TREATMENT, RE-ENTRY AND FEMALE EX-OFFENDERS: NEW RESEARCH INITIATIVES

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Objectives

- To discuss the impact of familial background characteristics on criminal behavior
- To discuss coping with the separation from and reunification with children and family and adherence to guidelines set by the state
- To discuss the impact of gender on patterns of treatment
- To explore policy implications for processing female offenders using a holistic approach
Theoretical Framework

- The gender entrapment model suggests that the intersection of race, class and gender places lower income minority women in situations where they have been victimized by their mates and are often incarcerated for violating laws that prohibit the sale and possession of specific drugs, which often result from their need to escape abusive situations and brutal social conditions. Many of their crimes are survival crimes to earn money, feed habits and escape abuse. These women, in particular, have a history of unmet social, educational, health, and economic needs, in addition to a history of victimization.
Theoretical Framework

- African-American women, in particular, continue to be victimized by the trilogy of oppression. They are impacted by racial oppression, sex discrimination, and class stratification. They have enjoyed very few of the benefits of womanhood. Nothing has been done for her, she has not been defended, and she has remained outside of the world of chivalry.

- Her existence in this society was conceived and defined within the context of slavery, her value has always been based on her ability to breed.

- Sexual exploitation has shaped her life during slavery and beyond. She continues to face the threat of physical violence and sexual aggression, yet she still considers her relationships important. Due to the limitations placed on her and her past experiences, she has endured unnecessary abusive relationships.
Research Questions

- What is the interrelationship between substance abuse/addiction, family history of criminal involvement/mental illness, and past traumatic experiences among incarcerated women?

- What is the interrelationship between substance abuse/addiction, family history of criminal involvement/mental illness, and past traumatic experiences among African American and Caucasian American incarcerated women?

- Will dispositional factors such as age, race and sociodemographic status serve to moderate the relationship between substance abuse/addiction, family history of criminal involvement/mental illness, and past traumatic experiences among incarcerated women?
Data for this study were collected from 200 women who had been recently released in Virginia, Maryland, District of Columbia, and New York.

Participants were recruited by requesting volunteers to participate in the study.

Women with children were recruited and females who were released from prison in community centers that provided services to ex-offenders were also interviewed.
Demographic Information

- **Race/Ethnicity:**
  - African American: 55%
  - Caucasian: 45%

- **Age:**
  - 18-24: 20%
  - 25-34: 10%
  - 35-44: 42%
  - 45-54: 28%

- **Education:** Some College 33%

- **Employment Prior to Arrest:** 34%
Research Design and Methods

- Questionnaire items examined:
  a. Familial background characteristics (i.e., living situation while growing up)
  b. Family history of incarceration, and parental abuse of drugs and alcohol
  c. Personal situations including abuse prior to incarceration
  d. History of drug and/or alcohol abuse, physical illness, patterns of treatment including drug/alcohol treatment, mental health counseling, medical attention, group counseling, parenting classes, and reunification counseling
  e. Items also addressed the mechanisms that female inmates used to cope with their incarceration, particularly in instances where extended separation from children was involved.
### Analysis and Findings

**Profile and Needs of Female Inmates Reporting Alcohol and Drug Use**

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Abuse</strong></td>
<td>4.1304 AOD Score</td>
<td>2.2593 AOD Score</td>
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Note: All relationships are based on results from t-tests of significance and are significant at the .05 level. Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient for the Alcohol and Drug Abuse (AOD) scale is .820, N=8 items.
Analysis and Findings

- Family History of Crime/Mental Illness
- Past Traumatic Experiences
- Substance Abuse
- Addiction

Family History of Crime/Mental Illness

X

Past Traumatic Experiences

Family History of Crime/Mental Illness

X

Past Traumatic Experiences
Analysis and Findings

- Most women were African American (55%), between the ages of 35-44 (42%), had limited education completing only high school (38%), had children under the age of 18 (71%), and were involved in drug possession (46%).

- Regarding familial characteristics, most women reported living in a two parent household (56%), living with incarcerated family members (70%), and receiving minimal visits from their children (41%).
Analysis and Findings

- Regarding substance abuse and treatment, most women had a history of prior AOD use (75%), were under influence at the time of arrest (52%), and committed an offense to get money for drugs (60%).

- About 80% reported having used marijuana and 65% reported using cocaine.

- Less than ¼ received gynecological examinations while in jail (23%).
Analysis and Findings

- Only one-third (1/3) of the women have participated in some form of individual/group counseling.

- About 5% reported that they had received this type of counseling while incarcerated. Twenty-eight percent of the female inmates reported receiving prescription medications while in jail, while 33% indicated that they had been admitted overnight to a mental health facility.

- Fewer of the women offenders in the sample had been treated for a diagnosed mental condition (36%), had been treated for a diagnosed mental condition in jail (23%), had received family counseling or treatment (28%), and had received parenting classes (48%).

- It must also be noted that none of the women reported that they had participated in a family reunification program. While all of the respondents reported that they were able to use some mechanism to cope with their imprisonment, the majority of them indicated that they relied on their family to help them cope (90%), followed by their friends (79%), their pastor (44%), and their children (32%). Fewer of the women reported that they relied on a counselor (11%) or a physician (11%) to help them cope with their circumstances.
Analysis and Findings

- We included descriptions of the specific racial differences among the women in jail, including information on their family background, history of abuse, relationships with their children, drug addiction, mental health status, physical health, the extent of treatment for drugs and mental illness, participation in specific programs, and patterns of coping with incarceration. Chi-Square Tests of Independence ($\chi^2$) were conducted for this portion of the analysis, and the study reports all relationships that were significant at the .05 level.

- Results show that white women were more likely than their black counterparts to report a prior history of drug or alcohol abuse (100%), report a prior history of mental illness or psychiatric condition (40%), indicate that they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their arrest (82%), indicate that they were under the influence of psychiatric medication at the time of their arrest (40%), and report that they committed an offense to get money to buy drugs (89%). Compared to black women, they were also more likely to indicate that at some point in their lives they had used marijuana (100%), cocaine (100%), heroin (42%), stimulants (51%), depressants (69%), hallucinogens (51%), and antidepressants (58%). However, with regard to the use of crack which was categorized as a separate drug from cocaine, black women were more likely to report usage (18%).
Analysis and Findings

Findings also suggest specific racial differences with regard to women’s participation in these programs. For example, white women were more likely than their black counterparts to report participation in mental health counseling (58%), to report being diagnosed with a physical illness (40%) and treated by a doctor (40%), to report receiving a gynecological examination in jail (40%), to report participation in individual/group counseling prior to jail (40%) and while in jail (11%), to have received prescription medications in jail (40%), to have been treated for a diagnosed mental condition prior to jail (58%) and while in jail (40%), and to have received family counseling (51%).

However, results also show that a large number of black women were more likely to report participation in drug/alcohol treatment in jail (55%). Fewer reported participation in mental health counseling in jail (18%), although the percentage of participation remained higher than that of white women. Additionally, white women reported greater reliance on the following to cope with detainment: family (100%), friends (100%), and a pastor (60%). Black women were more likely to report reliance on their children (50%) in their efforts to cope with their situation.
Discussion and Conclusion: Literature

- Correctional rehabilitative programs must become tailored to the subjective experience of the female offender. Alexander (2000) suggests that the characteristics of promising programs for women in prison must include substance abuse awareness, empowerment with basic life skills, parenting skills, vocational and educational training, as well as relationship empowerment. Other components of effective treatment are well trained staff, individualized and structured programs, sufficient resources, victimization services, and program participation.

- Because substance abuse is so prevalent among female offenders, programs for those on probation should also provide adequate childcare, which has been a significant hindrance to many women trying to meet probation requirements. When addressing substance abuse, it is equally important to note the racial and economic differences that accompany usage. Most minority and lower-income women are not addicted to legal substances, but are instead battling addictions to hard drugs such as crack-cocaine (McGee, 2000; McGee and Baker, 2003).
Discussion and Conclusion: Research Study

- The findings of this research project support the contention that although there are programs that aim to treat the female offender and her addictions, there are fewer that incorporate family reunification, developing parenting skills, and counseling and treatment for mothers and their children. If the criminal justice system will not provide additional alternatives to incarceration, there must be an increase in funding for gender-specific treatment programs and greater emphasis on family-based correctional programs in order to holistically and successfully treat the female offender.

- The findings of this research study have clearly indicated a need for parenting programs, substance abuse treatment, mental health counseling for post-traumatic experiences, vocational/educational training, basic life skills training, and perhaps most importantly, programs for reuniting the mother and child and maintaining contact while she is incarcerated.

- The foundation must be laid for treating and rehabilitating women in the “concrete womb,” many of whom are forced to parent their children behind bars. Additionally, there is a dire need for the critical evaluation of existing programs to further determine what is effective, what contributes best to the reduction of recidivism, and what promotes the greatest mental health outcomes among the diverse population of women in prison and the children that they leave behind.
Future Implications

- The deficits in available treatment programs for women inside and after their release from prison need to be created and designed with mothers in mind.
- Further research is needed in regards to the treatment of incarcerated women as it relates to race and age.
- There is a need for more positive coping strategies/resources for women and children who are separated due to incarceration.
- With 60% to 80% of incarcerated women having minor children, services after being released to attain permanent housing, suitable employment, regain custody of children and obtain adequate services need to be reviewed.
Questions/Comments?