gunnison, "An Examination," 26.

in Connecticut detention facilities showed that indirect controls, such as emotional bonds, had a greater influence on adolescent girls, while direct controls like supervision and discipline were more influential for adolescent boys.⁷ Likewise, girls' failures tend to be the result of low bonding and peers' influence, whereas boys' downfalls relate to their perceived injustices of an institution's rules or enforcement.⁸ While this evidence pertains to younger women, understanding how deviance may develop from a young age is beneficial knowledge when creating programs.

Additionally, the nature of social bonds among men and women can affect an individual's post-release offending. Positive social bonds increase human capital allowing ex-offenders to have a greater level of social and economic support, more access to work and education, and more people to encourage a prosocial identity.⁹ Also, if a person has a number of positive social relationships, situational opportunities for crime that result from association with deviant peers would be greatly reduced.¹⁰ Females are less likely to characterize their friendships as pressured, and therefore are more likely to opt out of participating in delinquent peer networks; instead, females will tend to favor smaller circles with stronger bonds and protection, like family.¹¹ Peer attachments exert less social control for males and thus negative social bonds, characterized by propensity for criminality, may contribute to a male offender recidivating.¹² The higher an individual's propensity is towards crime, the more hesitant he or she is to enter a prosocial relationship.¹³

Lack of prosocial relationships could be attributed to limited education and job opportunities that would make it difficult to assume the expected responsibilities within relationships.¹⁴ Reentry programs offering job training and education are very successful for women in the transition process; however, these programs are usually offered only to women without a high school education.¹⁵ A high school degree is a protective factor for women, particularly of minority races, supporting successful parole.¹⁶ Education in conjunction with job training and employment services sufficiently meet the needs of women post-incarceration as

7 Day et al, "What Works for Whom?" 97.

8 Day et al, "What Works for Whom?" 96.

9 Jennifer E. Cobbina, Beth M. Huebner, and Mark T. Berg, "Men, Women, and Postrelease Offending: An Examination of the Nature of the Link Between Relational ties and Recidivism," *Crime and Delinquency* 58, no. 3 (2012): 333.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, 334-335, 349-350.

12 Ibid, 331, 334-335, 349-350.

13 Ibid, 335.

14 Ibid.

15 Jennifer R. Scroggins, and Sara Malley, "Reentry and (Unmet) Needs of Women," *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 49 (2010): 157.

16 Huebner et al, "Women Coming Home," 246.

found by Scroggins et al.¹⁷ The education and job training that programs may provide post-release may not be fully utilized without adequate housing and transportation services. However, there are few women's reentry programs that offer these services. On average only 17.3% of programs in the United States offer any housing or transportation assistance.¹⁸ The programs that do offer housing and transportation services do not have ample resources and are overwhelmed by the amount of women in need.¹⁹

Social bonds also guide a woman's pathway to drug abuse differently than a man's. Substance abuse can strongly predict recidivism, and more specifically explain women's criminal involvement.²⁰ Gunnison found that alcohol use contributed both to onset and persistence in females' offending; according to the study, females were more likely to experience an alcohol problem in the six months prior to their offending.²¹ For women, drug abuse often results from the breakdown of the protective factors of relationships, while continued substance use serves as a coping mechanism or to maintain relationships.²² Women with substance abuse histories also tend to have weaker parental bonds and relationships with intimate partners, suggesting that drug use can affect the nature and presence of social bonds post-release.²³ Statically, only 66% of women who reported a history of substance abuse received familial support immediately following release, while 82% who did not have a history of substance abused received support.²⁴

Maintaining contact with family during incarceration allows for stronger familial support which contributes to an individual's success post-release.²⁵ As previously mentioned in reference to adolescent girls, women are also more responsive to informal social controls, primarily family support.²⁶ Nearly 80% of incarcerated women have children for whom they were the primary caregiver at the time of their incarceration, so these women are more dependent on strong social and familial bonds for reunification and proper care of their children upon release because of the lack of childcare services offered.²⁷ These strong bonds also serve as a protective factor; women who report good-quality relationships with their parents or intimate partners have a lower risk of recidivism than those who report weak bonds.²⁸ Unfortunately, the findings of Cobbina et al suggest that a woman's attachment to her significant other, particularly a male romantic partner,

17 Scroggins et al, "Reentry and (Un)met," 157.

18 Ibid, 156.

19 Ibid, 150.

20 Cobbina et al, "Men, Women, and Postrelease Offending," 336.

21 Gunnison, "An Examination," 27.

22 Cobbina et al, "Men, Women, and Postrelease," 336.

23 Ibid, 349.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid, 350.

26 Ibid, 348.

27 Ibid, 348. Scroggins, Malley 154.

28 Cobbina et al, "Men, Women, and Postrelease Offending," 347.

can influence the woman's deviancy; more specifically, if a woman's boyfriend or spouse is involved with criminal activity, her emotional attachments may encourage her to participate as well.²⁹

The TPCI and Gender-Responsive Programming

Assessing offenders' risks and needs prior to intervention allows for personal development and a smoother transition for the offender reentering the community.

The Transition from Prison to the Community Initiative, established by the National Institute of Corrections in 2001, is a prime example of a successful reentry program for adult offenders.³⁰ The initiative uses a preliminary risk and needs assessment to determine static and dynamic risks that may influence an offender's course of reentry.³¹ Static risks include factors that, regardless of time or intervention, will not change;³² these factors – for example, sentence length – indicate that more gradual transitions, such as first going to a half-way house upon release, may be the most beneficial for the specific individual.³³ Dynamic risks, however, are traits that can be altered with the use of programming and therefore may be good indicators that directed intervention will lead to successful reentry.³⁴ Although this assessment is non-standardized and gender neutral, recognizing individual's necessities can show trends of gender-specific needs.

Gender responsive programming has proved beneficial and has lowered the risk of recidivism for young female offenders in secure detention who have gender-sensitive risk factors.³⁵ Unfortunately, girls who do not display gender-sensitive risk factors have a greater risk of recidivism when they participate in gender responsive programming.³⁶ Participation in these programs may be ineffective and produce frustration in girls who do not display the gender sensitive risk factors because the programs are inapplicable to them;³⁷ these girls benefit more from traditional reinforcement programming methods that target general criminogenic factors.³⁸

A gender responsive approach for preventing delinquency in girls focuses on meeting physical and emotional safety needs, building positive relationships, and enhancing self-esteem; this counters effects from past abuse, trauma, mental and physical health problems, and negative influences from their male counterparts.³⁹ These programs foster strong bonds and trust among participants while teaching girls individualized skills – such as how to maturely deal with

29 Ibid, 333.

30 Holtfreter et al, "Transitions from Prison to Community Initiative," 2.

31 Ibid, 2 & 3.

32 Ibid, 3.

33 Ibid, 6.

34 Ibid, 3.

35 Day et al, "What Works for Whom?" 94.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid, 121.

38 Ibid, 94 & 120.

negative emotions.⁴⁰ Further, these programs are successful because they are designed for specific individuals with specific needs, which emphasize the importance of individual assessment of offenders for successful transitions.⁴¹

Conclusion

Given the issues identified, the importance of gender specific programs to appropriately address offenders should be noted. Men and women are not exactly the same in their motivations for crime, their risk factors, nor their post-release needs; therefore, different criteria are needed to better serve offenders in reentry. A successful reentry program is characterized by low recidivism rates as well as positive changes, including acquiring a job or furthering education; such accomplishments imply lasting benefits and progressive changes in offenders' dynamic risks.

Bibliography

- Cobbina, Jennifer E., Beth M. Huebner, and Mark T. Berg, "Men, Women, and Postrelease Offending: An Examination of the Nature of the Link Between Relational ties and Recidivism," *Crime and Delinquency* 58, no. 3 (2012): 331-361.
- Day, Jacob C., Margaret A. Zahn, and Lisa P. Tichavsky, "What Works for Whom? The Effects of Gender Responsive Programming on Girls and Boys in Secure Detention," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 52, no. 1 (2015): 93-129.
- Gunnison, Elaine. "An Examination of Female and Male Work Release Offenders: Risk Factors, Needs, and Recidivism." *Journal of Community Corrections* 21, no. 4 (2012): 9-28.
- Holtfreter, Kristy, and Katelyn A. Wattanaporn. "Transition from Prison to Community Initiative: An Examination of Gender Responsiveness for Female Offender Reentry." *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 41 (2014): 41-57.
- Huebner, Beth M., Christina DeJong, and Jennifer Cobbina, "Women Coming Home: Long-Term Patterns of Recidivism," *Justice Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2010): 225-254.
- Scroggins, Jennifer R., and Sara Malley. "Reentry and (Unmet) Needs of Women." *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 49 (2010): 146-163.

39 Ibid, 95.

40 Ibid, 120.

41 Ibid.